

Module 5: Learning parameters of mathematical models from data

John Lowengrub (Math, BME)
Jack Corrette (MCSB)
Caleb Hendrick (MCSB, Math)
Zirui (Ray) Zhang (UCI/WPI)

Mathematical and computational modeling provides a bridge between experiments and the real physical system

🌐 Mathematical

- 📌 Model of real system, typically simplified
- 📌 lack of knowledge about real system (uncertainty about model)

🌐 Experimental data

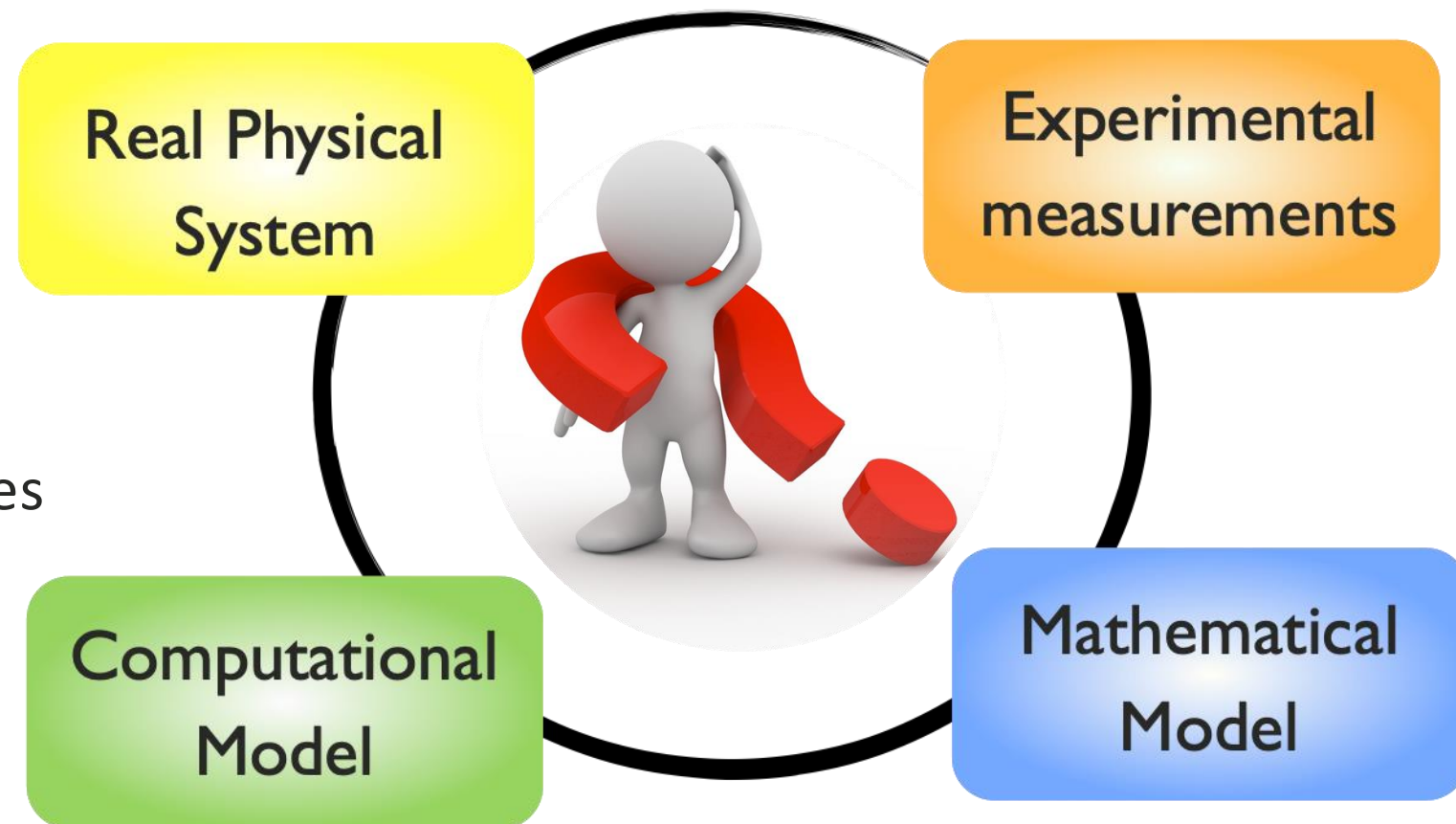
- 📌 measurements
- 📌 Experimental errors, noise (uncertainty in measurements)

🌐 Parametric

- 📌 Need to determine parameter values
- 📌 limited knowledge of model parameter values (uncertainty in parameter values)

🌐 Computational

- 📌 numerical approximations, (e.g. discretization over finite number of grid points)
- 📌 rounding errors (uncertainty about numerical accuracy)



A model is only as good as its parameters

3 main types of parameter estimation from data:

- Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE)
 - Point estimates for parameters that are the best in explaining the data
- Maximum a posteriori (MAP)
 - Point estimates for parameters that are the best in explaining the data taking into account prior knowledge. (e.g., parameter ranges)
- Bayesian parameter inference
 - Estimate probability distribution of parameters, given the data.

Outline of module 5

Focus on Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE)

- Brief intro to MLE
- Application of MLE to determine parameters of logistic growth model (demonstration in Matlab)
- Neural network approaches. (Physics-Informed Neural Networks)
 - Test algorithms
 - Vary network parameters
 - Inference using synthetic data
 - Inference using bacteria growth data

Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) I

- Let $p(D|\rho)$ denote the probability that the data D can be described by a model with parameters ρ . Then, we want to choose ρ to *maximize* $p(D|\rho)$.
- Typically, this is done by minimizing $-\log(p(D|\rho))$. That is,

$$\rho_{MLE} = \operatorname{argmin}_{\rho} (-\log(p(D|\rho)))$$

This is usually motivated by assuming that D contains a set of independent observations, e.g., $p(D|\rho) = \prod_{i=1}^n p(D_i|\rho)$

- If one defines a cost function by

$$c(D|\rho) = -\log(p(D|\rho))$$

Then, we can write

$$p(D|\rho) = e^{c(D,\rho)}$$

Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) II

Let's see how to apply this to a typical problem.

Consider the model of logistic growth:

$$\frac{dx}{dt} = \lambda x(t) (1 - (x(t)/\theta)^\alpha), \quad x(0) = p_0$$

where

- $x(t)$ is the population at time t ,
- λ is the intrinsic *reproduction rate*,
- θ is the *carrying capacity*, and
- α is an *impedance* (shape) parameter

Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) III

Given the parameters $(\lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0)$

we can write the solution as: $x(t; \lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0)$

and take the cost function to be the sum of squared errors:

$$c(\lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0) = SSE(\lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0) = \sum_i (x(t_i, \lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0) - x_i)^2$$

where x_i are the observations at t_i

Thus, we want to solve the inverse problem:

$$(\lambda^*, \theta^*, \alpha^*, p_0^*) = \arg \min_{(\lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0)} SSE(\lambda, \theta, \alpha, p_0)$$

Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) IV

In classical optimization theory, generate a sequence:

$$\boldsymbol{\rho}_n = (\lambda_n, \theta_n, \alpha_n, p_{0,n}) \xrightarrow{n \rightarrow \infty} \boldsymbol{\rho}^* = (\lambda^*, \theta^*, \alpha^*, p_0^*)$$

The classic approach to generate the sequence is gradient descent:

$$\boldsymbol{\rho}_{n+1} = \boldsymbol{\rho}_n - \delta \nabla_{\boldsymbol{\rho}} SSE(\boldsymbol{\rho}_n)$$

Here, $\nabla_{\boldsymbol{\rho}}$ denotes the gradient with respect to the parameters.

Note that this requires, $\nabla_{\boldsymbol{\rho}} x(t, \boldsymbol{\rho})$ which must be calculated.

An alternative, is to use the *Nelder-Mead algorithm* (fminsearch), which does not require derivatives.

MATLAB

Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) V

We will demonstrate how to fit the logistic growth model to synthetic noisy data. The codes can be found in <https://github.com/CalebHend/MCSB-Bootcamp-Data-Fitting/tree/main/fminsearch-MATLAB-Demo>. Note that this approach still requires the solution of Eq. (1) to be computed at each stage of the iteration.

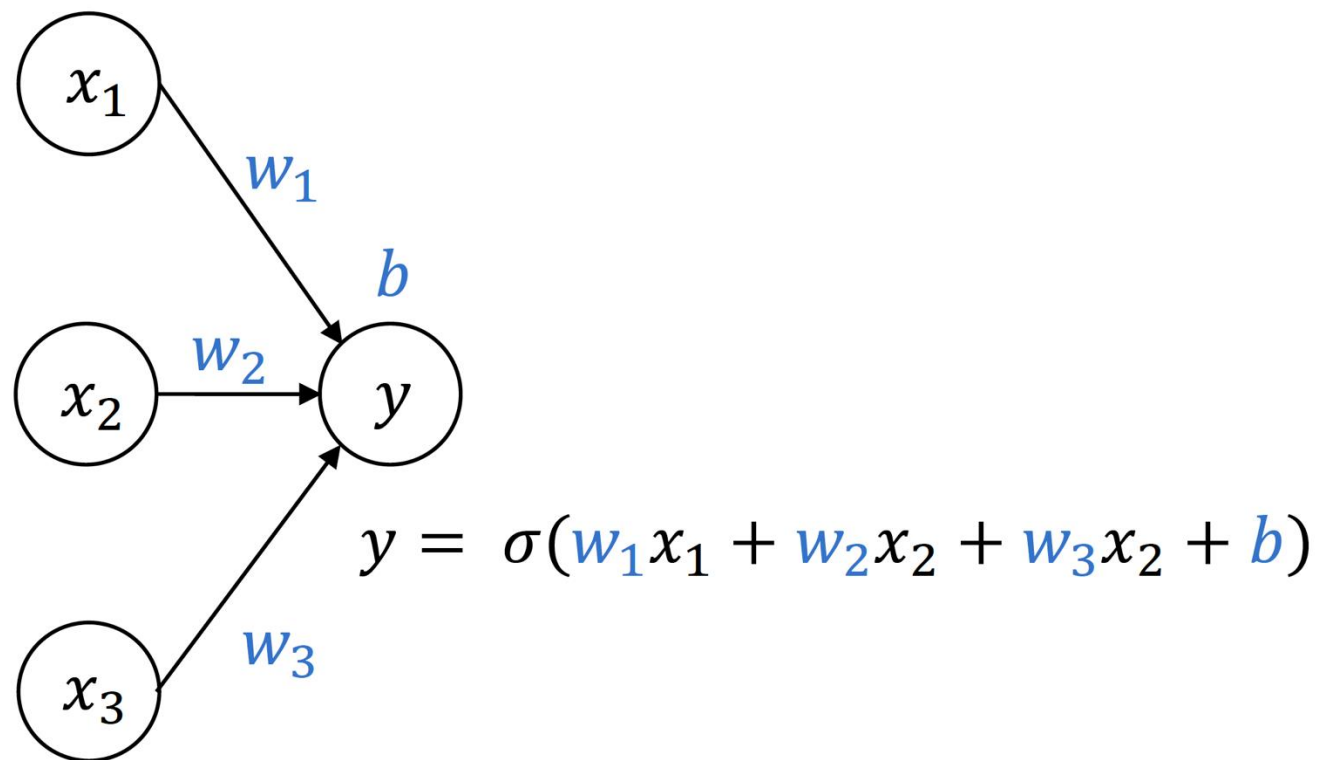
Physically-Informed Neural Networks I

- Introduction to Neural Network
- How to Train a Neural Network
- What is a Physics-Informed Neural Network (PINN)
- Solving an Inverse Problem using PINNs

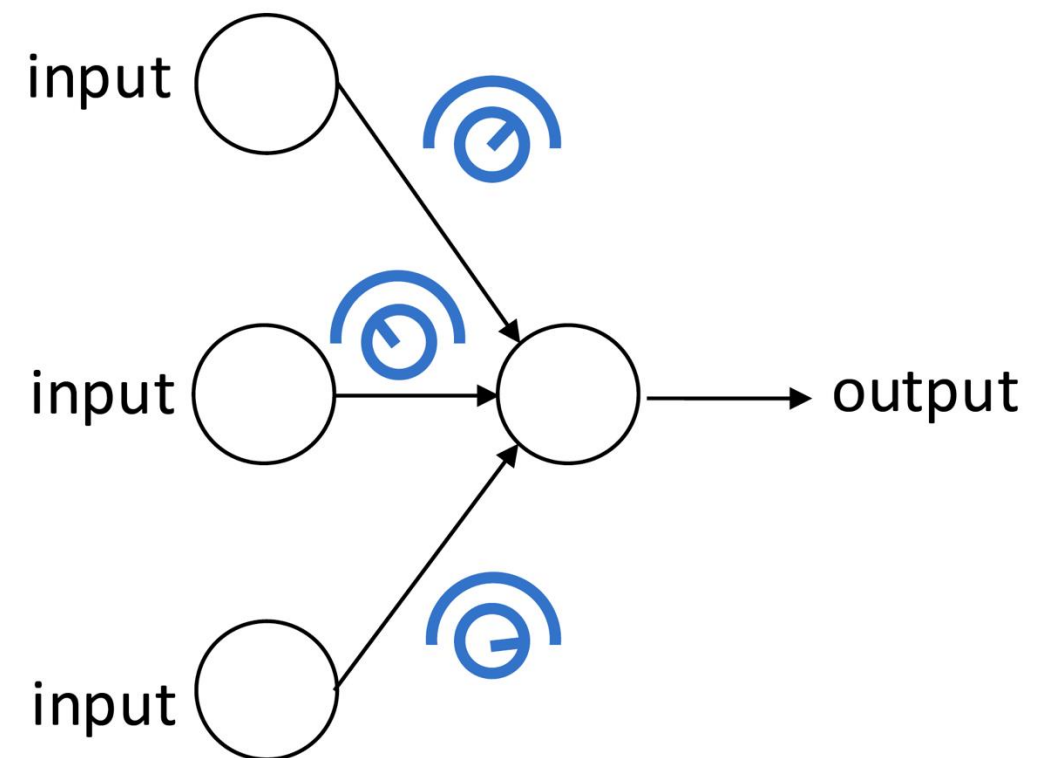
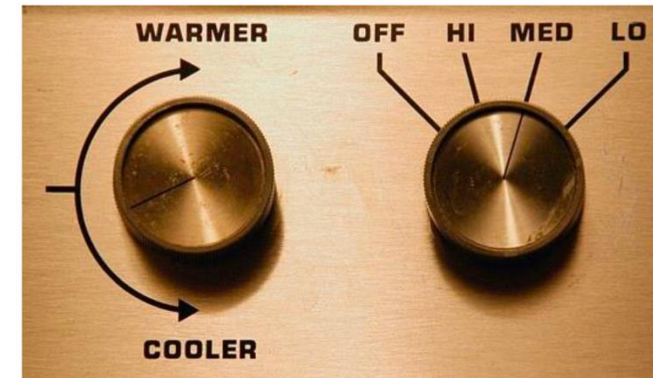
Advantages:

- Solve the forward and backward problems simultaneously
- Use sophisticated algorithms previously developed for neural networks.
- Very powerful, e.g., can infer unknown functions with “little” imposed structure,...

Physically-Informed Neural Networks II: Neuron

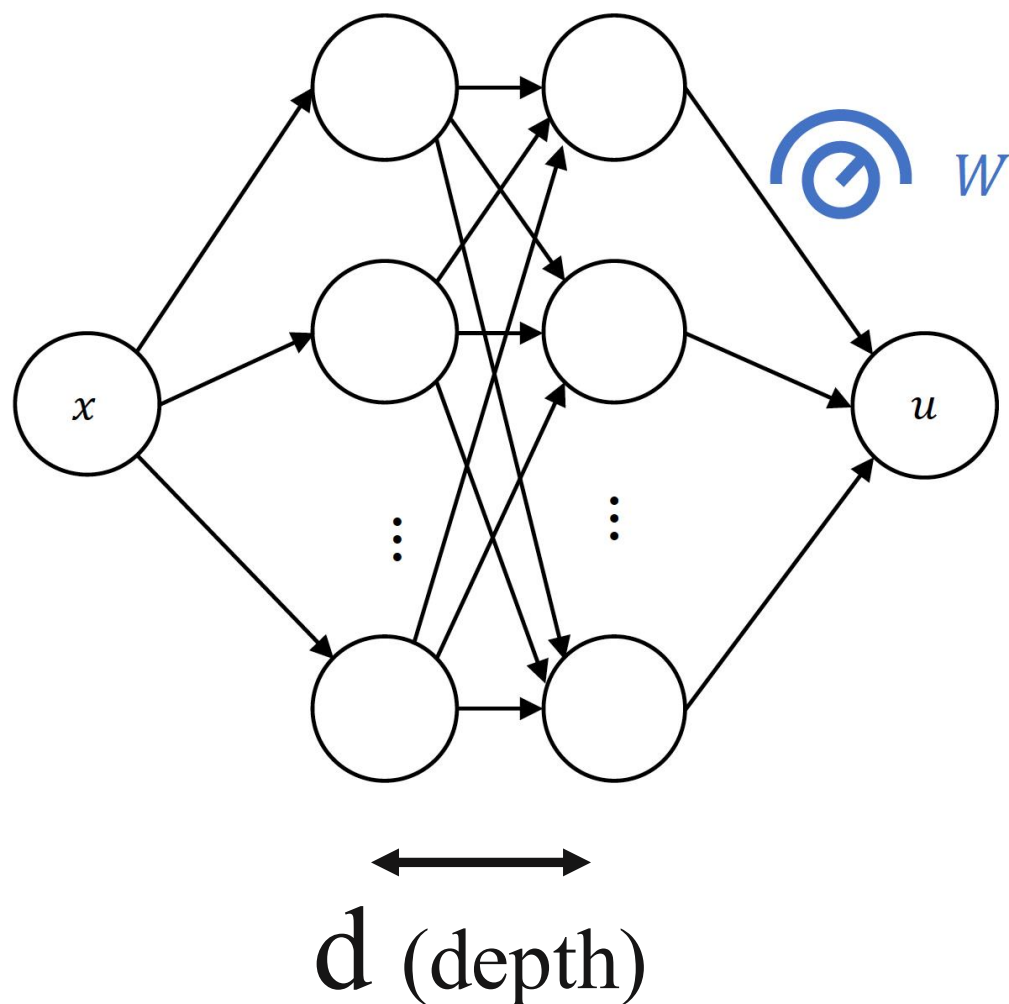


Example activation $\sigma(z) = \tanh(z)$



Physically-Informed Neural Networks II: Neural network

Neural network is a function that depends on the **weights** $u_W(x)$



W
(Width)

input $\xrightarrow{\text{Weights}}$ output



Physically-Informed Neural Networks III: How to train a Neural network

Given data $(t_1, y_1), \dots (t_N, y_N),$

$$\min_W L_{data} = \sum_{i=1}^N (u_W(t_i) - y_i)^2$$



min
weights

error between the neural network prediction and data

Turn the “knobs” to decrease the loss

Google Colab

Physically-Informed Neural Networks IV: Google Colab

The necessary files can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10YSACiWFgAvxpZKgGNzzt9tpcDoNeF4W?usp=sharing>

Have one member of your group **make a copy** of the folder in their Drive and **share and edit the copy** with the group. Work only in the copied folder.

Google Colab

References

- Raissi, M., Perdikaris, P., Karniadakis, G.E., 2019. Physics-informed neural networks: A deep learning framework for solving forward and inverse problems involving nonlinear partial differential equations.
- Zhang et al., Medical Image Analysis, 103423 (2025)
- Zhang et al., BiLO: Bilevel Local Operator Learning for PDE inverse problems. Part 1: PDE constrained optimization. Arxiv.2404.17789v4 (2025). J. Comput. Phys. in review.
- Zhang et al., BiLO: Bilevel Local Operator Learning for PDE inverse problems. Part 2: Efficient uncertainty quantification with low-rank adaptation. ArXiv (2025). J. SCI. Comput. in review.