

Statistics 360: Advanced R for Data Science

Lecture 4

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Scoping

Lazy evaluation and ...

Exiting a function

Function forms

Functional Programming Basics

Digging deeper into functions

- ▶ Reading: Text, sections 6.4-6.8
- ▶ Topics:
 - ▶ more on scoping (finding objects)
 - ▶ lazy evaluation and variable arguments with ...
 - ▶ exiting a function
 - ▶ prefix, infix, replacement and special function forms

Scoping

Lexical scoping in R

- ▶ We have already touched on the essence of scoping in R: When a computation needs an object we start by looking in the current environment, and then search successive enclosing environments.
- ▶ More formally R has four rules:
 - ▶ Name masking
 - ▶ Functions versus variables
 - ▶ A fresh start
 - ▶ Dynamic lookup

Name masking

- ▶ A consequence of the search order for objects is that names defined *inside* a function mask names defined *outside*.

```
x <- y <- 200
z <- 30 # defined in global environment
f <- function() { # f's env enclosed by global
  x <- 100 # defined in f's environment
  y <- 20
  g <- function() { #g's env enclosed by f's
    x <- 10 # defined in g's environment
    c(x,y,z)
  }
  g()
}
f()
```

```
## [1] 10 20 30
```

Each function call gets a new environment

- ▶ As we saw in lecture 3, function calls create an environment. On exit, this environment is (typically) unbound and will disappear.

```
x <- 100
f <- function(){
  print(environment())
  x <- x+1
  x
}
f()
```

```
## <environment: 0x1399b6408>
```

```
## [1] 101
```

```
f()
```

```
## <environment: 0x13994bf08>
```

```
## [1] 101
```

Dynamic lookup

- ▶ Be aware that functions only look for objects when run (dynamic lookup), not when created (static lookup).
- ▶ If a function gets an object from an enclosing environment, it will return different results whenever the object in the enclosing environment changes.
 - ▶ This may be what you intend, but it's also a common source of errors. What if in the following I meant to define `y` in `f()` but forgot?

```
y <- 100
f <- function(x) {
  x + y
}
f(1)
```

```
## [1] 101
```

```
y <- 200
f(1)
```

```
## [1] 201
```


Lazy evaluation and . . .

Lazy evaluation

- ▶ Function arguments are only evaluated when needed.
 - ▶ The text describes how lazy evaluation is implemented (Section 6.5), but we will not discuss the details.

```
f<-function(xx,yy) {  
  xx  
}  
f(1) # no value for yy, but OK since yy not used
```

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

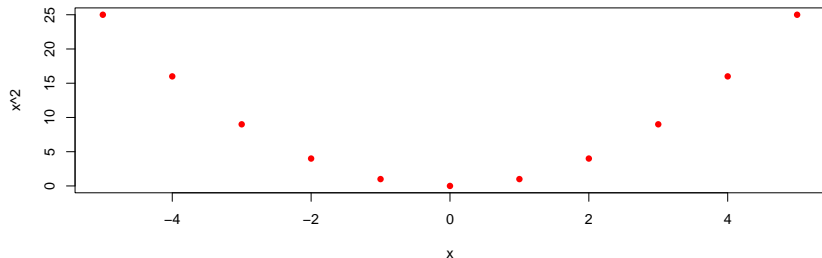
```
try(f(yy=1)) # xx is needed
```

```
## Error in f(yy = 1) : argument "xx" is missing, with no default
```

Variable arguments with ...

- ▶ The special function argument ... (dot-dot-dot) allows a function to take any number of arguments.
- ▶ A typical use is to pass these to another function, as in the following example.

```
myplot <- function(x,...) {  
  plot(x,x^2,...) # pass any args not named x to plot  
}  
myplot((-5:5),col="red",pch=16)
```



Exiting a function

Exiting a function

- ▶ Functions can exit explicitly with `return()` or implicitly, where the last expression in the function is its return value
- ▶ When a function returns, explicitly or implicitly, the default is to print the return value.
 - ▶ You can suppress this with `invisible()`.

```
ff <- function(x) { x }  
ff(1)
```

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

```
ff_invis <- function(x) { invisible(x) }  
ff_invis(1) # but x <- ff_invis(1) same as x <- ff(1)
```

Signalling conditions

- ▶ Functions can signal error, warning or message conditions with `stop()`, `warning()` and `message()`, respectively.
 - ▶ `stop()` stops execution, `warning()` and `message()` don't
- ▶ These signals can be “handled” by ignoring them
 - ▶ ignore errors with `try()`
 - ▶ ignore warnings with `suppressWarnings()`
 - ▶ ignore messages with `suppressMessages()`
- ▶ or implementing a custom handler that over-rides the default behaviour of a condition
 - ▶ see Chapter 8 of the text if you are interested in learning more about handling conditions
- ▶ We restrict attention to (i) signalling and (ii) cleaning up any changes to the R session before exiting.

stop()

- If your function encounters an error, use `stop()` to stop and print an error message, also called “throwing” an error.

```
centre <- function(x,method) {  
  switch(method,mean=mean(x),median=median(x),  
          stop("method ",method," not implemented"))  
}  
try(centre(1:10,"mymean"))
```

```
## Error in centre(1:10, "mymean") : method mymean not implement
```

warning()

- ▶ If you suspect an error but can proceed without stopping, throw a `warning()` instead.

```
centre <- function(x,method) {  
  switch(method,mean=mean(x),median=median(x),  
    {warning("\nmethod ",method,  
             " not implemented, using mean\n");  
    mean(x)})  
}  
centre(1:10,"mymean")
```

```
## Warning in centre(1:10, "mymean"):  
## method mymean not implemented, using mean  
## [1] 5.5
```


message()

- ▶ If you don't think the condition warrants a warning, you can issue a message.

```
centre <- function(x,method) {  
  switch(method,mean=mean(x),median=median(x),  
    {message("\nmethod ",method,  
              " not implemented, using mean\n");  
    mean(x)})  
}  
centre(1:10,"mymean")
```

```
##  
## method mymean not implemented, using mean  
## [1] 5.5
```

Cleaning up with exit handlers

- ▶ An R session has a “global state” of options and parameters that control default behaviour.
 - ▶ type `options()` or `par()` to see some of these
- ▶ If your function temporarily modifies the global state, you can use an exit handler to re-set, even if your function stops.
 - ▶ Use `add=TRUE` to add more than one handler.

```
rplot <- function(y,x){  
  opar <- par(mfrow=c(2,2))  
  on.exit(par(opar),add=TRUE)  
  plot(lm(y~x)) #could throw an error  
}  
y <- rnorm(100); x <- rnorm(10) # different length  
try(rplot(y,x)) # Fails, but re-sets par mfrow
```

```
## Error in model.frame.default(formula = y ~ x, drop.unused.lev  
##   variable lengths differ (found for 'x')
```

Function forms

Function forms

- ▶ We have been writing “prefix” functions, with a function name followed by arguments.
- ▶ Other forms are “infix”, “replacement” and “special”.
- ▶ We will cover each form very briefly; see the text, section 6.8 for more details.

Infix functions

- ▶ An infix function has two arguments and is called by putting the name between arguments, as in `x+y`.
 - ▶ `x+y` calls `+` as ``+`(x,y)`
 - ▶ `+` and `-` are special infix functions that can be called with only one argument
 - ▶ You can define your own infix function by enclosing the function name in `%``.

```
`%-%` <- function(set1,set2){  
  setdiff(set1,set2)  
}  
s1 <- 1:10; s2 <- 4:6  
s1 %-% s2 # same as `%-%`(s1,s2)
```

```
## [1] 1 2 3 7 8 9 10
```

Replacement functions

- ▶ Replacement functions are called to change values.
 - ▶ For example, change values of attributes of objects
- ▶ Must have arguments `x` and `value`, and must return the modified object.
- ▶ They are made to look like prefix functions, and may have prefix counterparts.

```
x <- c(a=1,b=2)
names(x)
```

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

```
names(x) <- c("aa","bb")
x
```

```
## aa bb
## 1 2
```

```
x <- `names<-`(x,c("aaa","bbb"))
x
```

```
## aaa bbb
## 1 2
```

- ▶ You can write your own replacement functions if you end the function name with <-

```
`st360names<-` <- function(x,value){  
  names(x) <- paste0(value,"360",names(x))  
  x  
}  
st360names(x) <- c("a","b")  
x
```

```
## a360aaa b360bbb  
##      1      2
```

Special functions

- ▶ Examples: subset `[` and extract `[[`, control flow `if`, `for`, etc.
- ▶ Key point: These are functions, and it is sometimes useful to know their names so that we can get help or use them like any other prefix function.

```
dd <- data.frame(x=1:2,y=3:4)
`[[` (dd,1) # compare to dd[[1]]
```

```
## [1] 1 2
```

```
dd <- `[[<-` (dd,1,value=5:6) #cf dd[[1]] <- 5:6
dd
```

```
##      x y
## 1 5 3
## 2 6 4
```


- It can be useful to know functions by name so that we can call them in `lapply`-like functions.

```
sapply(dd, `[<-`, 2, value=10)
```

```
##           x  y  
## [1,]    5  3  
## [2,]   10 10
```

Functional Programming Basics

Functional programming languages

- ▶ In a functional language functions are data structures.
 - ▶ Can assign them to variables, pass them as arguments to other functions and return them from other functions.
 - ▶ This is true of R functions, and is what we'll be focusing on.
- ▶ Many functional languages also require functions to be “pure”.
 - ▶ Function output should only depend on the input, and the function should not have any side-effects.
 - ▶ We can see from our brief discussion of scoping that R functions can use global variables, and we know they have side-effects like generating plots.

Functional style

- ▶ We will say that functional programming *style* means a top-down approach that breaks big problems into smaller pieces that we solve with small, easy (easier) to understand functions.
- ▶ This is the way we are approaching our implementation of MARS.
- ▶ Functional languages support this style with “higher-order” functions that take other functions as input .
 - ▶ The higher-order function is part of the “big problem”, and its input is the “small function”.

Functionals

- ▶ You have already seen higher-order functions in Stat 260: The `map` family of functions from the `purrr` package, or `lapply()` from base R.
- ▶ The text calls these functionals and they are discussed in Chapter 9.
- ▶ You have already studied the `map` functions, so our discussion here will be brief, with an emphasis on parallelization:
 - ▶ Not only can we break a computation into pieces, but we can have the pieces computed on different cores of a computer or nodes of a compute cluster.

Map-like functions such as `lapply()`

- ▶ Take a vector and function as input and return a list (or some simplification) whose elements are the function applied to each vector element.
 - ▶ We are mapping (in math sense) the vector elements x to $f(x)$.
- ▶ Basically a for loop over the input vector, calling the input function at each iteration.

```
simple_map <- function(x, f, ...) { # text, Section 9.2
  out <- vector("list", length(x))
  for (i in seq_along(x)) {
    out[[i]] <- f(x[[i]], ...)
  }
  out
}
```

Examples with lapply()

```
rfun <- function(seed,n) { set.seed(seed); return(rnorm(n))}  
dat <- lapply(1:10,rfun,n=1e7) # specify non-vectorized arg by name  
mfun <- function(x) { return(mean(quantile(x,probs=c(.25,.75)))) }  
system.time( unlist(lapply(dat,mfun)) ) # Look at elapsed
```

```
##      user  system elapsed  
##  1.679    0.241    1.961
```

Parallel execution with mclapply()

- ▶ `mclapply()` is the multi-core version of `lapply()`; i.e., function calls are done on separate cores.

```
library(parallel) # comes with R
ncores <- detectCores() ; cat("number of cores=",ncores,"\n")
```

```
## number of cores= 8
```

```
system.time({ unlist(mclapply(dat,mfun,mc.cores=ncores)) })
```

```
##      user  system elapsed
```

```
##    1.613    0.839    1.028
```


Another example

```
dat2 <- lapply(1:10, rfun, n=1e5)
mfun2 <- function(x) { return(data.frame(sum=sum(x), n=length(x))) }
sumdat <- lapply(dat2, mfun2)
```

Reduce-like functions

- ▶ Reduce functions successively combine vector elements.
 - ▶ Can use them to assemble output of a map-like function.
 - ▶ When implemented to parallelize over multiple computers, this is the MapReduce programming model you hear about for “big data”.
- ▶ Reducers combine with a loop:

```
simple_reduce <- function(x, f) { # Text section 9.5
  out <- x[[1]]
  for (i in seq(2, length(x))) {
    out <- f(out, x[[i]])
  }
  out
}
```

Example reduce

```
allres <- simple_reduce(sumdat, rbind)
allres
```

```
##           sum      n
## 1 -224.40833 100000
## 2  307.85570 100000
## 3   36.96750 100000
## 4 -20.44743 100000
## 5 -726.27096 100000
## 6 -191.83899 100000
## 7  -50.00946 100000
## 8  270.86608 100000
## 9  -52.17403 100000
## 10 -595.83810 100000
```

```
sum(allres$sum)/sum(allres$n) # mean
```

```
## [1] -0.001245298
```

Further reading on parallel computing

- ▶ For parallel computing on a cluster, see the `doParallel` and `foreach` packages (canonical link to `doParallel` vignette currently broken):

<http://users.iems.northwestern.edu/~nelsonb/Masterclass/gettingstartedParallel.pdf>

Other higher-order functions

- ▶ Other chapters discuss function factories (Chapter 10) and function operators (Chapter 11).
- ▶ These are used less and will not be discussed.

<i>In \ Out</i>	Vector	Function
Vector	Regular function	Function factory
Function	Functional	Function operator

Figure 1: Higher-order functions