Using R Markdown

Put your name here
Put the date here

Introduction

This module will teach you how to use R Markdown to create quality documents that incorporate text and R code seamlessly.

Are you in your project?

If you are looking at this document, that means you successfully completed the "Intro to R" module. At the end of that module, you created a new project called Using_R_Markdown and you should have placed this file in it. Let's make sure you're in your project.

Look at the upper right corner of the screen. Under your username, does it say Using_R_Markdown? If so, congratulations! You are in your project and you can safely skip down to the next section "What is R Markdown?"

If not, click on whatever it does say there (probably Project: (None)).

When you do the next step, this file will likely close and you'll have to re-open it again!

You can click "Open Project" but it's likely that the Using_R_Markdown project appears in the drop-down menu in your list of recently accessed projects. So click on the project Using_R_Markdown and then you'll have to re-open this file...

... and we're back, I hope.

What is R Markdown?

The first question should really be, "What is Markdown?"

Markdown is a way of using plain text with simple characters to indicate formatting choices in a document. For example, in a Markdown file, one can make headers by using number signs (or hashtags as the kids are calling them these days¹). The Markdown file itself is just a plain text file. To see the formatting, one has to send the file through a process called knitting, which is described below.

R Markdown is a special version of Markdown that also allows you to include R code alongside the text.

Knitting a document

Going from the raw text of an R Markdown document to formatted output is called "knitting". There is a button in the toolbar right above the text that says "Knit". Go ahead and push it. See what happens.

Once the pretty output is generated, take a few moments to look back and forth between it and the original R Markdown text file (the plain text in RStudio). You can see some tricks that we won't need much (embedding web links, making lists, etc.) and some tricks that we will use everyday (like R code chunks).

The PDF file will be the "pretty" output file that you submit when you turn in your assignment. At first, you'll want to work back and forth between the R Markdown file and the PDF file to get used to how the

¹Also called "pound signs" or "octothorpes". This is also an example of formatting a footnote!

formatting codes in the plain text file get translated to output in the PDF file. After a while, you will knit to PDF less often and work mostly in the R Markdown file, only knitting to PDF when you are finished and ready to submit your final draft.

Literate programming

R Markdown is one way to implement a "literate programming" paradigm. The concept of literate programming was famously described by Donald Knuth, an eminent computer scientist. The idea is that computer programs should not appear in a sterile file that's full of hard to read, abstruse lines of computer code. Instead, functional computer code should appear interspersed with writing that explains the code.

Reproducible research

One huge benefit of organizing your work into R Markdown documents is that it makes your work *reproducible*. This means that anyone with access to your data and your R Markdown file should be able to re-create the exact same analysis you did.

This is a far cry from what generally happens in research. For example, if I do all my work in Microsoft Excel, I make a series of choices in how I format and analyze my data and all those choices take the form of menu commands that I point and click with my mouse. There is no record of the exact sequence of clicks that took me from point A to B all the way to Z. All I have to show for my work is the "clean" spreadsheet and anything I've written down or communicated about my results. If there were any errors along the way, they would be very hard to track down.²

Reproducibility should be a minimum prerequisite for all statistical analysis. Sadly, that is not the case in most of the research world. We are training you to be better.

Structure of an R Markdown document

Let's start from the top. Look at the very beginning of the plain R Markdown file. The section that starts and ends with three hyphens is called the YAML header. (Google it if you really care why.) The title of the document appears already, but you'll need to substitute your name and today's date in the obvious places. Scroll up and do that now.

You've made changes to the document, so you'll need to push the "Knit" button again. Once the knitting is done, look at the PDF document again. The YAML header has been converted into a nicely formatted document header with the new information you've provided.

Next, there is some weird looking code with instructions not to touch it. I recommend heeding that advice. This code will allow you to answer questions and have your responses appear between pretty blue lines. Let's try it:

ANSWER __

Replace this text here with something else. Then knit the document and see how it appears in the PDF file.

To be clear, the colorful "answer" bars are not part of the standard R Markdown tool set. That's why we had to define them manually near the top of the file. Note that the weird code itself does not show up in the PDF file. It works in the background to define the blue bars that show up in the PDF file.

 $^{^2}$ If you think these errors are trivial, Google "Reinhart and Rogoff and Excel error" to read about the catastrophic consequences of seemingly trivial Excel mistakes.

Next we have our first section header, which in the R Markdown file looks like ## Introduction. The number signs are Markdown code for formatting headers. Observe:

Section header

Not quite as big

We could actually use a single number sign, but # makes a header as big as the title, which is too big. Therefore, I prefer to use ## for section headers and ### for subsections.

You do need to make sure that there is a blank line before and after each section header. To see why, look at the PDF document at this spot: ### Is this a new section? Do you see the problem?

Put a blank line before and after the line above that says "Is this a new section?" Knit one more time and make sure that the line now shows up as a proper section header.

Other formatting tricks

You can make text *italic* or **bold** by using asterisks. (Don't forget to look at the knit document to see the result.)

You can make bullet-point lists. These are also made with asterisks, but at the beginning of a line, followed by a space. If you want sub-items, indent four spaces and use a minus sign followed by a space. (Search online for syntax that will allow even deeper levels of nesting.)

- Item
 - Sub-item
 - Sub-item
- Item
- Item

Or you can make ordered lists. Just use numbers and R Markdown will do all the work for you. Sub-items work the same way as above.

- 1. First Item
 - Sub-item
 - Sub-item
- 2. Second Item
- 3. Third Item

We can make horizontal rules. There are lots of ways of doing this, but I prefer a bunch of asterisks in a row.

There are many more formatting tricks available. For a good resource on all R Markdown stuff, click on this link for a "cheat sheet". And note the syntax for including hyperlinks in your document in the raw R Markdown file.

R code chunks

The most powerful feature of R Markdown is the ability to do data analysis right inside the document. This is accomplished by including R code chunks. An R code chunk doesn't just show you the R code in your output file; it also runs that code and generates output that appears right below the code chunk.

An R code chunk starts with three "backticks" followed by the letter \mathbf{r} enclosed in braces, and it ends with three more backticks. (The backtick is usually in the upper-left corner of your keyboard, next to the number

1 and sharing a key with the tilde ~.) In RStudio, click the little dark green, right-facing arrow in the upper-right corner of the code chunk below. (The icon I'm referring to is next to a faint gear icon and a lighter green icon with a downward-facing arrow.)

```
# Here's some sample R code
test <- c(1, 2, 3, 4)
sum(test)</pre>
```

[1] 10

After pushing the dark green arrow, you should notice that the output of the R code appeared like magic. If you go to the PDF file, you should see the same output appear. If you hover your mouse over the button, you should see the words "Run Current Chunk". We'll call this the Run button for short.

We need to address something here that always confuses people new to R and R Markdown. A number sign (aka "hashtag") in an R Markdown document gives us headers. In R, however, a number sign indicates a "comment" line. In the R code above, the line # Here's some sample R code is not executed as R code. But you can clearly see that the two lines following were executed as R code. (Perhaps even more confusingly, the R output in the PDF file is preceded by two number signs.) So be careful! Number signs inside and outside R code chunks behave very differently.

Typically, the first code chunk that appears in our document will load any packages we need. We will be using a package called mosaic throughout the course. This package was designed by stats educators to provide some useful tools for teaching statistics to undergraduates. We load it now. Click on the Run button (the dark green, right-facing arrow) in the code chunk below.

```
library(mosaic)
```

##

```
## Loading required package: dplyr
## Attaching package: 'dplyr'
## The following objects are masked from 'package:stats':
##
##
       filter, lag
## The following objects are masked from 'package:base':
##
##
       intersect, setdiff, setequal, union
## Loading required package: lattice
## Loading required package: ggplot2
## Loading required package: mosaicData
## Loading required package: Matrix
##
## The 'mosaic' package masks several functions from core packages in order to add additional features.
## The original behavior of these functions should not be affected by this.
## Attaching package: 'mosaic'
## The following object is masked from 'package:Matrix':
##
##
       mean
```

The following objects are masked from 'package:dplyr':

count, do, tally

```
## The following objects are masked from 'package:stats':
##
       binom.test, cor, cov, D, fivenum, IQR, median, prop.test,
##
       quantile, sd, t.test, var
##
## The following objects are masked from 'package:base':
##
##
       max, mean, min, prod, range, sample, sum
```

The output here is very messy because it just consists of a bunch of messages that are generated when trying to load the package. Let's change the code chunk in RStudio to look like this instead. (As before, press the Run button.)

library(mosaic)

The warning and message flags in the code chunk header control whether we see the annoying messages that are generated in the output. Keep in mind that this is one of the few times we will actively try to suppress the output. In general, the whole point is to see both the R code and its output simultaneously.

Okay, let's do something interesting now. We'll take a look at the mtcars data set. First, let's explore what happens when we push the Run button in a code chunk containing several commands that generate output.

head(mtcars)

```
##
                      mpg cyl disp hp drat
                                                wt
                                                   qsec vs am gear carb
## Mazda RX4
                     21.0
                                160 110 3.90 2.620 16.46
                                                           0
                                                              1
                                                                        4
## Mazda RX4 Wag
                     21.0
                             6
                                160 110 3.90 2.875 17.02
                                                                   4
                                                           0
                                                              1
## Datsun 710
                     22.8
                             4
                               108 93 3.85 2.320 18.61
                                                           1
                                                                   4
                                                                        1
                                                              1
                             6
                               258 110 3.08 3.215 19.44
                                                                   3
                                                                        1
## Hornet 4 Drive
                     21.4
                                                           1
## Hornet Sportabout 18.7
                             8
                               360 175 3.15 3.440 17.02
                                                           0
                                                              0
                                                                   3
                                                                        2
## Valiant
                     18.1
                             6
                                225 105 2.76 3.460 20.22
                                                                   3
                                                                        1
tail(mtcars)
```

```
mpg cyl disp hp drat
                                             wt qsec vs am gear carb
                                                               5
## Porsche 914-2
                  26.0
                         4 120.3 91 4.43 2.140 16.7
                                                                    2
## Lotus Europa
                  30.4
                         4 95.1 113 3.77 1.513 16.9
                                                       1
                                                               5
## Ford Pantera L 15.8
                         8 351.0 264 4.22 3.170 14.5
                                                               5
                                                                    4
                  19.7
                         6 145.0 175 3.62 2.770 15.5
                                                               5
                                                                    6
## Ferrari Dino
## Maserati Bora 15.0
                         8 301.0 335 3.54 3.570 14.6
                                                      0
                                                                    8
## Volvo 142E
                  21.4
                         4 121.0 109 4.11 2.780 18.6
                                                                    2
```

str(mtcars)

summary(mtcars)

```
'data.frame':
                   32 obs. of 11 variables:
##
   $ mpg : num
                21 21 22.8 21.4 18.7 18.1 14.3 24.4 22.8 19.2 ...
##
   $ cyl : num 6646868446 ...
                160 160 108 258 360 ...
   $ disp: num
##
   $ hp : num
                110 110 93 110 175 105 245 62 95 123 ...
                3.9 3.9 3.85 3.08 3.15 2.76 3.21 3.69 3.92 3.92 ...
##
   $ drat: num
##
         : num
                2.62 2.88 2.32 3.21 3.44 ...
   $ qsec: num
                16.5 17 18.6 19.4 17 ...
                0 0 1 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 ...
##
   $ vs
         : num
   $ am : num 1 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 ...
   $ gear: num 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 ...
   $ carb: num 4 4 1 1 2 1 4 2 2 4 ...
```

```
##
                           cyl
                                             disp
                                                                hp
         mpg
    Min.
##
            :10.40
                              :4.000
                                               : 71.1
                                                         Min.
                                                                 : 52.0
                      Min.
                                       Min.
                                       1st Qu.:120.8
##
    1st Qu.:15.43
                      1st Qu.:4.000
                                                         1st Qu.: 96.5
    Median :19.20
                      Median :6.000
                                       Median :196.3
                                                         Median :123.0
##
##
    Mean
            :20.09
                      Mean
                              :6.188
                                       Mean
                                               :230.7
                                                         Mean
                                                                 :146.7
##
    3rd Qu.:22.80
                      3rd Qu.:8.000
                                       3rd Qu.:326.0
                                                         3rd Qu.:180.0
##
    Max.
            :33.90
                      Max.
                              :8.000
                                       Max.
                                               :472.0
                                                         Max.
                                                                 :335.0
##
         drat
                            wt
                                             qsec
                                                                vs
##
            :2.760
                              :1.513
                                                                 :0.0000
    Min.
                      Min.
                                       Min.
                                               :14.50
                                                         Min.
##
    1st Qu.:3.080
                      1st Qu.:2.581
                                       1st Qu.:16.89
                                                         1st Qu.:0.0000
##
    Median :3.695
                      Median :3.325
                                       Median :17.71
                                                         Median :0.0000
##
    Mean
            :3.597
                      Mean
                              :3.217
                                       Mean
                                               :17.85
                                                         Mean
                                                                 :0.4375
##
    3rd Qu.:3.920
                      3rd Qu.:3.610
                                       3rd Qu.:18.90
                                                         3rd Qu.:1.0000
##
    Max.
            :4.930
                      Max.
                              :5.424
                                       Max.
                                               :22.90
                                                         Max.
                                                                 :1.0000
##
           am
                            gear
                                              carb
##
            :0.0000
                               :3.000
                                                :1.000
    Min.
                       Min.
                                        Min.
    1st Qu.:0.0000
##
                       1st Qu.:3.000
                                        1st Qu.:2.000
    Median : 0.0000
                       Median :4.000
                                        Median :2.000
##
            :0.4062
                               :3.688
                                        Mean
                                                :2.812
    Mean
                       Mean
##
    3rd Qu.:1.0000
                       3rd Qu.:4.000
                                        3rd Qu.:4.000
##
    Max.
            :1.0000
                       Max.
                               :5.000
                                        Max.
                                                :8.000
```

If you're looking at this in RStudio, this is a big mess. RStudio did its best to give you what you asked for, but there are four separate commands here. The first two (head and tail) print some of the data, so the first two boxes of output are tables showing you the head and the tail of the data. The next two (str and summary) normally just print some information to the Console. So RStudio gave you an R Console box with the output of both of those commands.

If you look at the PDF file, you can see the situation isn't as bad. Each command and its corresponding output appear nicely separated there.

Nevertheless, it will be good practice and a good habit to get into to put multiple output-generating commands in their own R code chunks. Compare:

head(mtcars)

str(mtcars)

```
##
                                                      qsec vs am gear carb
                       mpg cyl disp
                                      hp drat
                                                  wt
## Mazda RX4
                      21.0
                                 160 110 3.90 2.620 16.46
                                                                           4
                                 160 110 3.90 2.875 17.02
                                                                           4
## Mazda RX4 Wag
                      21.0
                              6
                                                             0
                                                                1
                                                                      4
## Datsun 710
                      22.8
                              4
                                 108
                                      93 3.85 2.320 18.61
                                                                      4
                                                                           1
                                                             1
                                                                      3
## Hornet 4 Drive
                              6
                                 258 110 3.08 3.215 19.44
                                                             1
                                                                0
                                                                           1
                      21.4
## Hornet Sportabout 18.7
                              8
                                 360 175 3.15 3.440 17.02
                                                             0
                                                                      3
                                                                           2
## Valiant
                      18.1
                                 225 105 2.76 3.460 20.22
                                                                      3
                              6
                                                                           1
tail(mtcars)
```

```
##
                    mpg cyl
                             disp
                                    hp drat
                                                wt qsec
                                                         ٧S
                                                            am
                                                               gear
                                    91 4.43 2.140 16.7
## Porsche 914-2
                   26.0
                          4 120.3
                                                          0
                                                             1
                                                                  5
                                                                        2
## Lotus Europa
                   30.4
                              95.1 113 3.77 1.513 16.9
                                                             1
                                                                  5
                                                                        2
                          8 351.0 264 4.22 3.170 14.5
                                                                  5
                                                                        4
## Ford Pantera L
                   15.8
                                                          0
                                                             1
                                                                        6
## Ferrari Dino
                   19.7
                          6 145.0 175 3.62 2.770 15.5
                                                          0
                                                             1
                                                                  5
## Maserati Bora
                   15.0
                          8 301.0 335 3.54 3.570 14.6
                                                          0
                                                             1
                                                                  5
                                                                        8
                                                                        2
## Volvo 142E
                   21.4
                           4 121.0 109 4.11 2.780 18.6
```

```
## 'data.frame': 32 obs. of 11 variables:
## $ mpg : num 21 21 22.8 21.4 18.7 18.1 14.3 24.4 22.8 19.2 ...
```

```
6 6 4 6 8 6 8 4 4 6 ...
##
    $ cvl : num
    $ disp: num
                 160 160 108 258 360 ...
##
##
          : num
                  110 110 93 110 175 105 245 62 95 123 ...
                 3.9 3.9 3.85 3.08 3.15 2.76 3.21 3.69 3.92 3.92 ...
##
    $ drat: num
##
            num
                 2.62 2.88 2.32 3.21 3.44
##
    $ qsec: num
                 16.5 17 18.6 19.4 17 ...
                 0 0 1 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 ...
##
    $ vs
            num
##
            num
                  1 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 ...
##
    $ gear: num
                 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 ...
    $ carb: num
                 4 4 1 1 2 1 4 2 2 4 ...
```

summary(mtcars)

```
##
                           cyl
                                             disp
                                                                hp
         mpg
##
    Min.
            :10.40
                              :4.000
                                               : 71.1
                                                                 : 52.0
                      Min.
                                       Min.
                                                         Min.
##
                      1st Qu.:4.000
                                       1st Qu.:120.8
                                                         1st Qu.: 96.5
    1st Qu.:15.43
    Median :19.20
                      Median :6.000
                                       Median :196.3
                                                         Median :123.0
##
            :20.09
                              :6.188
                                               :230.7
                                                                 :146.7
    Mean
                      Mean
                                       Mean
                                                         Mean
##
    3rd Qu.:22.80
                      3rd Qu.:8.000
                                       3rd Qu.:326.0
                                                         3rd Qu.:180.0
##
            :33.90
                              :8.000
                                               :472.0
                                                                 :335.0
    Max.
                      Max.
                                       Max.
                                                         Max.
                                             qsec
##
         drat
                            wt
                                                                vs
##
    Min.
            :2.760
                      Min.
                              :1.513
                                       Min.
                                               :14.50
                                                         Min.
                                                                 :0.0000
##
    1st Qu.:3.080
                      1st Qu.:2.581
                                       1st Qu.:16.89
                                                         1st Qu.:0.0000
                                                         Median :0.0000
##
    Median :3.695
                      Median :3.325
                                       Median :17.71
##
            :3.597
                              :3.217
                                               :17.85
                                                                 :0.4375
    Mean
                      Mean
                                       Mean
                                                         Mean
##
    3rd Qu.:3.920
                      3rd Qu.:3.610
                                       3rd Qu.:18.90
                                                         3rd Qu.:1.0000
                                               :22.90
##
            :4.930
                              :5.424
    Max.
                      Max.
                                       Max.
                                                         Max.
                                                                 :1.0000
##
                                              carb
           am
                            gear
##
    Min.
            :0.0000
                      Min.
                               :3.000
                                        Min.
                                                :1.000
##
    1st Qu.:0.0000
                       1st Qu.:3.000
                                        1st Qu.:2.000
                       Median :4.000
##
    Median :0.0000
                                        Median :2.000
##
            :0.4062
                               :3.688
                                                :2.812
    Mean
                       Mean
                                        Mean
##
    3rd Qu.:1.0000
                       3rd Qu.:4.000
                                        3rd Qu.:4.000
            :1.0000
                               :5.000
                                                :8.000
    Max.
                       Max.
                                        Max.
```

This won't look any different in the PDF file, but it sure looks a lot cleaner in RStudio.

What about the two lines of the first code chunk we ran above?

```
test <- c(1, 2, 3, 4) sum(test)
```

```
## [1] 10
```

Should these two lines be separated into two code chunks? If you run it, you'll see only one piece of output. That's because the line test <- c(1, 2, 3, 4) works invisibly in the background. The vector test gets assigned, but no output it produced. Try it and see (push the Run button):

```
test <- c(1, 2, 3, 4)
```

So while there's no harm in separating these lines and putting them in their own chunks, it's not strictly necessary. You really only need to separate lines when they produce output. (And even then, if you forget, RStudio will kindly give you multiple boxes of output.)

Working at the Console

One thing that gives new R users headaches is understanding the difference between working in an R Markdown file and working at the Console.

It's important to know that R Markdown document creates variables in a completely separate space called an *environment*. This environment is different from the Global Environment that you see in the Environment pane in the upper right.

For example, suppose we define a new variable called test2 in a code chunk. FOR PURPOSES OF THIS EXERCISE, DO NOT HIT THE RUN BUTTON YET! But do go look at the PDF file.

```
test2 <- c("a", "b", "c")
test2
```

```
## [1] "a" "b" "c"
```

The first line defines test2 invisibly. The second line just asks R to print the value of test2, so in the PDF file, we see "a" "b" "c" just as we expect.

Okay, now go to the Console in RStudio (in the lower left corner of the screen). Try typing test2. You should get an "Error: object 'test2' not found."

Why does this happen? Remember that R Markdown has stored the test2 variable in its environment, but the Global Environment doesn't know about it yet. Look in the upper right corner of the screen, under the "Environment" tab. You should see test, but not test2.

Okay, NOW GO BACK AND CLICK THE RUN BUTTON IN THE LAST CHUNK ABOVE. The output appears in RStudio below the code chunk and the Global Environment has been updated.

The take home message is this:

Be sure to run all your code chunks in RStudio!

If you forget, everything will still work fine in the R Markdown file, but working interactively in the Console might cause things to break.

One more bit of weirdness to explore. Run the following code chunk:

```
test3 <- "Hello!"
test3
```

```
## [1] "Hello!"
```

You can see the output here and you can see the test3 variable defined in the Global Environment.

Now go to the Console and type the following:

```
test3 <- "WTF?"
```

What do you think is going to happen when you run the following code chunk? Make a guess in your head, and then try it to find out.

```
test3
```

```
## [1] "Hello!"
```

Okay, so that sort of makes sense. We redefined test3 to be "WTF?" and the above output in RStudio reflected that. But now go find this spot in the PDF file.

It still says "Hello!" What's going on?

Again, remember that the R Markdown file creates its own environment, and that environment is separate from the Global Environment. When you knit the PDF, that process doesn't look at the Global Environment

at all. It only looks at code chunks here in the R Markdown file. The last place it can find a definition of test3, it said

test3 <- "Hello!"

So how do we avoid problems like this? In RStudio, look in the toolbar above this document, toward the right. You should see the word "Run" with a little drop-down menu next to it. Click on that drop-down menu and select "Run All". Do you see what happened? All the code chunks ran again, and that means that anything in the Global Environment will now be updated to reflect the definitions made in the R Markdown document.

It's a good idea to "Run All" when you first open a new R Markdown document. This will ensure that all your code chunks have their output below them (meaning you don't have to go through and click the Run button manually for each chunk, one at a time) and the Global Environment will accurately reflect the variables you are using.

You can "Run All" from time to time, but it's easier just to "Run All" once at the beginning, and then Run individual R code chunks manually as you create them. It's also a good idea to "Run All" at the end of your session as well to make sure you haven't introduced any inadvertent errors.

Inline R commands

You don't need a standalone R code chunk to do computations. One neat feature is the ability to use R to calculate things right in the middle of your text.

Here's an example. Suppose I wanted to compute the mean mpg for the cars in the mtcars dataset. I could do this, of course:

mean(mtcars\$mpg)

[1] 20.09062

But we can also do this inline by using backticks and putting the letter \mathbf{r} inside the first backtick. Go to the PDF document to see how the following sentence appears:

The mean mpg for cars in the mtcars dataset is 20.090625.

You can (and should) check to make sure your inline R code is working, but you don't necessarily need to go to the PDF file to find out. Click so that the cursor is somewhere in the middle of the inline code chunk in the paragraph above. Now type Ctrl-Enter or Cmd-Enter (PC or Mac respectively). A little box should pop up that shows you the answer!

Notice that in addition to the inline R command that calculated the mean, I also enclosed mtcars in backticks to make it stand out in the output. I'll continue to do that for all computer commands and R functions.

Exporting the PDF file

When you are all done with these R Markdown assignments, you will need to submit the PDF back to your professor (probably in Canvas). Remember, though, you are working in the cloud. The PDF file that was generated is not living on your personal computer. It appears in a window spawned by some distant server. (And by "distant", I mean the basement of the Giovale Library.)

So how do we get files off the server and onto our personal computers?

It's especially tempting to use what appears to be a functional "Download" button right there in the PDF viewer. This is the first place students try to go, but this doesn't seem to work consistently!

Instead, close the PDF viewer and go back to the Files pane of RStudio Server. Check the box next to the name of the file you want to export. In this case, it will be Using_R_Markdown.pdf. (Make sure you select the PDF file, not the Rmd file!)

The toolbar in the Files pane has buttons for "New Folder", "Upload", "Delete", "Rename" and "More". Click on "More". In the drop-down menu, select "Export". In the dialog box that pops up, leave the file name alone and click "Download". This will place the file back in the "Downloads" folder on your personal computer. From here, you'll follow the instructions of your professor for how to submit the PDF file for grading. (It will likely be an assignment in Canvas.)

I cannot emphasize this enough:

If you do this wrong, you run the risk of producing a blank or otherwise corrupted file. If you submit that file, there is no way for your assignment to be graded, so you will receive no credit!

Do not use the "Download" utility in the PDF viewer! Close the PDF viewer and Export the file through RStudio as explained above!

Conclusion

That's it! There wasn't too much you were asked to do for this assignment that will actually show up in the PDF output. (Make sure you did do the two things that were asked of you, however: one was typing something between the blue answer bars, and the other was to make a section header appear properly.) As you gain confidence and as we move into more serious stats material, you will be asked to do a lot more.

Now you know how to use an R Markdown file to generate pretty output files. If you look in your project folder, you should see three files. One is the .Rproj file that you were instructed never to touch. The one with extension .Rmd is your R Markdown file. It is really nothing more than a text file; you could open it up in the most basic notepad program on your computer with no trouble. Then you also have a .pdf file that is the pretty output file generated when you knit to PDF. (There may also be other internal files, perhaps starting with a period, in the folder, but you can ignore those too.)