1 Aliasing and mutable objects

Aliasing is when two or more variables refer to the same object. This is not a new concept for us... however, things get more interesting when the object is mutable.

For example, L2 is an alias of L (and vice versa) because they both refer to the same list object.

```python
>>> L = [1, 2, 3]
>>> L2 = L
>>> print L2
[1, 2, 3]
>>> L[1] = 200
>>> print L
[1, 200, 3]
>>> print L2 # since L2 is an alias, the change to L affects L2!
[1, 200, 3]
```

Notice that even though we did not do anything with the variable L2, it is clearly affected by operations performed on its alias L. Since lists are mutable, when you change L, you are also changing L2 since they both refer to the same object. Strings can be aliased too but since they are not mutable, we tend not to worry about the fact that two variables might refer to the same string object.

The python visualizer is a great tool for understanding aliasing (http://www.pythontutor.com/visualize.html). Be sure to adjust the settings so they look like this:

or this

There’s more on the back!
2 Aliasing and functions

Aliasing arises with functions. The parameter of a function is always an alias of the variable that is passed in as an argument. In this example, the parameter $L$ is an alias of the argument $a\_list$.

```python
def double(L):
    '''
    (list of int) -> NoneType
    Doubles every number in list L
    '''
    for i in range(len(L)):
        L[i] = L[i] * 2
    print(L)

a\_list = [5, 6]
double(a\_list)
print(a\_list)
```

If we run the above code, the list $[10, 12]$ is printed twice (once for `print L` and once for `print a\_list`). That’s because...

- $L$ and $a\_list$ are aliases: they refer to the same list object
- the function mutates the list object: each value in the list is doubled

3 Avoiding aliasing

To avoid aliasing, you can make a copy of the list (using slicing). In this example, $L$ and $L2$ are not aliases.

```python
>>> L = [1,2,3]
>>> L2 = L[:]       # makes a copy
>>> L[1] = 200
>>> print(L)
[1, 200, 3]
>>> print(L2)
[1, 2, 3]
```

Subtle detail: if you are an eagle-eyed observer, you might notice that while these two lists are not aliases, the contain the same collection of items. If those items are mutable (e.g., the item is itself a list) then mutating one of the items in $L$ would cause a change to that item in $L2$. If you do not understand this subtle detail, do not worry about it at this point.
Lecture #17 handout introduced lists. This handout describes list methods.

1  Lists vs. strings
We have compared lists and strings before. Here are some new similarities and differences. List also support slicing and it works exactly the same way as it does on strings (Handout #19). Lists and strings have some methods in common, such as count. Some methods are different: for instance find on a string works differently than index on a list. Another significant difference: lists have methods that mutate the list object. The table below indicates which methods actually change or mutate the list. Finally, you can translate from lists to strings and back. To turn a string into a list, use the list function. To turn a list of characters into a string, use the join method.

2  List methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List Method</th>
<th>Arguments</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mutates?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>append</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Adds item x to the end of the list.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extend</td>
<td>other_list</td>
<td>Adds all of the items in list other_list to the end of the list.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remove</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>removes x from the list and returns nothing. If x is not in the list, you get an error.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pop</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>Returns the item at index i and also removes it from the list.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>count</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Returns the number of times item x occurs in the list</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>index</td>
<td>x, start, end</td>
<td>Returns index of item. If x not in list, you get an an error! Note difference from find method on strings. The start and end parameters are optional.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insert</td>
<td>i, x</td>
<td>Moves items at indexes i and larger to the right and inserts x in list at position i.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reverse</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Reverses the list. This method returns None.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sort</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Sorts the list. This method returns None.</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```python
>>> s = "hello"
>>> L = list(s)
>>> L
['h', 'e', 'l', 'l', 'o']
>>> L[0] = 'c'
>>> s2 = ''.join(L)
>>> s2
'cello'
```

```python
>>> L = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'b', 'd', 'b']
>>> L.index('c')
2
>>> L.index('z')
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
ValueError: 'z' is not in list
>>> L.count('z')
1 of 2
```
3 Exercises

Some solutions are presented in class and also included in the moodle version of this handout.

1. Write a function `remove_all` that takes that takes L, a list of ints, and an int x and removes all occurrences of x from the list. Hint: use count, remove, and a while loop. **Important point:** if you want to repeatedly add/remove items from a list, it’s not a good idea to use a for loop over that list. (Essentially a for loop assumes the thing it’s looping over is not changing.)

2. Write a function `remove_less_than` that takes L, a list of ints, and an int x and removes any occurrence that is strictly less than x. Again, use a while loop.

3. Write a function `is_anagram` that takes two strings and returns True if the strings are anagrams of each other. Challenge edition: ignore spaces and be case-insensitive. So ‘Dormitory’ is an anagram of ‘Dirty Room’.

4. Write a function `count_distinct` that takes a list and returns the number of distinct items. For example, on `[10, 20, 10, 30, 20]` it should return 3 because there are three distinct items.