

Advanced SQL

⑤

Window Functions

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1 | Window Functions

With SQL:2003, the ISO SQL Standard introduced **window functions**, a new mode of row-based computation:

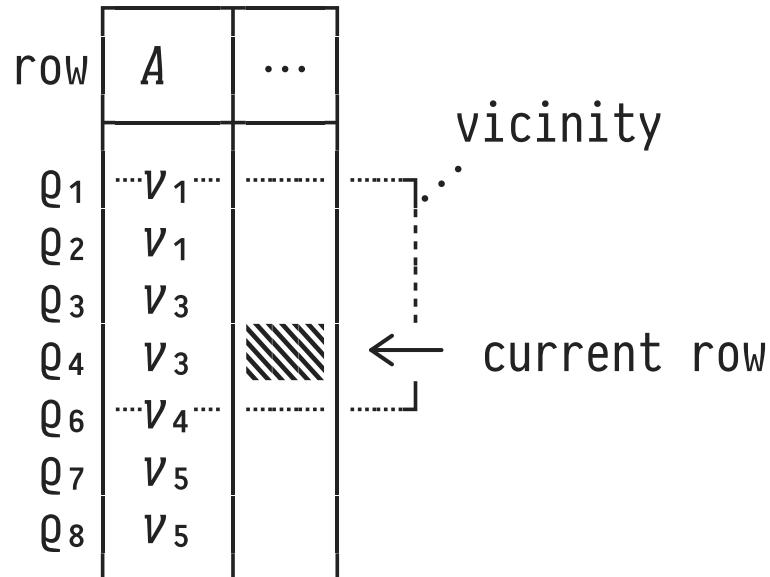
SQL Feature	Mode of Computation
function/operator	row → row
table-generating function	row → table of rows
aggregate	group of rows → row (one per group)
window function 	row vicinity → row (one per row)

SQL Modes of Computation

Window functions ...

- ... are **row-based**: each individual input row r is mapped to one result row,
- ... use the **vicinity** around r to compute this result row.

Row Vicinity: Window Frames

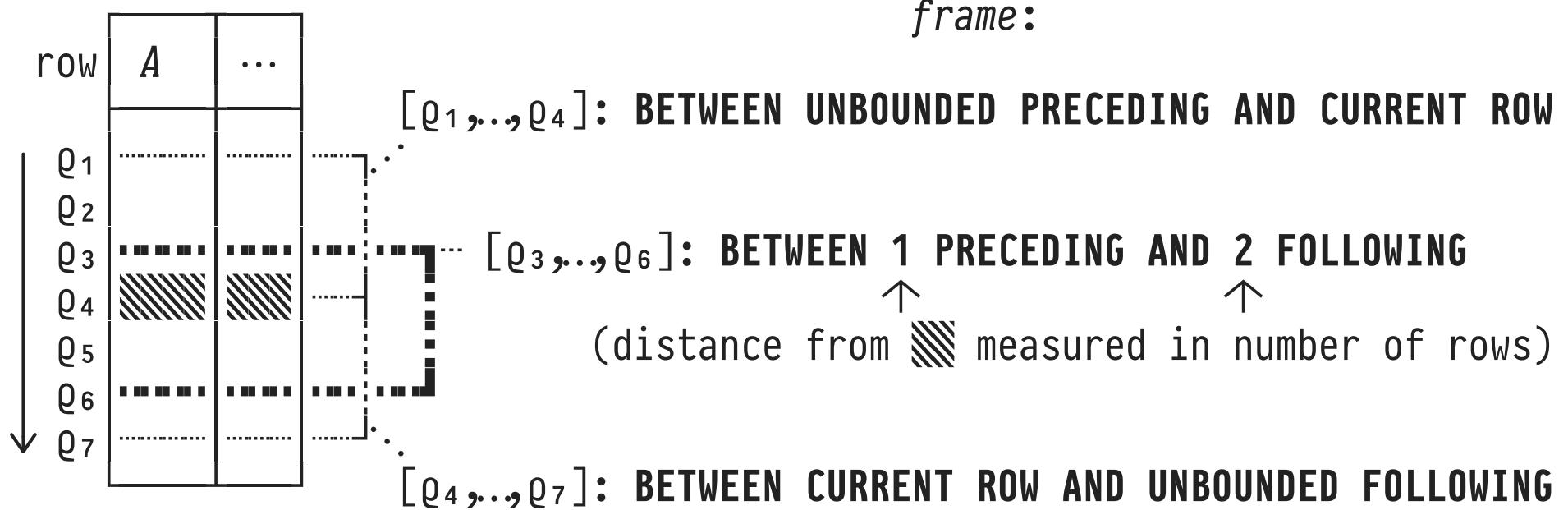


- Each row is the **current row**  at one point in time.
- Row vicinity (**window**, **frame**) is based on either:
 - ① row **position** (**ROWS** windows),
 - ② row **values** v_i (**RANGE** windows),
 - ③ row **peers** (**GROUPS** windows).

- As the current row changes, the window *slides* with it.
- ⚠️ Window semantics depend on a defined **row ordering**.

Window Frame Specifications (Variant: ROWS)

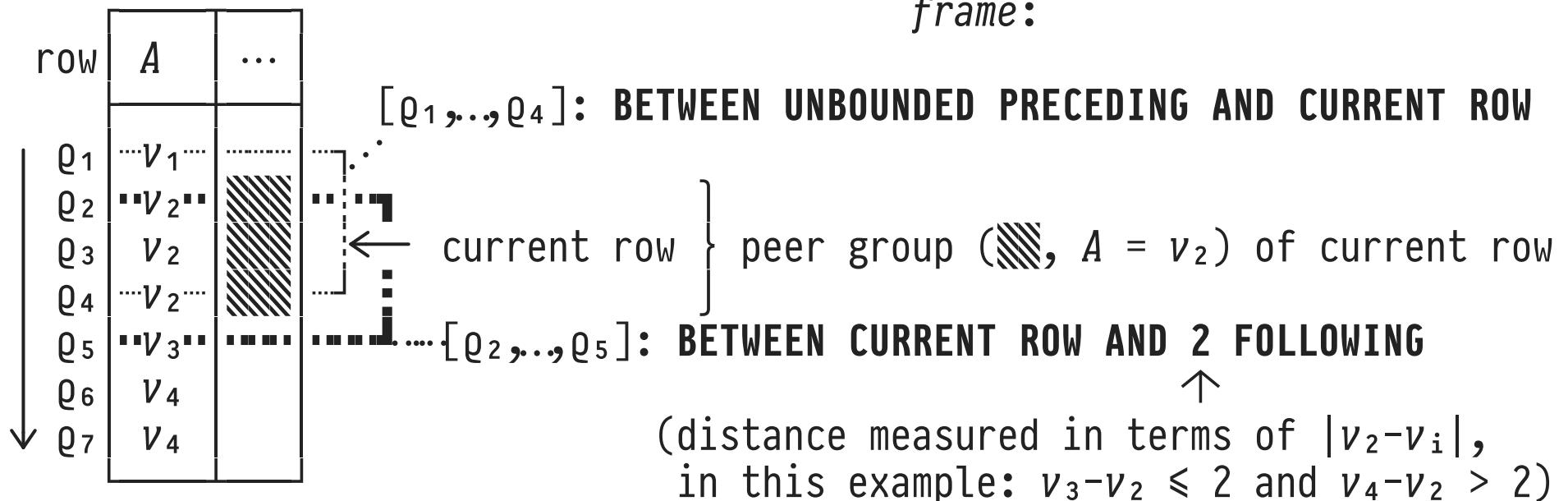
window function	ordering criteria	frame specification
f	$\text{OVER } (\text{ORDER BY } e_1, \dots, e_n [\text{ROWS } frame])$	



Window Frame Specifications (Variant: RANGE)

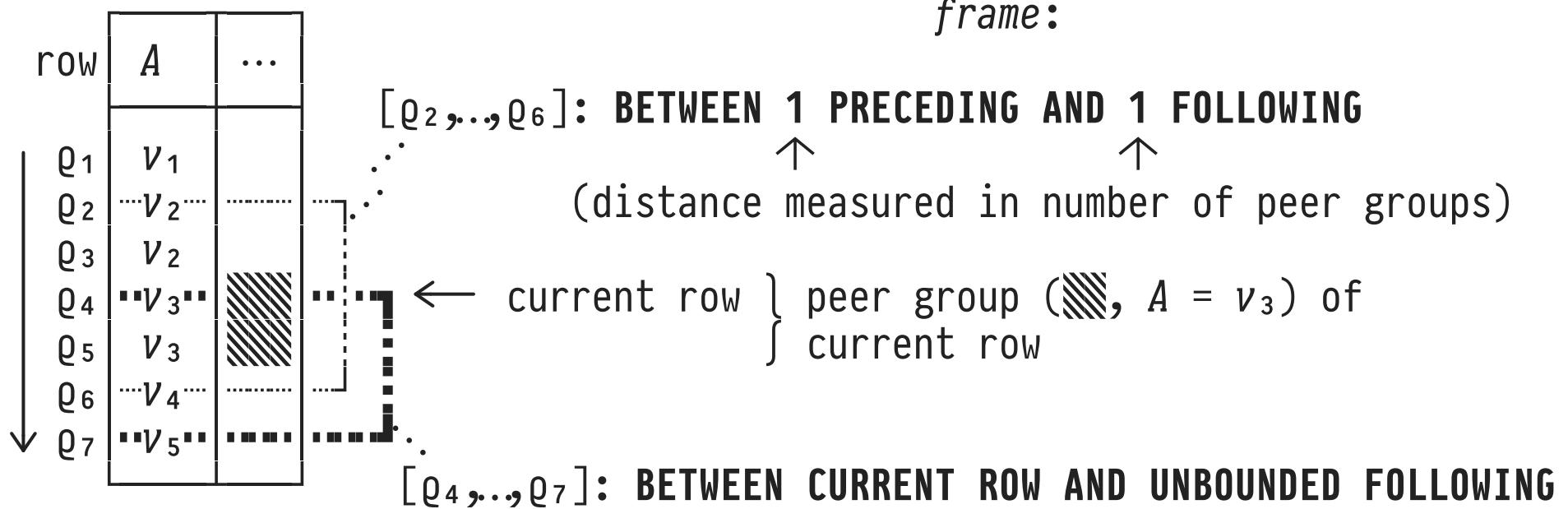
window function one criterion frame specification

f OVER (ORDER BY A [RANGE *frame*])

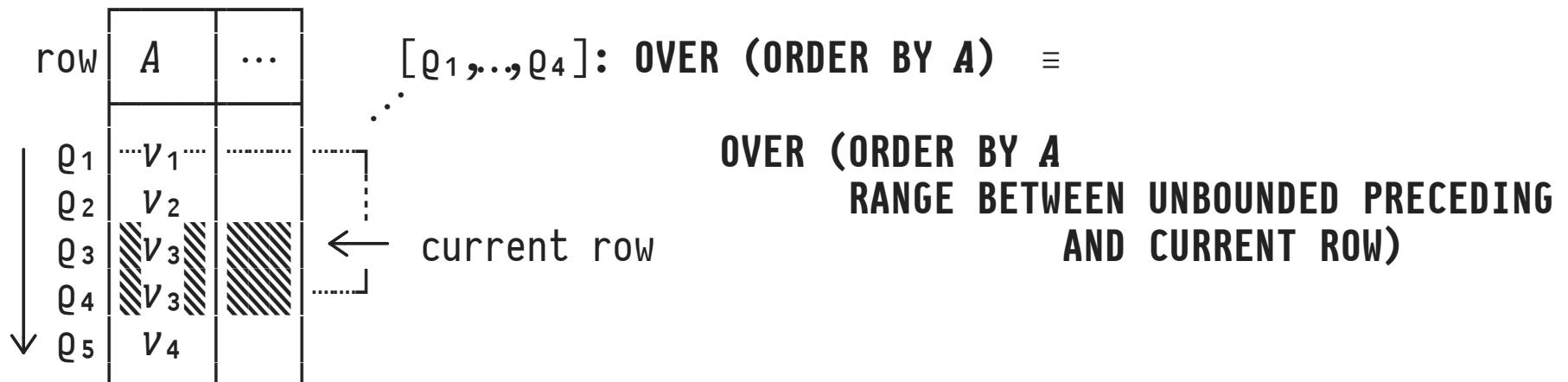
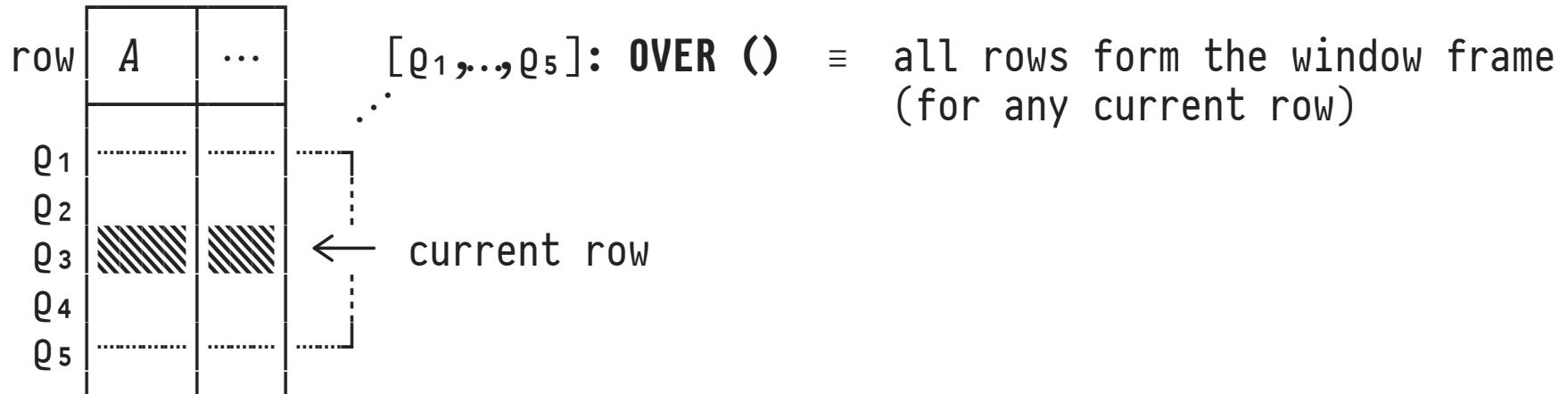


Window Frame Specifications (Variant: GROUPS)

window function	ordering criteria	frame specification
f	$\text{OVER (ORDER BY } e_1, \dots, e_n\text{)}$	$[\text{GROUPS } frame]$



Window Frame Specifications: Abbreviations



WINDOW Frame Specifications: Exclusion¹

window function	exclusion clause
f OVER (ORDER BY A frame [exclusion])	

row

	A	...
Q ₁	v_1	
Q ₂	$\dots v_2 \dots$	
Q ₃	v_3	
Q ₄	$\overline{v_3}$	$\overline{v_3}$
Q ₅	$\dots v_3 \dots$	
Q ₆	v_4	

current row

exclusion:

- EXCLUDE NO OTHERS** $[Q_2, Q_3, Q_4, Q_5]$
- EXCLUDE CURRENT ROW** $[Q_2, Q_3, Q_5]$
- EXCLUDE GROUP** $[Q_2]$
- EXCLUDE TIES** $[Q_2, Q_4]$

¹ **Q:** Which *frame* would lead to a window as shown above?

WINDOW Clause: Name the Frame

Syntactic ⚡: If window frame specifications

1. become unwieldy because of verbose SQL syntax and/or
2. one frame is used multiple times in a query,

add a **WINDOW** clause to a SFW block to **name the frame**, e.g.:

```
SELECT ... f OVER wi ... g OVER wj ...
FROM ...
WHERE ...
:
WINDOW w1 AS (frame1), ..., wn AS (framen)
ORDER BY ...
```

Use SQL Itself to Explain Window Frame Semantics

Regular **aggregates** may act as window functions *f*. All **rows** in the frame will be aggregated:

```
SELECT w.row AS "current row",
       count(*) OVER win AS "frame size",
       list(w.row) OVER win AS "rows in frame"
FROM W AS w
WINDOW win AS (frame)
```

row	a	b
Q ₁	1	●
Q ₂	2	○
Q ₃	3	○
Q ₄	3	●
:	:	:

Table W

🔧 Q: What is the Chance of Fine Weather on Weekends?

Input: Daily weather readings in **sensors**:

day	weekday	temp	rain
1	Fri	10	800
2	Sat	12	300
:	:	:	:

Table **sensors**

- The weather is fine on day d if—**on d and the two days prior**—the minimum temperature is above 15°C and the overall rainfall is less than 600ml/m².
- **Expected output:**

weekend?	% fine
f	29
t	43

2 | PARTITION BY: Window Frames Inside Partitions

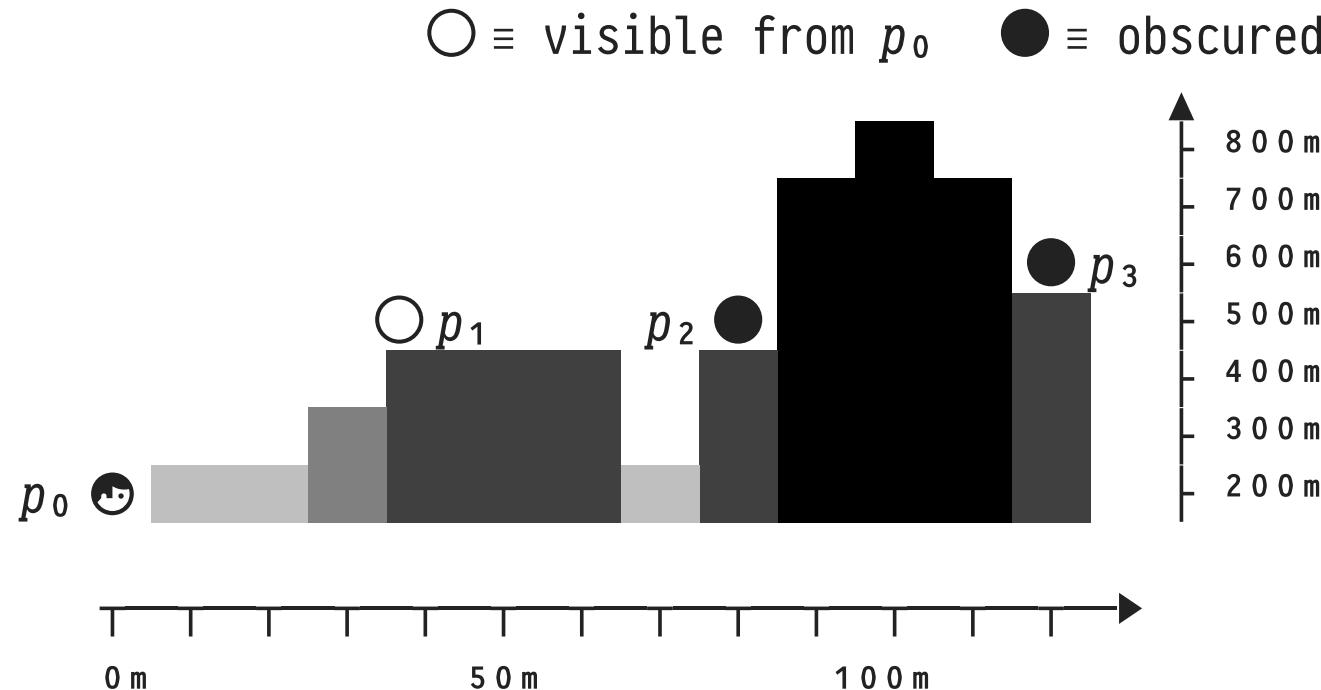
Optionally, we may **partition** the input table *before* rows are sorted and window frames are determined:

all input rows that agree on all p_i form one partition

$$f \text{ OVER } ([\overbrace{\text{PARTITION BY } p_1, \dots, p_m} \\ [\text{ORDER BY } e_1, \dots, e_n] \\ [frame])]$$

- Note:
 1. Frames **never cross partitions**.
 2. **BETWEEN ... PRECEDING AND ... FOLLOWING respects partition boundaries**.

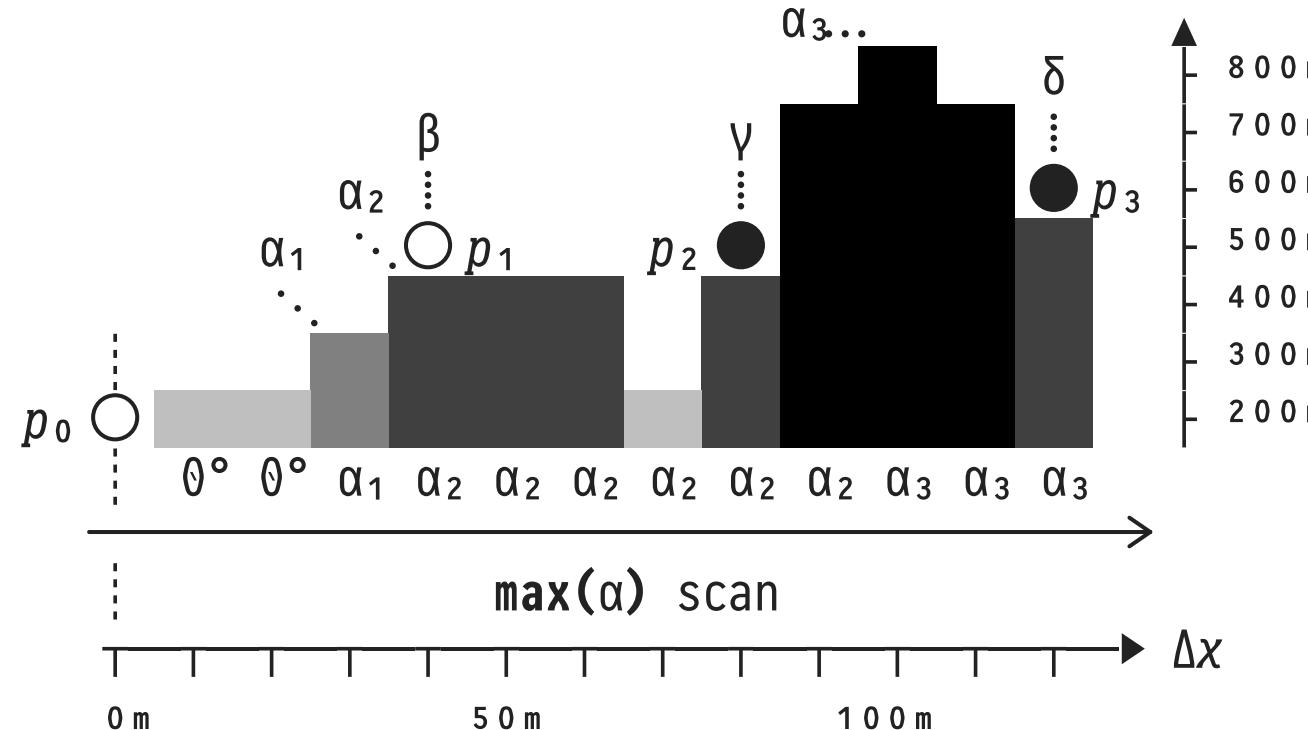
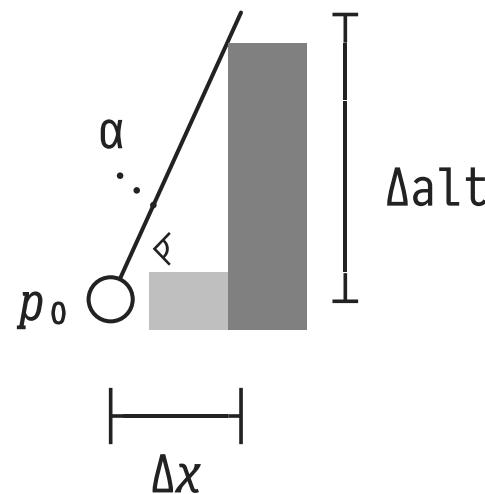
🔧 Q: Which Spots are Visible in a Hilly Landscape?



- From the viewpoint of p_0 (\circlearrowleft) we can see p_1 , but...
 - ... p_2 is **obscured** (no straight-line view from p_0),
 - ... p_3 is **obscured** (lies behind the 800m peak).

🔧 Q: Visible Spots in a Hilly Landscape? — A: MAX Scan!

$$\alpha = \text{atan}(\Delta \text{alt}/\Delta x)$$



- We have $0^\circ < \alpha_1 < \alpha_2 < \alpha_3$ and $\beta \geq \alpha_2$, $\gamma < \alpha_2$, $\delta < \alpha_3$.
 - p_1 visible
 - $p_{2,3}$ obscured

 Q: Visible Spots in a Hilly Landscape? — A: MAX Scan!

- **Input:** Location of p_0 (here: $x = 0$) and 1D-map of hills:

<u>x</u>	alt
0	200
10	200
⋮	⋮
120	500

Table [map](#)

- **Output:** Can p_0 see the point on the hilltop at x ?

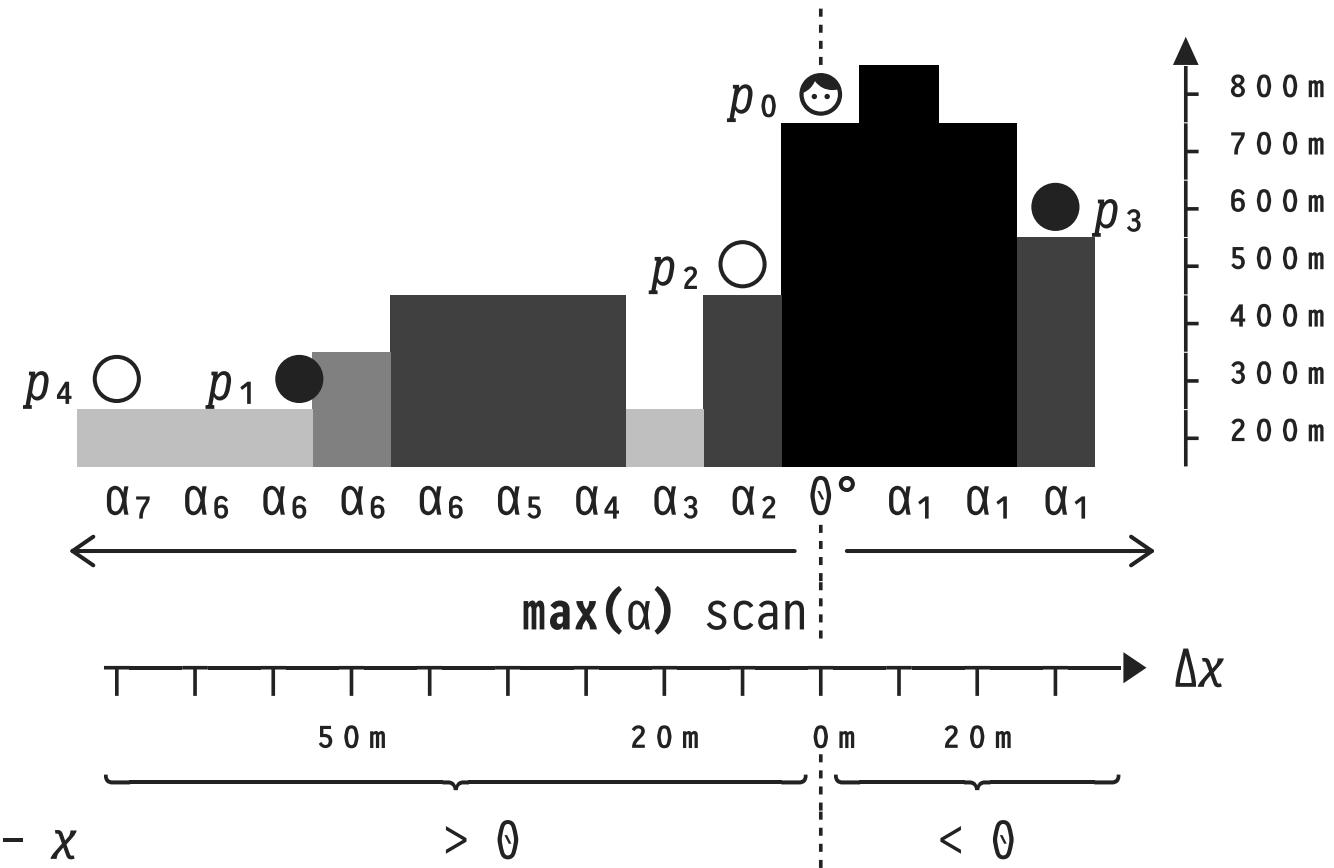
<u>x</u>	visible?
0	true
10	true
⋮	⋮
120	false

Q: Visible Spots in a Hilly Landscape? — A: MAX Scan!

WITH

```
-- 1 Angles  $\alpha$  (in  $^\circ$ ) between  $p_0$  and the hilltop at  $x$ 
angles(x, angle) AS (
    SELECT m.x,
        degrees(atan((m.alt - p0.alt) /
                      abs(p0.x - m.x))) AS angle
    FROM map AS m
    WHERE m.x > p0.x
),
-- 2 max( $\alpha$ ) scan (to the right of  $p_0$ )
max_scan(x, max_angle) AS (
    SELECT a.x,
        max(a.angle)
        OVER (ORDER BY abs(p0.x - a.x)) AS max_angle
    FROM angles AS a
),
:
```

🔧 Looking Left and Right: PARTITION BY



- Need MAX scans left and right of $p_0 \Rightarrow$ use PARTITION BY.

🔧 Looking Left and Right: PARTITION BY

WITH

:

```
-- 2 max(a) scan (left/right of  $p_0$ )
max_scan(x, max_angle) AS (
    SELECT a.x, --  $\in \{-1, 0, 1\}$ 
          max(a.angle) --  $\overbrace{\quad\quad\quad}^{\Delta x > 0}$ 
        OVER (PARTITION BY sign( $p_0.x - a.x$ )
              ORDER BY abs( $p_0.x - a.x$ )) AS max_angle
  FROM angles AS a --  $\overbrace{\quad\quad\quad}^{\Delta x > 0}$ 
),
:
```

- $\forall a \in \text{angles}: a.x \neq p_0.x \Rightarrow$ We end up with **two** partitions.

3 | Scans: Not Only in the Hills

Scans are a general and expressive computational pattern:

$$\underbrace{\text{agg}(e)}_{(\emptyset, z, +)} \text{ OVER } (\text{ORDER BY } e_1, \dots, e_n) \text{ } \begin{cases} \text{ROWS, RANGE} \end{cases} \text{ BETWEEN } \text{UNBOUNDED PRECEDING AND CURRENT ROW})$$

- Available in a variety of forms in programming languages
 - Haskell: `scanl z ⊕ xs`, APL: `⊕\xs`, Python: `accumulate`.
 $\text{scanl } \oplus z [x_1, x_2, \dots] = [z, z \oplus x_1, (z \oplus x_1) \oplus x_2, \dots]$
- In parallel programming: *prefix sums* (👉 Guy Blelloch)
 - Sorting, lexical analysis, tree operations, reg.exp. search, drawing operations, image processing, ...

4 | Interlude: Quiz

Q: Assume $xs \equiv '((b*2)-4*a*c)*0.5'$. What is computed below?

```
SELECT inp.pos, inp.c,
       sum([0,1,-1][p.oc]) OVER (ORDER BY inp.pos) AS d
FROM   unnest(string_split(xs(), ''))  

        WITH ORDINALITY AS inp(c, pos),
        LATERAL (VALUES (list_position(['(', ')'],  

                           inp.c) + 1)) AS p(oc)
ORDER BY inp.pos;
```

💡 Hint (this is the same query expressed in APL):

```
xs ← '((b*2)-4*a*c)*0.5'  
+\ (1 - 1 0)[('()'`xs]
```

5 | Beyond Aggregation: Window Functions

window function

$$\downarrow \\ f \text{ OVER (} [\text{ PARTITION BY } p_1, \dots, p_m] \\ [\text{ ORDER BY } e_1, \dots, e_n] \\ [\text{ frame }] \text{)}$$

Three kinds of **window functions** f :

1. **Aggregates:** $\text{sum}(\cdot)$, $\text{avg}(\cdot)$, $\text{max}(\cdot)$, $\text{list}(\cdot)$, ... process all rows in the frame. ✓
2. **Row Access:** access row by *absolute/relative position* in ordered frame or partition: first/last/ n^{th} / n rows away.
3. **Row Ranking:** assign numeric *rank of row* in partition.

6 | LAG/LEAD: Access Rows of the Past and Future

Row access at offset $\pm n$, relative to the current row:

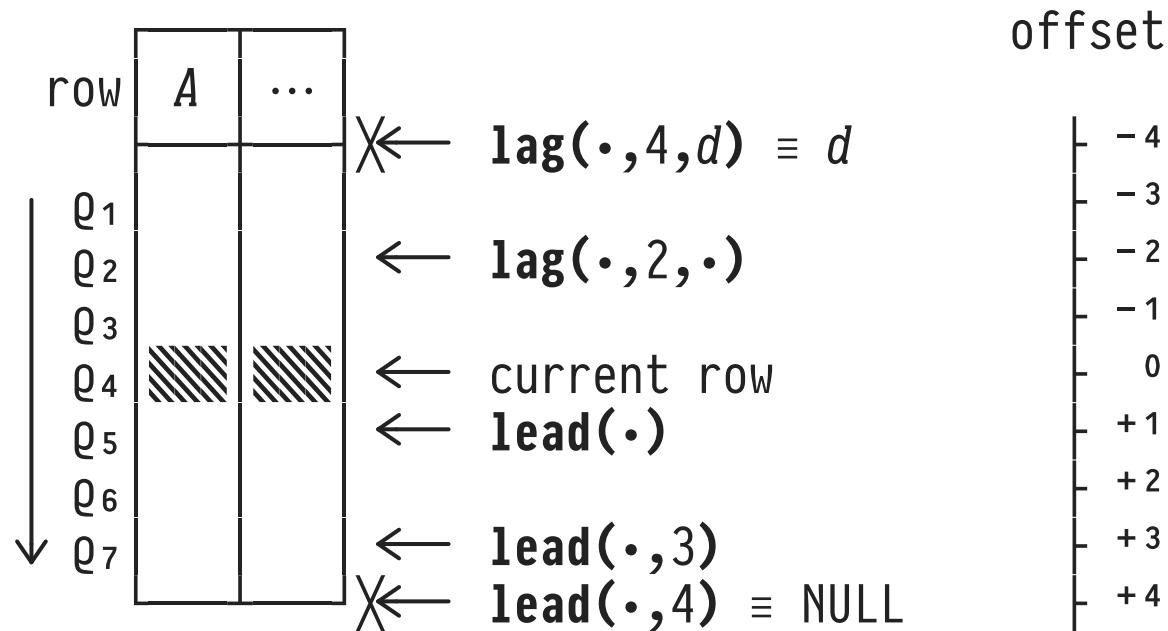
-- evaluate e as if we were
-- n rows **before** the current row
--

$\overbrace{\text{lag}(e,n,d)}$ OVER ([PARTITION BY p_1, \dots, p_m]
 ORDER BY e_1, \dots, e_n)

Note:

- $\text{lead}(e,n,d)$: ... n rows **after** the current row ...
- Scope is partition—no row access outside the partition.
- No row at offset $\pm n$? \Rightarrow return default value d .

LAG/LEAD: Row Offsets (Assume: No Partitioning, ORDER BY A)



- The frame of the current row is irrelevant for **lag/lead**.
- Default parameters if absent: $n \equiv 1$, $d \equiv \text{NULL}$.

🔧 A March Through the Hills: Ascent or Descent?

```
SELECT m.x, m.alt,
CASE sign(lead(m.alt, 1) OVER rightwards - m.alt)
    WHEN -1 THEN '↓' WHEN 1 THEN '↑'
    WHEN 0 THEN '→' ELSE '?'
END AS climb,
lead(m.alt, 1) OVER rightwards - m.alt AS "by [m]"
FROM map AS m
WINDOW rightwards AS (ORDER BY m.x) -- marching right
```

x	alt	climb	by [m]
0	200	→	0
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮
90	700	↓	100
100	800	↙	-100
110	700	↘	-200
120	500	?	NULL

🔧 Crime Scene: Sessionization

A spy broke into the Police HQ computer system. A [log](#) records keyboard activity of user [uid](#) at time [ts](#):

<u>uid</u>	<u>ts</u>
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 07:25:12
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 07:25:18
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 08:01:55
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 08:05:07
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 08:05:30
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 08:05:39
00000000000000000000000000000000	2025-12-11 08:05:46

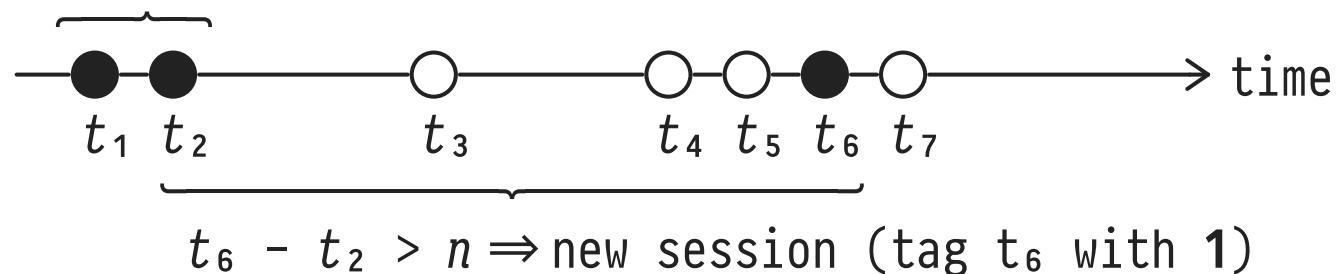
Table [log](#)

- **Q:** Can we **sessionize** the log so that investigators can identify *sessions* (\equiv streaks of uninterrupted activity)?

🔧 Sessionization (Query Plan)

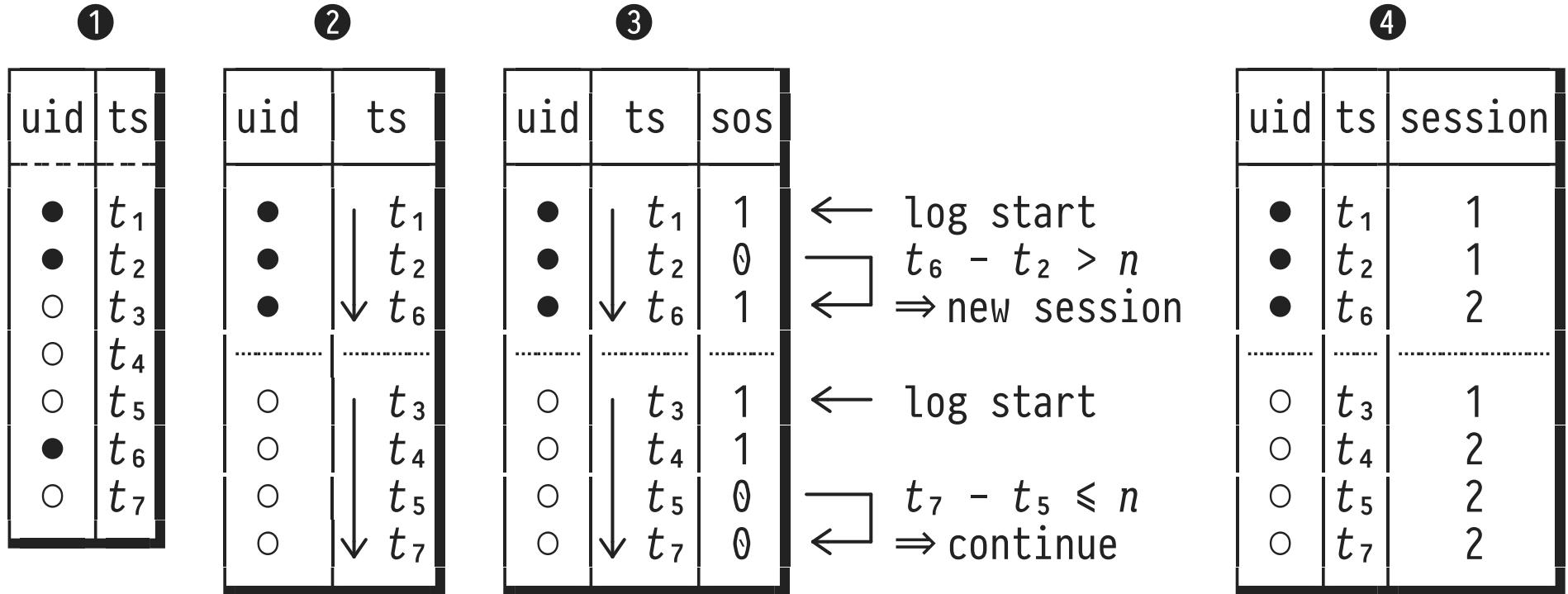
1. Cop and spy sessions happen independently (even if interleaved): partition `log` into /● and /○ rows.
2. **Tag** keyboard activities (below: tagging for ●):

$t_2 - t_1 \leq \text{threshold } n \Rightarrow \text{continue session (tag } t_2 \text{ with 0)}$



3. **Scan** the tagged table and derive session IDs by maintaining a **running sum** of *start of session* tags.

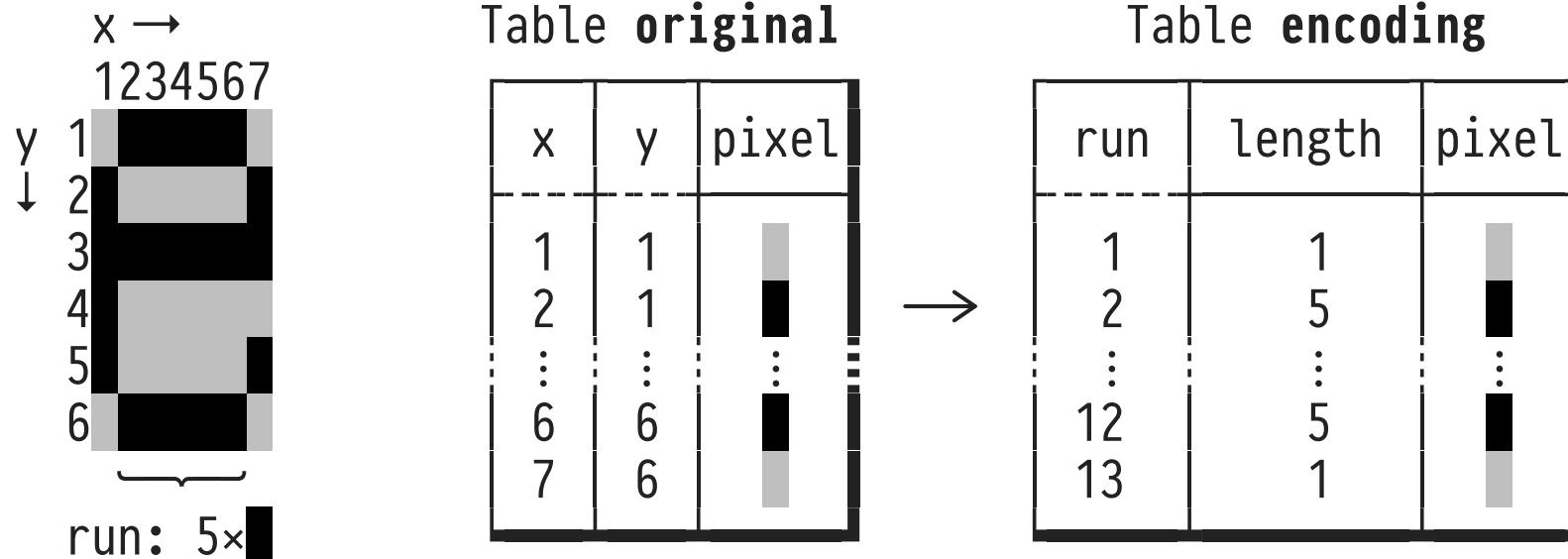
🔧 Sessionization (Query Plan)



- At log start, always begin a new session (**sos = 1**).
- How to assign *global session IDs* (○'s sessions: 3, 4)?

🔧 Image Compression by Run-Length Encoding

Compress image by identifying pixel **runs** of the same color:



- Here: assumes a row-wise linearization of the pixel map.
- In b/w images we may omit column **pixel** in table **encoding**.

🔧 Run-Length Encoding (Query Plan)

①

x	y	pixel	change?
1	1	█	t 1
2	1	█	t 1
3	1	█	f 0
4	1	█	f 0
5	1	█	f 0
6	1	█	f 0
7	1	█	t 1
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮

②

x	y	pixel	change?	Σ change?
1	1	█	1	1
2	1	█	1	2
3	1	█	0	2
4	1	█	0	2
5	1	█	0	2
6	1	█	0	2
7	1	█	1	3
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮

run #2 of
length 5

- ①: `lag(pixel, 1, undefined)`: pixel @ (1,1) always “changes.”
- ②: A `sum()` scan of `change?` yields run identifiers.

7 | FIRST_VALUE, LAST_VALUE, NTH_VALUE: In-Frame Row Access

Aggregates reduce *all rows* inside a frame to a single value.
Now for something different:

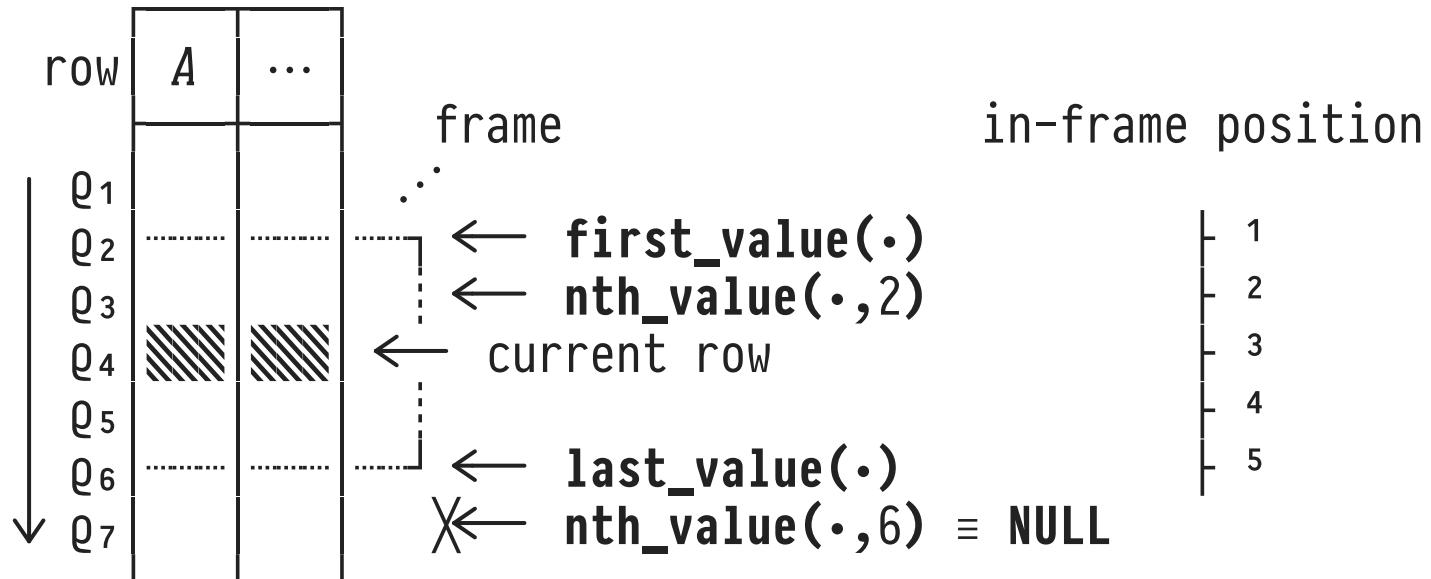
- **Positional access to individual rows** inside a frame is provided by three window functions:

```
-- evaluate expression e as if we were at  
-- the first/last/nth row in the frame  
--
```

 **first_value(e)**
last_value(e)
nth_value(e,n) } OVER (...)

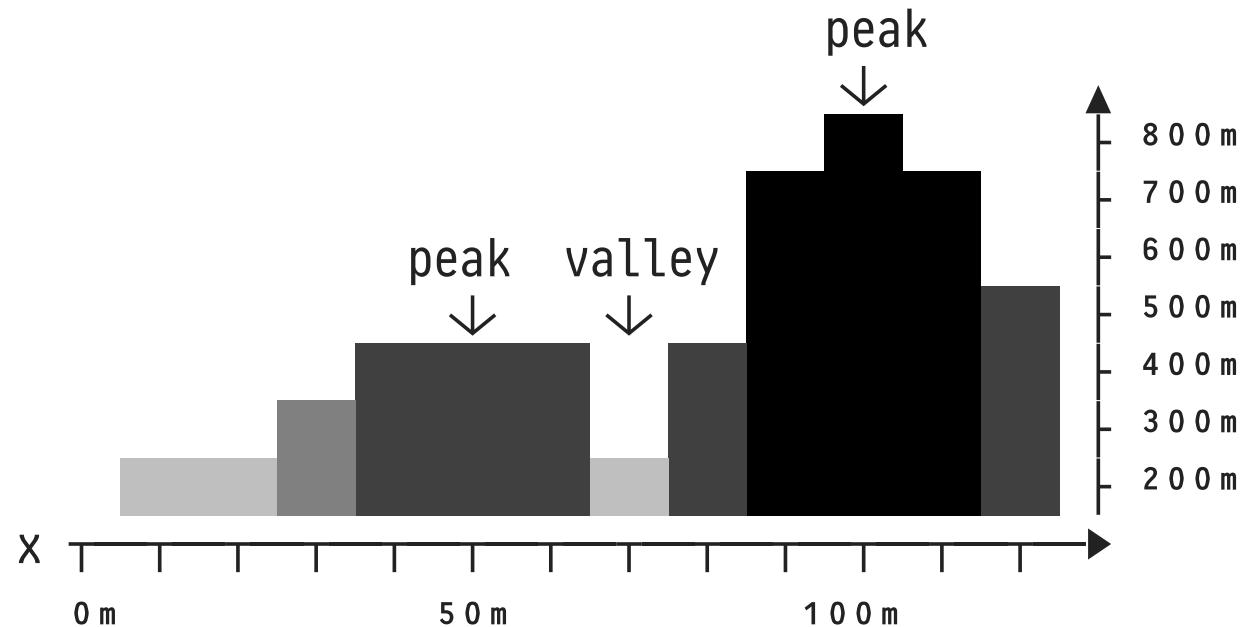
- **nth_value(e,n):** No n^{th} row in frame \Rightarrow return **NULL**.

In-Frame Row Access



- We have $\text{first_value}(e) \equiv \text{nth_value}(e, 1)$.

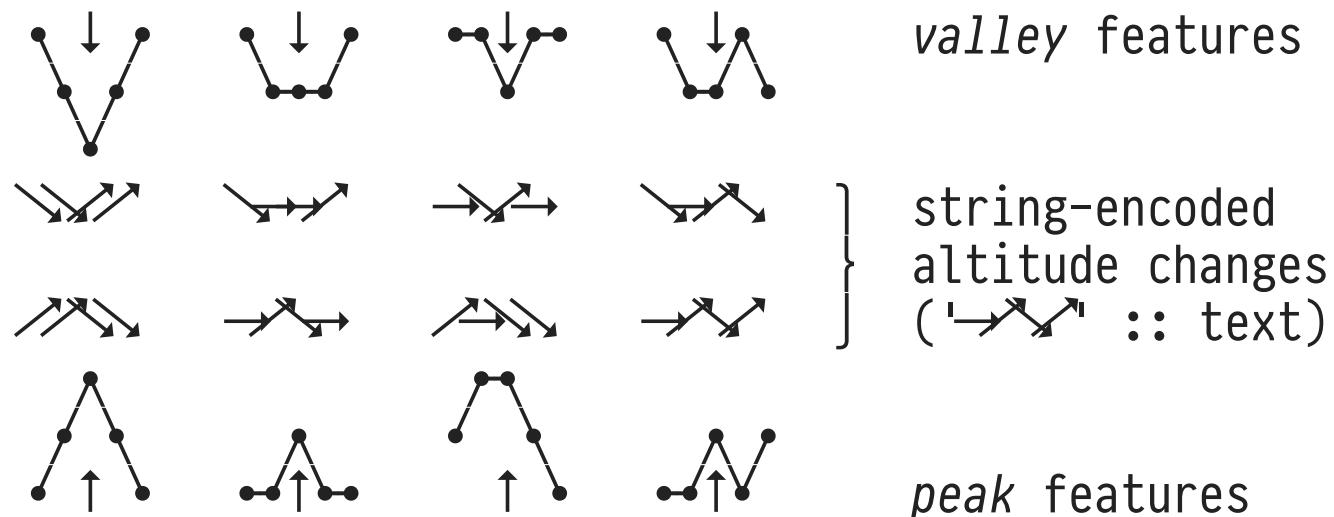
🔧 Detecting Landscape Features



- Detect features in a hilly landscape. Attach label $\in \{\text{peak}, \text{valley}, -\}$ to every location x .
- Feature defined by relative altitude change **in vicinity**.

🔧 Detecting Landscape Features (Query Plan)

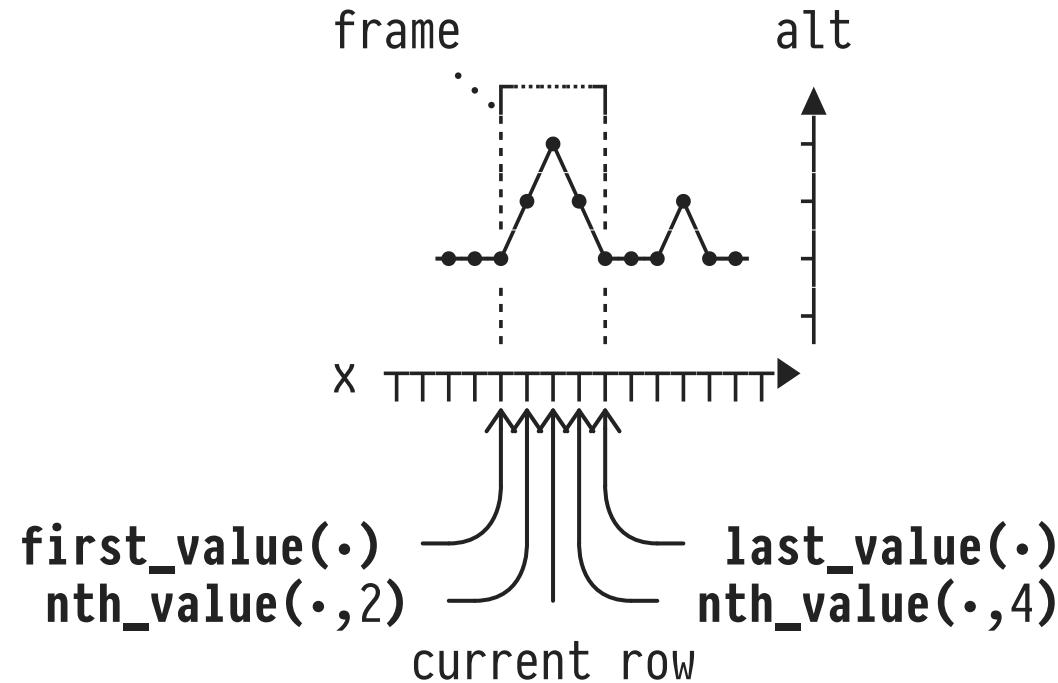
1. Track relative altitude changes in a sliding **x-window of size 5**:



2. Pattern match on change strings to detect features.

🔧 Altitude Changes in a Sliding Window

- Frame: ROWS BETWEEN 2 PRECEDING AND 2 FOLLOWING (5 rows):



- $\text{first_value}(\text{alt}) < \text{nth_value}(\text{alt}, 2) \Rightarrow \text{ascent} ('↗')$.

🔧 Altitude Changes in a Sliding Window

-- Find slopes in ± 2 vicinity around point x

```
SELECT m.x,
    slope(sign(first_value(m.alt) OVER w-nth_value(m.alt,2) OVER w)) |||
    slope(sign(nth_value(m.alt,2) OVER w-m.alt)) ||
    slope(sign(m.alt - nth_value(m.alt,4) OVER w)) ||
    slope(sign(nth_value(m.alt,4) OVER w-last_value(m.alt) OVER w))
FROM map AS m
WINDOW w AS (ORDER BY m.x ROWS BETWEEN 2 PRECEDING AND 2 FOLLOWING)
```

- Recall: 1D landscape represented as table `map(x,alt)`.
- Encode alt changes: `slope(-1) ≡ '↗'`, `slope(0) ≡ '→'` (here: `slope(·)` implemented as a DuckDB macro).

Row Pattern Matching (SQL:2016)

SQL:2016 introduced an entirely new SQL construct, **row pattern matching** (`MATCH_RECOGNIZE`):

1. **ORDER BY**: Order the rows of a table.
2. **DEFINE**: Tag rows that satisfy given predicates.
3. **PATTERN**: Specify a **regular expression over row tags**, find matches in the ordered sequence of rows.
4. **MEASURES**: For each match, evaluate expressions that measure its features (matched rows, length, ...).

 As of December 2025, not supported by .

(Work is underway here in Tübingen to rectify this.)

Row Pattern Matching (SQL:2016)

```

SELECT *
FROM map
MATCH_RECOGNIZE (
    ORDER BY x
    MEASURES first(x,1) AS x,
              match_number() AS feature,
              classifier() AS slope
    ONE ROW PER MATCH
    AFTER MATCH SKIP TO NEXT ROW
    PATTERN (((DOWN DOWN|DOWN EVEN|UP DOWN|EVEN DOWN)...)
    DEFINE UP AS UP.alt > PREV(UP.alt), -- }
              DOWN AS DOWN.alt < PREV(DOWN.alt), -- } row tags
              EVEN AS EVEN.alt = PREV(EVEN.alt) -- }
)

```

Output

x	feature	slope
50	1	DOWN
70	2	UP
100	3	DOWN

8 | Numbering and Ranking Rows

Countless problem scenarios involve the **number** (position) or **rank** of the current row in an *ordered sequence* of rows.

- Family of **window functions to number/rank rows:**

<code>row_number()</code>	-- intra-partition ranking ↗
<code>dense_rank()</code>	--
<code>rank()</code>	--
<code>percent_rank()</code>	OVER ([PARTITION BY p_1, \dots, p_m]
<code>cume_dist()</code>	[ORDER BY e_1, \dots, e_n])
<code>ntile(n)</code>	-- ranking w/o ORDER BY ↘

- Scope is partition (if present)—*frame* is irrelevant.

Numbering and Ranking Rows — $f()$ OVER (ORDER BY A)

Table W

f

row	A	row_number	dense_rank	rank
ρ1	1	1	1	1
ρ2	2	2	2	2
ρ3	3	3	3	3
ρ4	3	4	3	3
ρ5	3	5	3	3
ρ6	4	6	4	6
ρ7	6	7	5	7
ρ8	6	8	5	7
ρ9	7	9	6	9

- Rows that agree on the sort criterion (here: **A**) ...
 - ... number randomly
 - ... rank equally

| Mind the ranking gap (think Olympics)

- In general: $\text{dense_rank}() \leq \text{rank}() \leq \text{row_number}()$

🔧 Once More: Find the Top n Rows in a Group

species	length	height	legs
:	:	:	$\in \{2, 4, \text{NULL}\}$

Table `dinosaurs`

```

SELECT tallest.legs, tallest.species, tallest.height
FROM (SELECT d.legs, d.species, d.height,
    row_number()...rank() OVER (PARTITION BY d.legs
                                ORDER BY d.height DESC) AS n
    FROM dinosaurs AS d
    WHERE d.legs IS NOT NULL) AS tallest
WHERE tallest.n <= 3
  
```

- `rank()` vs `row_number()`: both OK, but different semantics!
- Need a subquery: window functions *not* allowed in `WHERE` (but see SQL filtering clause `QUALIFY`).

🔧 Identify Consecutive Ranges

- What you often encounter in scientific papers ☺:
 “... as Knuth has shown in [5,2,14,3,1,42,6,10,7,13] ...”
- What you want to see ☺:
 “... as Knuth has shown in [1-3,5-7,10,13&14,42] ...”

Table **citations**

ref
5
2
:
13

Output

ref	range
1	r_0
2	r_0
:	:
42	r_4

references belong
to the same range

🔧 Identify Consecutive Ranges (Query Plan)

①	②				
ref	ref	row_number()			
5	1	-	1	=	0
2	2	-	2	=	0
14	3	-	3	=	0
3	5	-	4	=	1
1	6	-	5	=	1
42	7	-	6	=	1
6	10	-	7	=	3
10	13	-	8	=	5
7	14	-	9	=	5
13	42	-	10	=	32 }

subtract

range $0 \equiv r_0$

range $1 \equiv r_1$

range $3 \equiv r_2$

range $5 \equiv r_3$

range $32 \equiv r_4$

Numbering and Ranking Rows — f OVER (ORDER BY A)

row

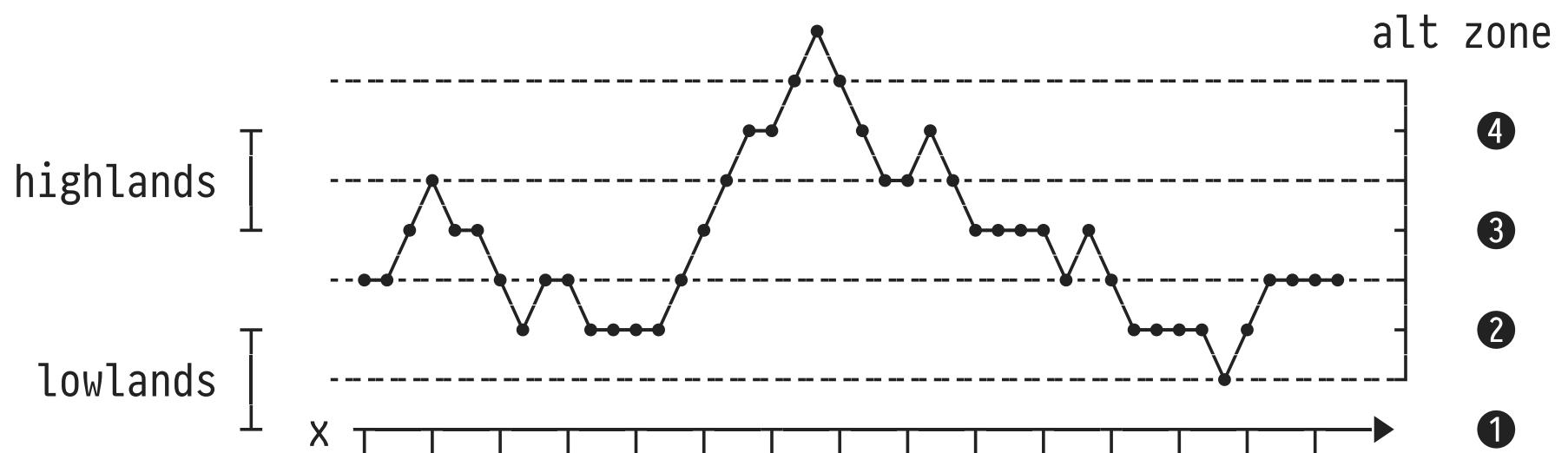
	A	percent_rank	cume_dist	ntile(3)	
q1	1	0	$1/9$	1	... Rows that agree on ... the sort criterion ... (here: A) rank equally
q2	2	$1/8$	$2/9$	1	
q3	3	$2/8$	$5/9$	1	
q4	3	$2/8$	$5/9$	2	
q5	3	$2/8$	$5/9$	2	
q6	4	$5/8$	$6/9$	2	
q7	6	$6/8$	$8/9$	3	
q8	6	$6/8$	$8/9$	3	← current row is in the n^{th} of 3 chunks of rows
q9	7	$8/8$	$9/9$	3	

$n\%$ of the other rows rank lower than the current row

the current row and lower ranked rows make up $n\%$ of all rows

🔧 Altitudinal Mountain Zones

- Classify the altitudes of a mountain range into
 1. **equal-sized vegetation zones** and
 2. lowlands (altitude in the lowest **20%**) and highlands (between **60%-80%** of maximum altitude).



 Altitudinal Mountain Zones

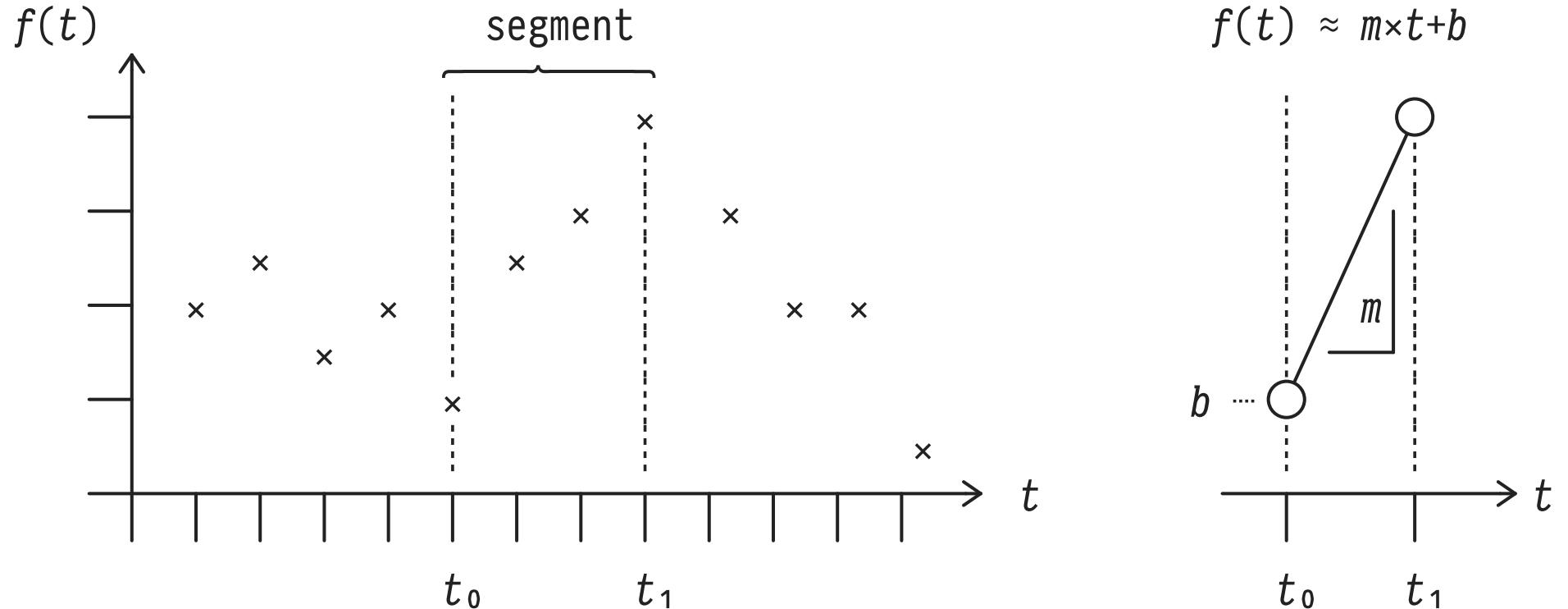
```
-- Classify altitudinal zones in table mountains(x, alt)
```

```
--
```

```
SELECT
```

```
m.x, m.alt,  
ntil(4) OVER altitude AS zone,  
CASE  
    WHEN percent_rank() OVER altitude BETWEEN 0.6 AND 0.8  
        THEN 'highlands'  
    WHEN percent_rank() OVER altitude < 0.2  
        THEN 'lowlands'  
    ELSE '-'  
END AS region  
FROM mountains AS m  
WINDOW altitude AS (ORDER BY m.alt)  
ORDER BY m.x;
```

🔧 Linear Approximation of a Time Series



1. `ntile(n)` segments time series at desired granularity.
2. Compute m , b in each **segment** \equiv **window frame**.

9 | Summary: Window Function Semantics²

Scope	Computation	Function	Description
frame	aggregation row access	(aggregates) <code>first_value(e)</code> <code>last_value(e)</code> <code>nth_value(e,n)</code>	<code>sum</code> , <code>avg</code> , <code>max</code> , <code>list</code> , ... e at first row in frame e at last row in frame e at n^{th} row in frame
partition	row access ranking	<code>lag(e,n,d)</code> <code>lead(e,n,d)</code> <code>row_number()</code> <code>rank()</code> <code>dense_rank()</code> <code>percent_rank()</code> <code>cume_dist()</code> <code>ntile(n)</code>	e at n rows <i>before</i> current row e at n rows <i>after</i> current row number of current row rank with gaps (“Olympics”) rank without gaps relative rank of current row ratio of rows up to “—” rank on a scale $\{1,2,\dots,n\}$

² `first_value(e)`: expression e will be evaluated as if we are at the first row in the frame.

`lag(e,n,d)`: default expression d is returned if there is no row at offset n before the current row.