

# Score Matching, MPF and Wasserstein Gradient Flows

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## 1 Introduction

Score matching, introduced in [3], yields a new heuristic to estimate continuous statistical models where the probability density function is known only

up to a multiplicative normalization constant. The method is shown to be locally consistent under identifiability of the model, and the estimation does not require to compute the normalization constant.

Here we propose a new point of view that shows that score matching is equivalent to searching for the model that minimizes the Wasserstein gradient (under empirical expectation) of the KL divergence between the real density and the estimated one.

This framework can be generalized to different functionals and may lead to new methods for parametric statistical inference.

Then we move on to show a deep connection between score matching and minimum probability flow. The latter, introduced in [4], is a different method for estimating statistical models, initially developed for discrete domains such as Ising models, but easily adapted to continuous problems.

## 2 Background on Score Matching

As in usual statistical inference frameworks, we start from a given set of datapoints  $D = \{x^{(1)}, \dots, x^{(n)}\}$  with  $x^{(i)} \in \mathbb{R}^d$ , sampled via  $X^{(1)}, \dots, X^{(n)} \stackrel{\text{iid}}{\sim} \mu_g$ , where  $\mu_g$  is the real (unknown) distribution whose density with respect to the Lebesgue measure is  $g$ .

We want to model the distribution with  $\pi_\theta$ , absolutely continuous with respect to Lebesgue, and with density  $f_\theta(x) = \frac{1}{Z} e^{-H_\theta(x)}$ .

Score matching reads

$$\begin{aligned} \theta_{SM} &= \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_g[\|\nabla_x \log f_\theta - \nabla_x \log g\|_2^2] \\ &= \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_g[(\nabla_x H_\theta)^2 - 2\Delta_x H_\theta] \text{ after integrating by parts,} \end{aligned}$$

whose sample version is

$$\begin{aligned} \theta_{SM}^* &= \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_{g^D}[\|\nabla_x \log f_\theta - \nabla_x \log g\|_2^2] \\ &= \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_{g^D}[(\nabla_x H_\theta)^2 - 2\Delta_x H_\theta], \end{aligned}$$

which does not require the normalization constant  $Z$  and can be computed from the data.

In [3] it is shown that  $\theta_{SM}$  is locally consistent if the model is identifiable (i.e. under the condition that if  $\theta_1 \neq \theta_2$  then  $\pi_{\theta_1} \neq \pi_{\theta_2}$ ), and the sample version is asymptotically equivalent to the population one due to the strong law of large numbers.

### 3 Background on Wasserstein Gradient Flows

The main objective of this section is to unify the notation regarding flows of measures and to define properly Wasserstein gradient flows.

#### 3.1 Flows of measures

Let us sample  $X_0 \sim \mu_0$ , with  $d\mu_0 = f_0 d\lambda$  and let  $v_t : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  be any vector field. If we evolve our particle via

$$\dot{X}_t = v_t(X_t), \quad (1)$$

we find out that  $\mu_t := \text{Law}(X_t)$  is absolutely continuous with respect to Lebesgue, it has finite second moment, and its density satisfies the continuity equation, i.e. it satisfies

$$\partial_t f_t + \nabla \cdot (v_t f_t) = 0 \quad (2)$$

in weak sense. The proof can be found in [1].

#### 3.2 Background on Wasserstein spaces

Consult this [manuscript](#).

#### 3.3 Wasserstein gradient flows

Given a functional  $\mathcal{F} : \mathcal{P}_2^{ac}(\lambda) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  with bounded first variation, we define its Wasserstein gradient at  $\mu \in \mathcal{P}_2^{ac}(\lambda)$  as

$$\begin{aligned} \nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2} \mathcal{F}(\mu) : \mathbb{R}^d &\rightarrow \mathbb{R}^d \\ x &\mapsto \nabla[\delta \mathcal{F}(\mu)](x). \end{aligned}$$

Now we fix a functional  $\mathcal{F}$  with bounded first variation, and use  $-\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2}\mathcal{F}(\mu_t)$  as our vector field  $v_t$  in (1), so that  $\mu_t$  will evolve via

$$\partial_t f_t + \nabla \cdot (-\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2}\mathcal{F}(\mu_t)f_t) = 0, \quad (3)$$

that is known as *Wasserstein gradient flow* of  $\mu_t$  with respect to  $\mathcal{F}$ , started at  $\mu_0$ .

There are many vector fields  $v_t$  such that the ODE (1) induces the PDE (3), it turns out that the *most economical* one, i.e. the one which minimizes  $\|v_t\|_{L_2(\mu_t)}^2$  is

$$v_t = -\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2}\mathcal{F}(\mu_t). \quad (4)$$

Again, we suggest consulting [1] for a proof.

Clearly if a functional  $\mathcal{F}$  is displacement convex, then it has a unique minima  $\mu^*$ .

The main result for this section, denoted in [2] as Poljak–Łojasiewicz inequality, states that the Wasserstein gradient flow with respect to a (strongly) displacement convex  $\mathcal{F}$ , started at any  $\mu_0 \in \mathcal{P}_2^{ac}(\lambda)$ , converges exponentially fast towards the unique minimizer  $\mu^* \in \mathcal{P}_2^{ac}(\lambda)$ .

It turns out that  $\mathcal{F}(\cdot) = \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\cdot\|\pi_\theta)$  is (strongly) displacement convex, so it is reasonable trying to minimize it via Wasserstein gradient flows.

## 4 Score Matching and Gradient Flows

Let us come back to our usual framework of  $\mu_g$  and  $\pi_\theta$ . The idea is that if  $\mu_g \approx \pi_\theta$ , then

$$\mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_g\|\pi_\theta) \approx 0, \quad (5)$$

so that the Wasserstein gradient flow of  $\mathcal{D}_{KL}(\cdot\|\pi_\theta)$  (which is playing the role of  $\mathcal{F}(\cdot)$ ) started from  $\mu_g$  will be almost stationary. For a sample  $X_0 \sim \mu_g$ , since  $\dot{X}_0 = -\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2}\mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_g\|\pi_\theta)(X_0)$  is the starting point of the *most economical* ODE inducing (3), the requirement (5) naturally translates into finding

$$\theta^* := \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_g[\| -\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2}\mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_g\|\pi_\theta) \|_2^2]. \quad (6)$$

But we know that  $\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2} \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\cdot \| \pi_\theta) = \nabla_x H_\theta + \nabla_x \log g$  (consult the other [manuscript](#)), so that (6) is aiming to find

$$\begin{aligned}\theta^* &= \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_g [(-\nabla_x H_\theta - \nabla_x \log g)^2] \\ &= \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_g [(\nabla_x \log f_\theta - \nabla_x \log g)^2]\end{aligned}$$

that is precisely the starting point of score matching.

## 5 Score Matching and Minimum Probability Flow

Minimum probability flow, introduced in [4], is another method for statistical inference. In the continuous framework, it can be summarized as

$$\theta_{MPF} = \arg \min_{\theta} \mathbb{E}_g \left[ \left| \frac{d}{dt} \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_g \| \mu_t) \right|_{t=0} \right],$$

with  $\mu_t$  following the Fokker-Planck<sup>1</sup> equation with potential  $\pi_\theta$ .

It has been shown in [4], using brute force computations, that the function that minimum probability flow is trying to minimize is the same as score matching; in this section we want to show it from another perspective.

The main idea is that the Wasserstein gradient flow of  $\mathcal{D}_{KL}(\cdot \| \pi_\theta)$  is the Fokker-Planck equation with potential  $H_\theta$ , i.e.

$$\partial_t f_t + \nabla \cdot (-\nabla (\log f_t + H_\theta) f_t) = 0 \quad \Longleftrightarrow \quad \partial_t f_t = \Delta f_t + \nabla \cdot (f_t \nabla H_\theta),$$

and we can show that score matching is in turn equivalent to minimizing  $\mathbb{E}_g \left[ \left| \frac{d}{dt} \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_t \| \pi_\theta) \right|_{t=0} \right]$ , as  $\mu_t$  satisfies the Fokker Planck equation with potential  $H_\theta$  **(IT IS STILL NOT TRIVIAL TO SHOW FORMALLY THAT THEY ARE EQUIVALENT.)**

## 6 Langevin Matching

Motivated by the previous sections, we propose a new algorithm for parameter inference in continuous models, inspired by the idea of matching the temporal evolution of probability distributions under Langevin dynamics.

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<sup>1</sup>in practice we use a discretized version.

## 6.1 Extending score matching

We begin by recalling the classical score matching algorithm:

1. Given data samples  $x_1, \dots, x_n \sim \mu_g$ .
2. Model unknown  $\mu_g$  with unnormalized density  $\pi_\theta(x) \propto \exp(-H_\theta(x))$ .
3. Define the objective function (the expectation over  $g$  has to be interpreted as an empirical expectation):

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{SM}}^{(1)}(\theta) := \mathbb{E}_g [\|\nabla_x H_\theta(x)\|_2^2 - 2\Delta_x H_\theta(x)],$$

which is equivalent to

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{SM}}^{(2)}(\theta) := \mathbb{E}_g [\|\nabla_{\mathcal{W}_2} \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_g \|\pi_\theta)\|_2^2],$$

which again is equivalent to

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{SM}}^{(3)}(\theta) := \mathbb{E}_g \left[ \left\| \frac{d}{dt} \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_t \|\pi_\theta) \right\|_{t=0} \right],$$

where  $\mu_t$  is the solution of the Fokker–Planck equation:

$$\partial_t \mu_t = \nabla \cdot (\mu_t \nabla H_\theta) + \Delta \mu_t, \text{ with } \mu_0 = \mu_g.$$

4. Optimize over  $\theta$  with any convex optimization algorithm. We show below an instance with gradient descent.

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### Algorithm 1 Score Matching

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- 1: Initialize parameters  $\theta_0$
  - 2: **for**  $k = 0$  to  $K - 1$  **do**
  - 3:     Compute gradient  $\nabla_\theta \mathcal{L}_{\text{SM}}(\theta_k)$
  - 4:     Update:  $\theta_{k+1} \leftarrow \theta_k - \eta \nabla_\theta \mathcal{L}_{\text{SM}}(\theta_k)$
  - 5: **end for**
  - 6: Return  $\theta^*$  as estimate of optimal parameter  $\theta_{\text{SM}}$
-

We show below a graphical representation of the algorithm.

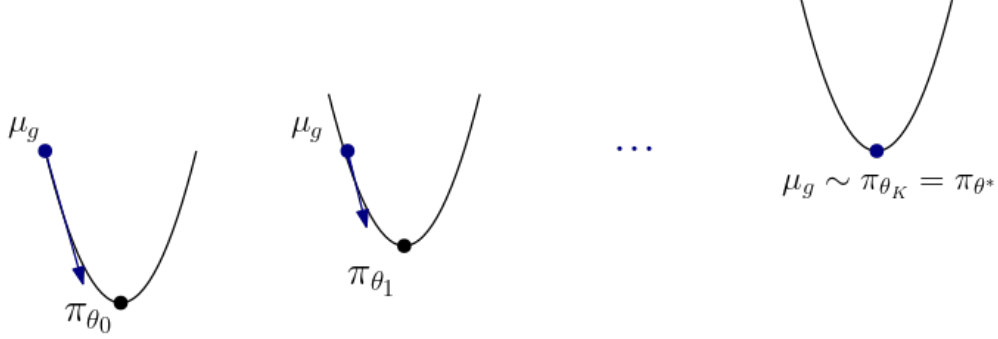


Figure 1: Score Matching evolution.

The black line represent the Wasserstein gradient flow of the KL divergence, a.k.a. the Fokker-Planck evolution with potential  $H_\theta$ , and the blue arrow represent the Wasserstein gradient.

Notice that while the evolution regards  $\mu_g$  moving towards  $\pi_\theta$ , in the algorithm  $\mu_g$  is fixed, and the optimization takes place through  $\theta$ .

In the implementation we substitute  $\mu_g$  with the empirical measure.

Motivated by this understanding, instead of trying to minimize iteratively the Wasserstein gradient, our idea is to evolve at each step our empirical measure  $\mu_g$  along the gradient flow (we know that Langevin diffusion with potential  $H_\theta$  evolves the measure via Fokker-Planck with the same potential), and then optimize this in  $\theta$  with numerical differentiation.

The algorithm reads as follows.

1. Given data samples  $x_1, \dots, x_n \sim \mu_g$ .
2. Model unknown  $\mu_g$  with unnormalized density  $\pi_\theta(x) \propto \exp(-H_\theta(x))$ .
3. Define the objective function (the expectation over  $g$  has to be interpreted as an empirical expectation):

$$\mathcal{L}_{LM}(\theta) := \mathbb{E}_g[\mathcal{F}(\mu_g, \pi_\theta)],$$

for some discrepancy  $\mathcal{F} : \mathcal{P} \times \mathcal{P} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ .

4. Optimize over  $\theta$  with any convex optimization algorithm. We show below an instance with gradient descent.

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**Algorithm 2** Langevin Matching

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- 1: Initialize parameters  $\theta_0$
  - 2: **for**  $k = 0$  to  $K - 1$  **do**
  - 3:   Evolve  $\mu_g$  with  $n$  steps of Langevin with potential  $H_{\theta_k}$
  - 4:   Compute gradient  $\nabla_{\theta} \mathcal{L}_{LM}(\theta_k)$
  - 5:   Update:  $\theta_{k+1} \leftarrow \theta_k - \eta \nabla_{\theta} \mathcal{L}_{LM}(\theta_k)$
  - 6: **end for**
  - 7: Return  $\theta^*$  as estimate of optimal parameter  $\theta_{LM}$
- 

We show below a graphical representation of the algorithm.

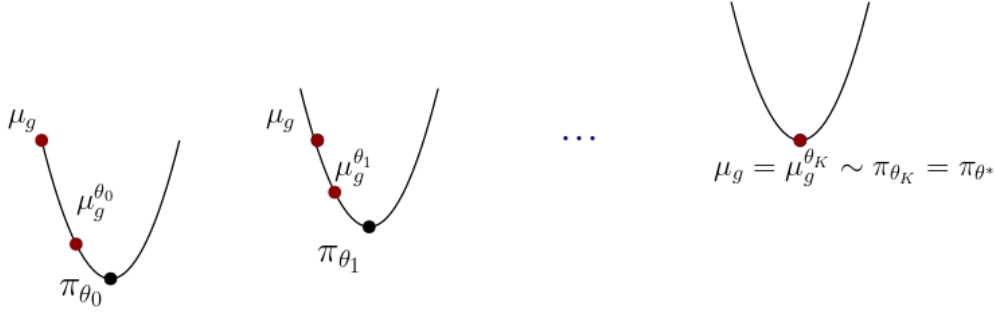


Figure 2: Langevin Matching evolution.

In practice we have a variety of possibilities for  $\mathcal{F}$ , such as *Sinkhorn*, *MMD*, *Sliced Wasserstein*, *Energy* and many others.

Notice that if  $\mathcal{F}(\mu_g, \pi_{\theta_k}) = \frac{1}{\epsilon} [\mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_0 \| \pi_{\theta_k}) - \mathcal{D}_{KL}(\mu_{\epsilon} \| \pi_{\theta_k})]$  as  $\epsilon \rightarrow 0$  we get back score matching.

## 6.2 Numerical experiments

We have tried to implement Langevin Matching for different choices of the loss function, using score matching as a benchmark.

In a nutshell, score matching has better performances both in terms of inference and computational efficiency. The latter is trivially due to the fact that



numerical differentiation is expensive for Langevin Matching. The former is due to the fact that our problem is no longer guaranteed to be convex, in particular the initialization of our parameter  $\theta_0$  matters.

## References

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