A Brief Introduction to Programming with R

MEcon & MiQE/F Introductory Week

Erik Senn & Jeremia Stalder

2025-09-05

Part I: Background / Tools

Schedule

Morning Sessions

09:15 - 10:00

Introduction, Background, Tools, First

steps with R

10:00 - 10:15

Break, Support with Installations

10:15 - 11:00

Exercises, Basic Concepts

11:00 - 11:15

Break, Q&A

11:15 - 11:45

Exercises, Basic Concepts

Afternoon Sessions

11:45 - 13:15

Lunch (individually)

13:15 - 14:00

Working with Data

14:00 - 14:15

Break, Q&A

14:15 - 15:15

Exercises

Welcome

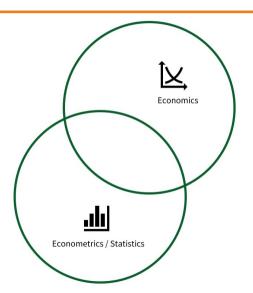
- 1. Fire up your notebooks!
- 2. **Download** (or clone) the course materials
 - GitHub Repository
 - Course slides available online

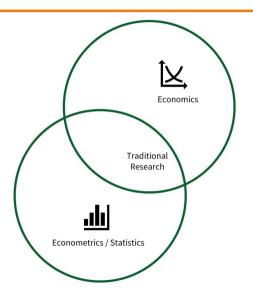
Why learn to program (now)?

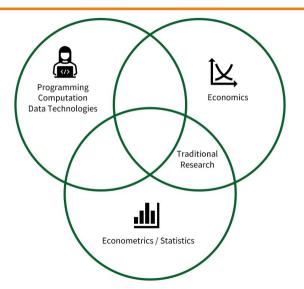
Background: technological change

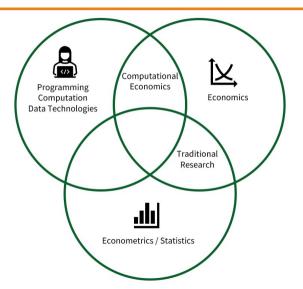
- Computers have become omnipresent
- Data is one of the world's most valuable resources
- Al and machine learning are reshaping every business and industry

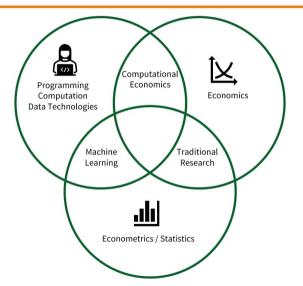


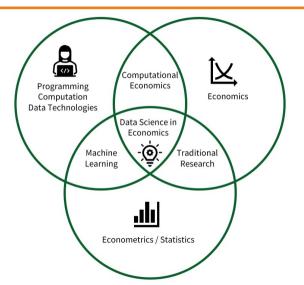












Programming in the age of Al-assistance

All assistants are powerful for many coding tasks, but might do 'stupid' hard to spot mistakes.

- Understand code: Al-usage requires coding skills to evaluate suggestions (bugs, efficiency, security)
- Problem solving: Structuring the analysis and adapting solutions are harder to automate.
- Blindly prompting AI for simple tasks hinders learning.

Recommendation: use Al as a teacher for programming

Why R?

A data language

- Widely used in data science jobs
- Particularly adapted to program with data
- Originally designed for statistical analysis
- Competing with Python as the top data science language



• Relatively easy to learn

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- Extensive free resources:

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 - RStudio Cheatsheets

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 - DataCamp: Introduction to R
 - RStudio Cheatsheets
 - Stack Overflow

Tools for this workshop

R is the programming language.

You can download R from: https://cran.r-project.org/

Rstudio desktop

RStudio is the most popular **integrated development environment (IDE).** for R, giving a useful visual interface for key programming tasks.

You can download RStudio Desktop from: https://posit.co/download/rstudio-desktop/

Rstudio cloud

RStudio Cloud lets you use RStudio without a local installation

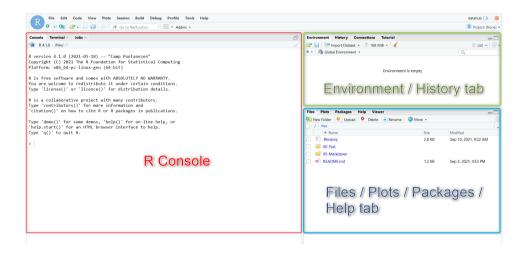
You can use RStudio (Posit) Cloud by registering here: https://posit.cloud/

An R-Studio Interface Tour

RStudio overview

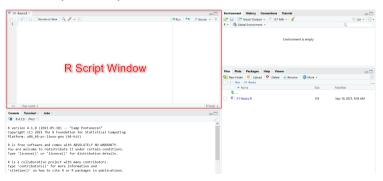
- Console: run R commands directly, quick testing
- Environment / Files: see variables, data, manage plots & files
- Help / Viewer: access documentation, view HTML output/plots

RStudio interface



Scripts in RStudio

- Write and save code in . R files
- Run selected lines (Ctrl+Enter)
- Keep work reproducible



Working directories & R projects

- Working directory = folder where R looks for files, e.g. data to load.
- Use getwd() and setwd()
- Better: R Projects
 - Define self-contained working environments
 - Save code, data, outputs together
 - Makes collaboration & reproducibility easier

Other tools in R-studio

- Help window for documentation
- Visual interfaces for file navigation, packages, exporting plots, loading data, ...
- Debugging, profiling, git for version control, Al integration (Copilot)

Exercises

Exercise a: setting up a working environment

- 1. Open RStudio and navigate to your desired working folder
- 2. Create a new folder called r_course
- 3. Set it as your working directory
- 4. Create subfolders: data and code
- 5. Create a new R Project in the r_course folder
- (*) Choose your favorite R-studio appearance: 'Tools > Global Options > Appearance'

Exercise b: r scripts

1. In the R console, type:

```
print("Hello world")
```

- 2. Create a new R script: File > New File > R Script (or Ctrl+Shift+N)
- 3. Type the same code in the script and run it using Ctrl+Enter or Ctrl+As+Enter

Part II: First Steps and Basic

Concepts

First steps in r

Variables and vectors

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Working with vectors

R easily allows to work with **vectors** of data!

```
Andy Betty Claire Daniel Eva
10 22 33 22 40
```

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Indexing

We can access **single** (or **multiple**) elements of a vector:

```
a[3] # Access the 3rd element
```

```
Claire
33
```

```
a[3:5] # Access the 3rd to 5th elements
```

```
Claire Daniel Eva
33 22 40
```

```
a["Claire"] # Access by name
```

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Inspecting variables

```
class(a) # Display the class
```

```
[1] "numeric"
```

```
str(a) # Display the structure
```

```
Named num [1:5] 10 22 33 22 40 - attr(*, "names")= chr [1:5] "Andy" "Betty" "Claire" "Daniel" ...
```

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Math operators

Basic operators:

- +:+
- -:-
- ×:*
- ÷:/

More operators:

- a^n : an
- \sqrt{a} : sqrt(a)
- $\ln a : \log(a)$
- e^n : exp(n)

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Basic Programming Concepts

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Loops

- Repeatedly execute a sequence of commands
- For a known or unknown number of iterations.
 - for-loop: number of iterations typically known
 - while-loop: iterate until a condition is met

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For-loops in r

```
n_iter <- 5  # Define number of iterations
# Specify the loop
for (i in 1:n_iter) {
    print(i) # Print the number 'i'
}</pre>
```

```
[1] 1[1] 2[1] 3[1] 4[1] 5
```

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For-loops: summing numbers

[1] 332

```
numbers <- c(72, 42, 150, 13, 36, 19)
total_sum <- 0  # Initialize sum

# Specify the loop
for (n in numbers) {
    total_sum <- total_sum + n
}
total_sum</pre>
```

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Nested for-loops

```
n iter inner <- 100
n iter outer <- 500
# Start outer loop
for (i in 1:n iter outer) {
    # Code for outer loop
    # Start inner loop
    for (j in 1:n iter inner) {
        # Code for inner loop
```

Booleans and logical statements

$$2 + 2 == 4$$
 # Is 2+2 equal to 4?

[1] TRUE

$$3 + 3 == 7$$
 # Is $3+3$ equal to 7 ?

[1] FALSE

[1] TRUE

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Control flow with booleans

```
if (condition) {
   print("The condition is true!")
} else {
   print("The condition is false!")
}
```

[1] "The condition is true!"

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R functions

- Functions take parameter values as input, process these values, and return results
- Many functions are provided with R
- Additional functions via packages

```
numbers <- c(13, 25, 39, 881)
mean(numbers) # Compute the mean
```

[1] 240

```
sd(numbers) # Standard deviation
```

[1] 428

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Creating custom functions

[1] 240

```
# Define custom mean function
my_mean <- function(x) {</pre>
    x bar <- sum(x) / length(x)
    return(x bar)
# Test the function
my mean(numbers)
```

mean(numbers) # Compare with built-in

Data Structures and Indices

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Vectors and lists

```
# Integer vector
integer vector <- 9:20
integer vector[2]  # Second element
Γ1 10
integer vector[2:5] # Second to fifth
[1] 10 11 12 13
# String vector
string vector <- c("a", "b", "c")
string vector[-3] # All except third
```

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Lists

Lists can contain **different types** of elements:

```
# Create a list
my_list <- list(
    numbers = integer_vector,
    letters = string_vector,
    condition = TRUE
)
str(my_list)</pre>
```

```
List of 3
$ numbers : int [1:12] 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 ...
$ letters : chr [1:3] "a" "b" "c"
$ condition: logi TRUE
```

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Accessing list elements

[1] 9 10 11

```
# Access by name
my list$numbers[1:3]
[1] 9 10 11
my_list[["letters"]]
[1] "a" "b" "c"
# Access by index
my list[[1]][1:3]
```

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Matrices

```
# Create a matrix
my_matrix <- matrix(integer vector, nrow = 4)</pre>
my matrix
    [,1] [,2] [,3]
[1,] 9 13 17
[2,] 10 14 18
[3,] 11 15 19
[4.] 12 16 20
my matrix[2,]  # Second row
```

[1] 10 14 18

Data frames

```
# Create a dataframe
my_df <- data.frame(
    Name = c("Alice", "Betty", "Claire"),
    Age = c(20, 30, 45)
)
my_df</pre>
```

Age
20
30
45

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Exercises

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Exercise a: write a sum function

Write a function that takes a **numeric vector** as input and returns the **sum** of the vector's elements.

```
my_sum <- function(x) {
    # Your code here
}</pre>
```

Test by comparing with built-in sum() function.

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Exercise b: robustness and warnings

Test your my_sum() function with:

Add **error checking** to make the function robust.

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Exercise c: standard deviation function

Implement a function to compute the **standard deviation**:

$$\mathrm{SD} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N-1}\sum_{i=1}^{N}(x_i-\bar{x})^2}$$

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Exercise d: standard error function

Building on Exercise C, implement:

$$\mathrm{SE}_{\bar{x}} = \frac{\mathrm{SD}}{\sqrt{N}}$$

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Exercise e: t-test

Implement a **one-sample t-test** function:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu_0}{\mathrm{SE}_{\bar{x}}}$$

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Exercise f: fibonacci sequence

Generate the first 30 Fibonacci numbers where:

- $F_0 = 0, F_1 = 1$
- $F_n = F_{n-1} + F_{n-2}$ for n > 1

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Exercise g: multiples of 3 and 5 (*)

Write a function that computes the sum of all **multiples of 3 or 5** up to a number N.

Hint: Multiples of both 3 and 5 should only be added once!

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Exercise h: prime numbers (*)

Write a function that computes the sum of all **prime numbers** up to a number N.

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Part III: Working with Data

Loading/importing Data

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Loading built-in r data sets

[1] "data.frame"

```
# Load built-in dataset
data(swiss)

# Check if loaded
class(swiss)
```

The data() function loads built-in R datasets into your environment.

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Inspect the data structure

```
# Structure of the swiss dataset str(swiss)
```

Infant.Mortality: num 22.2 22.2 20.2 20.3 20.6 26.6 23.6 24.9 21

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First few rows of the data

head(swiss, 4)

	Fertility	Agriculture	Examination E	ducation	Catholic	Infant.Mortality
Courtelary	80.2	17.0	15	12	9.96	22.2
Delemont	83.1	45.1	6	9	84.84	22.2
Franches-	92.5	39.7	5	5	93.40	20.2
Mnt						
Moutier	85.8	36.5	12	7	33.77	20.3

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Comma separated values (csv)

Example of **CSV format**:

```
"", "Fertility", "Agriculture", "Examination", ...
"Courtelary", 80.2, 17, 15, ...
"Delemont", 83.1, 45.1, 6, ...
```

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Importing data from different sources

```
# Csv files
swiss csv <- read.csv("./data/swiss.csv")</pre>
# Excel files (requires readxl)
library(readxl)
swiss excel <- read excel("./data/swiss.xlsx")</pre>
# Spss files (requires haven)
library(haven)
swiss spss <- read spss("./data/swiss.sav")</pre>
```

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Introduction to the Tidyverse

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What is the tidyverse?

"The tidyverse is an opinionated collection of R packages designed for data science. All packages share an underlying design philosophy, grammar, and data structures."

To install and load:

```
install.packages("tidyverse") # Install once
library(tidyverse) # Load in each session
```

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The pipe operator |>

Transform nested functions into readable pipelines:

```
# Traditional approach
head(select(swiss, Fertility, Education), 3)

# With pipe operator
swiss |>
select(Fertility, Education) |>
head(3)
```

Note: |> is built into R (since version 4.1.0). %>% is from the magrittr package, which has additional features

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Select columns with select()

```
# Select specific columns
swiss |>
   select(Fertility, Education, Catholic) |>
   head(3)
```

	Fertility	Education	Catholic
Courtelary	80.2	12	9.96
Delemont	83.1	9	84.84
Franches-Mnt	92.5	5	93.40

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Select columns - advanced patterns

```
# Select by pattern
swiss |>
select(starts_with("E") | contains("Mort")) |>
head(3)
```

	Examination	Education	Infant.Mortality
Courtelary	15	12	22.2
Delemont	6	9	22.2
Franches-Mnt	5	5	20.2

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Filter rows with filter()

```
# Keep rows meeting conditions
swiss |>
  filter(Education > 20) |>
  select(Fertility, Education, Catholic) |>
  head()
```

	Fertility	Education	Catholic
Lausanne	55.7	28	12.1
Neuchatel	64.4	32	16.9
V. De Geneve	35.0	53	42.3
Rive Droite	44.7	29	50.4
Rive Gauche	42.8	29	58.3

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Create new variables with mutate()

	Education	High_Education	Fertility	Fert_per_100
Courtelary	12	FALSE	80.2	0.802
Delemont	9	FALSE	83.1	0.831
Franches-Mnt	5	FALSE	92.5	0.925

Arrange rows with arrange()

```
swiss |>
  arrange(desc(Education)) |>
  select(Education, Examination) |>
  head(4)
```

	Education	Examination
V. De Geneve	53	37
Neuchatel	32	35
Rive Droite	29	16
Rive Gauche	29	22

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Summarize data with summarize()

```
swiss |>
summarize(
   mean_edu = mean(Education),
   sd_edu = sd(Education),
   median_fert = median(Fertility),
   n = n()
)
```

mean_edu	sd_edu	median_fert	n
11	9.62	70.4	47

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Group operations with group_by()

```
# Group and summarize
swiss |>
  group_by(Catholic > 50) |>
  summarize(
    mean_education = mean(Education),
    mean_fertility = mean(Fertility),
    count = n()
)
```

Catholic > 50	mean_education	mean_fertility	count
FALSE	12.14	66.2	29
TRUE	9.11	76.5	18

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Combining multiple operations

```
swiss |>
 filter(Agriculture < 50) |>
 group by(Catholic > 50) |>
 summarize(
   avg exam = mean(Examination),
   n = n()
    .groups = "drop"
 arrange(desc(avg exam))
```

Catholic > 50	avg_exam	r
FALSE	23.1	15
TRUE	12.3	6

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Reshape data: wide to long

```
# Original wide format
swiss_subset <- swiss |>
    slice(1:2) |>
    select(Fertility, Agriculture)
swiss subset
```

	Fertility	Agriculture
Courtelary	80.2	17.0
Delemont	83.1	45.1

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Reshape data: pivot_longer()

```
# Convert to long format
swiss_subset |>
  pivot_longer(
    cols = everything(),
    names_to = "Metric",
    values_to = "Value"
)
```

Value
80.2
17.0
83.1
45.1

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Join data frames (preparation)

```
# Sample data
df1 <- data.frame(</pre>
  Student ID = c(2501, 2502, 2503, 2504),
 Master = c("Mecon", "Mecon", "MiQE/F", "MiQE/F")
df2 <- data.frame(
  Student ID = c(2501, 2502, 2503, 2504, 2505, 2506),
 Grades = c(6, 5, 5.5, 5.5, 4, 5)
```

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Join data frames

```
# Left join keeps all rows from df1
left_join(df1, df2, by = "Student_ID")
```

Student_ID	Master	Grades
2501	Mecon	6.0
2502	Mecon	5.0
2503	MiQE/F	5.5
2504	MiQE/F	5.5

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Working with dates using lubridate (preparation)

```
# Create and parse dates
dates <- c("2025-09-05", "2025-09-06")
parsed_dates <- ymd(dates)</pre>
```

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Working with dates using lubridate

```
# Extract components
data.frame(
  date = parsed_dates,
  year = year(parsed_dates),
  month = month(parsed_dates),
  weekday = wday(parsed_dates, label = TRUE)
)
```

date	year	month	weekday
2025-09-05	2025	9	Fr
2025-09-06	2025	9	Sa

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Purrr: map functions

```
# Apply a function to multiple columns
swiss |>
select(Fertility, Agriculture, Education) |>
map_dbl(mean) |>
round(2)
```

```
Fertility Agriculture Education 70.1 50.7 11.0
```

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String manipulation with stringr

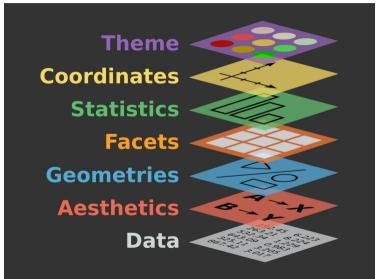
```
masters <- c("Mecon", "MiQE/F", "MACFin") # Example text
# String operations
tibble(
  original = masters,
 lower = str to lower(masters),
 length = str length(masters),
  contains e = str detect(masters, "e")
```

original	lower	length	contains_
Mecon	mecon	5	TRUE
MiQE/F	miqe/f	6	FALSE
MACEIR	no o ofin	6	EALCE

Visualization with R (ggplot2)

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Grammar of graphics - layers



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Ggplot2 basics

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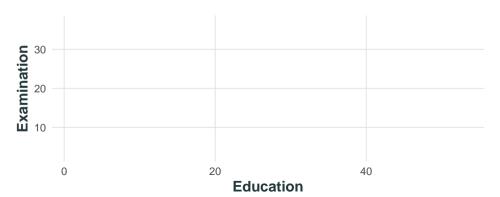
Prepare the data

```
Catholic Protestant
18 29
```

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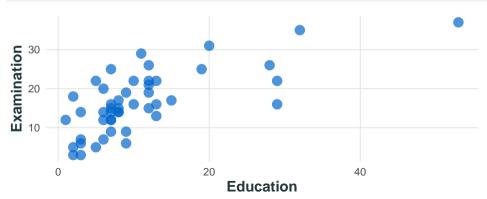
Building a plot: data + aesthetics

```
ggplot(data = swiss,
    aes(x = Education, y = Examination))
```



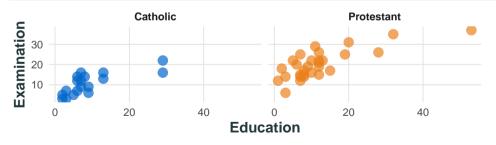
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Adding geometries



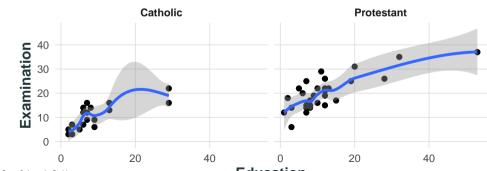
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Using facets



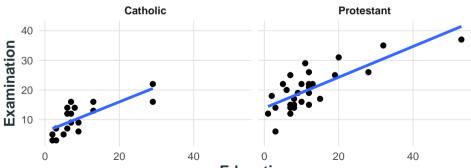
Religion • Catholic • Protestant

Adding statistics with loess



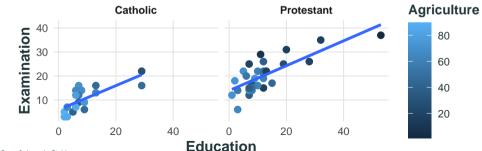
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Adding statistics with Im



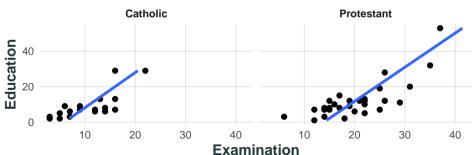
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Multiple aesthetics



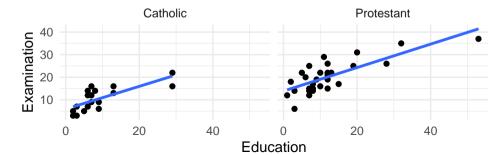
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Change coordinates



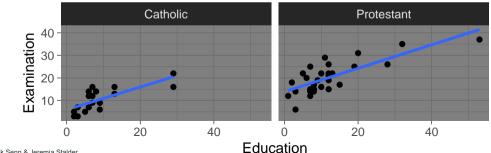
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Customizing themes



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Pre-built themes



Save plots

```
# Save the last plot
ggsave("my plot.png",
       width = 8, height = 5,
       dpi = 300)
# Save a specific plot
p <- ggplot(swiss, aes(Education, Examination)) +</pre>
  geom point()
ggsave("scatter.pdf", plot = p,
       width = 6, height = 4)
```

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Basic Statistics with R

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Descriptive statistics

```
# Create sample data
x <- c(10, 22, 33, 22, 40)

# Basic statistics
tibble(
  mean = mean(x),
  median = median(x),
  sd = sd(x),
  min = min(x),
  max = max(x)</pre>
```

mean	median	sd	min	max
25.4	22	11.5	10	40

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T-test example

```
# Generate sample data
set.seed(123)
sample <- rnorm(30, mean = 10, sd = 2)

# One-sample t-test
t_result <- t.test(sample, mu = 10)
t_result$p.value</pre>
```

```
[1] 0.794
```

```
t_result$conf.int
```

```
[1] 9.17 10.64 attr(,"conf.level")
```

Linear regression - setup

(Intercept) Education 10.127

0.579

```
# Define the model formula
model1 <- Examination ~ Education
# Fit the model
fit1 <- lm(model1, data = swiss)
# View coefficients
coef(fit1) # Use 'summary(fit1)' for more details
```

```
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                                                                                                                                                                                      99 / 113
```

Multiple linear regression

```
# Fit model with multiple predictors
fit2 <- lm(Examination ~ Education + Catholic + Agriculture,
           data = swiss)
# Model fit statistics
tibble(
 R2 = summary(fit2)$r.squared,
 Adj R2 = summary(fit2)$adj.r.squared,
 RMSE = sigma(fit2))
```

R2	Adj_R2	RMS
0.728	0.709	4.3

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Regression coefficients table

```
# Extract coefficient information
coef_summary <- summary(fit2)$coefficients
round(coef_summary, 3)</pre>
```

	Estimate	Std.	Error	t	value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	18.537		2.637		7.03	0.000
Education	0.424		0.087		4.89	0.000
Catholic	-0.080		0.017		-4.75	0.000
Agriculture	-0.068		0.040		-1.71	0.095

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Other econometric models

```
# Binary outcomes - logit
glm(v \sim x1 + x2,
    family = binomial(link = "logit"))
# Binary outcomes - probit
glm(y \sim x1 + x2,
    family = binomial(link = "probit"))
# Count data - poisson
glm(y \sim x1 + x2,
    family = poisson())
# Panel data - fixed effects
library(fixest) # install.packages("fixest")
feols(y \sim x1 + x2 \mid x3,
    data = panel data)
```

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Print regression results - console

```
# Basic regression table
library(modelsummary)
models <- list(
  "Model 1" = lm(Examination ~ Education,
                 data = swiss).
  "Model 2" = lm(Examination ~ Education + Catholic + Agriculture,
                  data = swiss)
modelsummary (models,
             stars = TRUE,
             gof omit = "AIC|BIC|Log.Lik.")
```

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Save regression output

```
# Save table directly to file
modelsummary(models, output = "table.docx")
modelsummary(models, output = "table.html")
modelsummary(models, output = "table.tex")
modelsummary(models, output = "table.md")
modelsummary(models, output = "table.txt")
modelsummary(models, output = "table.png")
# Raw table
modelsummary(models, output = "html")
modelsummary(models, output = "latex")
modelsummary(models, output = "markdown")
```

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Final Remarks

Some best practices for R programming

1. Organization

- Start scripts with library() calls
- Use meaningful variable names
- Comment your code with #

2. Efficiency

- Use functions to avoid repetition
- Vectorize operations when possible
- Use the tidyverse for data manipulation

3. Reproducibility

- Set seeds for random operations
- Use relative paths (./data/)
- Document package versions (or with with projects / environments)

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Resources for learning R

Online Resources:

- Stack Overflow
- R for Data Science book
- RStudio cheatsheets
- CRAN documentation

Al Assistance:

- ChatGPT
- GitHub Copilot
- Google Bard

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Example prompts to use AI as programming teacher

Bad prompt

- "Please solve this coding assignment."
- "Here's my code, please fix it."

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Better prompt

"The code below yields a variable type error. Please correct it and explain my mistake."

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Good prompt:

System prompt

"I am learning to code in R and want to use you as a teacher.

Please guide me to find the solution myself, not just give the answer."

Question prompt

"This code should do [A], but instead does [B].

I think the issue is in line [X–Y], where I meant to do [C].

Can you give me a hint?"

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Upcoming courses

Next Week

R Programming Course

Instructor: Erik Senn

Dates: September 8-11, 2025

Time: 9:00-12:00 and 13:00-17:00

Location: Rosenbergstrasse 30, Room 61-152 Contents: Similar contents as today in

slower pace. Automated reports using R-markdown on last day.

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Thank you!

Thanks for joining our R workshop!

Happy Coding!

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Survey - evaluation for introduction week



https://forms.office.com/e/Ki59zF84dY

Please take a moment to provide feedback on the introduction week.

Your input helps us improve future courses!

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