

Using Python

You can install Python for free on your own computer. Go to www.python.org, then to the Downloads page. You want to download Python 3.6.2; there should be a button for doing this on the Downloads page. This will download an installer onto your Downloads folder. Go there and click on the installer; it should do the rest on its own.

There are many different ways to access a Python system that is installed on your computer. For this class where we are more concerned with writing programs than in using programs someone else has written, we will use Python's *Idle* utility. Just as Python is named after the *Monte Python* comedy troupe, *Idle* is named after one of its founding members, Eric Idle.

In the most typical situation you want to get Idle to open a file of Python code. With Windows you can select the file, right-click on it, and choose *Open With Idle*. The Macintoshians of the world, can usually just click on the file, since *Idle* is the default way to open it. If that doesn't work, <CTRL>-click on the file and choose *Idle* from the menu that pops up.

There are two parts to Idle: the file editor and the shell. If you open up a file Idle will put you in the file editor. If you go to the File menu and select *New* or *Open* it will put you in the File editor.

In the file editor there is a Run menu. This has two options. One option is *Shell*. This takes you to the shell, which is the command interpreter. The prompt looks like this:

```
>>>
```

At this prompt you can type python commands. For example, if you type

```
>>> 4+8
```

It responds 12.

The shell is a very useful too for playing with Python commands to see how they work.

The other useful command from the Run menu of the file editor is *Run Module*. This takes you to the shell and runs the current program in the shell.