

# R Package Development

Robert Stojnić [rs550@cam.ac.uk](mailto:rs550@cam.ac.uk)

Laurent Gatto [lg390@cam.ac.uk](mailto:lg390@cam.ac.uk)

Cambridge System Biology Centre  
University of Cambridge



24 - 25 January 2013

- 1 A few words about R packages
- 2 Package structure
- 3 Writing R documentation
  - Rd format
  - In-source documentation
  - Vignettes
- 4 Package unit testing
- 5 Distributing packages

## 1 A few words about R packages

## 2 Package structure

## 3 Writing R documentation

- Rd format
- In-source documentation
- Vignettes

## 4 Package unit testing

## 5 Distributing packages

## References

- R Installation and Administration [R-admin], R Core team
- Writing R Extensions [R-ext], R Core team

Use `help.start()` to access them from your local installation, or <http://cran.r-project.org/manuals.html> from the web.

## Terminology

A **package** is loaded from a **library** by the function `library()`. Thus a library is a directory containing installed packages.

Calling `library("foo", lib.loc = "/path/to/bar")` loads the package (book) *foo* from the library *bar* located at `/path/to/bar`.

## Packages

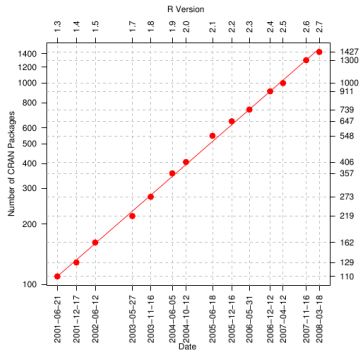
One of the aspects that make R appealing:

**CRAN** package repository features 4262 available packages.

**R-forge** 1453 hosted projects.

**Bioconductor** 610 reviewed packages in latest release (version 2.11).

Numbers checked on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2013



## Why packages

*Packages provide a mechanism for loading optional code and attached documentation as needed.*

There is more to it – packages are a means to

- logically group your own functions
- keep code and documentation together and consistent
- keep code and data together
- keep track of changes in code
- summarise all packages used for a analysis (see `sessionInfo()`)
- make a reproducible research compendium (container for code, text, data as a means for distributing, managing and updating)
- optionally test your code
- ... project management

even if you do not plan to distribute them.

## Building packages

R CMD build myPackage – the R package builder builds R package (and vignettes if available).

## Checking packages

R CMD check myPackage\_0.1.1.tar.gz or R CMD check myPackage – the R package checker tests whether the package or source work correctly.

- The package is installed (checks missing cross-references and duplicate aliases in help files).
- File names validity, permissions.
- Package DESCRIPTION file is checked for completeness, and some of its entries for correctness.
- R and .Rd files are checked for syntax errors.
- A check is made for missing documentation entries.
- Codoc checking
- Examples provided by the package's documentation are run.
- If available, package tests are run and vignettes are executed and compiled.

## Installing packages

R CMD INSTALL myPackage\_0.1.1.tar.gz or  
`install.packages("myPackage_0.1.1.tar.gz")` – installs the package in the default library. Other libraries can be specified with the `-l` option or `lib` argument.

## Loading

Use `library()` or `require()`.

## On Windows

R is very much Unix centric. To build from source on Windows, you will need Rtools<sup>a</sup>. See the *The Windows toolset* in R-Admin for more details.

---

<sup>a</sup><http://www.murdoch-sutherland.com/Rtools/>



1 A few words about R packages

**2 Package structure**

3 Writing R documentation

- Rd format
- In-source documentation
- Vignettes

4 Package unit testing

5 Distributing packages

## A minimal package

Function `package.skeleton()` automates some of the setup for a new source package. Calling it with minimal arguments produces the following hierarchy:

```
> foo <- function(x) x  
> package.skeleton(name = "myRpackage", list = "foo")
```

*Creating directories ...*

*Creating DESCRIPTION ...*

*Creating NAMESPACE ...*

*Creating Read-and-delete-me ...*

*Saving functions and data ...*

*Making help files ...*

*Done.*

*Further steps are described in*

*'./myRpackage/Read-and-delete-me'.*

```
> foo <- function(x) x  
> package.skeleton(name = "myRpackage", list = "foo")
```

## produces

```
myRpackage/  
|-- DESCRIPTION  
|-- man  
|   |-- foo.Rd  
|   `-- myRpackage-package.Rd  
|-- R  
|   `-- foo.R  
`-- Read-and-delete-me
```

2 directories, 5 files

# DESCRIPTION

Package: myRpackage ## mandatory (\*)

Type: Package ## optional, 'Package' is default type

Title: What the package does (short line) ## \*

Version: 1.0 ## \*

Date: 2013-05-10 ## release date of the current version

Author: Who wrote it ## \*

Maintainer: Who to complain to <yourfault@somewhere.net> ## \*

Description: More about what it does (maybe more than one line) ## \*

License: What license is it under? ## \*

## Lazy loading

A mechanism used to defer initialization of an object until the point at which it is needed. The individual objects in the package's environment are indirect references to the actual objects until, for example a function is called or an object loaded.

The `LazyLoad` and `LazyData` fields control whether the R objects and the datasets (respectively) use lazy-loading. `LazyLoad` must be set if the *methods* package is used.

`LazyLoad` is now on by default.

## Example

R uses *Lazy evaluation*, which delays the evaluation of an expression (here the argument) until its value is actually required <sup>[a]</sup>:

---

<sup>a</sup>example from Hadley Wickham's devtools

```
> f <- function(x) { 10 }  
> system.time(f(Sys.sleep(3)))
```

user	system	elapsed
0	0	0

```
> f <- function(x) { force(x); 10 }  
> system.time(f(Sys.sleep(3)))
```

user	system	elapsed
0.000	0.000	3.003

## Other important fields

- Depends** A comma-separated list of package names (optionally with versions) which this package depends on.
- Suggests** Packages that are not necessarily needed: used only in examples, tests or vignettes, packages loaded in the body of functions (see `require()`).
- Imports** Packages whose name spaces are imported from (as specified in the `NAMESPACE` file) but which do not need to be attached to the search path.
- Collate** Controls the collation order for the R code files in a package. If `filed` is present, all source files must be listed.
- URL** A list of URLs separated by commas or whitespace.

...





## Attach and load

Packages are attached to the search path with `library` or `require`.

**Attach** When a package is attached, then all of its dependencies (see `Depends` field in its `DESCRIPTION` file) are also attached. Such packages are part of the evaluation environment and will be searched.

**Load** One can also use the `Imports` field in the `NAMESPACE` file. Imported packages are loaded but are not attached: they do not appear on the search path and are available only to the package that imported them.

## Package subdirectories

### R

Contains source()able R source code to be installed. Files must start with an ASCII (lower or upper case) letter or digit and have one of the extensions .R (recommended), .S, .q, .r, or .s. File order is important if code relies on *earlier* code – order use Collate filed in DESCRIPTION file.

### Example

```
## works fine without Collate field
AllGenerics.R      DataClasses.R
methods-ClassA.R   methods-ClassB.R
functions-ClassA.R ...
```

zzz.R is generally used to define special functions used to initialize (called after a package is loaded and attached) and clean up (just before the package is detached). See `help(" onLoad")`, `?First.Lib` and `?Last.Lib` for more details.

### man

Manuals for the objects (package, functions, generics, methods, classes and data sets) in the package in R documentation (Rd) format. The filenames must start with an ASCII (lower or upper case) letter or digit and have the extension `.Rd` or `.rd` and should be URL compatible. If you use a NAMESPACE, only exported symbols need to be documented. Without NAMESPACE, internal use only objects should be documented in `pkg-internal.Rd`.

### data

Contains data files, made available via *lazy-loading* or for loading using `data()`. Data types that are allowed are

**R code** self-sufficient plain R code (`.R` or `.r`),

**Tables** possibly compressed tables (`.tab`, `.txt`, or `.csv`, see `?data` for the file formats)

**Objects** created using `save()` (`.RData` or `.rda`).

### Example

There is a `DnaSeq` object in `sequences/data`.

### inst

Content is copied recursively to the installation directory, for example

**CITATION** file (see `citation()` function),

**doc** directory for additional documents (see vignettes<sup>a</sup>, later).

**extdata** directory for other data files, not belonging in data.

**tests** code for unit tests (see later).

---

<sup>a</sup>It is now also possible to use the `./vignettes` directory for these.

### Example

In our *sequences* package, there is a fasta sequence in `sequences/inst/extdata` used to illustrate the `readFasta` function.

## Package subdirectories

### tests

Contains additional package-specific test code. We will talk about unit tests later.

### src

Contains sources and headers for the compiled code, plus optionally a file Makevars or Makefile.

### demo

R scripts run via `demo()` that demonstrate some of the functionality of the package. Execution of these scripts is not checked.

## Exercise 1: Let's create a package

So far, you have defined a set of classes, methods and functions ... Create the required directory structure and files using `package.skeleton(name="sequences")` or manually. For the former, you can use different arguments:

**list** to specify the R objects by their names.

**code\_files** to specify R code files (use this if you have S4 classes).

**environment** to specify an environment where objects are looked for.

See `?package.skeleton` for more details.

## Exercise 2: Let's build/check it

Do you expect the package to build/check/INSTALL:

R CMD build sequences

R CMD check sequences\_1.0.tar.gz

R CMD INSTALL sequences\_1.0.tar.gz

Why? Have a look at R CMD build|check --help.



1 A few words about R packages

2 Package structure

3 **Writing R documentation**

- Rd format
- In-source documentation
- Vignettes

4 Package unit testing

5 Distributing packages

### R documentation format

R objects are documented in files written in *R documentation* (Rd) format, a simple markup language much of which closely resembles  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , which can be processed into a variety of formats, including  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , HTML, pdf and plain text.

### An Rd file consists of

**Header** provides basic information about the name of the file, the topics documented, a title, a short textual description and R usage information – mandatory.

**Body** gives further information defined within *sections* (for example, on the function's arguments and return value, as in the example)

**Footer** with keyword information – optional.

Every (exported) object must be documented. Package documentation is optional.

## Example

```
% File src/library/base/man/load.Rd
\name{load}
\alias{load}
\title{Reload Saved Datasets}
\description{
  Reload the datasets written to a file with the function
  \code{save}.
}
\usage{
load(file, envir = parent.frame())
}
\arguments{
  \item{file}{a connection or a character string giving the
    name of the file to load.}
  \item{envir}{the environment where the data should be
    loaded.}
}
\seealso{
  \code{\link{save}}.
}
\examples{
## save all data
save(list = ls(), file= "all.RData")

## restore the saved values to the current environment
load("all.RData")

## restore the saved values to the workspace
load("all.RData", .GlobalEnv)
}
\keyword{file}
```

## General comments

- Different objects are documented with different types of Rd files, as defined by the `\docType{}` tag.
- Different object documentation require or are advised to contain different sections.
- One .Rd file can document several objects by defining multiple `\alias{}`'es.

## Guidelines for Rd files

These are suggested guidelines for the system help files (in .Rd format) that are intended for core developers but may also be useful for package writers. (see <http://developer.r-project.org/Rds.html>)

There are many different sections and marking text (for mathematical notation, tables, cross-references, ...), that will look very familiar to  $\text{\LaTeX}$  users. All are described in *Writing R documentation files* (section 2) of the R-ext manual.

Fortunately, the `prompt(object) et. al.` functions will inspect the object to be documented and create a specific documentation skeleton for us to be completed.

Provides an short and optional overview of a package.

### Example

```
promptPackage("sequences")
```

### Demonstration

Let's look at the `sequences-package.Rd` that documents our package.

## Example

```
\name{rivers}
\docType{data}
\alias{rivers}
\title{Lengths of Major North American Rivers}
\description{
  This data set gives the lengths (in miles) of 141 \dQuote{major}
  rivers in North America, as compiled by the US Geological
  Survey.
}
\usage{rivers}
\format{A vector containing 141 observations.}
\source{World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1975, page 406.}
\references{
  McNeil, D. R. (1977) \emph{Interactive Data Analysis}.
  New York: Wiley.
}
\keyword{datasets}
```

## Example

`prompt(myDataFrame)` or `promptData(myDataObject)`

## Demonstration

Let's look at the document of the `dnaseq` object.



## Function documentation

Many markup command, including `\usage{fun(arg1, arg2, ...)}`, `\arguments{...}`, `\section{Warning}{...}` and `\examples{...}`, which are executed!

### Example

`prompt(object=myFunction)` or `prompt(name="myFunction")`

### Demonstration

We have written one functions for our package so far, `readFasta`. It's documentation is available in `man/readFasta.Rd`.

## Documenting S4 classes and methods

Documentation is 'similar' than for functions. Note that aliases are of the form `MyClass-class` or `MyGeneric,signature_list-method`. Additional aliases should be added to refer to `MyGeneric`, `MyGeneric-method`, ... and the manuals are accessed with `class?topic` and `method?topic`. Overall documentation for methods should be aliased with `MyGeneric-methods`

See `help("Documentation", package = "methods")` for more details.

### Example

```
promptClass("MyClass") and promptMethods("myMethod")
```

### Demonstration

Let's have a look at our class documentations; we have used aliases for the methods to refer to on documentation file.

## What is it?

Roxygen is a Doxygen-like documentation system for R; allowing **in-source** specification of Rd files, collation and namespace directives.

See <https://github.com/klutometis/roxygen>.

Install with `install.packages("roxygen2")`.

Use R CMD `roxygen myPackage` to generate manuals and NAMESPACE.

## Example

```
##' Reads sequences data in fasta and create \code{DnaSeq}
##' and \code{RnaSeq} instances.
##'
##' This funtion reads DNA and RNA fasta files and generates
##' valid \code{"DnaSeq"} and \code{"RnaSeq"} instances.
##'
##' @title Read fasta files.
##' @param infile the name of the fasta file which the data are to be read from.
##' @return an instance of \code{DnaSeq} or \code{RnaSeq}.
##' @seealso \code{\linkS4class{GenericSeq}}, \code{\linkS4class{DnaSeq}} and \code{\linkS4class{RnaSeq}}.
##' @examples
##' f <- dir(system.file("extdata",package="sequences"),pattern="fasta",full.names=TRUE)
##' f
##' aa <- readFasta(f)
##' aa
##' @author Laurent Gatto \email{lg390@cam.ac.uk}
##' @keywords IO, file
readFasta <- function(infile){
  lines <- readLines(infile)
  header <- grep(">", lines)
  if (length(header)>1) {
    warning("Reading first sequence only.")
    lines <- lines[header[1]:(header[2]-1)]
    header <- header[1]
  }
  .id <- sub("> *", "", lines[header], perl=TRUE)
  .sequence <- toupper(paste(lines[(header+1):length(lines)], collapse=""))
  .alphabet <- toupper(unique(strsplit(.sequence, "")[[1]]))
  if (all(.alphabet %in% c("A", "C", "G", "T"))) {
    newseq <- new("DnaSeq",
      .id,
      .sequence,
      .alphabet)
```

## Good points

Makes (1) to get from code to full package straightforward and also (2) maintenance much easier.

## Since roxygen2

S4 support (classes, generics, methods) – at least under development.

## See also

Rd2roxygen – Convert Rd to roxygen documentation and utilities to improve documentation

<http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/Rd2roxygen/index.html>

## Package vignette

These *executable* documents are in Sweave format (`.Rnw` extension), which is an extended  $\text{\LaTeX}$  document that includes code chunks. These are executed and the output (variable, but also tables and graphs) are displayed in the document. These dynamic reports, are updated automatically if data or analysis change.

The package vignettes are compiled at build time and are the preferred place for more extensive package documentation and use-cases.

Reference: <http://www.stat.uni-muenchen.de/~leisch/Sweave/>

## Demonstration

Let's have a look at the *sequences* package vignette in `sequences/inst/doc`.

## sessionInfo()

Prints version information about R and attached or loaded packages.

```
sessionInfo()
```

```
## R Under development (unstable) (2013-04-05 r62500)
## Platform: x86_64-unknown-linux-gnu (64-bit)
##
## locale:
##  [1] LC_CTYPE=en_GB.UTF-8      LC_NUMERIC=C
##  [3] LC_TIME=en_GB.UTF-8      LC_COLLATE=en_GB.UTF-8
##  [5] LC_MONETARY=en_GB.UTF-8  LC_MESSAGES=en_GB.UTF-8
##  [7] LC_PAPER=C               LC_NAME=C
##  [9] LC_ADDRESS=C            LC_TELEPHONE=C
## [11] LC_MEASUREMENT=en_GB.UTF-8 LC_IDENTIFICATION=C
##
## attached base packages:
## [1] stats      graphics  grDevices  utils      datasets  methods   base
##
## other attached packages:
## [1] knitr_1.2
##
## loaded via a namespace (and not attached):
## [1] digest_0.6.3  evaluate_0.4.3 formatR_0.7    stringr_0.6.2
## [5] tools_3.1.0
```



```
toLatex(sessionInfo())
```

- R Under development (unstable) (2013-04-05 r62500),  
x86\_64-unknown-linux-gnu
- Locale: LC\_CTYPE=en\_GB.UTF-8, LC\_NUMERIC=C, LC\_TIME=en\_GB.UTF-8,  
LC\_COLLATE=en\_GB.UTF-8, LC\_MONETARY=en\_GB.UTF-8,  
LC\_MESSAGES=en\_GB.UTF-8, LC\_PAPER=C, LC\_NAME=C, LC\_ADDRESS=C,  
LC\_TELEPHONE=C, LC\_MEASUREMENT=en\_GB.UTF-8,  
LC\_IDENTIFICATION=C
- Base packages: base, datasets, graphics, grDevices, methods, stats, utils
- Other packages: knitr 1.2
- Loaded via a namespace (and not attached): digest 0.6.3, evaluate 0.4.3,  
formatR 0.7, stringr 0.6.2, tools 3.1.0

- 1 A few words about R packages
- 2 Package structure
- 3 Writing R documentation
  - Rd format
  - In-source documentation
  - Vignettes
- 4 Package unit testing**
- 5 Distributing packages

## How to test the code in your package?

Or how to make sure that changes in your code do not break existing functionality?

- Implicitly, documentation examples and a vignette do some tests.
- Using R's build-in testing, that runs some code and compares the output to a saved template.
- Specific packages for unit testing: *RUnit*<sup>a</sup> or *testthat*<sup>b</sup>.

---

<sup>a</sup><http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/RUnit/index.html>

<sup>b</sup><http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/testthat/index.html>

## Using an `.Rout.save` file

In `package/tests/`

Create

- `mytest.R` with code to be tested
- `mytest.Rout.save` with the reference output

When checking your package R will

- 1 execute the code in `mytest.R`
- 2 save the output to `mytest.Rout`
- 3 compare `mytest.Rout` to `mytest.Rout.save`
- 4 report any differences

### Test individual expression

`expect_that(object_or_expression, condition)` with conditions

- equals** `expect_that(1+2, equals(3))` or `expect_equal(1+2, 3)`
- gives\_warning** `expect_that(warning("a"), gives_warning())`
- is\_a** `expect_that(1, is_a("numeric"))` or `expect_is(1, "numeric")`
- is\_true** `expect_that(2 == 2, is_true())` or `expect_true(2==2)`
- matches** `expect_that("Testing is fun", matches("fun"))` or `expect_match("Testing is fun", "f.n")`
- takes\_less\_than** `expect_that(Sys.sleep(1), takes_less_than(3))`
- ...

## Example

```
library(sequences)

## Loading required package: Rcpp
## This is package 'sequences'

library(testthat)
a <- new("DnaSeq", sequence="ACGTaa")
test_that("ok test", {
  expect_equal(length(a), 6)
  expect_true(seq(a)=="ACGTAA")
  expect_is(a, "DnaSeq")
})
expect_true(seq(a)=="ACGTaa")

## Error: seq(a) == "ACGTaa" isn't true
```

## Demonstration

- Let's inspect the `sequences/tests/sequences-test.R` and `sequences-test.Rout.save` files. When actually checking the package, the resulting `sequences-test.Rout` file is in `sequences.Rcheck/tests/`.
- Let's play with *testthat* interactively.

- 1 A few words about R packages
- 2 Package structure
- 3 Writing R documentation
  - Rd format
  - In-source documentation
  - Vignettes
- 4 Package unit testing
- 5 Distributing packages**



**CRAN** Read the CRAN Repository Policy<sup>a</sup>. Upload your `--as-cran checked myPackage_x.y.z.tar.gz` to `ftp://cran.R-project.org/incoming` or using `http://CRAN.R-project.org/submit.html`. Your package will be installable with `install.packages("myRpackage")`.

**R-forge** Log in, register a project and wait for acceptance. Then commit your code to the svn repository. Your package will be installable with `install.packages` using `repos="http://R-Forge.R-project.org"`.

---

<sup>a</sup>`http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/policies.html`

**Bioconductor** Make sure to satisfy submission criteria (pass check, have a vignette, use S4 if OO, have a NAMESPACE, make use of appropriate existing infrastructure, include a NEWS file, must **not** already be on CRAN, ...) and submit by email. Your package will then be reviewed before acceptance. A svn account will then be created. Package will be installable with `biocLite("myPackage")`.

## Further reading

- R Installation and Administration, R Core team
- Writing R Extensions, R Core team
- R Programming for Bioinformatics, Robert Gentleman

Thank you for you attention.