



# Introduction to the R Language

## Data Types and Basic Operations

Roger Peng, Associate Professor  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

# Objects

R has five basic or “atomic” classes of objects:

- character
- numeric (real numbers)
- integer
- complex
- logical (True/False)

The most basic object is a vector

- A vector can only contain objects of the same class
- BUT: The one exception is a *list*, which is represented as a vector but can contain objects of different classes (indeed, that’s usually why we use them)

Empty vectors can be created with the `vector()` function.

# Numbers

- Numbers in R are generally treated as numeric objects (i.e. double precision real numbers)
- If you explicitly want an integer, you need to specify the `L` suffix
- Ex: Entering `1` gives you a numeric object; entering `1L` explicitly gives you an integer.
- There is also a special number `Inf` which represents infinity; e.g. `1 / 0`; `Inf` can be used in ordinary calculations; e.g. `1 / Inf` is `0`
- The value `NaN` represents an undefined value (“not a number”); e.g. `0 / 0`; `NaN` can also be thought of as a missing value (more on that later)

# Attributes

R objects can have attributes

- names, dimnames
- dimensions (e.g. matrices, arrays)
- class
- length
- other user-defined attributes/metadata

Attributes of an object can be accessed using the `attributes()` function.

# Entering Input

At the R prompt we type expressions. The `<-` symbol is the assignment operator.

```
> x <- 1
> print(x)
[1] 1
> x
[1] 1
> msg <- "hello"
```

The grammar of the language determines whether an expression is complete or not.

```
> x <- ## Incomplete expression
```

The `#` character indicates a comment. Anything to the right of the `#` (including the `#` itself) is ignored.

# Evaluation

When a complete expression is entered at the prompt, it is evaluated and the result of the evaluated expression is returned. The result may be auto-printed.

```
> x <- 5 ## nothing printed  
> x      ## auto-printing occurs  
[1] 5  
> print(x) ## explicit printing  
[1] 5
```

The `[1]` indicates that `x` is a vector and 5 is the first element.

# Printing

```
> x <- 1:20  
> x  
[1] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15  
[16] 16 17 18 19 20
```

The `:` operator is used to create integer sequences.

# Creating Vectors

The `c()` function can be used to create vectors of objects.

```
> x <- c(0.5, 0.6)      ## numeric
> x <- c(TRUE, FALSE)   ## logical
> x <- c(T, F)          ## logical
> x <- c("a", "b", "c") ## character
> x <- 9:29              ## integer
> x <- c(1+0i, 2+4i)     ## complex
```

Using the `vector()` function

```
> x <- vector("numeric", length = 10)
> x
[1] 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
```



# Mixing Objects

What about the following?

```
> y <- c(1.7, "a")  ## character  
> y <- c(TRUE, 2)   ## numeric  
> y <- c("a", TRUE) ## character
```

When different objects are mixed in a vector, *coercion* occurs so that every element in the vector is of the same class.

# Explicit Coercion

Objects can be explicitly coerced from one class to another using the `as.*` functions, if available.

```
> x <- 0:6
> class(x)
[1] "integer"
> as.numeric(x)
[1] 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
> as.logical(x)
[1] FALSE TRUE TRUE TRUE TRUE TRUE TRUE
> as.character(x)
[1] "0" "1" "2" "3" "4" "5" "6"
```

# Explicit Coercion

Nonsensical coercion results in NAs.

```
> x <- c("a", "b", "c")
> as.numeric(x)
[1] NA NA NA
Warning message:
NAs introduced by coercion
> as.logical(x)
[1] NA NA NA
> as.complex(x)
[1] 0+0i 1+0i 2+0i 3+0i 4+0i 5+0i 6+0i
```

# Matrices

Matrices are vectors with a *dimension* attribute. The dimension attribute is itself an integer vector of length 2 (nrow, ncol)

```
> m <- matrix(nrow = 2, ncol = 3)
> m
      [,1] [,2] [,3]
[1,]   NA   NA   NA
[2,]   NA   NA   NA
> dim(m)
[1] 2 3
> attributes(m)
$dim
[1] 2 3
```

# Matrices (cont'd)

Matrices are constructed *column-wise*, so entries can be thought of starting in the “upper left” corner and running down the columns.

```
> m <- matrix(1:6, nrow = 2, ncol = 3)
> m
      [,1] [,2] [,3]
[1,]    1    3    5
[2,]    2    4    6
```

# Matrices (cont'd)

Matrices can also be created directly from vectors by adding a dimension attribute.

```
> m <- 1:10
> m
[1] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
> dim(m) <- c(2, 5)
> m
      [,1] [,2] [,3] [,4] [,5]
[1,]    1    3    5    7    9
[2,]    2    4    6    8   10
```

# cbind-ing and rbind-ing

Matrices can be created by *column-binding* or *row-binding* with `cbind()` and `rbind()`.

```
> x <- 1:3
> y <- 10:12
> cbind(x, y)
      x y
[1,] 1 10
[2,] 2 11
[3,] 3 12
> rbind(x, y)
      [,1] [,2] [,3]
x         1     2     3
y        10    11    12
```

# Lists

Lists are a special type of vector that can contain elements of different classes. Lists are a very important data type in R and you should get to know them well.

```
> x <- list(1, "a", TRUE, 1 + 4i)
> x
[[1]]
[1] 1

[[2]]
[1] "a"

[[3]]
[1] TRUE

[[4]]
[1] 1+4i
```



# Factors

Factors are used to represent categorical data. Factors can be unordered or ordered. One can think of a factor as an integer vector where each integer has a *label*.

- Factors are treated specially by modelling functions like `lm()` and `glm()`
- Using factors with labels is *better* than using integers because factors are self-describing; having a variable that has values “Male” and “Female” is better than a variable that has values 1 and 2.

# Factors

```
> x <- factor(c("yes", "yes", "no", "yes", "no"))
> x
[1] yes yes no yes no
Levels: no yes
> table(x)
x
no yes
  2  3
> unclass(x)
[1] 2 2 1 2 1
attr(,"levels")
[1] "no" "yes"
```

# Factors

The order of the levels can be set using the `levels` argument to `factor()`. This can be important in linear modelling because the first level is used as the baseline level.

```
> x <- factor(c("yes", "yes", "no", "yes", "no"),  
              levels = c("yes", "no"))  
  
> x  
[1] yes yes no yes no  
Levels: yes no
```

# Missing Values

Missing values are denoted by `NA` or `NaN` for undefined mathematical operations.

- `is.na()` is used to test objects if they are `NA`
- `is.nan()` is used to test for `NaN`
- `NA` values have a class also, so there are integer `NA`, character `NA`, etc.
- A `NaN` value is also `NA` but the converse is not true

# Missing Values

```
> x <- c(1, 2, NA, 10, 3)
> is.na(x)
[1] FALSE FALSE  TRUE FALSE FALSE
> is.nan(x)
[1] FALSE FALSE FALSE FALSE FALSE
> x <- c(1, 2, NaN, NA, 4)
> is.na(x)
[1] FALSE FALSE  TRUE  TRUE FALSE
> is.nan(x)
[1] FALSE FALSE  TRUE FALSE FALSE
```

# Data Frames

Data frames are used to store tabular data

- They are represented as a special type of list where every element of the list has to have the same length
- Each element of the list can be thought of as a column and the length of each element of the list is the number of rows
- Unlike matrices, data frames can store different classes of objects in each column (just like lists); matrices must have every element be the same class
- Data frames also have a special attribute called `row.names`
- Data frames are usually created by calling `read.table()` or `read.csv()`
- Can be converted to a matrix by calling `data.matrix()`

# Data Frames

```
> x <- data.frame(foo = 1:4, bar = c(T, T, F, F))  
> x  
  foo  bar  
1   1 TRUE  
2   2 TRUE  
3   3 FALSE  
4   4 FALSE  
> nrow(x)  
[1] 4  
> ncol(x)  
[1] 2
```

# Names

R objects can also have names, which is very useful for writing readable code and self-describing objects.

```
> x <- 1:3
> names(x)
NULL
> names(x) <- c("foo", "bar", "norf")
> x
foo bar norf
  1   2   3
> names(x)
[1] "foo" "bar" "norf"
```



# Names

Lists can also have names.

```
> x <- list(a = 1, b = 2, c = 3)
> x
$a
[1] 1

$b
[1] 2

$c
[1] 3
```

# Names

And matrices.

```
> m <- matrix(1:4, nrow = 2, ncol = 2)
> dimnames(m) <- list(c("a", "b"), c("c", "d"))
> m
  c d
a 1 3
b 2 4
```

# Summary

## Data Types

- atomic classes: numeric, logical, character, integer, complex \
- vectors, lists
- factors
- missing values
- data frames
- names