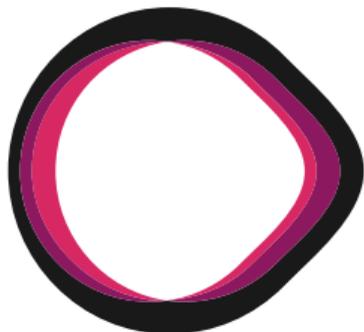


Automating teaching about automation in Python

I heard you like automation, so I put some automation in your automation

Florian Bruhin



Swiss Python Summit 2022

September 22nd

About me

Florian Bruhin, @The-Compiler

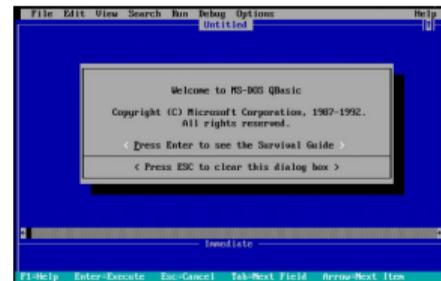
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The problem

- Pre-2021: Students learn Java as their primary programming language at OST
- Java can be a pain to deal with [citation needed]
...especially if you want a tool to make your life easier rather than learn the fundamentals of programming



The problem

- Pre-2021: Students learn Java as their primary programming language at OST
- Java can be a pain to deal with [citation needed]
...especially if you want a tool to make your life easier rather than learn the fundamentals of programming
- More and more places where Python is used as a tool
(to teach math, physics, AI, but also projects, final thesis, etc.)
- Students *demand* learning Python in their studies
...and lots of schools/universities have introduced/switched to it



The solution

- Fall semester 2021: New course **Automatisierung mit Python** (*Automation with Python*) for **all** first-semester IT students
- In **addition** to Java, but with a **different goal**: Solving real-life problems!
- “Students will be able to **use** the Python programming language [...] for simple and complex automation tasks.”

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- In **addition** to Java, but with a **different goal**: Solving real-life problems!
- *“Students will be able to **use** the Python programming language [...] for simple and complex automation tasks.”*
- **Flipped classroom**: No lectures, no paper exam.
Interactive graded labs and a small graded project!
- We have many newcomers studying IT, or people mostly doing support/network/..., without much programming experience.

You need to **get your hands dirty** to learn programming.

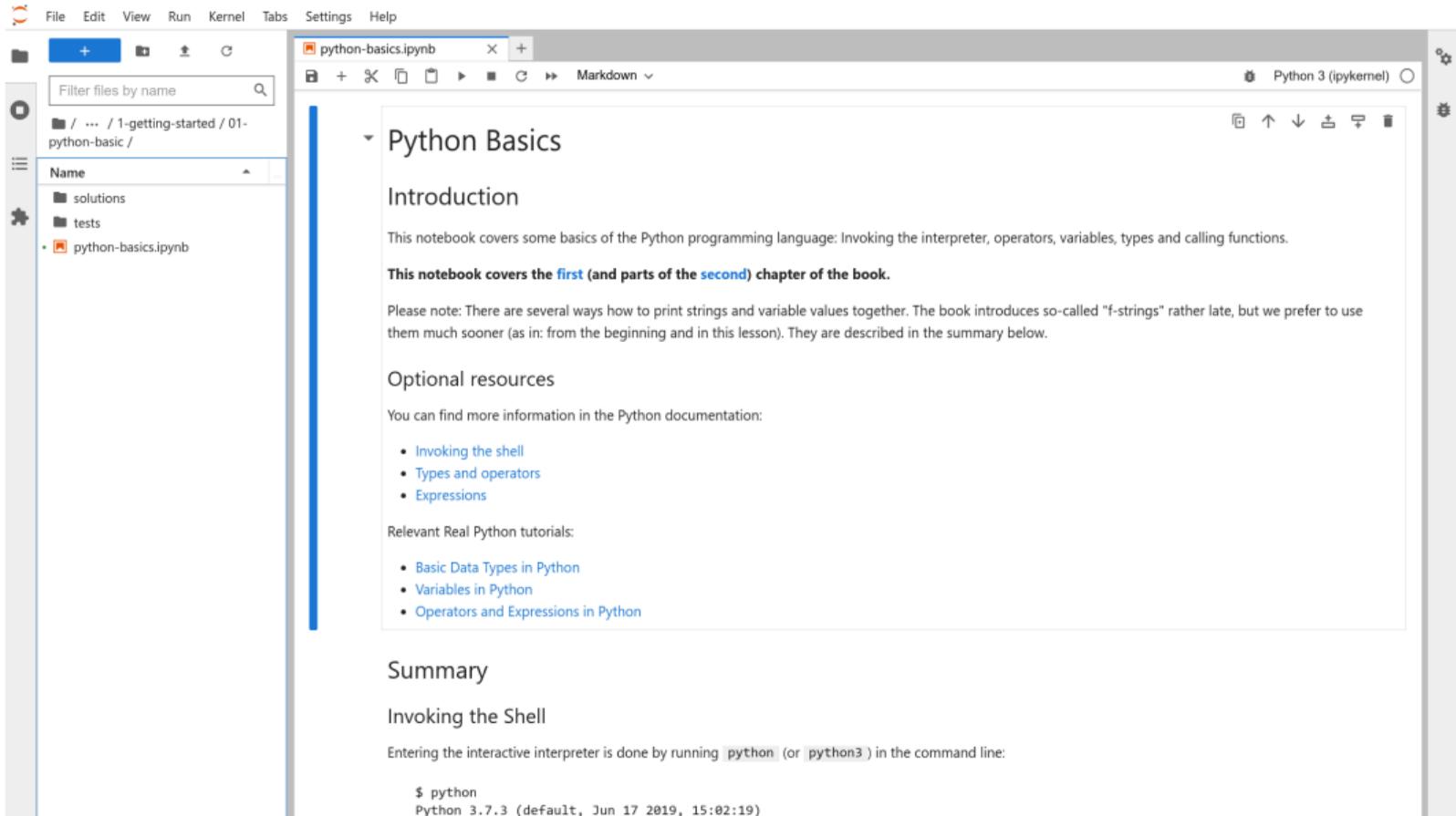
It's not just theory, but also a **“craft”**!

We want students to learn **both**: University of **Applied** sciences!



Interactive learning

Labs



The screenshot shows a Jupyter Notebook interface with a file explorer on the left and a notebook editor on the right. The notebook content is as follows:

```
File Edit View Run Kernel Tabs Settings Help
```

python-basics.ipynb Python 3 (ipykernel)

Python Basics

Introduction

This notebook covers some basics of the Python programming language: Invoking the interpreter, operators, variables, types and calling functions.

This notebook covers the [first](#) (and parts of the [second](#)) chapter of the book.

Please note: There are several ways how to print strings and variable values together. The book introduces so-called "f-strings" rather late, but we prefer to use them much sooner (as in: from the beginning and in this lesson). They are described in the summary below.

Optional resources

You can find more information in the Python documentation:

- [Invoking the shell](#)
- [Types and operators](#)
- [Expressions](#)

Relevant Real Python tutorials:

- [Basic Data Types in Python](#)
- [Variables in Python](#)
- [Operators and Expressions in Python](#)

Summary

Invoking the Shell

Entering the interactive interpreter is done by running `python` (or `python3`) in the command line:

```
$ python
Python 3.7.3 (default, Jun 17 2019, 15:02:19)
```

Interactive learning

Exercises

e) Input and output

- Ask the user for their favourite color and save the result in `color`. Note that it's possible to pass an additional text to be shown to the user (a "prompt") to the function you'll need to use, so you don't need a separate `print` for this.
- Show the text `So you like the color red? Great choice!`, but with `red` replaced by the user's input.

```
[2]: color = input("What's your favourite color?")  
print(f"So you like the color {color}? Great choice!")
```



```
What's your favourite color? purple  
So you like the color purple? Great choice!
```

Interactive learning

Tests with testbook

```
[1]: !submit python-basics.ipynb
```

Last change: 6 seconds ago

⋮ Testing...0m

Failed

- test_18 failed
- test_26 failed

2

Passed

- test_01 passed
- test_02 passed
- ...
- test_106 passed
- test_107 passed

105



✓ Submission successful! (2022-09-20 14:35:04, 7fc0904)

Interactive learning

Grading

- 1 ungraded lab (setup and getting started)
- 5 graded labs, 1/3 of final grade, **automated tests**
- Final project, **2/3** of final grade, **graded manually**
 - Python basics, flow control, data structures, . . .
 - Writing a CLI
 - Using web APIs

The... problem?

Over **120 students**, a total of 9 slots (4 hours each) every 2 weeks.

Slightly less this year: 110 or so, and “only” 7 slots.

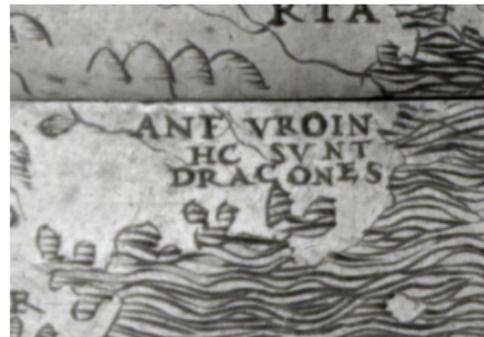
That’s **a lot** given that I’m doing this the first time!

Thanks, Stefan Richter, for trusting that we could pull it off.

In addition:

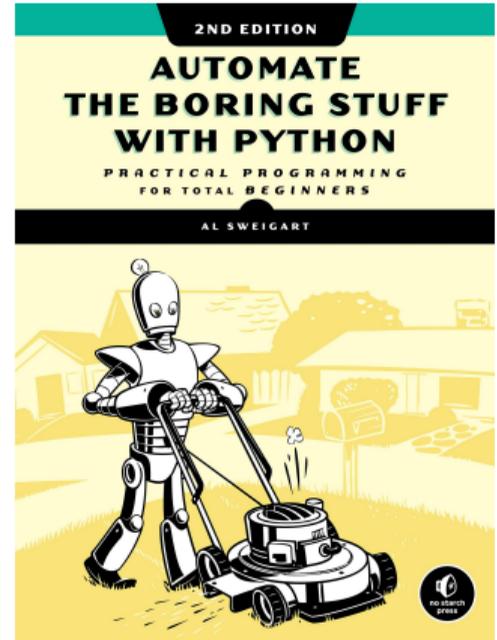
- I **love** writing opensource (qutebrowser/pytest), and giving company trainings
- Thus, this needs to stay a **40%** occupation (averaged over a year, I don’t teach in spring)
- Other people are busy too! But I got some help.

Thanks, Marco, Méline and Urs!



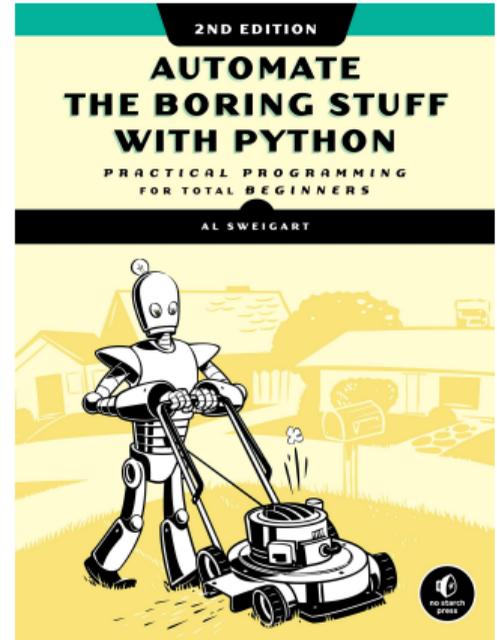
Focusing my attention

- With > 100 students, any kind of manual work with $O(n)$ is almost certainly **worth automating!**
- I teach students how to make their studies easier. Might as well make **my** job easier!
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Creating an environment to help people learn, helping people who are stuck, the beauty of **teaching**.



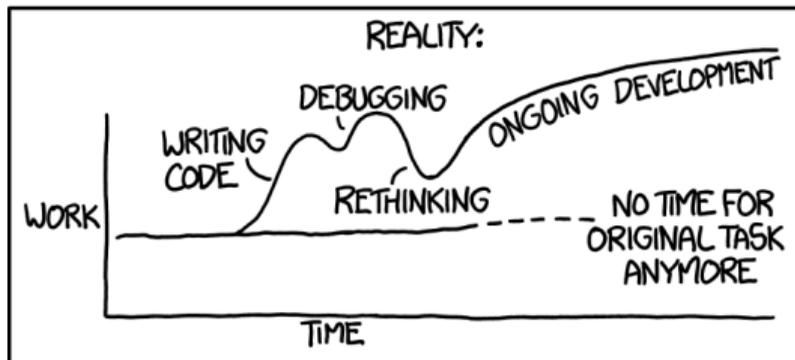
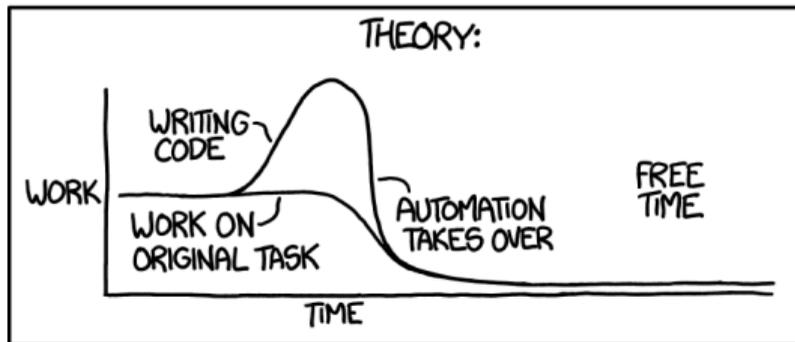
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- Let Python do the **boring** part. Bonus points:
It gets easier every year, because more is automated!
- A word of caution: Automation is **not** a substitute for teaching. **Know where to stop!**
- I'm not lazy (...sometimes) – but I want to **focus my attention** on things which benefit students most.



The danger of automation

"I SPEND A LOT OF TIME ON THIS TASK.
I SHOULD WRITE A PROGRAM AUTOMATING IT!"



The *real* danger

Eh, I just need a handful of very simple scripts.

I won't bother setting up...

- ...a proper Python package
- ...type annotations
- ...linters / formatters
- ...tests (Yes, I'm a pytest maintainer. Yes, I'm ashamed.)

The *real* danger: Whooops

Development / Deployment scripts	730 lines
Scraping participants	600 lines
Sending welcome mails / other mail code	370 lines

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not including:

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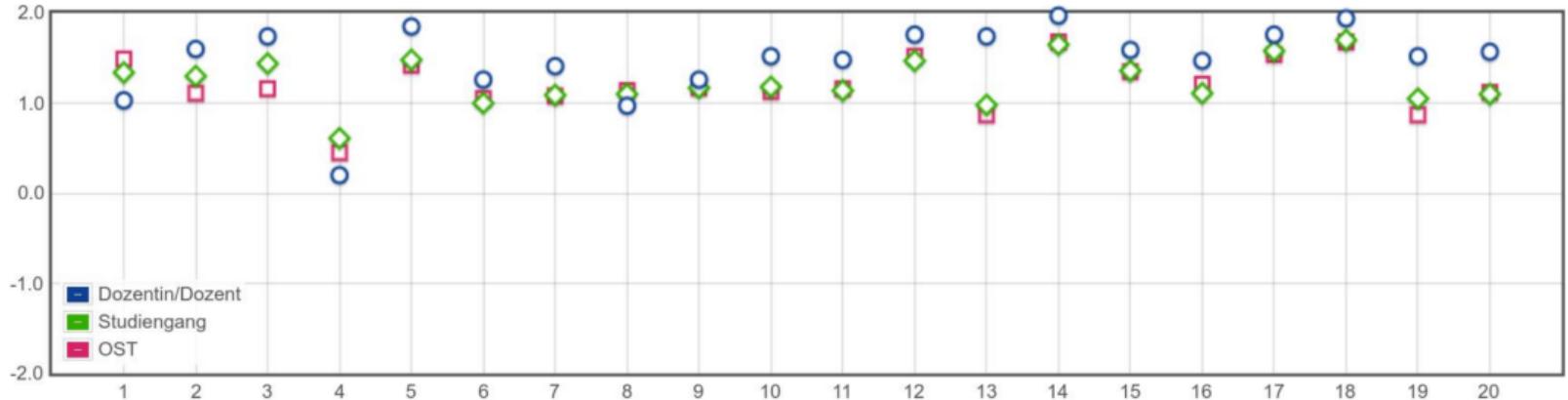
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Success!



1. **I was there**

2. **Contents important**

3. **Contents interesting**

4. Needed time is high

5. Content matches desc.

6. **Useful material**

7. Well structured

8. **Understandable**

9. Speed good

10. Extra material / media

11. Link between lect./ex.

12. **Room for questions**

13. **Checking progress**

14. Lecturer competent

15. Link between theory/practice

16. Didactics

17. Lecturer engaged

18. Mutual respect

19. Room / environment

20. **Overall**

Success!

- Concept of “Interactive learning” / “flipped classroom” as a whole.
Daniele Procida / EvilDMP of Diátaxis¹:
“I hardly believe in teaching anymore. The best thing you can do is creating an environment where people learn.”
- Using git as a “database” for student submissions, with one branch per student
- Including test logs (HTML + JSON) in the commits
- Having a custom GUI tool to view a student’s submission and test report
- Project grading based on parsing Markdown checklists
- ...all the other automation really, not regretting any of the time spent on it!

¹diataxis.fr, structuring docs into tutorial/how-to/explanation/reference

Issues

- Students accidentally deleting Jupyter cell tags
⇒ Tooling to notify us, protecting cells
- OST GitLab admins migrating storage without making it read-only
⇒ Thankfully I had the lost commits locally... please don't do that again!
- Various smaller issues with Jupyter cluster
⇒ Ample deadline extension for affected students, we're humans!

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- Me forgetting to check some checkboxes in the project grading checklists
⇒ Human mistakes bound to happen with so many students and days of grading. Caught thanks to detailed feedback mails being sent, additional sanity checks
- Grading system's API is "Download a template .xlsx, add grades, upload"
...but openpyxl somehow corrupts template.
⇒ Needs further debugging, until then, copy-paste all grades once in Libreoffice

Issues

Things nobody can prepare you for...

Disclaimer: I don't like calling students out for their mistakes, making mistakes is normal.
But those occurrences are just too strange to not tell you about...



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⇒ With >100 students, prepare to see **every corner case** you can think of, and some you'd never think of. Automation **won't help you** take difficult decisions.

# Automation examples

Before the semester

**RJ** **ADUNIS**   Info ▾   Reporting ▾   Stundenplanung ▾   Notenabgabe ▾

Home | Reporting | Anmeldungen

📄 📅 📧 @ 📄 📄

**Organisationseinheit** 🔍  
Bachelor ▾

**Semester** 🔍  
HS 2022/2023 ▾

**Standort** 🔍  
[Alle Standorte] ▾

**Organisationseinheit** 🔍  
[Organisationseinheit aus ▾

**Dozent** 🔍  
[Alle Dozenten (= alle Moc ▾

**Modul** 🔍

**Id** 97610  
**Dozenten** Bruhin Florian (BRFL)  
**Modulbezeichnung** Automatisierung mit Python [M\_AutPy] (I) (RJ)  
**Durchführungszustand** in Durchführung  
**Standort** Rapperswil  
**Anz. Studenten** 16

Studenten

| Pld | Name | Vorname | Email   |
|-----|------|---------|---------|
| 5-2 | B    | Y       | @ost.ch |
| 5-7 | B    | N       | ost.ch  |

# Automation examples

Before the semester

HOW LONG CAN YOU WORK ON MAKING A ROUTINE TASK MORE EFFICIENT BEFORE YOU'RE SPENDING MORE TIME THAN YOU SAVE?

(ACROSS FIVE YEARS)

|                             |            | HOW OFTEN YOU DO THE TASK |           |            |            |            |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                             |            | 50/DAY                    | 5/DAY     | DAILY      | WEEKLY     | MONTHLY    | YEARLY     |
| HOW MUCH TIME YOU SHAVE OFF | 1 SECOND   | 1 DAY                     | 2 HOURS   | 30 MINUTES | 4 MINUTES  | 1 MINUTE   | 5 SECONDS  |
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|                             | 30 SECONDS | 4 WEEKS                   | 3 DAYS    | 12 HOURS   | 2 HOURS    | 30 MINUTES | 2 MINUTES  |
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|                             | 1 HOUR     |                           | 10 MONTHS | 2 MONTHS   | 10 DAYS    | 2 DAYS     | 5 HOURS    |
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## No automation needed?

- People get added last-minute
- ...after preparing
- ...even after semester started

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## No automation needed?

- People get added last-minute
- ...after preparing
- ...even after semester started
- People leave in the middle of the semester
- ...and nobody tells you

# Automation examples

Before the semester

- No API (as far as I know)
- Lots of data (200 KB of JSON) in `window.adunisModel = ...`
- Not what we need, however...
- But HTML is structured enough. `requests` and `bs4` to the rescue!

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- Not what we need, however...
- But HTML is structured enough. `requests` and `bs4` to the rescue!
- Weird Microsoft-based login flow
- Couldn't figure out how it works, libraries seem to be for APIs only

# Automation examples

## Before the semester

- No API (as far as I know)
- Lots of data (200 KB of JSON) in `window.adunisModel = ...`
- Not what we need, however...
- But HTML is structured enough. `requests` and `bs4` to the rescue!
- Weird Microsoft-based login flow
- Couldn't figure out how it works, libraries seem to be for APIs only
- Whatever, I write a browser since 2013, and I can access cookies
- Login via QtWebEngine browser (injected JS to fill values)
- Grab session cookie, feed it to `requests` 😎

# Automation examples

During the semester: Commander

```
In []: a = -2.7
 b = 3.4

 a_abs = abs(a)
 b_abs = abs(b)

 a_rounded = round(a)
 b_rounded = round(b)

 bigger = min(a, b)
 smaller = min(a, b)
```

b) Type-related Functions

There are also functions to get the

**Failed** (hide details) notebooks/1-getting-started/01-python-ba

```
tb = <conftest.TBWrapper object at 0x7ff86e...
expected = 3.4

@pytest.mark.parametrize(
 "var, expected",
 [
 ("a", -2.7),
 ("b", 3.4),
 ("a_abs", 2.7),
 ("b_abs", 3.4),
 ("a_rounded", -3),
 ("b_rounded", 3),
 ("bigger", 3.4),
 ("smaller", -2.7),
```

|   | commit  | date            |             |
|---|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1 | 7fc0904 | 3 hours ago     | Submissi    |
| 2 | 27660c3 | Mon 17:15 +0000 | Submissi    |
| 3 | a2617fa | Mon 17:11 +0000 | Submissi    |
| 4 | 9c470ac | Mon 16:13       | Add CI cc   |
| 5 | c5443ee | Mon 11:55       | Initial cor |

| nodeid                                                   | tag                               | when | outcome |                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| test_builtin_math.py::test_values[bigger-3.4]            | built-in-functions-math-functions | call | failed  | assert -2.7 == 3.4                                     |
| test_builtin_math.py::test_ast[bigger-expected_sources6] | built-in-functions-math-functions | call | failed  | AssertionError: assert {'__type__': 'Assign', 'targets |
| test_builtin_help.py::test_output                        | built-in-functions-help           | call | passed  |                                                        |
| test_builtin_help.py::test_ast                           | built-in-functions-help           | call | passed  |                                                        |

Focus (Ctrl+1/2/3/4/5): Test (Ctrl+T): Folder (Ctrl+F): Branch (Ctrl+B): Zapper (Ctrl+J): 105 passed  
Not loaded 2 failed  
0 error  
≈ 5.91

ReportView values[bigger-3.4] d/01-python-basic florian.bruhin

# Automation examples

During the semester: Overview

*pmisc*

| Name            | 01   | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 16 | 17 | project |
|-----------------|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------|
| florian.bruhin  | 5.91 | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×       |
| urs.baumann     | ×    | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×       |
| test.teststerli | ×    | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×  | ×       |

pmisc  100% 0:00:00

# Automation examples

During the semester: Grep

```
—[florian@aragog]—[~/hsr/autpy/orga/scripts]—[22-09-20]—[19:57]—[git/master•]—
$ python3 submission-grep.py reports 2.7
```

```
florian.bruhin
```

```
1-getting-started/01-python-basic test_builtin_math.py::test_values
assert -2.7 = 3.4
```

```
florian.bruhin _____ 100% 0:00:00
```

```
—[florian@aragog]—[~/hsr/autpy/orga/scripts]—[22-09-20]—[19:57]—[git/master•]—
$ python3 submission-grep.py nodeid values
```

```
florian.bruhin
```

```
1-getting-started/01-python-basic test_builtin_math.py::test_values
assert -2.7 = 3.4
```

```
florian.bruhin _____ 100% 0:00:00
```

# Automation examples

Towards end of semester: Project overview

*misc*

| Name           | Project | Files                                                                                                  | Git | types | cli | black | rich | pillow | poetry | pytest | count |
|----------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| florian.bruhin | ✓       | test.txt                                                                                               | ✗   | ✗     | ✗   | ✗     | ✗    | ✗      | ✗      | ✗      | 0     |
| urs.baumann    | ✓       | AutPy_CLI/.gitignore<br>AutPy_CLI/README.md<br>AutPy_CLI/wuff.py<br>.../.git (Inhalte<br>übersprungen) | ✓   | ✗     | ✓   | ✗     | ✗    | ✗      | ✗      | ✗      | 2     |
| test.testerli  | ?       | project/Python_Projekt_St...                                                                           |     |       |     |       |      |        |        |        |       |

test.testerli ————— 100% 0:00:00

# Automation examples

After end of semester: Project grading

Project grading workflow:

- Pick random student
- Get zip from submissions repository
- Unpack zip in “grading-area” folder

# Automation examples

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- Show overview (file list, detected features)
- Prepare checklist and open in editor
- Wait until editor closed

# Automation examples

After end of semester: Project grading

Project grading workflow:

- Pick random student
- Get zip from submissions repository
- Unpack zip in “grading-area” folder
  
- Show overview (file list, detected features)
- Prepare checklist and open in editor
- Wait until editor closed
  
- Parse checklist
- Show parsed points and grade, wait for confirmation
- Commit grading file to submissions repository
- ...and during the whole process, only show names as rot13





# Automation examples

After end of semester: Project grading

## # Functionality (24P)

- Data download / reading (7P)
  - [ ] Download URL is obtained via API (2P)
  - [ ] Latest available data set used by default (1P)
  - ...
- [ ] Searching for dogs (2P)
- Statistics (9P)
  - [ ] Longest dog name is output correctly (0.5P)
  - [ ] Shortest dog name is output correctly (0.5P)
  - [ ] Top 10 is output correctly (1P)
  - ...

# Automation examples

After end of semester: Project grading

---

| Thema                | Punkte Max  |           |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Funktionalität (24P) | 18.5        | 24        |
| Error Handling (10P) | 4           | 10        |
| Best Practices (20P) | 7.5         | 20        |
| Nutzer-Sicht (6P)    | 6           | 6         |
| git                  | 8           | 10        |
| rich                 | 8           | 10        |
| Zusatzpunkte         | 0           | 0         |
| <b>Punkte total</b>  | <b>52.0</b> | <b>80</b> |

---

- Parse Markdown checklist
- Calculate points
- Send HTML + plaintext mails

## Funktionalität (24P)

- Daten-Download / Einlesen (7P)
  - Daten-URL wird via API bezogen (2P)
  - Standardmässig neuester verfügbarer Datensatz (1P): **2021 hardcoded**

# Automation examples

After end of semester: Final grade

| Thema                             | Gewichtung | Punkte | Max | ca. %  |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------|-----|--------|
| Lab 01                            |            | 107.0  | 107 | 100.0% |
| <b>Block 1</b>                    |            | 107.0  | 107 | 100.0% |
| Lab 02                            |            | 59.0   | 59  | 100.0% |
| Lab 03                            |            | 47.0   | 47  | 100.0% |
| <b>Block 2</b>                    | 1/6        | 106.0  | 106 | 100.0% |
| Lab 04                            |            | 24.0   | 24  | 100.0% |
| Lab 05                            |            | 55.0   | 55  | 100.0% |
| Lab 06                            |            | 38.0   | 38  | 100.0% |
| <b>Block 3</b>                    | 1/6        | 117.0  | 117 | 100.0% |
| Lab 07                            |            | 60.0   | 60  | 100.0% |
| Lab 08                            |            | 4.0    | 4   | 100.0% |
| Lab 09                            |            | 18.0   | 18  | 100.0% |
| Lab 10                            |            | 48.0   | 48  | 100.0% |
| <b>Block 4</b>                    | 1/6        | 130.0  | 130 | 100.0% |
| Lab 16 ( <i>nicht abgegeben</i> ) |            | 0.0    | 7   | 0.0%   |
| Lab 17 ( <i>nicht abgegeben</i> ) |            | 0.0    | 5   | 0.0%   |
| <b>Block 5</b>                    | 1/6        | 0.0    | 12  | 0.0%   |
| Projektabgabe                     | 1/3        | 74.5   | 80  | 93.1%  |

Nach entsprechender Gewichtung führt das zu ca. 81.04%, bzw. zur Note:  $5 * 389 / 480 + 1 \approx 5.0521$

Eingetragene Note, auf Viertelsnoten gerundet: **5**

- Rerun all test-cases  
local, parallelized, 1  
Docker container per  
student
- Calculate final grade  
Using fractions,  
no rounding!
- Send HTML +  
plaintext mails

## Next steps

- Teaching another  $\approx 100$  students, with many small improvements!
- Grading another  $\approx 100$  student projects...

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- Type annotations and autoformatters (done!)
- Tests for all the automation logic...
- Using `GitPython/pygitops/pygit2/Dulwich/Gittle/...` instead of `subprocess` (nicer API and performance)

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- Type annotations and autoformatters (done!)
- Tests for all the automation logic...
- Using `GitPython/pygitops/pygit2/Dulwich/Gittle/...` instead of `subprocess` (nicer API and performance)
- Maybe: Generalizing and publishing?



<https://fstring.help>

[https://twitter.com/the\\_compiler](https://twitter.com/the_compiler)  
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