Notes for Hyndman and Athanasopoulos – Chapter 2

* Frequency of a time-series is the number of observations before the seasonal pattern repeats.
  1. Yearly data: Frequency = 1
  2. Quarterly data: Frequency = 4
  3. Monthly data: Frequency = 12
  4. Weekly data: Frequency = 52
  5. Daily data might have two types of seasonality:
     + Weekly seasonality (frequency = 7)
     + Annual seasonality (frequency = 365)
* Time series patterns
  1. *Trend:* A trend exists when there is a long-term increase or decrease in the data. It does not have to be linear.
  2. *Seasonal:* A seasonal pattern occurs when a time-series is affected by seasonal factors such as the time of the year or the day of the week. Seasonality is always fixed and of known frequency.
  3. *Cyclic:* A cycle occurs when the data exhibit rises and falls that are not of a fixed frequency
* If the fluctuations are not of a FIXED FREQUENCY, then they are cyclic; if the frequency is unchanging and associated with some aspect of the calendar then the pattern is seasonal.
* An accurate forecasting method must take into account the time patterns in the data and be able to capture the patterns properly.
* A seasonal plot is similar to a time plot except that the data are plotted against individual seasons in which the data was observed.
* Scatterplots are useful for visualizing relationship between time-series. It is common in these cases to display the correlation coefficient to measure the strength of the relationship between these two variables.
* Autocorrelation measures the linear relationship between lagged values of a time-series.
* The autocorrelation coefficients are plotted to show the autocorrelation function (AFC). The plot generated is known as the *correlogram*.
* When data has a trend, the autocorrelation for small lags tend to be large and positive because observations nearby in time are also nearby in size (due to changing mean of the series as time goes by).
* When data is seasonal, the autocorrelations will be larger for the seasonal lags (at multiples of the seasonal frequency) than for other lags.
* Time series that show no autocorrelation are called **white noise**.

Notes for Hyndman and Athanasopoulos – Chapter 3

**Simple forecasting methods**

* Average method for forecasting:
  1. The forecasts of all future values are equal to the average of the historical data.
* Naïve method of forecasting:
  1. Naïve forecast consists in setting all forecasts to be the value of the last observation. This is an optimal technique when data follows a random walk.
* Seasonal naïve method:
  1. The forecast is equal to the last observed period from the same season of the past year.
* Drift method:
  1. A variation of the naïve method is to allow for forecasts to increase or decrease over time, where the amount of change over time (**drift**) is set to be the average change seen in historical data. Equivalent to drawing a line between the first and last observations and extrapolating into the future.
* These simple forecasting methods usually serve as benchmark to analyze more complicated models.

**Transformation and adjustment**

* Adjusting the historical data can often lead to a simpler forecasting task. The purpose of these adjustments and transformations is to simply the patterns in historical data by removing known sources of variation.
* Calendar adjustments:
  1. A common source of variation derives from the fact that some months have more days than others.
* Population adjustments:
  1. Any data that is affected by population changes can be adjusted to give per-capita data. This removes the effects of total population changes.
* Inflation adjustments:
  1. Financial time-series are usually adjusted so that all values are stated in dollar values from a particular year.

**Mathematical transformations**

* Logarithmic transformations.
* Power transformations.
* Box-cox transformation: a family of transformations that combines natural logarithms and power transformations. For different values of lambda, the series will change in shape. A good value of lambda makes the seasonal variation about the same across the whole series.
* One issue with mathematical transformations is that the back-transformed forecast will not be the mean of the forecast distribution. Therefore, the result might need to be adjusted to ensure that the mean of the distribution will be recovered. This process is called bias-adjusting.

**Residual diagnostics**

* The residuals in a time series model are what is left over after fitting a model.
* For many models, the residuals are equal to the difference between the observations and the corresponding fitted values.
* Residual analysis is useful for model diagnostics (whether it has adequately captured the information in the data). There are two characteristics of residuals generated by good forecasting methods:
  1. Residuals are uncorrelated. If there is correlation between residuals, it suggests that there is information that could be used in the forecasts.
  2. The residuals have zero mean. Otherwise the forecasts are biased.
* There are two other characteristics that are useful, although not necessary:
  1. Residuals have constant variance.
  2. They are normally distributed.
* Residual autocorrelation can be visually checked using the correlogram. However, it is also advisable to run tests that take into account the possibility that multiple comparisons might give rise to false positives. The box-pierce test is one of such tests (another alternative is the Ljung-Box test). Both tests assume that there is no autocorrelation between values in the series.
* Forecasts should be assessed (in terms of quality) against new information. Therefore, their accuracy can only be truly determined by considering how well a model performs on new data that was not used when fitting the model.
* When choosing models, the usual practice is to separate the available models into two parts:
  1. Training: used to learn model parameters.
  2. Test: used to evaluate the model accuracy.
* The size of the test set is typically about 20% of the total sample. However, it is good to practice for it to be as large as the maximum forecast horizon required.
* A forecast error is the difference between an observed value and its forecast.
* Forecast errors are on the same scale as the data. Therefore, accuracy measures that rely on forecast errors are scale-dependent and cannot be used to make comparison between series that involve different units.
* There are two scale-dependent measures that are frequently used:
  1. Mean absolute error (MAE): equal to the average absolute value of forecast errors.
  2. Root mean squared error (RMSE): equal to the square root of the average squared forecast error.
* A forecast method that minimizes the MAE will lead to forecasts of the median, while forecast methods that minimize the RMSE will lead to forecasts of the mean.
* Percentage error is how much, on a percent scale, the forecast is “wrong”. The mean absolute percentage error is the average of those. This is scale-independent.
* Scaled errors is an alternative to using percentage errors when comparing forecast accuracy across series with different units. They propose scaling the errors based on the *training* MAE from a simple forecast method.
* Cross-validation is another procedure to determine forecasting accuracy: In this procedure, there are a series of test sets, each consisting of a single observation. The corresponding training set consists only of observations that occurred prior to the observation that forms the test set.
* Since we need a minimum number of observations to generate a minimally reliable forecast, the earliest observations are not considered test sets.
* The forecast accuracy is computed by averaging over the test sets.
* A good way to choose the best forecasting model is to find the model with the smallest RMSE computed using time series cross-validation.
* A prediction interval provides an interval within which we expect our forecast to lie with a specified probability.
* The value of prediction intervals is that they express uncertainty in the forecasts.
* One-step prediction intervals:
  1. When forecasting one step ahead, the standard deviation of the forecast distribution is almost the same as the standard deviation of the residuals.
* For multi-step prediction intervals, it is necessary to estimate (the standard deviation of the forecast. For one-step ahead, the standard deviation of the residuals is a relatively good estimate).

Notes for Hyndman and Athanasopoulos – Chapter 5

* The basic concept behind time series regression models is that we forecast the time series of interest *y* assuming that it has a linear relationship with other time series x.
* When there are two or more predictor variables, the model is called a **multiple regression model**. The coefficients measure the effect of each predictor after taking into account the effects of all other predictors in the model. Thus, the coefficients measure the *marginal effects* of the predictor variables.
* Assumptions behind the linear regression model:
  1. The model is a reasonable approximation of reality; that is, the relationship between the forecast variable and the predictor variable satisfies the linear equation.
  2. There are three auxiliary assumptions about the errors:
     + They have mean zero; otherwise the forecasts will be systematically biased
     + They are not autocorrelated; otherwise the forecasts will be inefficient, as there is more information in the data that can be exploited.
     + They are unrelated to the predictor variables; otherwise there would be more information that should be included in the systematic part of the model.
     + Fixed predictors.
* We choose the coefficients that minimize the sum of squared residuals.
* The t-statistic and the associated p-values for the coefficients are useful if we are interested in studying the effect of each predictor and making causal claims about it. For forecasting these numbers are not particularly useful.
* A common way to summarize how well a linear regression model fits the data is via the coefficient of determination or R-squared. It reflects the proportion of the variation in the forecast variable that is accounted for by the regression model.
* Another measure of how well the model has fitted the data is the standard deviation of the residuals (the residual standard error). This measure is related to the size of the average error that the model produces.
* The differences between the observed *y* values and the corresponding fitted values *y-hat* are the training-set errors or “residuals”. There are a series of plots that serve to perform diagnostics on the residuals:
  1. ACF plot of residuals to visually detect residual autocorrelation. If autocorrelation is present, then the forecasts are inefficient (there are forecasts that have lower variability).
  2. Histogram of residuals to detect normality.
  3. Residual plot against predictors. We expect the residuals to be randomly scattered without showing any systematic patterns. If the scatterplots show a pattern, then the relationship may be nonlinear, and the model will need to be modified accordingly.
  4. Residual plot against fitted values: a plot of the residuals against the fitted values should also show no pattern. If a pattern is observed, there may be heteroscedasticity (variance not constant).
* Observations that take extreme values compared to the majority of the data are called **outliers.** Observations that have a large influence on the estimated coefficients of a regression model are called **influential observations.**
* More often than not, time series data are non-stationary: that is, the values of the time series do not fluctuate around a constant mean or with a constant variance. Regressing non-stationary time-series can lead to spurious regressions. High R-squared and high residual autocorrelation can be signs of spurious regression.
* Useful predictors for time-series regression models:
  1. Trend: it is common for time-series data to be trending. A linear trend can be modeled by simply setting = t as a predictor.
  2. Dummy variables. Indicator variables that takes the value of 1 (“yes”) or 0 (“no”). The interpretation of the associated coefficient with the dummy variable is that it is a measure of the effect of that category relative to the omitted category.
  3. Intervention variables: it is often necessary to model interventions that may have affected the variable to be forecast.
     + When the effect lasts only for one period, we use a “spike” variable. This is a dummy variable that takes the value of one in the period of intervention and zero elsewhere.
     + When the level shifts, we use a “step variable”. A step variable takes the value of one after the intervention and zero before.
  4. Trading days in sales data. The number of trading days in each month can be included as a predictor.
  5. Distributed lags, such as the ones that measure the effect of advertising.
  6. Fourier series instead of seasonal dummy variables for long seasonal periods.
* Predictive accuracy is a way to determine predictor selection.
* Forecasters should not use R-squared to determine whether a model will give good predictions as it will lead to overfitting. Therefore, it will always choose the model with most variables.
* Adjusted r-squared is a way to select predictors and is equivalent to minimizing the standard error of the regression.
* Another method is performing leave-one-out cross validation and compute the mean squared error.
* Akaike’s information criterion is an estimator of the relative quality of statistical models for a given set of data. The idea is to penalize the fit of the model (SSE) with the number of parameters that need to be estimated. For small series, the AIC tends to select too many predictors, so a bias-corrected version is available.
* Where possible, all potential regression models should be fitted and the best model should be selected based on one of the measures discussed (this is known as “best subsets” regression).
* When using regression models for time series data, we need to distinguish between the different types of forecasts that can be produced, depending on what is assumed to be known when the forecasts are computed.
  1. Ex-ante forecasts: forecasts made using only the information that is available in advance. In order to generate ex-ante forecasts, the model requires forecasts of the predictors.
  2. Ex-post forecasts: forecasts that are made using later information on the predictors. The model from which ex-post forecasts are produced should not be estimated using the data from the forecast period. We assume prior knowledge of the predictor variables (the x variables), but should not assume knowledge of the data that are to be forecast.
* For models that rely on special predictors (seasonal dummies or public holiday indicators, there is no difference between ex-ante and ex-post forecasts, because they rely on predictors known in advance and that are based in calendar variables that repeat themselves.
* Scenario based forecasting: in this setting, the forecaster assumes possible scenarios for the predictor variables that are of interest. Prediction intervals do not include the uncertainty associated with the future distribution of the predictor variables. They assume that the values of the predictors are known in advance.
* The great advantage of regression models is that they can be used to capture important relationships between the forecast variable of interest and the predictor variables. However, ex-ante forecasting requires obtaining forecasts of the predictors and that can be challenging.
  1. An alternative formulation is to use as predictors their lagged values. The predictor set is formed by predictor values that are observed *h* time periods prior to observing *y*.
* The simplest way of modelling a nonlinear relationship is to transform the forecast variable y and/or the predictor variable x before estimating the regression model. While this provides a non-linear functional form, the model is still linear in the parameters.
* There are cases where simply transforming the data will not be adequate and a more general specification is required. (We allow f(x) to be a more flexible nonlinear function of x).
* One of the simplest specifications is to make *f* piecewise linear. We introduce points where the slope of *f*  can change.
* It is important not to confuse correlation with causation, or causation with forecasting. A variable *x* may be useful for forecasting a variable *y*, but that does not mean *x* is causing *y*.
* It is important to understand that correlations are useful for forecasting, even when there is no causal relationship between the two variables, or when the correlation runs in the opposite direction.
* However, often a better model is possible if a causal mechanism can be determined.
* We say that two variables are confounded when their effects on the forecast variable cannot be separated.
* Multicollinearity occurs when similar information is provided by two or more of the predictor variables in a multiple regression. A sign of multicollinearity is an extremely high correlation between a pair of predictors.