Continuous Random Variables (Ch. 5.2)

Dason Kurkiewicz

Iowa State University

June 10, 2013

Outline

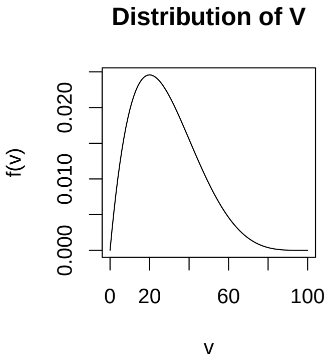
Continuous random variables

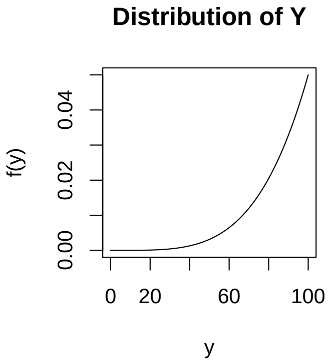
- Two types of random variables:
  - **Discrete random variable**: one that can only take on a set of isolated points (X, N, and S).
  - **Continuous random variable**: one that can fall in an interval of real numbers (T and Z).
- Examples of continuous random variables:
  - $Z =$ the amount of torque required to loosen the next bolt (*not* rounded).
  - $T =$ the time you'll have to wait for the next bus home.
  - $C =$ outdoor temperature at 3:17 PM tomorrow.
  - $L =$ length of the next manufactured part.

Continuous random variables

- V: % yield of a chemical process using method A.
- Y: % yield of a chemical process using method B.
- How do we mathematically distinguish between V and Y, given:
  - Each has the same range: $0\% \leq V, Y \leq 100\%$
  - There are uncountably many possible values in this range.
- We may want to show that Y tends to take on higher % yield values than V on average.

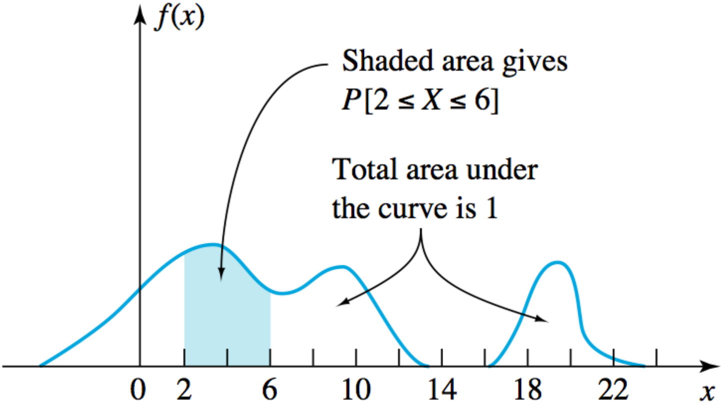
V and Y have *continuous* probability distributions





- The heights of these curves are not themselves probabilities.
- However, the the curves imply that process Y will yield more product per run on average than process V.

A generic probability density function (pdf)



Outline

Definition: probability density function (pdf)

- A **probability density function (pdf)** of a continuous random variable X is a function $f(x)$ with:

$$f(x) \geq 0 \text{ for all } x.$$
$$\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(x)dx = 1$$
$$P(a \leq X \leq b) = \int_a^b f(x)dx, \;\; a \leq b$$

- The pdf is the continuous analogue of a discrete random variable's probability mass function.

Example

- Let Y be the time delay (s) between a 60 Hz AC circuit and the movement of a motor on a different circuit.
- Say Y has a density of the form:

$$f(y) = \begin{cases} c & 0 < y < \frac{1}{60} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

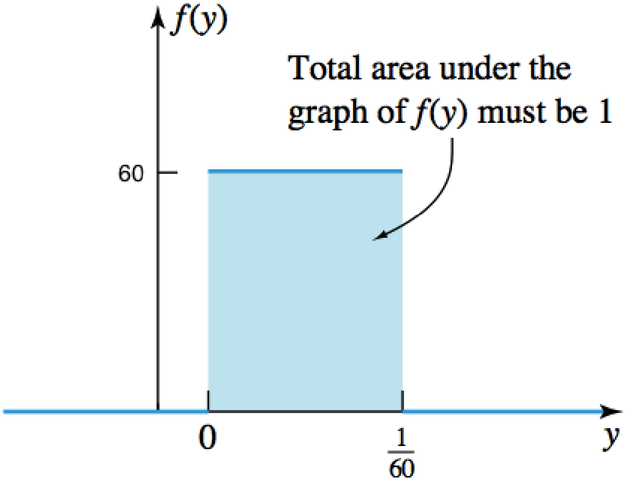
  we say that Y has a Uniform(0, 1/60) distribution.
- $f(y)$ must integrate to 1:

$$1 = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(y)dy = \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dy + \int_{0}^{1/60} cdy + \int_{1/60}^{\infty} 0dy = \frac{c}{60}$$

- hence, $c = 60$, and:

$$f(y) = \begin{cases} 60 & 0 < y < \frac{1}{60} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

A look at the density



Your turn: calculate the following probabilities.

$$f(y) = \begin{cases} 60 & 0 \leq y \leq \frac{1}{60} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

1. $P(Y \leq \frac{1}{100})$
2. $P(Y > \frac{1}{70})$
3. $P(|Y| < \frac{1}{120})$
4. $P(Y = \frac{1}{80})$

Answers: calculate the following probabilities

1.

$$
\begin{aligned}
P(Y \leq \frac{1}{100}) &= P(-\infty < Y \leq \frac{1}{100}) \\
&= \int_{-\infty}^{1/100} f(y)dy \\
&= \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dy = \int_{0}^{1/100} 60dy \\
&= \frac{60}{100} = \frac{3}{5}
\end{aligned}
$$

2.

$$
\begin{aligned}
P(Y > \frac{1}{70}) &= P(\frac{1}{70} < Y \leq \infty) \\
&= \int_{1/70}^{\infty} f(y)dy \\
&= \int_{1/70}^{1/60} 60dy + \int_{1/60}^{\infty} 0dy \\
&= 60y \mid_{1/70}^{1/60} + 0 \\
&= 60\left(\frac{1}{60} - \frac{1}{70}\right) \\
&= \frac{1}{7} \approx 0.143
\end{aligned}
$$

3.

$$\begin{aligned}
P(|Y| < \frac{1}{120}) &= P(-\frac{1}{120} < Y < \frac{1}{120}) \\
&= \int_{-1/120}^{1/120} f(y)dy \\
&= \int_{-1/120}^{0} 0dy + \int_{0}^{1/120} 60dy \\
&= 0 + 60y \mid_0^{1/120} \\
&= 60\left(\frac{1}{120} - 0\right) = \frac{1}{2}
\end{aligned}$$

4.

$$
\begin{aligned}
P(Y = \frac{1}{80}) = P(\frac{1}{80} \leq Y \leq \frac{1}{80}) \\
&= \int_{1/80}^{1/80} f(y)dy = \int_{1/80}^{1/80} 60dy \\
&= 60 \mid_{1/80}^{1/80} = 60 \left(\frac{1}{80} - \frac{1}{80} \right) \\
&= 0
\end{aligned}
$$

In fact, for any random variable X and any real number a:

$$
\begin{aligned}
P(X = a) = P(a \leq X \leq a) \\
&= \int_a^a f(x)dx = 0
\end{aligned}
$$

Outline

Cumulative distribution functions (cdf)

- The **cumulative distribution function** of a random variable X is a function F such that:

$$F(x) = P(X \leq x) = \int_{-\infty}^{x} f(t)dt$$

In other words:

$$\frac{d}{dx}F(x) = f(x)$$

- As with discrete random variables, F has the following properties:
  - $F(x) \geq 0$ for all x.
  - F is monotonically increasing.
  - $\lim_{x \to -\infty} F(x) = 0$
  - $\lim_{x \to \infty} F(x) = 1$

Example: calculating the cdf of Y

- Remember:

$$f_Y(y) = \begin{cases} 60 & 0 < y < 1/60 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

- For $y \leq 0$:

$$F(y) = P(Y \leq y) = \int_{-\infty}^{y} f(t)dt = \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dt = 0$$

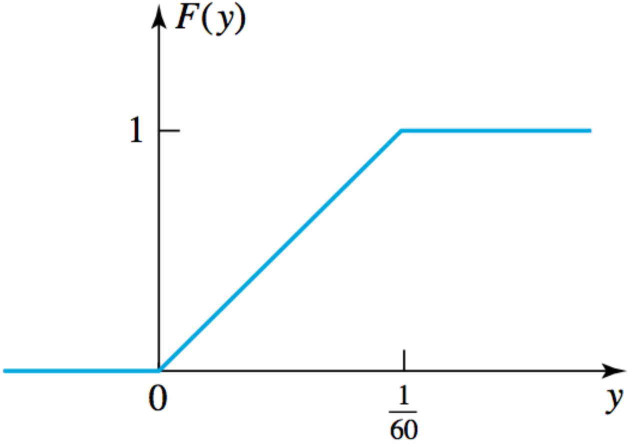
- For $0 < y < 1/60$:

$$F(y) = P(Y \leq y) = \int_{-\infty}^{y} f(t)dt = \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dt + \int_{0}^{y} 60dt = 60y$$

- For $y \geq 1/60$:

$$\begin{aligned} F(y) = P(Y \leq y) &= \int_{-\infty}^{y} f(t)dt \\ &= \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dt + \int_{0}^{1/60} 60dt + \int_{1/60}^{\infty} 0dt = 1 \end{aligned}$$

A look at the cdf



Your turn: calculate the following using the cdf

$$F(y) = \begin{cases} 0 & y \leq 0 \\ 60y & 0 < y \leq \frac{1}{60} \\ 1 & y > \frac{1}{60} \end{cases}$$

1. $F(1/70)$
2. $P(Y \leq \frac{1}{80})$
3. $P(Y > \frac{1}{150})$
4. $P(\frac{1}{130} \leq Y \leq \frac{1}{120})$

Answers: calculate the following using the cdf

1. $F(\frac{1}{70}) = 60\frac{1}{70} = \frac{6}{7}$
2. $P(Y \leq \frac{1}{80}) = F(\frac{1}{80}) = 60\frac{1}{80} = \frac{3}{4}$
3. $$\begin{aligned} P(Y > \frac{1}{150}) &= \int_{1/150}^{\infty} f(y)dy \\ &= \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(y)dy - \int_{-\infty}^{1/150} f(y)dy \\ &= 1 - F(1/150) = 1 - \frac{60}{150} \\ &= \frac{3}{5} \end{aligned}$$

In fact, for any random variable X, discrete or continuous:

$$P(X \geq x) = 1 - P(X < x)$$

4.

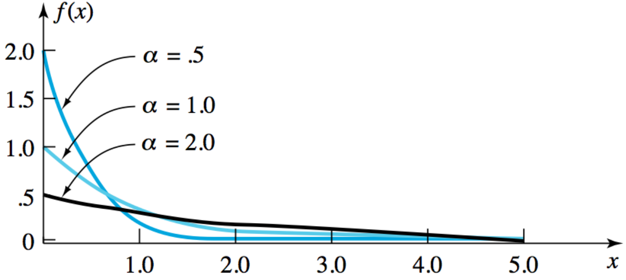
$$
\begin{aligned}
P(\frac{1}{130} \leq Y \leq \frac{1}{120}) &= \int_{1/130}^{1/120} f(y)dy \\
&= \int_{-\infty}^{1/120} f(y)dy - \int_{-\infty}^{1/130} f(y)dy \\
&= F(1/120) - F(1/130) \\
&= 60(1/120) - 60(1/130) \\
&= 1/26 \approx 0.0384
\end{aligned}
$$

Outline

The exponential distribution

- A random variable X has an Exponential(α) distribution if:

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{\alpha} e^{-x/\alpha} & x > 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$



Your turn: for $X \sim \text{Exp}(2)$, calculate the following

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2}e^{-x/2} & x > 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

1. $P(X \leq 1)$
2. $P(X > 5)$
3. The cdf F of X

Answers: for $X \sim \text{Exp}(2)$, calculate the following

1.

$$\begin{aligned}
P(X \leq 1) &= \int_{-\infty}^{1} f(x)dx \\
&= \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dx + \int_{0}^{1} \frac{1}{2} e^{-x/2} dx \\
&= 0 + (-e^{-x/2} \mid_0^1 \\
&= -e^{-1/2} - (-e^{-0/2}) \\
&= 1 - e^{-1/2} \approx 0.393
\end{aligned}$$

2.

$$
\begin{aligned}
P(X > 5) &= \int_5^\infty f(x)dx \\
&= \int_5^\infty \frac{1}{2}e^{-x/2}dx \\
&= -e^{-x/2}|_5^\infty \\
&= -e^{-\infty/2} + e^{-5/2} \\
&= e^{-5/2} \approx 0.082
\end{aligned}
$$

3. For $x < 0$:

$$F(x) = P(X \leq x) = \int_{-\infty}^{x} f(x)dx)$$
$$= \int_{-\infty}^{x} 0dx = 0$$

For $x \geq 0$:

$$F(x) = P(X \leq x) = \int_{-\infty}^{x} f(x)dx$$
$$= \int_{-\infty}^{0} 0dx + \int_{0}^{x} \frac{1}{2}e^{-t/2}dt$$
$$= -e^{-t/2} \mid_0^x = -e^{-x/2} - (-e^{-0/2})$$
$$= 1 - e^{-x/2}$$

Hence:

$$F(x) = \begin{cases} 1 - e^{-x/2} & x \geq 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

In general, an Exp(α) random variable has cdf:

$$F(x) = \begin{cases} 1 - e^{-x/\alpha} & x \geq 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Uses of the Exp(α) random variable

- An Exp(α) random variable measures the waiting time until a specific event that has an equal chance of happening at any point in time.
- Examples:
  - Time between your arrival at a bus stop and the moment the bus comes.
  - Time until the next person walks inside the library.
  - Time until the next car accident on a stretch of highway.