

# Algorithms for Machine Learning

Stanford, California

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<sup>1</sup>M.J. Kochenderfer and T.A. Wheeler, *Algorithms for Optimization*. MIT Press, 2019.

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Ancillary material is available on the template's webpage:  
[https://github.com/sisl/textbook\\_template](https://github.com/sisl/textbook_template)

# Part I: Supervised Learning

Let’s start by talking about a few examples of supervised learning problems. Suppose we have a dataset giving the living areas and prices of 47 houses from Portland, Oregon:

Living area (feet <sup>2</sup> )	Price (1000\$)
2104	400
1600	330
2400	369
1416	232
3000	540
⋮	⋮

From CS229 Fall 2020, Tengyu Ma, Andrew Ng & Chris Ré, Stanford University.

Table 1. Housing prices in Portland, OR.

We can plot this data:



Figure 1. Housing prices in Portland, OR.

Given data like this, how can we learn to predict the prices of other houses in Portland, as a function of the size of their living areas?

To establish notation for future use, we'll use  $x^{(i)}$  to denote the “input” variables (living area in this example), also called input **features**, and  $y^{(i)}$  to denote the “output” or **target** variable that we are trying to predict (price). A pair  $(x^{(i)}, y^{(i)})$  is called a **training example**, and the dataset that we'll be using to learn—a list of  $n$  training examples  $\{(x^{(i)}, y^{(i)}); i = 1, \dots, n\}$ —is called a **training set**. Note that the superscript “ $(i)$ ” in the notation is simply an index into the training set, and has nothing to do with exponentiation. We will also use  $\mathcal{X}$  denote the space of input values, and  $\mathcal{Y}$  the space of output values. In this example,  $\mathcal{X} = \mathcal{Y} = \mathbb{R}$ .

To describe the supervised learning problem slightly more formally, our goal is, given a training set, to learn a function  $h : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathcal{Y}$  so that  $h(x)$  is a “good” predictor for the corresponding value of  $y$ . For historical reasons, this function  $h$  is called a **hypothesis**. Seen pictorially, the process is therefore like this:

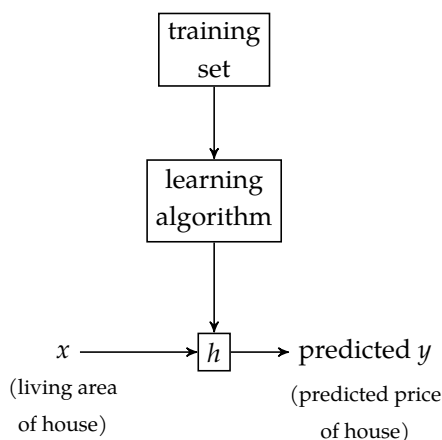


Figure 2. Hypothesis diagram.

When the target variable that we're trying to predict is continuous, such as in our housing example, we call the learning problem a **regression**<sup>2</sup> problem. When  $y$  can take on only a small number of discrete values (such as if, given the living area, we wanted to predict if a dwelling is a house or an apartment, say), we call it a **classification** problem.

<sup>2</sup> The term *regression* was originally coined due to “regressing” to the mean (Francis Galton, 1886).

# 1 Linear Regression

To make our housing example more interesting, let's consider a slightly richer dataset in which we also know the number of bedrooms in each house:

Living area (feet <sup>2</sup> )	# Bedrooms	Price (1000\$)
2104	3	400
1600	3	330
2400	3	369
1416	2	232
3000	4	540
$\vdots$	$\vdots$	$\vdots$

Table 1.1. Housing prices with bedrooms in Portland, OR.

Here, the  $x$ 's are two-dimensional vectors in  $\mathbb{R}^2$ . For instance,  $x_1^{(i)}$  is the living area of the  $i$ -th house in the training set, and  $x_2^{(i)}$  is its number of bedrooms.<sup>1</sup>

To perform supervised learning, we must decide how we're going to represent functions/hypotheses  $h$  in a computer. As an initial choice, let's say we decide to approximate  $y$  as a linear function of  $x$ :

$$h_\theta(x) = \theta_0 + \theta_1 x_1 + \theta_2 x_2 \quad (1.1)$$

Here, the  $\theta_i$ 's are the **parameters** (also called **weights**) parameterizing the space of linear functions mapping from  $\mathcal{X}$  to  $\mathcal{Y}$ . When there is no risk of confusion, we will drop the  $\theta$  subscript in  $h_\theta(x)$ , and write it more simply as  $h(x)$ . To simplify our notation, we also introduce the convention of letting  $x_0 = 1$  (this is the intercept term), so that

$$h(x) = \sum_{i=0}^d \theta_i x_i = \theta^\top x, \quad (1.2)$$

where on the right-hand side above we are viewing  $\theta$  and  $x$  both as vectors, and here  $d$  is the number of input variables (not counting  $x_0$ ).

<sup>1</sup>In general, when designing a learning problem, it will be up to you to decide what features to choose, so if you are out in Portland gathering housing data, you might also decide to include other features such as whether each house has a fireplace, the number of bathrooms, and so on. We'll say more about feature selection later, but for now let's take the features as given.

Now, given a training set, how do we pick, or learn, the parameters  $\theta$ ? One reasonable method seems to be to make  $h(x)$  close to  $y$ , at least for the training examples we have. To formalize this, we will define a function that measures, for each value of the  $\theta$ 's, how close the  $h(x^{(i)})$ 's are to the corresponding  $y^{(i)}$ 's. We define the **cost function**:

$$J(\theta) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left( h_{\theta}(x^{(i)}) - y^{(i)} \right)^2. \quad (1.3)$$

If you've seen linear regression before, you may recognize this as the familiar least-squares cost function that gives rise to the **ordinary least squares** regression model. Whether or not you have seen it previously, let's keep going, and we'll eventually show this to be a special case of a much broader family of algorithms.

### 1.1 Least mean squares (LMS) algorithm

We want to choose  $\theta$  so as to minimize  $J(\theta)$ . To do so, let's use a search algorithm that starts with some "initial guess" for  $\theta$ , and that repeatedly changes  $\theta$  to make  $J(\theta)$  smaller, until hopefully we converge to a value of  $\theta$  that minimizes  $J(\theta)$ . Specifically, let's consider the **gradient descent** algorithm, which starts with some initial  $\theta$ , and repeatedly performs the update:<sup>2</sup>

$$\theta_j \leftarrow \theta_j - \alpha \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta_j} J(\theta) \quad (1.4)$$

<sup>2</sup>This update is simultaneously performed for all values of  $j = 0, \dots, d$ .

Here,  $\alpha$  is called the **learning rate**. This is a very natural algorithm that repeatedly takes a step in the direction of steepest decrease of  $J$ .

In order to implement this algorithm, we have to work out what is the partial derivative term on the right hand side. Let's first work it out for the case of if we have only one training example  $(x, y)$ , so that we can neglect the sum in the definition of  $J$ . We have:

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta_j} J(\theta) &= \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta_j} \frac{1}{2} (h_\theta(x) - y)^2 \\
&= 2 \cdot \frac{1}{2} (h_\theta(x) - y) \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta_j} (h_\theta(x) - y) \\
&= (h_\theta(x) - y) \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta_j} \left( \sum_{i=0}^d \theta_i x_i - y \right) \\
&= (h_\theta(x) - y) x_j
\end{aligned}$$

For a single training example, this gives the update rule:<sup>3</sup>

$$\theta_j \leftarrow \theta_j + \alpha (y^{(i)} - h_\theta(x^{(i)})) x_j^{(i)}. \quad (1.5)$$

The rule is called the **LMS** update rule (LMS stands for “least mean squares”), and is also known as the **Widrow-Hoff** learning rule. This rule has several properties that seem natural and intuitive. For instance, the magnitude of the update is proportional to the **error** term  $(y^{(i)} - h_\theta(x^{(i)}))$ ; thus, for instance, if we are encountering a training example on which our prediction nearly matches the actual value of  $y^{(i)}$ , then we find that there is little need to change the parameters; in contrast, a larger change to the parameters will be made if our prediction  $h_\theta(x^{(i)})$  has a large error (i.e., if it is very far from  $y^{(i)}$ ).

We’ve derived the LMS rule for when there was only a single training example. There are two ways to modify this method for a training set of more than one example. The first is replace it with the following algorithm:

```

repeat
  for every  $j$  do
     $\theta_j \leftarrow \theta_j + \alpha \sum_{i=1}^n (y^{(i)} - h_\theta(x^{(i)})) x_j^{(i)}$ 
  end for
until convergence

```

<sup>3</sup> We use the notation “ $a \leftarrow b$ ” to denote an operation (in a computer program) in which we set the value of a variable  $a$  to be equal to the value of  $b$  (something  $:=$  is used). In other words, this operation overwrites  $a$  with the value of  $b$ . In contrast, we will write “ $a = b$ ” when we are asserting a statement of fact, that the value of  $a$  is equal to the value of  $b$ .

Algorithm 1.1. Gradient descent.

By grouping the updates of the coordinates into an update of the vector  $\theta$ , we can rewrite update algorithm 1.1 in a slightly more succinct way:

The reader can easily verify that the quantity in the summation in the update rule above is just  $\partial J(\theta) / \partial \theta_j$  (for the original definition of  $J$ ). So, this is simply



**repeat**

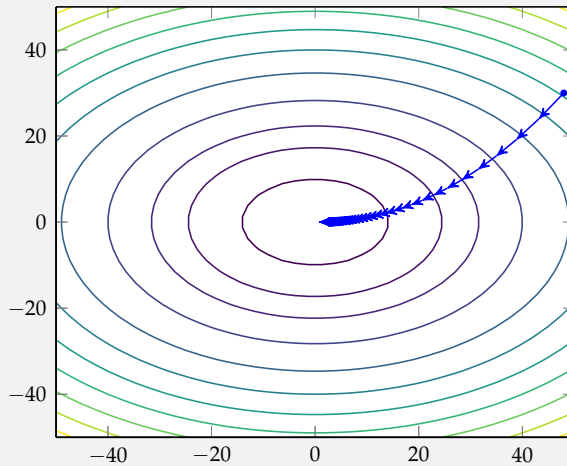
$$\theta \leftarrow \theta + \alpha \sum_{i=1}^n \left( y^{(i)} - h_{\theta}(x^{(i)}) \right) x^{(i)}$$

**until** convergence

Algorithm 1.2. Gradient descent vectorized.

gradient descent on the original cost function  $J$ . This method looks at every example in the entire training set on every step, and is called **batch gradient descent**. Note that, while gradient descent can be susceptible to local minima in general, the optimization problem we have posed here for linear regression has only one global, and no other local, optima; thus gradient descent always converges (assuming the learning rate  $\alpha$  is not too large) to the global minimum. Indeed,  $J$  is a convex quadratic function.

Here is an example of gradient descent as it is run to minimize a quadratic function.



The ellipses shown above are the contours of a quadratic function. Also shown is the trajectory taken by gradient descent, which was initialized at  $(48, 30)$ . The arrows in the figure (joined by straight lines) mark the successive values of  $\theta$  that gradient descent went through.

Example 1.1. Gradient descent on a quadratic function.

When we run batch gradient descent to fit  $\theta$  on our previous dataset, to learn to predict housing price as a function of living area. We obtain:

$$\theta_0 = 71.27 \quad (\text{intercept})$$

$$\theta_1 = 0.1345 \quad (\text{slope})$$

If we plot  $h_\theta(x)$  as a function of  $x$  (area), along with the training data, we obtain the following figure:



If the number of bedrooms were included as one of the input features as well, we get  $\theta_0 = 89.60, \theta_1 = 0.1392, \theta_2 = -8.738$ .

Example 1.2. Best fit line using batch gradient descent on Portland, Oregon housing prices.

The results in example 1.2 were obtained with batch gradient descent. There is an alternative to batch gradient descent that also works very well. Consider the following algorithm:

```

repeat
  for  $i = 1$  to  $n$  do
    for every  $j$  do
       $\theta_j \leftarrow \theta_j + \alpha \sum_{i=1}^n (y^{(i)} - h_{\theta}(x^{(i)})) x_j^{(i)}$ 
    end for
  end for
until convergence

```

Algorithm 1.3. Stochastic gradient descent.

By grouping the updates of the coordinates into an update of the vector  $\theta$ , we can rewrite update in algorithm 1.3 in a slightly more succinct way:

$$\theta \leftarrow \theta + \alpha \left( y^{(i)} - h_{\theta}^{(i)} \right) x^{(i)} \quad (1.6)$$

In this algorithm, we repeatedly run through the training set, and each time we encounter a training example, we update the parameters according to the gradient of the error with respect to that single training example only. This algorithm is called **stochastic gradient descent** (also **incremental gradient descent**). Whereas batch gradient descent has to scan through the entire training set before taking a single step—a costly operation if  $n$  is large—stochastic gradient descent can start making progress right away, and continues to make progress with each example it looks at. Often, stochastic gradient descent gets  $\theta$  “close” to the minimum much faster than batch gradient descent.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, particularly when the training set is large, stochastic gradient descent is often preferred over batch gradient descent.

## 1.2 The normal equations

Gradient descent gives one way of minimizing  $J$ . Let’s discuss a second way of doing so, this time performing the minimization explicitly and without resorting to an iterative algorithm. In this method, we will minimize  $J$  by explicitly taking its derivatives with respect to the  $\theta_j$ ’s, and setting them to zero. To enable us to

<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that it may never “converge” to the minimum, and the parameters  $\theta$  will keep oscillating around the minimum of  $J(\theta)$ ; but in practice most of the values near the minimum will be reasonably good approximations to the true minimum. By slowly letting the learning rate  $\alpha$  decrease to zero as the algorithm runs, it is also possible to ensure that the parameters will converge to the global minimum rather than merely oscillate around the minimum.

do this without having to write reams of algebra and pages full of matrices of derivatives, let's introduce some notation for doing calculus with matrices.

### 1.2.1 Matrix derivatives

For a function  $f : \mathbb{R}^{n \times d} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$  mapping from  $n$ -by- $d$  matrices to the real numbers, we define the derivative of  $f$  with respect to  $A$  to be:

$$\nabla_A f(A) = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial f}{\partial A_{11}} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f}{\partial A_{1d}} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \frac{\partial f}{\partial A_{n1}} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f}{\partial A_{nd}} \end{bmatrix} \quad (1.7)$$

Thus, the gradient  $\nabla_A f(A)$  is itself an  $n$ -by- $d$  matrix, whose  $(i, j)$ -element is  $\partial f / \partial A_{ij}$ .

For example, suppose  $A = \begin{bmatrix} A_{11} & A_{12} \\ A_{21} & A_{22} \end{bmatrix}$  is a 2-by-2 matrix, and the function  $f : \mathbb{R}^{2 \times 2} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$  is given by

$$f(A) = \frac{3}{2}A_{11} + 5A_{12}^2 + A_{21}A_{22}.$$

Here,  $A_{ij}$  denotes the  $(i, j)$  entry of the matrix  $A$ . We then have:

$$\nabla_A f(A) = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{3}{2} & 10A_{12} \\ A_{22} & A_{21} \end{bmatrix}$$

Example 1.3. Matrix derivative.

### 1.2.2 Least squares revisited

Armed with the tools of matrix derivatives, let us now proceed to find in closed-form the value of  $\theta$  that minimizes  $J(\theta)$ . We begin by re-writing  $J$  in matrix-vector notation.

Given a training set, define the **design matrix**  $\mathbf{X}$  to be the  $n$ -by- $d$  matrix (actually  $n$ -by- $(d+1)$ , if we include the intercept term) that contains the training examples' input values in its rows:

$$\mathbf{X} = \begin{bmatrix} -(x^{(1)})^\top & - \\ -(x^{(2)})^\top & - \\ \vdots & \\ -(x^{(n)})^\top & - \end{bmatrix} \quad (1.8)$$

Also, let  $\mathbf{y}$  be the  $n$ -dimensional vector containing all the target values from the training set:

$$\mathbf{y} = \begin{bmatrix} y^{(1)} \\ y^{(2)} \\ \vdots \\ y^{(n)} \end{bmatrix} \quad (1.9)$$

Now, since  $h_\theta(x^{(i)}) = (x^{(i)})^\top \theta$ , we can easily verify that

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{X}\theta - \mathbf{y} &= \begin{bmatrix} (x^{(1)})^\top \theta \\ \vdots \\ (x^{(n)})^\top \theta \end{bmatrix} - \begin{bmatrix} y^{(1)} \\ \vdots \\ y^{(n)} \end{bmatrix} \\ &= \begin{bmatrix} h_\theta(x^{(1)}) - y^{(1)} \\ \vdots \\ h_\theta(x^{(n)}) - y^{(n)} \end{bmatrix}. \end{aligned}$$

Thus, using the fact that for a vector  $z$ , we have that  $z^\top z = \sum_i z_i^2$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{1}{2}(\mathbf{X}\theta - \mathbf{y})^\top (\mathbf{X}\theta - \mathbf{y}) &= \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left( h_\theta(x^{(i)}) - y^{(i)} \right)^2 \\ &= J(\theta) \end{aligned}$$

Finally, to minimize  $J$ , let's find its derivative with respect to  $\theta$ . Hence:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \nabla_{\theta} J(\theta) &= \nabla_{\theta} \frac{1}{2} (\mathbf{X}\theta - \mathbf{y})^{\top} (\mathbf{X}\theta - \mathbf{y}) \\
 &= \frac{1}{2} \nabla_{\theta} \left( (\mathbf{X}\theta)^{\top} \mathbf{X}\theta - (\mathbf{X}\theta)^{\top} \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{y}^{\top} (\mathbf{X}\theta) + \mathbf{y}^{\top} \mathbf{y} \right) \\
 &= \frac{1}{2} \nabla_{\theta} \left( \theta^{\top} (\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X}) \theta - \mathbf{y}^{\top} (\mathbf{X}\theta) - \mathbf{y}^{\top} (\mathbf{X}\theta) \right) \quad (a^{\top} b = b^{\top} a) \\
 &= \frac{1}{2} \nabla_{\theta} \left( \theta^{\top} (\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X}) \theta - 2(\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{y})^{\top} \theta \right) \\
 &= \frac{1}{2} \left( 2\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X} \theta - 2\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{y} \right) \quad (\nabla_x b^{\top} x = b \text{ and } \nabla_x x^{\top} A x = 2Ax \text{ for sym. } A) \\
 &= \mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X} \theta - \mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{y}
 \end{aligned}$$

To minimize  $J$ , we set its derivatives to zero, and obtain the **normal equations**:

$$\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X} \theta = \mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{y} \quad (1.10)$$

Thus, the value of  $\theta$  that minimizes  $J(\theta)$  is given in closed form by the equation:<sup>5</sup>

$$\theta = (\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X})^{-1} \mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{y} \quad (1.11)$$

### 1.3 Probabilistic interpretation

When faced with a regression problem, why might linear regression, and specifically why might the least-squares cost function  $J$ , be a reasonable choice? In this section, we will give a set of probabilistic assumptions, under which least-squares regression is derived as a very natural algorithm.

Let us assume that the target variables and the inputs are related via the equation

$$y^{(i)} = \theta^{\top} x^{(i)} + \epsilon^{(i)}, \quad (1.12)$$

where  $\epsilon^{(i)}$  is an error term that captures either unmodeled effects (such as if there are some features very pertinent to predicting housing price, but that we'd left out of the regression), or random noise. Let us further assume that the  $\epsilon^{(i)}$  are distributed IID (independently and identically distributed) according to a Gaussian distribution (also called a Normal distribution) with mean zero and some variance  $\sigma^2$ . We can write this assumption as  $\epsilon^{(i)} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$ , i.e. the density of  $\epsilon^{(i)}$  is given by

$$p(\epsilon^{(i)}) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} \exp \left( -\frac{(\epsilon^{(i)})^2}{2\sigma^2} \right). \quad (1.13)$$

<sup>5</sup> Note that in this step, we are implicitly assuming that  $\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X}$  is an invertible matrix. This can be checked before calculating the inverse. If either the number of linearly independent examples is fewer than the number of features, or if the features are not linearly independent, then  $\mathbf{X}^{\top} \mathbf{X}$  will not be invertible. Even in such cases, it is possible to "fix" the situation with additional techniques, which we skip here for the sake of simplicity.

This implies that

$$p(y^{(i)} | x^{(i)}; \theta) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} \exp \left( -\frac{(y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2}{2\sigma^2} \right). \quad (1.14)$$

The notation “ $p(y^{(i)} | x^{(i)}; \theta)$ ” indicates that this is the distribution of  $y^{(i)}$  given  $x^{(i)}$  and parameterized by  $\theta$ . Note that we should not condition on  $\theta$  (i.e. “ $p(y^{(i)} | x^{(i)}, \theta)$ ”), since  $\theta$  is not a random variable. We can also write the distribution of  $y^{(i)}$  as  $(y^{(i)} | x^{(i)}; \theta) \sim \mathcal{N}(\theta^\top x^{(i)}, \sigma^2)$ .

Given  $\mathbf{X}$  (the design matrix, which contains all the  $x^{(i)}$ ’s) and  $\theta$ , what is the distribution of the  $y^{(i)}$ ’s? The probability of the data is given by  $p(\mathbf{y} | \mathbf{X}; \theta)$ . This quantity is typically viewed a function of  $\mathbf{y}$  (and perhaps  $\mathbf{X}$ ), for a fixed value of  $\theta$ . When we wish to explicitly view this as a function of  $\theta$ , we will instead call it the **likelihood** function:

$$L(\theta) = L(\theta; \mathbf{X}, \mathbf{y}) = p(\mathbf{y} | \mathbf{X}; \theta) \quad (1.15)$$

Note that by the independence assumption on the  $\epsilon^{(i)}$ ’s (and hence also the  $y^{(i)}$ ’s given the  $x^{(i)}$ ’s), this can also be written as

$$L(\theta) = \prod_{i=1}^n p(y^{(i)} | x^{(i)}; \theta) \quad (1.16)$$

$$= \prod_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} \exp \left( -\frac{(y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2}{2\sigma^2} \right). \quad (1.17)$$

Now, given this probabilistic model relating the  $y^{(i)}$ ’s and the  $x^{(i)}$ ’s, what is a reasonable way of choosing our best guess of the parameters  $\theta$ ? The principal of **maximum likelihood** says that we should choose  $\theta$  so as to make the data as high probability as possible—i.e. we should choose  $\theta$  to maximize  $L(\theta)$ .

Instead of maximizing  $L(\theta)$ , we can also maximize any strictly increasing function of  $L(\theta)$ . In particular, the derivations will be a bit simpler if we instead

maximize the **log likelihood**  $\ell(\theta)$ :

$$\begin{aligned}\ell(\theta) &= \log L(\theta) \\ &= \log \prod_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} \exp\left(-\frac{(y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2}{2\sigma^2}\right) \\ &= \sum_{i=1}^n \log \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} \exp\left(-\frac{(y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2}{2\sigma^2}\right) \\ &= n \log \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} - \frac{1}{\sigma^2} \cdot \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n (y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2\end{aligned}$$

Hence, maximizing  $\ell(\theta)$  gives the same answer as minimizing

$$\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n (y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2,$$

which we recognize to be  $J(\theta)$ , our original least-squares cost function.

**To summarize:** Under the previous probabilistic assumptions on the data, least-squares regression corresponds to finding the maximum likelihood estimate of  $\theta$ . This is thus one set of assumptions under which least-squares regression can be justified as a very natural method that's just doing maximum likelihood estimation.<sup>6</sup>

Note also that, in our previous discussion, our final choice of  $\theta$  did not depend on what was  $\sigma^2$ , and indeed we'd have arrived at the same result even if  $\sigma^2$  were unknown. We will use this fact again later, when we talk about the exponential family and generalized linear models.

<sup>6</sup> Note however that the probabilistic assumptions are by no means necessary for least-squares to be a perfectly good and rational procedure, and there may—and indeed there are—other natural assumptions that can also be used to justify it.

## 1.4 Locally weighted linear regression

Consider the problem of predicting  $y$  from  $x \in \mathbb{R}$ . The leftmost figure below shows the result of fitting a  $y = \theta_0 + \theta_1 x$  to a dataset. We see that the data doesn't really lie on straight line, and so the fit is not very good.

Instead, if we had added an extra feature  $x^2$ , and fit  $y = \theta_0 + \theta_1 x + \theta_2 x^2$ , then we obtain a slightly better fit to the data. (See middle figure) Naively, it might seem that the more features we add, the better. However, there is also a danger in adding too many features: The rightmost figure is the result of fitting



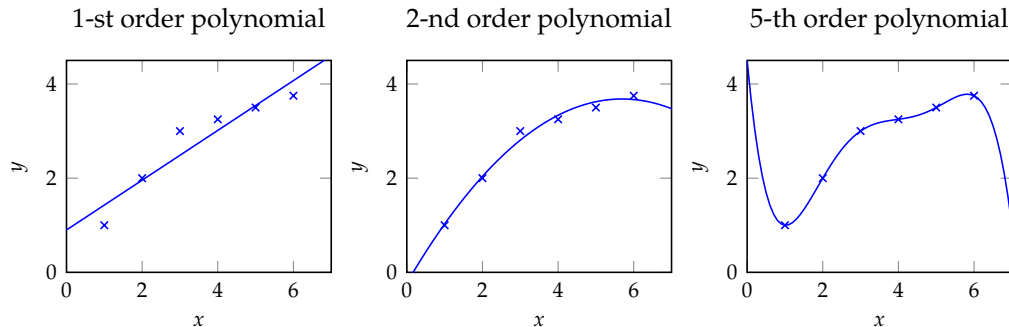


Figure 1.1. Polynomial regression with different  $k$ -order fits.

a 5-th order polynomial  $y = \sum_{j=0}^5 \theta_j x^j$ . We see that even though the fitted curve passes through the data perfectly, we would not expect this to be a very good predictor of, say, housing prices ( $y$ ) for different living areas ( $x$ ). Without formally defining what these terms mean, we'll say the figure on the left shows an instance of **underfitting**—in which the data clearly shows structure not captured by the model—and the figure on the right is an example of **overfitting**.<sup>7</sup>

As discussed previously, and as shown in figure 1.1, the choice of features is important to ensuring good performance of a learning algorithm. (When we talk about model selection, we'll also see algorithms for automatically choosing a good set of features.) In this section, let us briefly talk about the **locally weighted linear regression** (LWR) algorithm which, assuming there is sufficient training data, makes the choice of features less critical. This treatment will be brief, since you'll get a chance to explore some of the properties of the LWR algorithm yourself in the homework.

In the original linear regression algorithm, to make a prediction at a query point  $x$  (i.e. to evaluate  $h(x)$ ), we would:

1. Fit  $\theta$  to minimize  $\sum_i (y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2$ .
2. Output  $\theta^\top x$ .

In contrast, the locally weighted linear regression algorithm does the following:

1. Fit  $\theta$  to minimize  $\sum_i w^{(i)} (y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2$ .
2. Output  $\theta^\top x$ .

<sup>7</sup> Later in this class, when we talk about learning theory we'll formalize some of these notions, and also define more carefully just what it means for a hypothesis to be good or bad.

Here, the  $w^{(i)}$ 's are non-negative valued **weights**. Intuitively, if  $w^{(i)}$  is large for a particular value of  $i$ , then in picking  $\theta$  we'll try hard to make  $(y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2$  small. If  $w^{(i)}$  is small, then the  $(y^{(i)} - \theta^\top x^{(i)})^2$  error term will be pretty much ignored in the fit.

A fairly standard choice for the weights is:<sup>8</sup>

$$w^{(i)} = \exp\left(-\frac{(x^{(i)} - x)^2}{2\tau^2}\right) \quad (1.18)$$

Note that the weights depend on the particular point  $x$  at which we're trying to evaluate  $x$ . Moreover, if  $|x^{(i)} - x|$  is small, then  $w^{(i)}$  is close to 1; and if  $|x^{(i)} - x|$  is large, then  $w^{(i)}$  is small. Hence,  $\theta$  is chosen giving a much higher "weight" to the (errors on) training examples close to the query point  $x$ .<sup>9</sup> The parameter  $\tau$  controls how quickly the weight of a training example falls off with distance of its  $x^{(i)}$  from the query point  $x$ ;  $\tau$  is called the **bandwidth** parameter, and is also something that you'll get to experiment with in your homework.

Locally weighted linear regression is the first example we're seeing of a **non-parametric** algorithm. The (unweighted) linear regression algorithm that we saw earlier is known as a **parametric** learning algorithm, because it has a fixed, finite number of parameters (the  $\theta_i$ 's), which are fit to the data. Once we've fit the  $\theta_i$ 's and stored them away, we no longer need to keep the training data around to make future predictions. In contrast, to make predictions using locally weighted linear regression, we need to keep the entire training set around. The term "non-parametric" (roughly) refers to the fact that the amount of stuff we need to keep in order to represent the hypothesis  $h$  grows linearly with the size of the training set.

<sup>8</sup> If  $x$  is vector-valued, the weights  $w^{(i)}$  can be generalized to

$$\exp\left(-\frac{(x^{(i)} - x)^\top (x^{(i)} - x)}{2\tau^2}\right)$$

or

$$\exp\left(-\frac{(x^{(i)} - x)^\top \Sigma^{-1} (x^{(i)} - x)}{2\tau^2}\right)$$

for appropriate choices of  $\tau$  or  $\Sigma$ .

<sup>9</sup> Note also that while the formula for the weights takes a form that is cosmetically similar to the density of a Gaussian distribution, the  $w^{(i)}$ 's do not directly have anything to do with Gaussians, and in particular the  $w^{(i)}$  are not random variables, normally distributed or otherwise.

## 2 *Classification and Logistic Regression*

Let's now talk about the classification problem. This is just like the regression problem, except that the values  $y$  we now want to predict take on only a small number of discrete values. For now, we will focus on the **binary classification** problem in which  $y$  can take on only two values, 0 and 1. (Most of what we say here will also generalize to the multiple-class case.) For instance, if we are trying to build a spam classifier for email, then  $x^{(i)}$  may be some features of a piece of email, and  $y$  may be 1 if it is a piece of spam mail, and 0 otherwise. The class 0 is also called the **negative class**, and 1 the **positive class**, and they are sometimes also denoted by the symbols “−” and “+”. Given  $x^{(i)}$ , the corresponding  $y^{(i)}$  is also called the **label** for the training example.

### 2.1 *Logistic regression*

## *References*

1. M. J. Kochenderfer and T. A. Wheeler, *Algorithms for Optimization*. MIT Press, 2019 (cit. on p. iii).