
characteristic Documentation

Release 14.0.0

Hynek Schlawack

August 21, 2014

1	Teaser	3
2	User's Guide	5
2.1	Why not...	5
2.2	Examples	8
2.3	API	10
2.4	Project Information	14
3	Indices and tables	17

Release v14.0.0 (*What's new?*).

`characteristic` is an [MIT](#)-licensed Python package with class decorators that ease the chores of implementing the most common attribute-related object protocols.

You just specify the attributes to work with and `characteristic` gives you any or all of:

- a nice human-readable `__repr__`,
- a complete set of comparison methods,
- immutability for attributes,
- and a kwargs-based initializer (that cooperates with your existing one and optionally even checks the types of the arguments)

without writing dull boilerplate code again and again.

This gives you the power to use actual classes with actual types in your code instead of confusing `tuples` or confusingly behaving `namedtuples`.

So put down that type-less data structures and welcome some class into your life!

`characteristic`'s documentation lives at [Read the Docs](#), the code on [GitHub](#). It's rigorously tested on Python 2.6, 2.7, 3.3+, and PyPy.

Teaser

```
>>> from characteristic import Attribute, attributes
>>> @attributes(["a", "b"])
... class AClass(object):
...     pass
>>> @attributes(["a", Attribute("b", default_value="abc", instance_of=str)])
... class AnotherClass(object):
...     pass
>>> obj1 = AClass(a=1, b="abc")
>>> obj2 = AnotherClass(a=1, b="abc")
>>> obj3 = AnotherClass(a=1)
>>> AnotherClass(a=1, b=42)
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
TypeError: Attribute 'b' must be an instance of 'str'.
>>> print obj1, obj2, obj3
<AClass(a=1, b='abc')> <AnotherClass(a=1, b='abc')> <AnotherClass(a=1, b='abc')>
>>> obj1 == obj2
False
>>> obj2 == obj3
True
```


2.1 Why not...

2.1.1 ...tuples?

Readability

What makes more sense while debugging:

```
<Point (x=1, x=2)>
```

or:

```
(1, 2)
```

?

Let's add even more ambiguity:

```
<Customer(id=42, reseller=23, first_name="Jane", last_name="John")>
```

or:

```
(42, 23, "Jane", "John")
```

?

Why would you want to write `customer[2]` instead of `customer.first_name`?

Don't get me started when you add nesting. If you've never ran into mysterious tuples you had no idea what the hell they meant while debugging, you're much smarter then I am.

Using proper classes with names and types makes program code much more readable and [comprehensible](#). Especially when trying to grok a new piece of software or returning to old code after several months.

Extendability

Imagine you have a function that takes or returns a tuple. Especially if you use tuple unpacking (eg. `x, y = get_point()`), adding additional data means that you have to change the invocation of that function *everywhere*.

Adding an attribute to a class concerns only those who actually care about that attribute.

2.1.2 ...namedtuples?

The difference between `namedtuples` and classes decorated by `characteristic` is that the latter are type-sensitive and less typing aside regular classes:

```
>>> from characteristic import Attribute, attributes
>>> @attributes([Attribute("a", instance_of=int)])
... class C1(object):
...     def __init__(self):
...         if self.a >= 5:
...             raise ValueError("'a' must be smaller 5!")
...     def print_a(self):
...         print self.a
>>> @attributes([Attribute("a", instance_of=int)])
... class C2(object):
...     pass
>>> c1 = C1(a=1)
>>> c2 = C2(a=1)
>>> c1.a == c2.a
True
>>> c1 == c2
False
>>> c1.print_a()
1
>>> C1(a=5)
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: 'a' must be smaller 5!
```

... while `namedtuple`'s purpose is *explicitly* to behave like tuples:

```
>>> from collections import namedtuple
>>> NT1 = namedtuple("NT1", "a")
>>> NT2 = namedtuple("NT2", "b")
>>> t1 = NT1._make([1,])
>>> t2 = NT2._make([1,])
>>> t1 == t2 == (1,)
True
```

This can easily lead to surprising and unintended behaviors.

Other than that, `characteristic` also adds nifty features like type checks or default values.

2.1.3 ...hand-written classes?

While I'm a fan of all things artisanal, writing the same nine methods all over again doesn't qualify for me. I usually manage to get some typos inside and there's simply more code that can break and thus has to be tested.

To bring it into perspective, the equivalent of

```
>>> @attributes(["a", "b"])
... class SmartClass(object):
...     pass
>>> SmartClass(a=1, b=2)
<SmartClass(a=1, b=2)>
```

is

```

>>> class ArtisinalClass(object):
...     def __init__(self, a, b):
...         self.a = a
...         self.b = b
...
...     def __repr__(self):
...         return "<ArtisinalClass(a={}, b={})>".format(self.a, self.b)
...
...     def __eq__(self, other):
...         if other.__class__ is self.__class__:
...             return (self.a, self.b) == (other.a, other.b)
...         else:
...             return NotImplemented
...
...     def __ne__(self, other):
...         result = self.__eq__(other)
...         if result is NotImplemented:
...             return NotImplemented
...         else:
...             return not result
...
...     def __lt__(self, other):
...         if other.__class__ is self.__class__:
...             return (self.a, self.b) < (other.a, other.b)
...         else:
...             return NotImplemented
...
...     def __le__(self, other):
...         if other.__class__ is self.__class__:
...             return (self.a, self.b) <= (other.a, other.b)
...         else:
...             return NotImplemented
...
...     def __gt__(self, other):
...         if other.__class__ is self.__class__:
...             return (self.a, self.b) > (other.a, other.b)
...         else:
...             return NotImplemented
...
...     def __ge__(self, other):
...         if other.__class__ is self.__class__:
...             return (self.a, self.b) >= (other.a, other.b)
...         else:
...             return NotImplemented
...
...     def __hash__(self):
...         return hash((self.a, self.b))
>>> ArtisinalClass(a=1, b=2)
<ArtisinalClass(a=1, b=2)>

```

which is quite a mouthful and it doesn't even use any of characteristic's more advanced features like type checks or default values. Also: no tests whatsoever. And who will guarantee you, that you don't accidentally flip the < in your tenth implementation of `__gt__`?

If you don't care and like typing, I'm not gonna stop you. But if you ever get sick of the repetitiveness, characteristic will be waiting for you. :)

2.2 Examples

`@attributes` together with the definition of the attributes using class attributes enhances your class by:

- a nice `__repr__`,
- comparison methods that compare instances as if they were tuples of their attributes,
- and an initializer that uses the keyword arguments to initialize the specified attributes before running the class' own initializer (you just write the validator if you need anything more than type checks!).

```
>>> from characteristic import Attribute, attributes
>>> @attributes(["a", "b"])
... class C(object):
...     pass
>>> obj1 = C(a=1, b="abc")
>>> obj1
<C(a=1, b='abc')>
>>> obj2 = C(a=2, b="abc")
>>> obj1 == obj2
False
>>> obj1 < obj2
True
>>> obj3 = C(a=1, b="bca")
>>> obj3 > obj1
True
```

To offer more power and possibilities, `characteristic` comes with a distinct class to define attributes: `Attribute`. It allows for things like default values for certain attributes, making them optional when `characteristic`'s generated initializer is used:

```
>>> @attributes(["a", "b", Attribute("c", default_value=42)])
... class CWithDefaults(object):
...     pass
>>> obj4 = CWithDefaults(a=1, b=2)
>>> obj5 = CWithDefaults(a=1, b=2, c=42)
>>> obj4 == obj5
True
```

`characteristic` also offers factories for default values of complex types:

```
>>> @attributes([Attribute("a", default_factory=list),
...              Attribute("b", default_factory=dict)])
... class CWithDefaultFactory(object):
...     pass
>>> obj6 = CWithDefaultFactory()
>>> obj6
<CWithDefaultFactory(a=[], b={})>
>>> obj7 = CWithDefaultFactory()
>>> obj7
<CWithDefaultFactory(a=[], b={})>
>>> obj6 == obj7
True
>>> obj6.a is obj7.a
False
>>> obj6.b is obj7.b
False
```

You can also exclude certain attributes from certain decorators:

```
>>> @attributes(["host", "user",
...             Attribute("password", exclude_from_repr=True),
...             Attribute("_connection", exclude_from_init=True)])
... class DB(object):
...     _connection = None
...     def connect(self):
...         self._connection = "not really a connection"
>>> db = DB(host="localhost", user="dba", password="secret")
>>> db.connect()
>>> db
<DB(host='localhost', user='dba', _connection='not really a connection')>
```

Immutable data structures are amazing! Guess what characteristic supports?

```
>>> @attributes([Attribute("a")], apply_immutable=True)
... class ImmutableClass(object):
...     pass
>>> ic = ImmutableClass(a=42)
>>> ic.a
42
>>> ic.a = 43
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
AttributeError: Attribute 'a' of class 'ImmutableClass' is immutable.
>>> @attributes([Attribute("a")], apply_immutable=True)
... class AnotherImmutableClass(object):
...     def __init__(self):
...         self.a *= 2
>>> ic2 = AnotherImmutableClass(a=21)
>>> ic2.a
42
>>> ic.a = 43
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
AttributeError: Attribute 'a' of class 'AnotherImmutableClass' is immutable.
```

You know what else is amazing? Type checks!

```
>>> @attributes([Attribute("a", instance_of=int)])
... class TypeCheckedClass(object):
...     pass
>>> TypeCheckedClass(a="totally not an int")
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
TypeError: Attribute 'a' must be an instance of 'int'.
```

And if you want your classes to have certain attributes private, characteristic will keep your keyword arguments clean if not told otherwise¹:

```
>>> @attributes([Attribute("_private")])
... class CWithPrivateAttribute(object):
...     pass
>>> obj8 = CWithPrivateAttribute(private=42)
>>> obj8._private
42
>>> @attributes([Attribute("_private", init_aliaser=None)])
... class CWithPrivateAttributeNoAliasing(object):
```

¹ This works *only* for attributes defined using the `Attribute` class.

```
...     pass
>>> obj9 = CWithPrivateAttributeNoAliasing(_private=42)
>>> obj9._private
42
```

2.3 API

`characteristic` consists of several class decorators that add features to your classes. There are four that add *one* feature each to your class. And then there's the helper `@attributes` that combines them all into one decorator so you don't have to repeat the attribute list multiple times.

Generally the decorators take a list of attributes as their first positional argument. This list can consists of either native strings² for simple cases or instances of `Attribute` that allow for more customization of `characteristic`'s behavior.

The easiest way to get started is to have a look at the [Examples](#) to get a feeling for `characteristic` and return later for details!

Note: Every argument except for `attrs` for decorators and `name` for `Attribute` is a **keyword argument**. Their positions are coincidental and not guaranteed to remain stable.

`characteristic.attributes(attrs, apply_with_cmp=True, apply_with_init=True, apply_with_repr=True, apply_immutable=False, **kw)`
A convenience class decorator that allows to *selectively* apply `with_cmp()`, `with_repr()`, `with_init()`, and `immutable()` to avoid code duplication.

Parameters

- **attrs** (list of str or `Attributes`.) – Attributes to work with.
- **apply_with_cmp** (*bool*) – Apply `with_cmp()`.
- **apply_with_init** (*bool*) – Apply `with_init()`.
- **apply_with_repr** (*bool*) – Apply `with_repr()`.
- **apply_immutable** (*bool*) – Apply `immutable()`. The only one that is off by default.

Raises ValueError If both *defaults* and an instance of `Attribute` has been passed.

New in version 14.0: Added possibility to pass instances of `Attribute` in `attrs`.

New in version 14.0: Added `apply_*`.

Deprecated since version 14.0: Use `Attribute` instead of `defaults`.

Parameters defaults (dict or None) – Default values if attributes are omitted on instantiation.

Deprecated since version 14.0: Use `apply_with_init` instead of `create_init`. Until removal, if *either* if *False*, `with_init` is not applied.

Parameters create_init (*bool*) – Apply `with_init()`.

`characteristic.with_repr(attrs)`

A class decorator that adds a human readable `__repr__` method to your class using `attrs`.

Parameters attrs (list of str or `Attributes`.) – Attributes to work with.

² Byte strings on Python 2 and Unicode strings on Python 3.

```
>>> from characteristic import with_repr
>>> @with_repr(["a", "b"])
... class RClass(object):
...     def __init__(self, a, b):
...         self.a = a
...         self.b = b
>>> c = RClass(42, "abc")
>>> print c
<RClass(a=42, b='abc')>
```

`characteristic.with_cmp` (*attrs*)

A class decorator that adds comparison methods based on *attrs*.

For that, each class is treated like a tuple of the values of *attrs*. But only instances of *identical* classes are compared!

Parameters *attrs* (list of str or `Attributes`.) – Attributes to work with.

```
>>> from characteristic import with_cmp
>>> @with_cmp(["a", "b"])
... class CClass(object):
...     def __init__(self, a, b):
...         self.a = a
...         self.b = b
>>> o1 = CClass(1, "abc")
>>> o2 = CClass(1, "abc")
>>> o1 == o2 # o1.a == o2.a and o1.b == o2.b
True
>>> o1.c = 23
>>> o2.c = 42
>>> o1 == o2 # attributes that are not passed to with_cmp are ignored
True
>>> o3 = CClass(2, "abc")
>>> o1 < o3 # because 1 < 2
True
>>> o4 = CClass(1, "bca")
>>> o1 < o4 # o1.a == o4.a, but o1.b < o4.b
True
```

`characteristic.with_init` (*attrs*, ***kw*)

A class decorator that wraps the `__init__` method of a class and sets *attrs* using passed *keyword arguments* before calling the original `__init__`.

Those keyword arguments that are used, are removed from the *kwargs* that is passed into your original `__init__`. Optionally, a dictionary of default values for some of *attrs* can be passed too.

Attributes that are defined using `Attribute` and start with underscores will get them stripped for the initializer arguments by default (this behavior is changeable on per-attribute basis when instantiating `Attribute`).

Parameters *attrs* (list of str or `Attributes`.) – Attributes to work with.

Raises

- **ValueError** – If the value for a non-optional attribute hasn't been passed as a keyword argument.
- **ValueError** – If both *defaults* and an instance of `Attribute` has been passed.

Deprecated since version 14.0: Use `Attribute` instead of *defaults*.

Parameters *defaults* (dict or None) – Default values if attributes are omitted on instantiation.

```
>>> from characteristic import with_init, Attribute
>>> @with_init(["a",
...           Attribute("b", default_factory=lambda: 2),
...           Attribute("_c")])
... class IClass(object):
...     def __init__(self):
...         if self.b != 2:
...             raise ValueError("'b' must be 2!")
>>> o1 = IClass(a=1, b=2, c=3)
>>> o2 = IClass(a=1, c=3)
>>> o1._c
3
>>> o1.a == o2.a
True
>>> o1.b == o2.b
True
>>> IClass()
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: Missing keyword value for 'a'.
>>> IClass(a=1, b=3) # the custom __init__ is called after the attributes are initialized
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: 'b' must be 2!
```

Note: The generated initializer explicitly does *not* support positional arguments. Those are *always* passed to the existing `__init__` unaltered. Used keyword arguments will *not* be passed to the original `__init__` method and have to be accessed on the class (i.e. `self.a`).

`characteristic.immutable(attrs)`

Class decorator that makes *attrs* of a class immutable.

That means that *attrs* can only be set from an initializer. If anyone else tries to set one of them, an `AttributeError` is raised.

New in version 14.0.

```
>>> from characteristic import immutable
>>> @immutable([Attribute("foo")])
... class ImmutableClass(object):
...     foo = "bar"
>>> ic = ImmutableClass()
>>> ic.foo
'bar'
>>> ic.foo = "not bar"
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
AttributeError: Attribute 'foo' of class 'ImmutableClass' is immutable.
```

Please note, that that doesn't mean that the attributes themselves are immutable too:

```
>>> @immutable(["foo"])
... class C(object):
...     foo = []
>>> i = C()
>>> i.foo = [42]
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
```



```
AttributeError: Attribute 'foo' of class 'C' is immutable.
>>> i.foo.append(42)
>>> i.foo
[42]
```

```
class characteristic.Attribute(name,      exclude_from_cmp=False,      exclude_from_init=False,
                               exclude_from_repr=False,      exclude_from_immutable=False,
                               default_value=NOTHING,      default_factory=None,      in-
                               stance_of=None, init_aliaser=<function strip_leading_underscores
                               at 0x7f03fd4885f0>)
```

A representation of an attribute.

In the simplest case, it only consists of a name but more advanced properties like default values are possible too.

All attributes on the Attribute class are *read-only*.

Parameters

- **name** (*str*) – Name of the attribute.
- **exclude_from_cmp** (*bool*) – Ignore attribute in `with_cmp()`.
- **exclude_from_init** (*bool*) – Ignore attribute in `with_init()`.
- **exclude_from_repr** (*bool*) – Ignore attribute in `with_repr()`.
- **exclude_from_immutable** (*bool*) – Ignore attribute in `immutable()`.
- **default_value** – A value that is used whenever this attribute isn't passed as an keyword argument to a class that is decorated using `with_init()` (or `attributes()` with `apply_with_init=True`).

Therefore, setting this makes an attribute *optional*.

Since a default value of *None* would be ambiguous, a special sentinel `NOTHING` is used. Passing it means the lack of a default value.

- **default_factory** (*callable*) – A factory that is used for generating default values whenever this attribute isn't passed as an keyword argument to a class that is decorated using `with_init()` (or `attributes()` with `apply_with_init=True`).

Therefore, setting this makes an attribute *optional*.

- **instance_of** (*type*) – If used together with `with_init()` (or `attributes()` with `apply_with_init=True`), the passed value is checked whether it's an instance of the type passed here. The initializer then raises `TypeError` on mismatch.
- **init_aliaser** (*callable*) – A callable that is invoked with the name of the attribute and whose return value is used as the keyword argument name for the `__init__` created by `with_init()` (or `attributes()` with `apply_with_init=True`). Uses `strip_leading_underscores()` by default to change `_foo` to `foo`. Set to *None* to disable aliasing.

Raises ValueError If both `default_value` and `default_factory` have been passed.

New in version 14.0.

```
characteristic.strip_leading_underscores(attribute_name)
```

Strip leading underscores from *attribute_name*.

Used by default by the `init_aliaser` argument of `Attribute`.

Parameters `attribute_name` (*str*) – The original attribute name to mangle.

Return type `str`

```
>>> from characteristic import strip_leading_underscores
>>> strip_leading_underscores("_foo")
'foo'
>>> strip_leading_underscores("__bar")
'bar'
>>> strip_leading_underscores("___qux")
'qux'
```

`characteristic.NOTHING = NOTHING`

Sentinel class to indicate the lack of a value when None is ambiguous.

New in version 14.0.

2.4 Project Information

2.4.1 License and Hall of Fame

`characteristic` is licensed under the permissive [MIT](#) license. The full license text can be also found in the [source code repository](#).

Authors

`characteristic` is written and maintained by [Hynek Schlawack](#).

The development is kindly supported by [Variomedia AG](#).

It's inspired by Twisted's [FancyEqMixin](#) but is implemented using class decorators because [sub-classing](#) is bad for you, m'kay?

The following folks helped forming `characteristic` into what it is now:

- [Adam Dangoor](#)
- [Glyph](#)
- [Itamar Turner-Trauring](#)
- [Jean-Paul Calderone](#)
- [Julian Berman](#)
- [Richard Wall](#)

2.4.2 How To Contribute

Every open source project lives from the generous help by contributors that sacrifice their time and `characteristic` is no different.

To make participation as pleasant as possible, this project adheres to the [Code of Conduct](#) by the Python Software Foundation.

Here are a few guidelines to get you started:

- Add yourself to the [AUTHORS.rst](#) file in an alphabetical fashion. Every contribution is valuable and shall be credited.
- If your change is noteworthy, add an entry to the [changelog](#).

- No contribution is too small; please submit as many fixes for typos and grammar bloopers as you can!
- Don't *ever* break backward compatibility. If it ever *has* to happen for higher reasons, `characteristic` will follow the proven [procedures](#) of the Twisted project.
- *Always* add tests and docs for your code. This is a hard rule; patches with missing tests or documentation won't be merged. If a feature is not tested or documented, it doesn't exist.
- Obey [PEP 8](#) and [PEP 257](#).
- Write [good commit messages](#).
- Ideally, [squash](#) your commits, i.e. make your pull requests just one commit.

Note: If you have something great but aren't sure whether it adheres – or even can adhere – to the rules above: **please submit a pull request anyway!**

In the best case, we can mold it into something, in the worst case the pull request gets politely closed. There's absolutely nothing to fear.

Thank you for considering to contribute to `characteristic`! If you have any question or concerns, feel free to reach out to me.

2.4.3 Changelog

- : Switch to a year-based version scheme.
- #8: Add explicit `Attribute` class and use it for default factories. Deprecate the `defaults` argument of `with_init()` and `attributes()`.
- #14: Add `immutable()` to make certain attributes of classes immutable. Also add `apply_immutable` argument to `attributes()`.
- #13: Add aliasing of private attributes for `with_init()`'s initializer when used together with `Attribute`. Allow for custom aliasing via a callable.
- #12: Add type checks to `with_init()`'s initializer.
- : Add possibility to exclude single attributes from certain decorators.
- : Add possibility to hand-pick which decorators are applied from within `attributes()`. A new line of arguments has been introduced for that and `create_init` has been deprecated.
- : Initial work.

Indices and tables

- *genindex*
- *search*