# Stuff You Should Know About: Handling Large Data Files with R

## The Data Table package and various other ways to handle data in R

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* **Research field**: Bioinformatics / Computational Biology / Cancer Genomics
* **Lesson Topic**: An introduction to various packages for file I/O and data manipulation in R, with comparision to base R (and compatibility with data frames), in terms of user-friendliness, performance in CPU-time, and memory usage.

## Installation

Install Data Table from CRAN (current version 1.9.6)

install.packages("data.table", repos = "https::/cran.rstudio.com")  
library("data.table")

Install development version from GitHub (current version 1.9.7)

install.packages("data.table", repos = "https://Rdatatable.github.io/data.table", type = "source") #v1.9.7

##   
## The downloaded source packages are in  
## '/tmp/RtmpZ6sLFA/downloaded\_packages'

library("data.table")

## Getting Started: Data Frames

data table has it's own read function - to rapidly read data into R Backwards compatible: It can be used for data.frames

gapminderFiveYearData <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.csv", data.table=F)  
class(gapminderFiveYearData)

## [1] "data.frame"

dim(gapminderFiveYearData)

## [1] 1704 6

head(gapminderFiveYearData)

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1 Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2 Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3 Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4 Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5 Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## 6 Afghanistan 1977 14880372 Asia 38.438 786.1134

tail(gapminderFiveYearData)

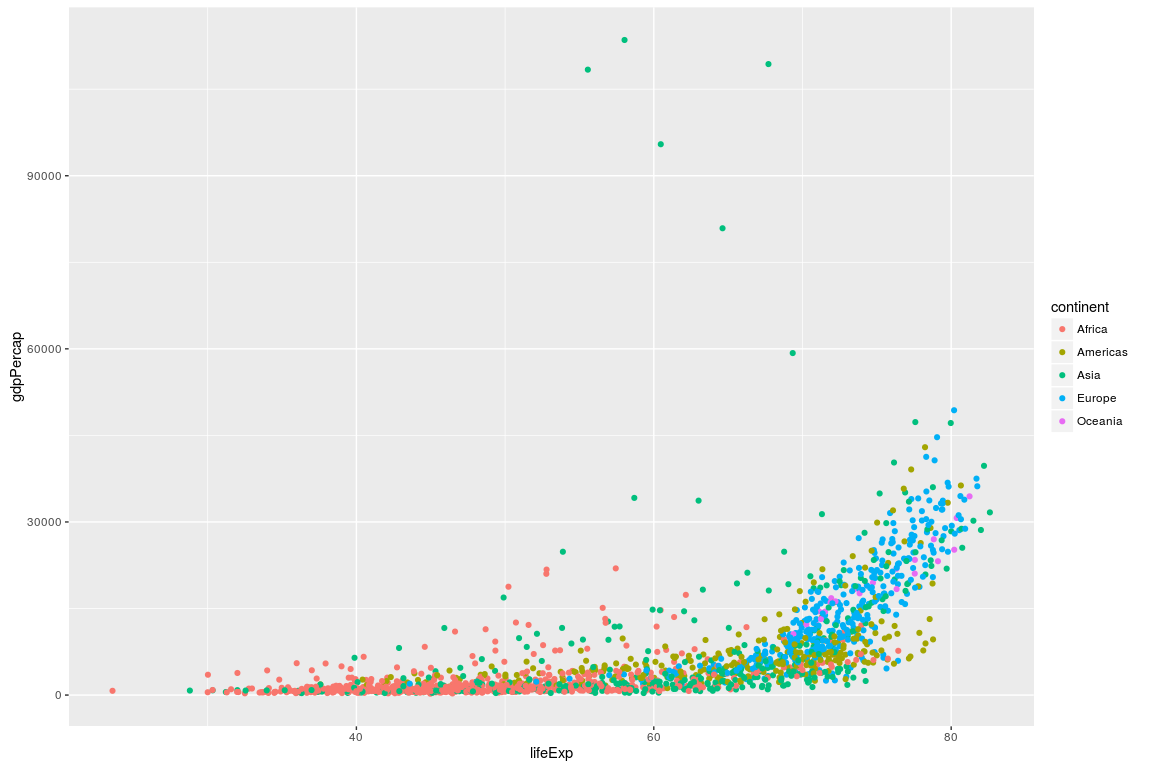
## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1699 Zimbabwe 1982 7636524 Africa 60.363 788.8550  
## 1700 Zimbabwe 1987 9216418 Africa 62.351 706.1573  
## 1701 Zimbabwe 1992 10704340 Africa 60.377 693.4208  
## 1702 Zimbabwe 1997 11404948 Africa 46.809 792.4500  
## 1703 Zimbabwe 2002 11926563 Africa 39.989 672.0386  
## 1704 Zimbabwe 2007 12311143 Africa 43.487 469.7093

str(gapminderFiveYearData)

## 'data.frame': 1704 obs. of 6 variables:  
## $ country : chr "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" ...  
## $ year : int 1952 1957 1962 1967 1972 1977 1982 1987 1992 1997 ...  
## $ pop : num 8425333 9240934 10267083 11537966 13079460 ...  
## $ continent: chr "Asia" "Asia" "Asia" "Asia" ...  
## $ lifeExp : num 28.8 30.3 32 34 36.1 ...  
## $ gdpPercap: num 779 821 853 836 740 ...

Backwards compatible: these are standard dataframes compatible with ggplots

library("ggplot2")  
ggplot(data = gapminderFiveYearData, aes(x = lifeExp, y = gdpPercap, color=continent)) +  
 geom\_point()

  
 ##Introducing Data Tables

data table defaults to reading it's own data.table format

gapminderFiveYearData <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.csv")  
class(gapminderFiveYearData)

## [1] "data.table" "data.frame"

dim(gapminderFiveYearData)

## [1] 1704 6

head(gapminderFiveYearData)

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## 6: Afghanistan 1977 14880372 Asia 38.438 786.1134

tail(gapminderFiveYearData)

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Zimbabwe 1982 7636524 Africa 60.363 788.8550  
## 2: Zimbabwe 1987 9216418 Africa 62.351 706.1573  
## 3: Zimbabwe 1992 10704340 Africa 60.377 693.4208  
## 4: Zimbabwe 1997 11404948 Africa 46.809 792.4500  
## 5: Zimbabwe 2002 11926563 Africa 39.989 672.0386  
## 6: Zimbabwe 2007 12311143 Africa 43.487 469.7093

str(gapminderFiveYearData)

## Classes 'data.table' and 'data.frame': 1704 obs. of 6 variables:  
## $ country : chr "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" ...  
## $ year : int 1952 1957 1962 1967 1972 1977 1982 1987 1992 1997 ...  
## $ pop : num 8425333 9240934 10267083 11537966 13079460 ...  
## $ continent: chr "Asia" "Asia" "Asia" "Asia" ...  
## $ lifeExp : num 28.8 30.3 32 34 36.1 ...  
## $ gdpPercap: num 779 821 853 836 740 ...  
## - attr(\*, ".internal.selfref")=<externalptr>

Data tables also auto-trim when printing to console

gapminderFiveYearData

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## ---   
## 1700: Zimbabwe 1987 9216418 Africa 62.351 706.1573  
## 1701: Zimbabwe 1992 10704340 Africa 60.377 693.4208  
## 1702: Zimbabwe 1997 11404948 Africa 46.809 792.4500  
## 1703: Zimbabwe 2002 11926563 Africa 39.989 672.0386  
## 1704: Zimbabwe 2007 12311143 Africa 43.487 469.7093

data tables are backwards compatible with a lot of operations which use data.frames Such as plots...

dev.off()

## null device   
## 1

ggplot(data = gapminderFiveYearData, aes(x = lifeExp, y = gdpPercap, color=continent)) +  
 geom\_point()

... and linear models...

linear\_model <- lm(gdpPercap ~ pop + year, gapminderFiveYearData)  
summary(linear\_model)

##   
## Call:  
## lm(formula = gdpPercap ~ pop + year, data = gapminderFiveYearData)  
##   
## Residuals:  
## Min 1Q Median 3Q Max   
## -10537 -5356 -2811 2043 109153   
##   
## Coefficients:  
## Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)   
## (Intercept) -2.537e+05 2.674e+04 -9.487 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## pop -4.143e-06 2.198e-06 -1.885 0.0596 .   
## year 1.319e+02 1.351e+01 9.760 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## ---  
## Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1  
##   
## Residual standard error: 9595 on 1701 degrees of freedom  
## Multiple R-squared: 0.05365, Adjusted R-squared: 0.05254   
## F-statistic: 48.22 on 2 and 1701 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

linear\_model <- lm(lifeExp ~ gdpPercap + pop + year, gapminderFiveYearData)  
summary(linear\_model)

##   
## Call:  
## lm(formula = lifeExp ~ gdpPercap + pop + year, data = gapminderFiveYearData)  
##   
## Residuals:  
## Min 1Q Median 3Q Max   
## -67.497 -7.075 1.121 7.701 19.640   
##   
## Coefficients:  
## Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)   
## (Intercept) -4.115e+02 2.767e+01 -14.872 < 2e-16 \*\*\*  
## gdpPercap 6.729e-04 2.444e-05 27.529 < 2e-16 \*\*\*  
## pop 6.353e-09 2.218e-09 2.864 0.00423 \*\*   
## year 2.354e-01 1.400e-02 16.812 < 2e-16 \*\*\*  
## ---  
## Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1  
##   
## Residual standard error: 9.673 on 1700 degrees of freedom  
## Multiple R-squared: 0.4402, Adjusted R-squared: 0.4392   
## F-statistic: 445.6 on 3 and 1700 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

linear\_model <- glm(lifeExp ~ gdpPercap + continent + pop + year, family ="gaussian", gapminderFiveYearData)  
summary(linear\_model)

##   
## Call:  
## glm(formula = lifeExp ~ gdpPercap + continent + pop + year, family = "gaussian",   
## data = gapminderFiveYearData)  
##   
## Deviance Residuals:   
## Min 1Q Median 3Q Max   
## -28.4051 -4.0550 0.2317 4.5073 20.0217   
##   
## Coefficients:  
## Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)   
## (Intercept) -5.185e+02 1.989e+01 -26.062 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## gdpPercap 2.985e-04 2.002e-05 14.908 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## continentAmericas 1.429e+01 4.946e-01 28.898 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## continentAsia 9.375e+00 4.719e-01 19.869 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## continentEurope 1.936e+01 5.182e-01 37.361 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## continentOceania 2.056e+01 1.469e+00 13.995 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## pop 1.791e-09 1.634e-09 1.096 0.273   
## year 2.863e-01 1.006e-02 28.469 <2e-16 \*\*\*  
## ---  
## Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1  
##   
## (Dispersion parameter for gaussian family taken to be 47.37935)  
##   
## Null deviance: 284148 on 1703 degrees of freedom  
## Residual deviance: 80355 on 1696 degrees of freedom  
## AIC: 11420  
##   
## Number of Fisher Scoring iterations: 2

... and data manipulation packages (plyr, dplyr, reshape, tidyr, etc...)

library("plyr")  
calcGDP <- function(dat, year=NULL, country=NULL) {  
 if(!is.null(year)) {  
 dat <- dat[dat$year %in% year, ]  
 }  
 if (!is.null(country)) {  
 dat <- dat[dat$country %in% country,]  
 }  
 gdp <- dat$pop \* dat$gdpPercap  
   
 new <- cbind(dat, gdp=gdp)  
 return(new)  
}  
plyr::ddply(  
 .data = calcGDP(gapminderFiveYearData),  
 .variables = "continent",  
 .fun = function(x) mean(x$gdp)  
)

## continent V1  
## 1 Africa 20904782844  
## 2 Americas 379262350210  
## 3 Asia 227233738153  
## 4 Europe 269442085301  
## 5 Oceania 188187105354

Yeah you get the idea.

Data tables have built-in "methods" for a range of functions, these are often faster than standard dataframes or matrices, if these aren't found it uses dataframe functions. A "Data Table" is compatible with any function from any package designed for a "Data Frame".

## File I/O (Input/Output)

fread is "fast read", and it's **fast**, even for large data files. Let's try it out on some larger datafiles:

gapminderlarge <- fread("gapminder-large.csv", header=T)

##   
Read 53.1% of 1656288 rows  
Read 94.8% of 1656288 rows  
Read 1656288 rows and 11 (of 11) columns from 0.146 GB file in 00:00:04

fread is smart, it auto detects column classes, separators, headers, nrows (for a regularly separated file). We can use the same comand for a whole bunch of file formats. All the usual reading options can be specified manually...

gapminderFiveYearData <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.tsv") #tab delimited  
gapminderFiveYearData <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.txt") #space delimited  
gapminderFiveYearDataCrop <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.tsv", header=T, col.names=c("place", "time", "people", "big place", "life", "money"), nrows=1000, stringsAsFactors=F)  
gapminderFiveYearDataCrop

## place time people big place life money  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## ---   
## 996: Mexico 2007 108700891 Americas 76.195 11977.5750  
## 997: Mongolia 1952 800663 Asia 42.244 786.5669  
## 998: Mongolia 1957 882134 Asia 45.248 912.6626  
## 999: Mongolia 1962 1010280 Asia 48.251 1056.3540  
## 1000: Mongolia 1967 1149500 Asia 51.253 1226.0411

...but it does a lot of the tedious work for you (pretty well too).

It's also got cool progress bars for large files :) These kick in automatically if the file takes longer than about a second. This is really handy to know your code is working, and how long it will take.

gapminderlarger <- fread("gapminder-larger.csv")

##   
Read 0.0% of 6625152 rows  
Read 14.8% of 6625152 rows  
Read 28.1% of 6625152 rows  
Read 39.2% of 6625152 rows  
Read 49.4% of 6625152 rows  
Read 52.5% of 6625152 rows  
Read 62.5% of 6625152 rows  
Read 72.8% of 6625152 rows  
Read 77.4% of 6625152 rows  
Read 86.2% of 6625152 rows  
Read 94.2% of 6625152 rows  
Read 95.1% of 6625152 rows  
Read 6625152 rows and 13 (of 13) columns from 0.702 GB file in 00:00:15

It's so fast it tells you. Let's compare that with base R:

system.time(gapminderlarger.dataframe <- read.csv("gapminder-larger.csv", header=T))

## user system elapsed   
## 59.532 0.336 59.939

The same operation took much longer with base R, with larger files (or repeating this many times) that ~6x difference could mean a lot for your workflow.

FYI - there's also a "fast write" compatible with several file formats

fwrite(gapminderlarger, file="test.csv") #defaults to csv  
fwrite(gapminderlarger, file="test.tsv", sep="\t")

They're also fast to write data, compared to base R:

system.time(fwrite(gapminderlarger, file="test.csv"))

## user system elapsed   
## 26.548 0.652 28.164

system.time(write.csv(gapminderlarger, file="test.csv"))

## user system elapsed   
## 47.256 0.704 48.071

## Another solution: bigmemory

library("bigmemory")

"bigmemory" uses the "big.matrix" format to access large data files in a C++ framework - rather than stored in RAM/memory as usual in R. This is handy for handling **very large** files, when loading the full dataset in working environment (RAM memory) slows your computer to a halt. Might be handy on servers / HPC too but usually they have enough memory if you're willing to wait for it in a queue.

Let's try out bigmemory, first we convert an R data matrix into a "big.matrix":

gapminderFiveYearData.big <- as.big.matrix(gapminderFiveYearData)  
gapminderFiveYearData.big

## An object of class "big.matrix"  
## Slot "address":  
## <pointer: 0x5a2400f0>

class(gapminderFiveYearData.big)

## [1] "big.matrix"  
## attr(,"package")  
## [1] "bigmemory"

dim(gapminderFiveYearData.big)

## [1] 1704 6

head(gapminderFiveYearData.big)

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1 1 1952 8425333 3 28.801 779.4453  
## 2 1 1957 9240934 3 30.332 820.8530  
## 3 1 1962 10267083 3 31.997 853.1007  
## 4 1 1967 11537966 3 34.020 836.1971  
## 5 1 1972 13079460 3 36.088 739.9811  
## 6 1 1977 14880372 3 38.438 786.1134

tail(gapminderFiveYearData.big)

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1699 142 1982 7636524 1 60.363 788.8550  
## 1700 142 1987 9216418 1 62.351 706.1573  
## 1701 142 1992 10704340 1 60.377 693.4208  
## 1702 142 1997 11404948 1 46.809 792.4500  
## 1703 142 2002 11926563 1 39.989 672.0386  
## 1704 142 2007 12311143 1 43.487 469.7093

str(gapminderFiveYearData.big)

## Formal class 'big.matrix' [package "bigmemory"] with 1 slot  
## ..@ address:<externalptr>

bigmemory, also has read/write functions direct to big.matrix format:

write.big.matrix(gapminderFiveYearData.big, "test.csv")  
gapminderFiveYearData.big <- read.big.matrix("test.csv")

These are designed to be efficient for memory - how fast are they?

system.time(gapminderlarger.big <- read.big.matrix("gapminder-larger.csv"))

## user system elapsed   
## 28.636 0.392 29.441

system.time(write.big.matrix(gapminderFiveYearData.big, "test.csv"))

## user system elapsed   
## 0.012 0.000 0.011

## New and Shiny: FEATHER

### A Fast On-Disk Format for Data Frames for R and Python, powered by Apache Arrow

FEATHER (is it's own fast file format) - from Hadley Wickham ggplot/dplyr/etc... and Wes Mckinney (pandas in Python) Note: it's in development (unstable) - future versions may not read past versions - intended for use to transfer files quickly (e.g., between R and Python)

At the moment you can only try it out from their github repo (in R or python), it will no doubt end up on CRAN very soon:

library("devtools")  
devtools::install\_github("wesm/feather/R")  
library(feather)

FEATHER has it's own file I/O commands (and format):

path <- "gapminder-FiveYearData.feather"  
write\_feather(gapminderFiveYearData, path) #write data frame to file  
gapminderFiveYearData <- read\_feather(path) #read to data frame  
gapminderFiveYearData

## Source: local data frame [1,704 x 6]  
##   
## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## <chr> <int> <dbl> <chr> <dbl> <dbl>  
## 1 Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2 Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3 Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4 Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5 Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## 6 Afghanistan 1977 14880372 Asia 38.438 786.1134  
## 7 Afghanistan 1982 12881816 Asia 39.854 978.0114  
## 8 Afghanistan 1987 13867957 Asia 40.822 852.3959  
## 9 Afghanistan 1992 16317921 Asia 41.674 649.3414  
## 10 Afghanistan 1997 22227415 Asia 41.763 635.3414  
## .. ... ... ... ... ... ...

Did I mention it's crazy fast?

path <- "gapminderlarger.feather"  
system.time(write\_feather(gapminderlarger, path))

## user system elapsed   
## 1.252 0.356 6.822

system.time(gapminderlarger.feather <- read\_feather(path))

## user system elapsed   
## 5.272 0.064 5.342

Or install and run in Python:

import feather  
path = 'my\_data.feather'  
feather.write\_dataframe(df, path)  
df = feather.read\_dataframe(path)

Note that FEATHER is designed for data *already* loaded into python or R.

## FILE I/O Summary

### READ

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **base R** | **data table** | **bigmemory** | **feather** |
| read.csv | fread | read.big.matrix | read\_feather |
| 52.203s | 8.154s | 28.647s | 2.414s |

### Convert dataframe to format

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **base R** | **data table** | **bigmemory** | **feather** |
| data.frame | as.data.table | as.big.matrix | built-in |
| NA | 0.002s | 66.07s | NA |

### Write

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **base R** | **data table** | **bigmemory** | **feather** |
| write.csv | fwrite | write.big.matrix | write\_feather |
| 71.382s | 35.453s | 0.068ss | 5.008s |

## Manipulating Data Tables

gapminderFiveYearData <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.csv", data.table=T, header = T)  
class(gapminderFiveYearData)

## [1] "data.table" "data.frame"

We can simply treat it as a data frame in many cases:

gapminderFiveYearData[1,]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453

colnames(gapminderFiveYearData)

## [1] "country" "year" "pop" "continent" "lifeExp" "gdpPercap"

head(gapminderFiveYearData$country)

## [1] "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan"  
## [6] "Afghanistan"

tail(gapminderFiveYearData$country)

## [1] "Zimbabwe" "Zimbabwe" "Zimbabwe" "Zimbabwe" "Zimbabwe" "Zimbabwe"

Data Table has a "Natural" Syntax

DT[where, select|update|do, by]

...although suspiciously similar to SQL?

it allows chaining queries: DT[][]

Formally: we subset a datatable, Dt, with DT[i, j, by]

### I: row selection

gapminderFiveYearData[c(1:5, 100:105),] #by number

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## 6: Bangladesh 1967 62821884 Asia 43.453 721.1861  
## 7: Bangladesh 1972 70759295 Asia 45.252 630.2336  
## 8: Bangladesh 1977 80428306 Asia 46.923 659.8772  
## 9: Bangladesh 1982 93074406 Asia 50.009 676.9819  
## 10: Bangladesh 1987 103764241 Asia 52.819 751.9794  
## 11: Bangladesh 1992 113704579 Asia 56.018 837.8102

gapminderFiveYearData[gapminderFiveYearData$country=="New Zealand",] #by condition

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.390 10556.58  
## 2: New Zealand 1957 2229407 Oceania 70.260 12247.40  
## 3: New Zealand 1962 2488550 Oceania 71.240 13175.68  
## 4: New Zealand 1967 2728150 Oceania 71.520 14463.92  
## 5: New Zealand 1972 2929100 Oceania 71.890 16046.04  
## 6: New Zealand 1977 3164900 Oceania 72.220 16233.72  
## 7: New Zealand 1982 3210650 Oceania 73.840 17632.41  
## 8: New Zealand 1987 3317166 Oceania 74.320 19007.19  
## 9: New Zealand 1992 3437674 Oceania 76.330 18363.32  
## 10: New Zealand 1997 3676187 Oceania 77.550 21050.41  
## 11: New Zealand 2002 3908037 Oceania 79.110 23189.80  
## 12: New Zealand 2007 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01

gapminderFiveYearData[gapminderFiveYearData$country %in% c("New Zealand", "Australia", "Japan"),] #by condition

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Australia 1952 8691212 Oceania 69.120 10039.596  
## 2: Australia 1957 9712569 Oceania 70.330 10949.650  
## 3: Australia 1962 10794968 Oceania 70.930 12217.227  
## 4: Australia 1967 11872264 Oceania 71.100 14526.125  
## 5: Australia 1972 13177000 Oceania 71.930 16788.629  
## 6: Australia 1977 14074100 Oceania 73.490 18334.198  
## 7: Australia 1982 15184200 Oceania 74.740 19477.009  
## 8: Australia 1987 16257249 Oceania 76.320 21888.889  
## 9: Australia 1992 17481977 Oceania 77.560 23424.767  
## 10: Australia 1997 18565243 Oceania 78.830 26997.937  
## 11: Australia 2002 19546792 Oceania 80.370 30687.755  
## 12: Australia 2007 20434176 Oceania 81.235 34435.367  
## 13: Japan 1952 86459025 Asia 63.030 3216.956  
## 14: Japan 1957 91563009 Asia 65.500 4317.694  
## 15: Japan 1962 95831757 Asia 68.730 6576.649  
## 16: Japan 1967 100825279 Asia 71.430 9847.789  
## 17: Japan 1972 107188273 Asia 73.420 14778.786  
## 18: Japan 1977 113872473 Asia 75.380 16610.377  
## 19: Japan 1982 118454974 Asia 77.110 19384.106  
## 20: Japan 1987 122091325 Asia 78.670 22375.942  
## 21: Japan 1992 124329269 Asia 79.360 26824.895  
## 22: Japan 1997 125956499 Asia 80.690 28816.585  
## 23: Japan 2002 127065841 Asia 82.000 28604.592  
## 24: Japan 2007 127467972 Asia 82.603 31656.068  
## 25: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.390 10556.576  
## 26: New Zealand 1957 2229407 Oceania 70.260 12247.395  
## 27: New Zealand 1962 2488550 Oceania 71.240 13175.678  
## 28: New Zealand 1967 2728150 Oceania 71.520 14463.919  
## 29: New Zealand 1972 2929100 Oceania 71.890 16046.037  
## 30: New Zealand 1977 3164900 Oceania 72.220 16233.718  
## 31: New Zealand 1982 3210650 Oceania 73.840 17632.410  
## 32: New Zealand 1987 3317166 Oceania 74.320 19007.191  
## 33: New Zealand 1992 3437674 Oceania 76.330 18363.325  
## 34: New Zealand 1997 3676187 Oceania 77.550 21050.414  
## 35: New Zealand 2002 3908037 Oceania 79.110 23189.801  
## 36: New Zealand 2007 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.009  
## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap

gapminderFiveYearData[year=="1952"]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2: Albania 1952 1282697 Europe 55.230 1601.0561  
## 3: Algeria 1952 9279525 Africa 43.077 2449.0082  
## 4: Angola 1952 4232095 Africa 30.015 3520.6103  
## 5: Argentina 1952 17876956 Americas 62.485 5911.3151  
## ---   
## 138: Vietnam 1952 26246839 Asia 40.412 605.0665  
## 139: West Bank and Gaza 1952 1030585 Asia 43.160 1515.5923  
## 140: Yemen Rep. 1952 4963829 Asia 32.548 781.7176  
## 141: Zambia 1952 2672000 Africa 42.038 1147.3888  
## 142: Zimbabwe 1952 3080907 Africa 48.451 406.8841

setkey(gapminderFiveYearData, country)  
gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia")] #by key (will be detailed later)

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.390 10556.58  
## 2: New Zealand 1957 2229407 Oceania 70.260 12247.40  
## 3: New Zealand 1962 2488550 Oceania 71.240 13175.68  
## 4: New Zealand 1967 2728150 Oceania 71.520 14463.92  
## 5: New Zealand 1972 2929100 Oceania 71.890 16046.04  
## 6: New Zealand 1977 3164900 Oceania 72.220 16233.72  
## 7: New Zealand 1982 3210650 Oceania 73.840 17632.41  
## 8: New Zealand 1987 3317166 Oceania 74.320 19007.19  
## 9: New Zealand 1992 3437674 Oceania 76.330 18363.32  
## 10: New Zealand 1997 3676187 Oceania 77.550 21050.41  
## 11: New Zealand 2002 3908037 Oceania 79.110 23189.80  
## 12: New Zealand 2007 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 13: Australia 1952 8691212 Oceania 69.120 10039.60  
## 14: Australia 1957 9712569 Oceania 70.330 10949.65  
## 15: Australia 1962 10794968 Oceania 70.930 12217.23  
## 16: Australia 1967 11872264 Oceania 71.100 14526.12  
## 17: Australia 1972 13177000 Oceania 71.930 16788.63  
## 18: Australia 1977 14074100 Oceania 73.490 18334.20  
## 19: Australia 1982 15184200 Oceania 74.740 19477.01  
## 20: Australia 1987 16257249 Oceania 76.320 21888.89  
## 21: Australia 1992 17481977 Oceania 77.560 23424.77  
## 22: Australia 1997 18565243 Oceania 78.830 26997.94  
## 23: Australia 2002 19546792 Oceania 80.370 30687.75  
## 24: Australia 2007 20434176 Oceania 81.235 34435.37  
## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap

### J: column selection

head(gapminderFiveYearData[,"country"]) #by names

## [1] "country"

head(gapminderFiveYearData[,country]) #by column

## [1] "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan" "Afghanistan"  
## [6] "Afghanistan"

gapminderFiveYearData[,list(country, year, pop)] #by list

## country year pop  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957 9240934  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962 10267083  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967 11537966  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972 13079460  
## ---   
## 1700: Zimbabwe 1987 9216418  
## 1701: Zimbabwe 1992 10704340  
## 1702: Zimbabwe 1997 11404948  
## 1703: Zimbabwe 2002 11926563  
## 1704: Zimbabwe 2007 12311143

This allows operations to be performed on columns:

gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(gdpPercap)] #by colnames

## [1] 12294917

gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(gdpPercap\*pop)] #by colnames

## [1] 3.183235e+14

gapminderFiveYearData[,mean(pop)] #by colnames

## [1] 29601212

gapminderFiveYearData[,mean(lifeExp)] #by colnames

## [1] 59.47444

### BY: group operation

This is paricularly power in that we can apply operations to sets values, grouped "by":

gapminderFiveYearData[j=sum(gdpPercap), by=year]

## year V1  
## 1: 1952 528989.2  
## 2: 1957 610516.0  
## 3: 1962 671065.4  
## 4: 1967 778678.7  
## 5: 1972 961351.8  
## 6: 1977 1038469.6  
## 7: 1982 1067684.0  
## 8: 1987 1121930.7  
## 9: 1992 1158522.4  
## 10: 1997 1290804.9  
## 11: 2002 1408334.5  
## 12: 2007 1658570.2

gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(gdpPercap), year]

## year V1  
## 1: 1952 528989.2  
## 2: 1957 610516.0  
## 3: 1962 671065.4  
## 4: 1967 778678.7  
## 5: 1972 961351.8  
## 6: 1977 1038469.6  
## 7: 1982 1067684.0  
## 8: 1987 1121930.7  
## 9: 1992 1158522.4  
## 10: 1997 1290804.9  
## 11: 2002 1408334.5  
## 12: 2007 1658570.2

gapminderFiveYearData[,mean(lifeExp), year]

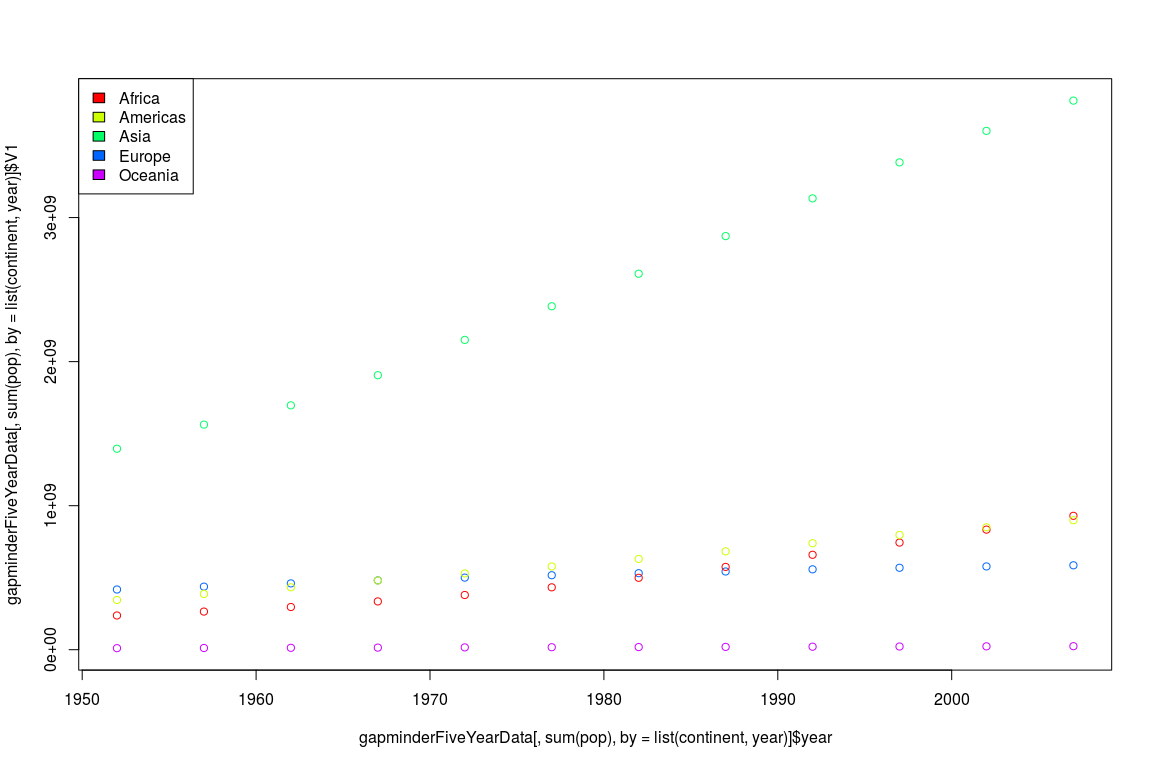
## year V1  
## 1: 1952 49.05762  
## 2: 1957 51.50740  
## 3: 1962 53.60925  
## 4: 1967 55.67829  
## 5: 1972 57.64739  
## 6: 1977 59.57016  
## 7: 1982 61.53320  
## 8: 1987 63.21261  
## 9: 1992 64.16034  
## 10: 1997 65.01468  
## 11: 2002 65.69492  
## 12: 2007 67.00742

gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(pop), by=list(continent, year)]

## continent year V1  
## 1: Asia 1952 1395357352  
## 2: Asia 1957 1562780599  
## 3: Asia 1962 1696357182  
## 4: Asia 1967 1905662900  
## 5: Asia 1972 2150972248  
## 6: Asia 1977 2384513556  
## 7: Asia 1982 2610135582  
## 8: Asia 1987 2871220762  
## 9: Asia 1992 3133292191  
## 10: Asia 1997 3383285500  
## 11: Asia 2002 3601802203  
## 12: Asia 2007 3811953827  
## 13: Europe 1952 418120846  
## 14: Europe 1957 437890351  
## 15: Europe 1962 460355155  
## 16: Europe 1967 481178958  
## 17: Europe 1972 500635059  
## 18: Europe 1977 517164531  
## 19: Europe 1982 531266901  
## 20: Europe 1987 543094160  
## 21: Europe 1992 558142797  
## 22: Europe 1997 568944148  
## 23: Europe 2002 578223869  
## 24: Europe 2007 586098529  
## 25: Africa 1952 237640501  
## 26: Africa 1957 264837738  
## 27: Africa 1962 296516865  
## 28: Africa 1967 335289489  
## 29: Africa 1972 379879541  
## 30: Africa 1977 433061021  
## 31: Africa 1982 499348587  
## 32: Africa 1987 574834110  
## 33: Africa 1992 659081517  
## 34: Africa 1997 743832984  
## 35: Africa 2002 833723916  
## 36: Africa 2007 929539692  
## 37: Americas 1952 345152446  
## 38: Americas 1957 386953916  
## 39: Americas 1962 433270254  
## 40: Americas 1967 480746623  
## 41: Americas 1972 529384210  
## 42: Americas 1977 578067699  
## 43: Americas 1982 630290920  
## 44: Americas 1987 682753971  
## 45: Americas 1992 739274104  
## 46: Americas 1997 796900410  
## 47: Americas 2002 849772762  
## 48: Americas 2007 898871184  
## 49: Oceania 1952 10686006  
## 50: Oceania 1957 11941976  
## 51: Oceania 1962 13283518  
## 52: Oceania 1967 14600414  
## 53: Oceania 1972 16106100  
## 54: Oceania 1977 17239000  
## 55: Oceania 1982 18394850  
## 56: Oceania 1987 19574415  
## 57: Oceania 1992 20919651  
## 58: Oceania 1997 22241430  
## 59: Oceania 2002 23454829  
## 60: Oceania 2007 24549947  
## continent year V1

As you can see, these results lend well to data we can tabulate or plot:

library("gplots")  
plot(gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(pop), by=list(continent, year)]$year,  
 gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(pop), by=list(continent, year)]$V1,  
 col=rainbow(5)[as.numeric(as.factor(gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(pop), by=list(continent, year)]$continent))])  
legend("topleft", fill=rainbow(5), legend=levels(as.factor(gapminderFiveYearData[,sum(pop), by=list(continent, year)]$continent)))

  
New and Shiny: by=.EACHI enables more explicit control of the "by" feature. We could manually pull out years or countries we wish to deal with individually:

gapminderFiveYearData[year=="1952" | year=="2002", j=sum(pop), by=year]

## year V1  
## 1: 1952 2406957151  
## 2: 2002 5886977579

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"),sum(gdpPercap\*pop)]

## [1] 4.516491e+12

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"),sum(gdpPercap\*pop), by=year]

## year V1  
## 1: 1952 108314447889  
## 2: 1957 133653656027  
## 3: 1962 164672906489  
## 4: 1967 211917727171  
## 5: 1972 268224218455  
## 6: 1977 309415422324  
## 7: 1982 352354302760  
## 8: 1987 418903127997  
## 9: 1992 472638359652  
## 10: 1997 578608510367  
## 11: 2002 690473760353  
## 12: 2007 807314089023

Notice in both of the above cases the countries are grouped together. Unless specified countries will not be grouped, we can do this either explicitly by=country or use the .EACHI options for more complex i queries:

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"),sum(gdpPercap\*pop), by=country]

## country V1  
## 1: New Zealand 6.734455e+11  
## 2: Australia 3.843045e+12

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"),sum(gdpPercap\*pop), by=.EACHI]

## country V1  
## 1: New Zealand 6.734455e+11  
## 2: Australia 3.843045e+12

Group by multiple arguments explicitly may also give data in a more sensible format:

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"),sum(gdpPercap\*pop), by=list(year, country)]

## year country V1  
## 1: 1952 New Zealand 21058193787  
## 2: 1957 New Zealand 27304428858  
## 3: 1962 New Zealand 32788333487  
## 4: 1967 New Zealand 39459740429  
## 5: 1972 New Zealand 47000447797  
## 6: 1977 New Zealand 51378093149  
## 7: 1982 New Zealand 56611498451  
## 8: 1987 New Zealand 63050008703  
## 9: 1992 New Zealand 63127124700  
## 10: 1997 New Zealand 77385257446  
## 11: 2002 New Zealand 90626601698  
## 12: 2007 New Zealand 103655730130  
## 13: 1952 Australia 87256254102  
## 14: 1957 Australia 106349227169  
## 15: 1962 Australia 131884573002  
## 16: 1967 Australia 172457986742  
## 17: 1972 Australia 221223770658  
## 18: 1977 Australia 258037329175  
## 19: 1982 Australia 295742804309  
## 20: 1987 Australia 355853119294  
## 21: 1992 Australia 409511234952  
## 22: 1997 Australia 501223252921  
## 23: 2002 Australia 599847158654  
## 24: 2007 Australia 703658358894  
## year country V1

by=.EACHI is a little weird, it's an explicit way of restoring a previous version data.table functionality. Consider a simple operation of counting the rows returned:

By default data.table counts all rows returned:

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"), .N]

## [1] 24

To restore previous functionality (an implicit by), .by=.EACHI will count the number of rows returned *for each* i. Basically data.table was really clever and did it for you but some people took issue with a by being performed when it wasn't specified.

gapminderFiveYearData[c("New Zealand","Australia"), .N, by=.EACHI]

## country N  
## 1: New Zealand 12  
## 2: Australia 12

## Keys

tables() shows all tables and their SQL-like "keys", by default to keys are given:

gapminderFiveYearData <- fread("gapminder-FiveYearData.csv")  
tables()

## NAME NROW NCOL MB  
## [1,] gapminderFiveYearData 1,704 6 1  
## [2,] gapminderFiveYearDataCrop 1,000 6 1  
## [3,] gapminderlarge 1,656,288 11 294  
## [4,] gapminderlarger 6,625,152 13 1,248  
## COLS KEY  
## [1,] country,year,pop,continent,lifeExp,gdpPercap   
## [2,] place,time,people,big place,life,money   
## [3,] V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,country,year,pop,continent,lifeExp,gdpPercap   
## [4,] V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,country,year,pop,continent,lifeExp,gdpPercap   
## Total: 1,544MB

We can create a unique identifier as a key:

rowID <- paste(gapminderFiveYearData$country, gapminderFiveYearData$year)  
head(rowID)

## [1] "Afghanistan 1952" "Afghanistan 1957" "Afghanistan 1962"  
## [4] "Afghanistan 1967" "Afghanistan 1972" "Afghanistan 1977"

tail(head(rowID))

## [1] "Afghanistan 1952" "Afghanistan 1957" "Afghanistan 1962"  
## [4] "Afghanistan 1967" "Afghanistan 1972" "Afghanistan 1977"

gapminderFiveYearData$rowID <- rowID  
gapminderFiveYearData

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952 8425333 Asia 28.801 779.4453  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957 9240934 Asia 30.332 820.8530  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962 10267083 Asia 31.997 853.1007  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967 11537966 Asia 34.020 836.1971  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972 13079460 Asia 36.088 739.9811  
## ---   
## 1700: Zimbabwe 1987 9216418 Africa 62.351 706.1573  
## 1701: Zimbabwe 1992 10704340 Africa 60.377 693.4208  
## 1702: Zimbabwe 1997 11404948 Africa 46.809 792.4500  
## 1703: Zimbabwe 2002 11926563 Africa 39.989 672.0386  
## 1704: Zimbabwe 2007 12311143 Africa 43.487 469.7093  
## rowID  
## 1: Afghanistan 1952  
## 2: Afghanistan 1957  
## 3: Afghanistan 1962  
## 4: Afghanistan 1967  
## 5: Afghanistan 1972  
## ---   
## 1700: Zimbabwe 1987  
## 1701: Zimbabwe 1992  
## 1702: Zimbabwe 1997  
## 1703: Zimbabwe 2002  
## 1704: Zimbabwe 2007

setkey(gapminderFiveYearData, rowID)  
tables()

## NAME NROW NCOL MB  
## [1,] gapminderFiveYearData 1,704 7 1  
## [2,] gapminderFiveYearDataCrop 1,000 6 1  
## [3,] gapminderlarge 1,656,288 11 294  
## [4,] gapminderlarger 6,625,152 13 1,248  
## COLS   
## [1,] country,year,pop,continent,lifeExp,gdpPercap,rowID   
## [2,] place,time,people,big place,life,money   
## [3,] V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,country,year,pop,continent,lifeExp,gdpPercap   
## [4,] V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,V1,country,year,pop,continent,lifeExp,gdpPercap  
## KEY   
## [1,] rowID  
## [2,]   
## [3,]   
## [4,]   
## Total: 1,544MB

We can search rows i for this key:

gapminderFiveYearData["New Zealand 1952",] #search row by key

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap rowID  
## 1: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.39 10556.58 New Zealand 1952

In contrast to dataframes (rownames) duplicate keys are permitted:

setkey(gapminderFiveYearData, country)  
gapminderFiveYearData["New Zealand",]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap rowID  
## 1: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.390 10556.58 New Zealand 1952  
## 2: New Zealand 1957 2229407 Oceania 70.260 12247.40 New Zealand 1957  
## 3: New Zealand 1962 2488550 Oceania 71.240 13175.68 New Zealand 1962  
## 4: New Zealand 1967 2728150 Oceania 71.520 14463.92 New Zealand 1967  
## 5: New Zealand 1972 2929100 Oceania 71.890 16046.04 New Zealand 1972  
## 6: New Zealand 1977 3164900 Oceania 72.220 16233.72 New Zealand 1977  
## 7: New Zealand 1982 3210650 Oceania 73.840 17632.41 New Zealand 1982  
## 8: New Zealand 1987 3317166 Oceania 74.320 19007.19 New Zealand 1987  
## 9: New Zealand 1992 3437674 Oceania 76.330 18363.32 New Zealand 1992  
## 10: New Zealand 1997 3676187 Oceania 77.550 21050.41 New Zealand 1997  
## 11: New Zealand 2002 3908037 Oceania 79.110 23189.80 New Zealand 2002  
## 12: New Zealand 2007 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01 New Zealand 2007

By default, alls rows are returned for each group (rather than only first for dataframe), the mult="first" or "last" can modify this:

gapminderFiveYearData["New Zealand", mult="first"]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap rowID  
## 1: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.39 10556.58 New Zealand 1952

gapminderFiveYearData["New Zealand", mult="last"]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap rowID  
## 1: New Zealand 2007 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01 New Zealand 2007

Queries in data.tables aren't just *easier* they're **faster**

gapminderFiveYearData["New Zealand", mult="first"]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap rowID  
## 1: New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.39 10556.58 New Zealand 1952

system.time(gapminderFiveYearData["New Zealand", mult="first"]) #time 0.001s

## user system elapsed   
## 0.004 0.000 0.000

gapminderFiveYearData.dataframe <- as.data.frame(gapminderFiveYearData)  
gapminderFiveYearData.dataframe[gapminderFiveYearData.dataframe$country=="New Zealand",][1,]

## country year pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap rowID  
## 1093 New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania 69.39 10556.58 New Zealand 1952

system.time(gapminderFiveYearData.dataframe[gapminderFiveYearData.dataframe$country=="New Zealand",][1,])

## user system elapsed   
## 0 0 0

Ok, that didn't seem that different. They're powerful with larger datafiles though. Compare these examples for the same operation with dataframes and datatables.

setkey(gapminderlarger, country)  
gapminderlarger["New Zealand", mult="first"]

## V1 V1.1 V1.2 V1.3 V1.4 V1.5 V1.6 country year pop continent  
## 1: 1093 1093 1093 1093 1093 1093 1093 New Zealand 1952 1994794 Oceania  
## lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: 69.39 10556.58

system.time(gapminderlarger["New Zealand", mult="first"])

## user system elapsed   
## 0.000 0.000 0.001

gapminderlarger.dataframe <- as.data.frame(gapminderlarger)  
gapminderlarger.dataframe[gapminderlarger.dataframe$country=="New Zealand",][1,]

## V1 V1 V1 V1 V1 V1 V1 country year pop  
## 4245697 1093 1093 1093 1093 1093 1093 1093 New Zealand 1952 1994794  
## continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 4245697 Oceania 69.39 10556.58

system.time(gapminderlarger.dataframe[gapminderlarger.dataframe$country=="New Zealand",][1,])

## user system elapsed   
## 0.316 0.048 0.364

Here's an example with multiple keys:

setkey(gapminderlarger, country, year)  
gapminderlarger[list("New Zealand", 2007)]

## V1 V1.1 V1.2 V1.3 V1.4 V1.5 V1.6 country year  
## 1: 1104 1104 1104 1104 1104 1104 1104 New Zealand 2007  
## 2: 2808 2808 2808 2808 2808 2808 2808 New Zealand 2007  
## 3: 4512 4512 4512 4512 4512 4512 4512 New Zealand 2007  
## 4: 6216 6216 6216 6216 6216 6216 6216 New Zealand 2007  
## 5: 7920 7920 7920 7920 7920 7920 7920 New Zealand 2007  
## ---   
## 3884: 6617736 3305160 1648872 820728 820728 84600 2808 New Zealand 2007  
## 3885: 6619440 3306864 1650576 822432 822432 86304 4512 New Zealand 2007  
## 3886: 6621144 3308568 1652280 824136 824136 88008 6216 New Zealand 2007  
## 3887: 6622848 3310272 1653984 825840 825840 89712 7920 New Zealand 2007  
## 3888: 6624552 3311976 1655688 827544 827544 91416 9624 New Zealand 2007  
## pop continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 1: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 2: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 3: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 4: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 5: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## ---   
## 3884: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 3885: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 3886: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 3887: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 3888: 4115771 Oceania 80.204 25185.01

system.time(gapminderlarger[list("New Zealand", 2007)])

## user system elapsed   
## 0.004 0.000 0.001

head(gapminderlarger.dataframe[gapminderlarger.dataframe$country=="New Zealand" & gapminderlarger.dataframe$year=="2007",])

## V1 V1 V1 V1 V1 V1 V1 country year pop  
## 4245708 1104 1104 1104 1104 1104 1104 1104 New Zealand 2007 4115771  
## 4245720 2808 2808 2808 2808 2808 2808 2808 New Zealand 2007 4115771  
## 4245732 4512 4512 4512 4512 4512 4512 4512 New Zealand 2007 4115771  
## 4245744 6216 6216 6216 6216 6216 6216 6216 New Zealand 2007 4115771  
## 4245756 7920 7920 7920 7920 7920 7920 7920 New Zealand 2007 4115771  
## 4245768 9624 9624 9624 9624 9624 9624 9624 New Zealand 2007 4115771  
## continent lifeExp gdpPercap  
## 4245708 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 4245720 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 4245732 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 4245744 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 4245756 Oceania 80.204 25185.01  
## 4245768 Oceania 80.204 25185.01

system.time(gapminderlarger.dataframe[gapminderlarger.dataframe$country=="New Zealand" & gapminderlarger.dataframe$year=="2007",])

## user system elapsed   
## 1.896 0.064 1.964

by is faster than a simliar operation on dataframes too:

gapminderlarger[,sum(gdpPercap), year]

## year V1  
## 1: 1952 2056710004  
## 2: 1957 2373686150  
## 3: 1962 2609102091  
## 4: 1967 3027502913  
## 5: 1972 3737735642  
## 6: 1977 4037569928  
## 7: 1982 4151155538  
## 8: 1987 4362066449  
## 9: 1992 4504335130  
## 10: 1997 5018649457  
## 11: 2002 5475604411  
## 12: 2007 6448520931

system.time(gapminderlarger[,sum(gdpPercap), year])

## user system elapsed   
## 0.072 0.000 0.072

tapply(gapminderlarger.dataframe$gdpPercap,gapminderlarger.dataframe$year,sum)

## 1952 1957 1962 1967 1972 1977   
## 2056710004 2373686150 2609102091 3027502913 3737735642 4037569928   
## 1982 1987 1992 1997 2002 2007   
## 4151155538 4362066449 4504335130 5018649457 5475604411 6448520931

system.time(tapply(gapminderlarger.dataframe$gdpPercap,gapminderlarger.dataframe$year,sum))

## user system elapsed   
## 0.452 0.044 0.494