



## Variance reduction for stochastic gradient descent

Даня Меркулов

Методы Оптимизации в Машинном Обучении. ФКН ВШЭ

## Finite-sum problem

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$$\min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^p} f(x) = \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^p} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n f_i(x)$$

The gradient descent acts like follows:

$$x_{k+1} = x_k - \frac{\alpha_k}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \nabla f_i(x) \quad (\text{GD})$$

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Let's/ switch from the full gradient calculation to its unbiased estimator, when we randomly choose  $i_k$  index of point at each iteration uniformly:

$$x_{k+1} = x_k - \alpha_k \nabla f_{i_k}(x_k) \quad (\text{SGD})$$

With  $p(i_k = i) = \frac{1}{n}$ , the stochastic gradient is an unbiased estimate of the gradient, given by:

$$\mathbb{E}[\nabla f_{i_k}(x)] = \sum_{i=1}^n p(i_k = i) \nabla f_i(x) = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{n} \nabla f_i(x) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \nabla f_i(x) = \nabla f(x)$$

This indicates that the expected value of the stochastic gradient is equal to the actual gradient of  $f(x)$ .

## Results for Gradient Descent

Stochastic iterations are  $n$  times faster, but how many iterations are needed?

If  $\nabla f$  is Lipschitz continuous then we have:

Assumption	Deterministic Gradient Descent	Stochastic Gradient Descent
PL	$O(\log(1/\varepsilon))$	$O(1/\varepsilon)$
Convex	$O(1/\varepsilon)$	$O(1/\varepsilon^2)$
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  - Oracle returns an unbiased gradient approximation with bounded variance.
- Momentum and Quasi-Newton-like methods do not improve rates in stochastic case. Can only improve constant factors (bottleneck is variance, not condition number).

# SGD with constant stepsize does not converge

Stochastic Gradient Descent. Batch = 2



# Main problem of SGD

$$f(x) = \frac{\mu}{2} \|x\|_2^2 + \frac{1}{m} \sum_{i=1}^m \log(1 + \exp(-y_i \langle a_i, x \rangle)) \rightarrow \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n}$$

Strongly convex binary logistic regression.  $m=200$ ,  $n=10$ ,  $\mu=1$ .



## Variance reduction methods

## Key idea of variance reduction

**Principle:** reducing variance of a sample of  $X$  by using a sample from another random variable  $Y$  with known expectation:

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## Application to gradient estimation ?

- SVRG: Let  $X = \nabla f_{i_k}(x^{(k-1)})$  and  $Y = \nabla f_{i_k}(\tilde{x})$ , with  $\alpha = 1$  and  $\tilde{x}$  stored.

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- $X - Y = \nabla f_{i_k}(x^{(k-1)}) - \nabla f_{i_k}(\tilde{x})$

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$$g_{i_k}^{(k)} = \nabla f_{i_k}(x^{(k-1)}) \quad (\text{most recent gradient of } f_{i_k})$$

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- Isn't it expensive to average all these gradients? Basically just as efficient as SGD, as long we're clever:

$$x^{(k)} = x^{(k-1)} - \alpha_k \underbrace{\left( \frac{1}{n} g_{i_k}^{(k)} - \frac{1}{n} g_{i_k}^{(k-1)} + \underbrace{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n g_i^{(k-1)}}_{\text{old table average}} \right)}_{\text{new table average}}$$

# SAG convergence

Assume that  $f(x) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n f_i(x)$ , where each  $f_i$  is differentiable, and  $\nabla f_i$  is Lipschitz with constant  $L$ .

Denote  $\bar{x}^{(k)} = \frac{1}{k} \sum_{l=0}^{k-1} x^{(l)}$ , the average iterate after  $k - 1$  steps.

## Theorem

SAG, with a fixed step size  $\alpha = \frac{1}{16L}$ , and the initialization

$$g_i^{(0)} = \nabla f_i(x^{(0)}) - \nabla f(x^{(0)}), \quad i = 1, \dots, n$$

satisfies

$$\mathbb{E}[f(\bar{x}^{(k)})] - f^* \leq \frac{48n}{k} [f(x^{(0)}) - f^*] + \frac{128L}{k} \|x^{(0)} - x^*\|^2$$

where the expectation is taken over random choices of indices.

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- But, the constants are different! Bounds after  $k$  steps:
  - GD:  $\frac{L\|x^{(0)}-x^*\|^2}{2k}$
  - SAG:  $\frac{48n[f(x^{(0)})-f^*]+128L\|x^{(0)}-x^*\|^2}{k}$
- So the first term in SAG bound suffers from a factor of  $n$ ; authors suggest smarter initialization to make  $f(x^{(0)}) - f^*$  small (e.g., they suggest using the result of  $n$  SGD steps).

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Assume further that each  $f_i$  is strongly convex with parameter  $\mu$ .

## Theorem

SAG, with a step size  $\alpha = \frac{1}{16L}$  and the same initialization as before, satisfies

$$\mathbb{E}[f(x^{(k)})] - f^* \leq \left(1 - \min\left(\frac{\mu}{16L}, \frac{1}{8n}\right)\right)^k \left(\frac{3}{2} (f(x^{(0)}) - f^*) + \frac{4L}{n} \|x^{(0)} - x^*\|^2\right)$$

## Notes:

- This is linear convergence rate  $\mathcal{O}(\gamma^k)$  for SAG. Compare this to  $\mathcal{O}(\gamma^k)$  for GD, and only  $\mathcal{O}\left(\frac{1}{k}\right)$  for SGD.

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- Like GD, we say SAG is adaptive to strong convexity.
- Proofs of these results not easy: 15 pages, computed-aided!

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- For the generalized linear models (this includes LogReg, LLS) you need to store much less memory  $\mathcal{O}(n)$  instead of  $\mathcal{O}(pn)$ .

$$f_i(w) = \varphi(w^T x_i) \leftrightarrow \nabla f_i(w) = \varphi'(w^T x_i) x_i$$

## SAG non-uniform sampling

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- To generate with probabilities  $L_i / \sum_j L_j$ , there is an algorithm with complexity  $O(\log N)$ .

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- Two gradient evaluations per inner step.
- Two parameters: length of epochs + step-size  $\alpha$ .
- Linear convergence rate, simple proof.

## Adaptivity or scaling

## Adagrad (Duchi, Hazan, and Singer 2010)

Very popular adaptive method. Let  $g^{(k)} = \nabla f_{i_k}(x^{(k-1)})$ , and update for  $j = 1, \dots, p$ :

$$v_j^{(k)} = v_j^{(k-1)} + (g_j^{(k)})^2$$
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- Main weakness is the monotonic accumulation of gradients in the denominator. AdaDelta, Adam, AMSGrad, etc. improve on this, popular in training deep neural networks.
- The constant  $\epsilon$  is typically set to  $10^{-6}$  to ensure that we do not suffer from division by zero or overly large step sizes.

## RMSProp (Tieleman and Hinton, 2012)

An enhancement of AdaGrad that addresses its aggressive, monotonically decreasing learning rate. Uses a moving average of squared gradients to adjust the learning rate for each weight. Let  $g^{(k)} = \nabla f_{i_k}(x^{(k-1)})$  and update rule for  $j = 1, \dots, p$ :

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- Commonly used in training neural networks, particularly in recurrent neural networks.

## Adadelta (Zeiler, 2012)

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- Often used in deep learning where parameter scales differ significantly across layers.

## Adam (Kingma and Ba, 2014) <sup>1 2</sup>

Combines elements from both AdaGrad and RMSProp. It considers an exponentially decaying average of past gradients and squared gradients.

EMA: 
$$m_j^{(k)} = \beta_1 m_j^{(k-1)} + (1 - \beta_1) g_j^{(k)}$$
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- Гораздо лучше работает для языковых моделей, чем для задач компьютерного зрения - почему?

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<sup>1</sup>Adam: A Method for Stochastic Optimization

<sup>2</sup>On the Convergence of Adam and Beyond



## AdamW (Loshchilov & Hutter, 2017)

Addresses a common issue with  $\ell_2$  regularization in adaptive optimizers like Adam. Standard  $\ell_2$  regularization adds  $\lambda\|x\|^2$  to the loss, resulting in a gradient term  $\lambda x$ . In Adam, this term gets scaled by the adaptive learning rate  $(\sqrt{\hat{v}_j} + \epsilon)$ , coupling the weight decay to the gradient magnitudes.

AdamW decouples weight decay from the gradient adaptation step.

Update rule:

$$\begin{aligned}m_j^{(k)} &= \beta_1 m_j^{(k-1)} + (1 - \beta_1) g_j^{(k)} \\v_j^{(k)} &= \beta_2 v_j^{(k-1)} + (1 - \beta_2) (g_j^{(k)})^2 \\ \hat{m}_j &= \frac{m_j^{(k)}}{1 - \beta_1^k}, \quad \hat{v}_j = \frac{v_j^{(k)}}{1 - \beta_2^k} \\ x_j^{(k)} &= x_j^{(k-1)} - \alpha \left( \frac{\hat{m}_j}{\sqrt{\hat{v}_j} + \epsilon} + \lambda x_j^{(k-1)} \right)\end{aligned}$$

### Notes:

- The weight decay term  $\lambda x_j^{(k-1)}$  is added *after* the adaptive gradient step.

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### Notes:

- The weight decay term  $\lambda x_j^{(k-1)}$  is added *after* the adaptive gradient step.
- Widely adopted in training transformers and other large models. Default choice for huggingface trainer.

# A lot of them

Rosenbrock Function.  
Adaptive stochastic gradient algorithms.  
Learning rate 0.003



# How to compare them? AlgoPerf benchmark

# NanoGPT speedrun

Ускорение обучения NanoGPT - 125M

@fminxyz



## Shampoo (Gupta, Anil, et al., 2018; Anil et al., 2020)

Stands for **S**tochastic **H**essian-**A**pproximation **M**atrix **P**reconditioning for **O**ptimization **O**f deep networks. It's a method inspired by second-order optimization designed for large-scale deep learning.

**Core Idea:** Approximates the full-matrix AdaGrad pre conditioner using efficient matrix structures, specifically Kronecker products.

For a weight matrix  $W \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ , the update involves preconditioning using approximations of the statistics matrices  $L \approx \sum_k G_k G_k^T$  and  $R \approx \sum_k G_k^T G_k$ , where  $G_k$  are the gradients.

Simplified concept:

1. Compute gradient  $G_k$ .

**Notes:**

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### Notes:

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- Computationally more expensive than Adam but can converge faster or to better solutions in terms of steps.
- Requires careful implementation for efficiency (e.g., efficient computation of inverse matrix roots, handling large matrices).
- Variants exist for different tensor shapes (e.g., convolutional layers).

$$\begin{aligned}W_{t+1} &= W_t - \eta(G_t G_t^\top)^{-1/4} G_t (G_t^\top G_t)^{-1/4} \\&= W_t - \eta(US^2U^\top)^{-1/4} (USV^\top)(VS^2V^\top)^{-1/4} \\&= W_t - \eta(US^{-1/2}U^\top)(USV^\top)(VS^{-1/2}V^\top) \\&= W_t - \eta US^{-1/2}SS^{-1/2}V^\top \\&= W_t - \eta UV^\top\end{aligned}$$