Advanced R
Cheat Sheet

Created by: Arianne Colton and Sean Chen

Environment Basics

Environment – **Data structure** (with two components below) that powers lexical scoping

Create environment: env1<-new.env()

1. **Named list** ("Bag of names") – each name points to an object stored elsewhere in memory.

   If an object has no names pointing to it, it gets automatically deleted by the garbage collector.

   - Access with: **ls('env1')**
2. **Parent environment** – used to implement lexical scoping. If a name is not found in an environment, then R will look in its parent (and so on).
   - Access with: **parent.env('env1')**

Four special environments

1. **Empty environment** – ultimate ancestor of all environments
   - Parent: none
   - Access with: **emptyenv()**
2. **Base environment** - environment of the base package
   - Parent: empty environment
   - Access with: **baseenv()**
3. **Global environment** – the interactive workspace that you normally work in
   - Parent: environment of last attached package
   - Access with: **globalenv()**
4. **Current environment** – environment that R is currently working in (may be any of the above and others)
   - Parent: empty environment
   - Access with: **environment()**

Environments

Search Path

Search path – mechanism to look up objects, particularly functions.

- Access with : **search() –** lists all parents of the global environment (see Figure 1)
- Access any environment on the search path: **as.environment('package:base')**

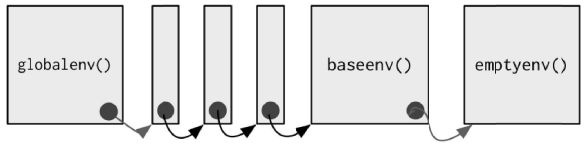


Figure 1 – The Search Path

- Mechanism : always start the search from global environment, then inside the latest attached package environment.
  - New package loading with **library()/require()** : new package is attached right after global environment. (See Figure 2)
  - Name conflict in two different package : functions with the same name, latest package function will get called.

```
search() :
'.GlobalEnv' ... 'Autoloads' 'package:base'
library(reshape2); search()
'.GlobalEnv'  'package:reshape2' ... 'Autoloads' 'package:base'
```

NOTE: Autoloads : special environment used for saving memory by only loading package objects (like big datasets) when needed

Figure 2 – Package Attachment

Binding Names to Values

Assignment – act of binding (or rebinding) a name to a value in an environment.

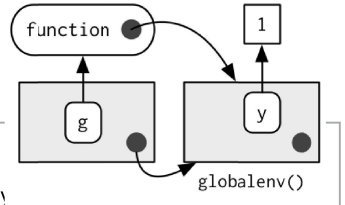
1. **<-** (Regular assignment arrow) – always creates a variable in the current environment
2. **<<-** (Deep assignment arrow) - modifies an existing variable found by walking up the parent environments

Warning: If <<- doesn't find an existing variable, it will create one in the global environment.

Function Environments

1. **Enclosing environment -** an environment where the function is created. It determines how function finds value.
   - Enclosing environment never changes, even if the function is moved to a different environment.
   - Access with: **environment('func1')**
2. **Binding environment -** all environments that the function has a binding to. It determines how we find the function.
   - Access with: **pryr::where('func1')**

   Example (for enclosing and binding environment):




```
y <- 1
e <- new.env()
e$g <- function(x) x + y
```

- function g enclosing environment is the global environment,
- the binding environment is "e".

3. **Execution environment -** new created environments to host a function call execution.
   - Two parents :

     I. Enclosing environment of the function

     II. Calling environment of the function
   - Execution environment is thrown away once the function has completed.
4. **Calling environment** - environments where the function was called.
   - Access with: **parent.frame('func1')**
   - Dynamic scoping :
     - About : look up variables in the calling environment rather than in the enclosing environment
     - Usage : most useful for developing functions that aid interactive data analysis

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Data Structures

	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
1d	Atomic vector	List
2d	Matrix	Data frame
nd	Array	

Note: R has no 0-dimensional or scalar types. Individual numbers or strings, are actually vectors of length one, NOT scalars.

Human readable description of any R data structure :

```
str(variable)
```

Every **Object** has a mode and a class

1. **Mode**: represents how an object is stored in memory
   - 'type' of the object from R's point of view
   - Access with: **typeof()**
2. **Class**: represents the object's abstract type
   - 'type' of the object from R's object-oriented programming point of view
   - Access with: **class()**

	typeof()	class()
strings or vector of strings	character	character
numbers or vector of numbers	numeric	numeric
list	list	list
data.frame	list	data.frame

Factors

1. Factors are built on top of integer vectors using two attributes :

```
class(x) -> 'factor'
levels(x)  # defines the set of allowed values
```

2. Useful when you know the possible values a variable may take, even if you don't see all values in a given dataset.

Warning on Factor Usage:

1. Factors look and often behave like character vectors, they are actually integers. Be careful when treating them like strings.
2. Most data loading functions automatically convert character vectors to factors. (Use argument stringAsFactors = FALSE to suppress this behavior)

Object Oriented (OO) Field Guide

Object Oriented Systems

R has three object oriented systems :

1. **S3** is a very casual system. It has no formal definition of classes. It implements generic function OO.
   - **Generic-function OO** - a special type of function called a generic function decides which method to call.

Example:	drawRect(canvas, 'blue')
Language:	R

   - **Message-passing OO** - messages (methods) are sent to objects and the object determines which function to call.

Example:	canvas.drawRect('blue')
Language:	Java, C++, and C#

2. **S4** works similarly to S3, but is more formal. Two major differences to S3 :
   - **Formal class definitions** - describe the representation and inheritance for each class, and has special helper functions for defining generics and methods.
   - **Multiple dispatch** - generic functions can pick methods based on the class of any number of arguments, not just one.
3. **Reference classes** are very different from S3 and S4:
   - **Implements message-passing OO** - methods belong to classes, not functions.
   - **Notation** - $ is used to separate objects and methods, so method calls look like **canvas$drawRect('blue')**.

S3

1. **About S3 :**
   - R's first and simplest OO system
   - Only OO system used in the base and stats package
   - Methods belong to functions, not to objects or classes.
2. **Notation :**
   - **generic.class()**

mean.Date()	Date method for the generic - mean()

3. **Useful 'Generic' Operations**
   - Get all methods that belong to the 'mean' generic:
     - **Methods('mean')**
   - List all generics that have a method for the 'Date' class :
     - **methods(class = 'Date')**

4. **S3 objects** are usually built on top of lists, or atomic vectors with attributes.
   - Factor and data frame are S3 class
   - Useful operations:

Check if object is an S3 object	is.object(x) & !isS4(x) or pryr::otype()
Check if object inherits from a specific class	inherits(x, 'classname')
Determine class of any object	**class(x)**

Base Type (C Structure)

R base types - the internal C-level types that underlie the above OO systems.

- **Includes :** atomic vectors, list, functions, environments, etc.
- **Useful operation :** Determine if an object is a base type (Not S3, S4 or RC) **is.object(x)** returns FALSE
- **Internal representation :** C structure (or struct) that includes :
  - Contents of the object
  - Memory Management Information
  - Type
    - Access with: **typeof()**

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