Week 12 Walkthrough

A crash course on the grammar of graphics

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Wait, what's that?

An author? These walkthroughs have *authors*?

That's right! These walkthroughs are indeed not AI-generated... to my knowledge, anyways. While I can't capture the same essence created by our lovely mystery man James, I can certainly try!

Just kidding. My imitation would be poor. Before we begin, here's a brief list of things that'll be covered in this walkthrough:

Learning Objectives:

- learn what the heck gg stands for in ggplot (and how it works)
- learn common one- and two-variable plots, including but not limited to the following: bar graphs, box plots, histograms, scatterplots
- customize plots: axis labels, titles, change color of plots
- this walkthrough will *not* be covering faceting or legends. While legends are mentioned, there won't be an explicit example of customizing a legend. Without further ado...

ggplot!

The "gg" in ggplot stands for "Grammar of Graphics". In the same way that grammar defines the regular structures and composition of a language, grammar of graphics outlines a framework to structure statistical graphics!

The idea of ggplot is that instead of being limited to a predefined set of charts and plots, you can plot just about anything! Much like how a painter starts with a canvas, then paints layers on top of one another to produce something beautiful; ggplot works by stacking layers on top of a canvas. We use + to accomplish this.

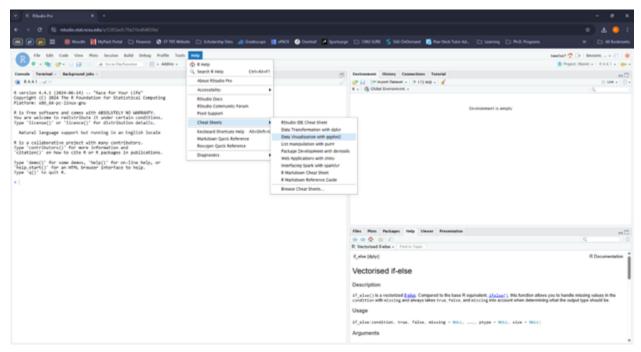
The plus operator '+' works exactly the same as our handy dandy pipe operator %>%. There's also the native pipe operator |> that I prefer to use, but they're exactly the same, I promise. With ggplot, though, we use +

The layers are as follows:

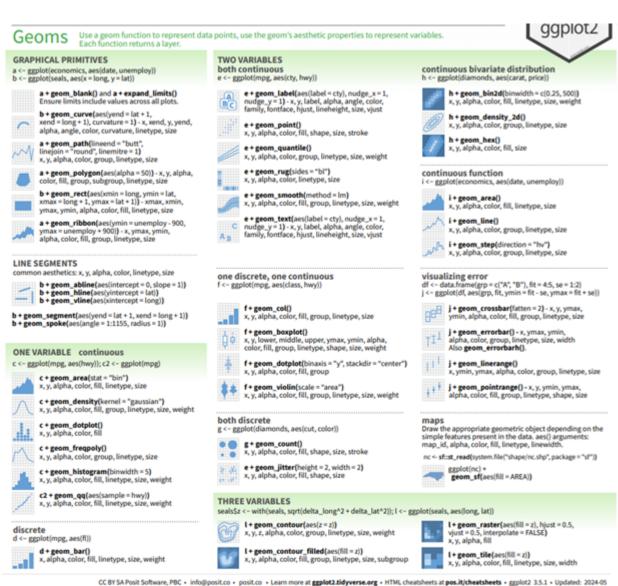
- Data: Every plot needs data! ggplot likes *tidy* data, which is usually just in the form of a data frame. We create this layer, this *canvas*, with the ggplot() function. This stores the data to be used later in other parts! Can't paint without a canvas!
 - (I mean, you could paint on the walls or something, although *technically* the wall would be the canvas then, and you'd be down *a lot* of money when you're inevitably fined.)
- Mapping: the next layer is called the mapping, but I prefer the fancy term **aesthetics**. This is short for "aesthetic attributes", which works as a dictionary to translate the data into the graphics system that creates our output!
 - This is where the customization *really* starts to take shape. If we wanted to create one-variable plots, we'd only specify, well, *one* variable!
- Layers: the heart of any graphic is the layers. This takes the mapped data and represents it as something we can interpret. You can think of the **mapping** as the specific aspects of the data we want to select: the variable(s) we want to look at, if we want to color them (perhaps by another variable!), things like that. Layers have three parts:
 - 1. **geometry** geom_(): this determines how the data is displayed. This includes points (e.g., dotplots, scatterplots), lines (e.g., lineplots, density plots, violin plots, or contour plots) or rectangles (e.g., histograms, barplots bar graphs) (call them what you want)
 - 2. statistical transformation stat_(): inside of ggplot, we can create new variables to plot the data we want to look at. Counts and frequencies are one such examples that we would use in bar graphs and histograms.
 - 3. **position**: if our plot has a lot going on, we can adjust the *position* of things on our canvas. This would include things like jittering, stacking, or dodging.

If this is *really* confusing, well, that's because it is, at first. If only there were a one-stop shop with all this information organized in a neatly manner that could be accessed whenever needed...

Fortunately for us, there is! There is a ggplot2 cheat sheet if you go to $Help \longrightarrow Cheat$ Sheets $\longrightarrow Data$ visualization with ggplot2:



It is rather quite lengthy, so I just want to highlight one part: the geoms!



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Figure 1: Geometry of ggplot2

Example time!

We're going to be using the iris dataset for the first part of this walkthrough, which is built-in to R, and so we **don't** need to call library on it. What I will do, though, is save it into its own object so that it's in our global environment:

```
iris <- datasets::iris
```

I used datasets explicitly here to show you all where it's coming from, but datasets is one of the many packages loaded in whenever you open RStudio.

One Variable Visualizations, Continuous

We're first going to focus on visualizing one variable. Some things we might be interested in are the *distribution* or *shape* of the variable, or how often some values occur more than others. These are often called **graphical summaries** because we're producing graphs!

The graphs at our disposal depend on what *type* of variable we're working with. If we are interested in a *continuous* or *numeric* variable, then some common plots include:

- density plot: a *density plot* attempts to plot the density function of the data. Sorry for the word vomit. It is a smooth line that attempts to capture the relative shape and spread of the data. It's often used in conjunction with...
- **histogram:** ... the histogram! One plot you can't leave home without. A histogram partitions (separates into nonoverlapping groups) the numeric data into groups or bins, then plots the relative frequency of data values in those groups. It's sorta like a bar graph, but for numeric variables. We can do a lot with histograms.

There are two ways to apply ggplot to data. Let's check them out. First, let's check out the ggplot book from our bookshelf of packages by using library:

```
library(ggplot2)
```

If we don't want to save our "canvas" (our ggplot) object, we can use the pipe operator directly. I illustrate using a histogram:

```
iris |> ggplot(aes(x = Sepal.Length)) |> geom_histogram()
```

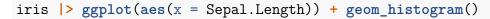
```
## Error in `geom_histogram()`:
## ! `mapping` must be created by `aes()`.
## i Did you use `%>%` or `|>` instead of `+`?
```

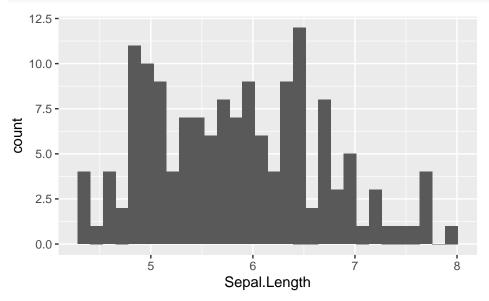
This is what I referred to earlier: ggplot's pipe operator is +, not %>%, and R recognizes this, and even tells us! I love informative errors

As for the rest of the code, I would read it like this:

What's this? An error?

Take the 'iris' dataset and then use it as a canvas or base for our graph, with 'Sepal.Length' on the x-axis. Then create a histogram using as many bins as you see fit.



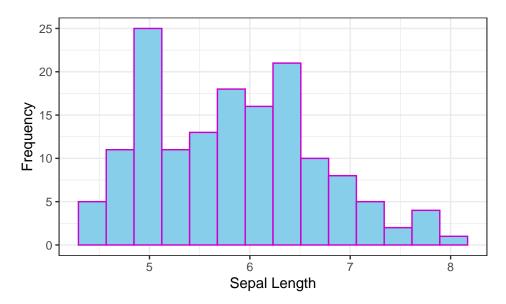


Hooray! We have a histogram! But it's a bit problematic:

- there's far too any bins. Some of them are empty! That's because the default is 30 bins. We can change this with the bins = argument.
- the background *sucks*, and our axes don't have labels. We can change the axes with the labs() statement, and change the background with theme_ (there are a few).
- I'm not sure about you, but I personally am not a fan of the dark gray histogram color. We can change this with the fill = option, and the we can actually change the outline with color = as well!

Additionally, we can save our "canvas" to an R object we can play with:

```
a <- ggplot(data = iris, mapping = aes(x = Sepal.Length))
a + geom_histogram(bins = 14, fill = "skyblue", color = "magenta3") +
   labs(x = "Sepal Length", y = "Frequency") + theme_bw()</pre>
```



For the first line, instead of iris |> ggplot(...), we threw iris into ggplot! I stated the data = and mapping = aes(...) explicitly for the sake of demonstration. Whether you do ggplot(iris, aes()) or iris |> ggplot(aes()), they will work exactly the same.

Then we assigned our ggplot object to a new variable a, which is just a placeholder, essentially. Then, much like the chaining with dplyr, we use + to add new layers! You might notice theme_bw(); this stands for "theme black and white". There are a few others we'll play with—use your favorite (as long as it's not the ggplot default).

As mentioned, we used fill and color arguments to change the color of the bars on our histogram:

```
geom_histogram(bins = 14, fill = "skyblue", color = "magenta3")
```

fill colors the *inside* of the histograms, while color actually colors the *border* of the histograms. This can be confusing, as with other visualizations, color, well, colors our plots!

You mentioned qeom_density, and we haven't even used it yet! What the heck, Kris?

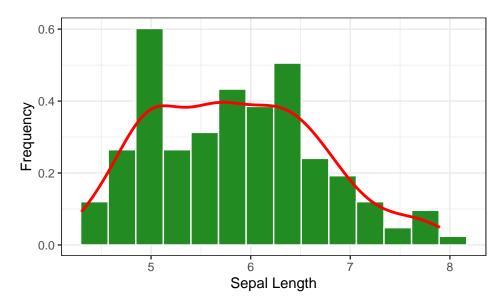
You're right! I did say density plots are often used in conjunction with histograms. Let's see it in action:

Since we already defined a as our ggplot object:

```
class(a)
```

```
## [1] "gg" "ggplot"
```

We don't have to recreate it every time—we can just use it.



A few things:

• We changed the geom_histogram() to now include and aes() argument where we specify what we want to be on the y-axis:

- This is an example of a **statistical transformation** we talked about earlier. Instead of **stat_density()**, we wrote **stat(density)** inside of our mapping.
- Specifically, aes(y = stat(density)) changes the y-axis from the *count* (the quantity) to the *relative frequency* that the category appears. As a result, when we call geom_density(color = "red", size = 1), the curve will be plotted on a scale appropriate to the histogram. You can remove aes(y = stat(density)), keep the rest of the code the same, and see what happens! It's not a pretty sight.

One Variable Visualizations, Discrete

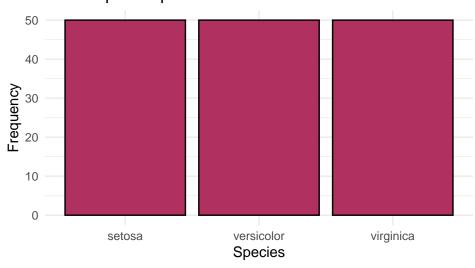
Next, we're going to make a bar graph! That is the only useful one variable discrete visualization. By default, <code>geom_bar</code> produces the count for each level of our categorical variable. Unfortunately, for this particular dataset, this isn't super useful, since no <code>Species</code> appears more than the others:

```
##
## setosa versicolor virginica
## 50 50 50
```

That won't stop us though! It just means if we want to summarize Species graphically, we'll probably have to do so in conjunction with another variable.

```
ggplot(iris, aes(x = Species)) +
  geom_bar(fill = "maroon", color = "black") +
  labs(x = "Species", y = "Frequency", title = "Bar Graph of Species") +
  theme_minimal()
```

Bar Graph of Species



As alluded to, this is pretty much useless. But it sure looks cool! One thing I want to point out is just like the histograms, we used fill and color arguments to change the color of the bars

Two Variable Visualizations: One Discrete, One Continuous

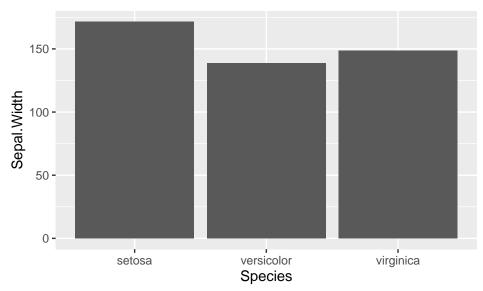
The purpose of two variable visualizations is to investigate things about one variable relative to another. When one of the variables is discrete or categorical, we can investigate at the continuous variable at each level of the categorical variable. This is a graphical analog to the combination of group_by() %>% summarise() we utilize in order to get summary statistics for each level of a categorical variable. In this case, we have two main layers at our disposal:

- geom_col(): This computes the count of the continuous variable at each level of the discrete variable and plots it. This is our common bar graph or bar plot. The count (total) is the default action—we could report a different summary statistic!
- geom_boxplot(): This produces a boxplot, which reports the minimum, first quartile, median, third quartile, and maximum values (aka the "five number summary": min, Q1, median, Q3, max). This is extremely useful for visualizing the shape or distribution of a (numeric) variable at each level of our discrete variable.

But first, the bar graph!

We can look at the values of Sepal.Width for each Species. Note that I can't use a that we created earlier, since its aesthetics, its canvas, is only for Sepal.Length.



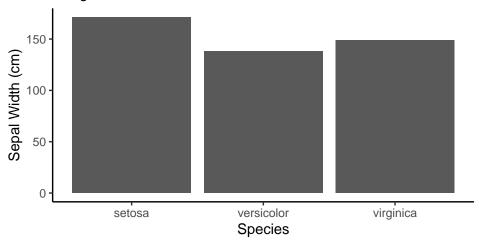


Here we have plotted Species on the x-axis, and Sepal.Width on the y-axis. It's pretty clear that the virginica species (*Iris virginica*) has the greatest Sepal Width. followed by *Iris versicolor*, then lastly by *Iris setosa*. That said, Just like our first histogram, this bar graph is ugly, but it works! Let's add some *flair*, much like how we did before:

```
iris |> ggplot(aes(x = Species, y = Sepal.Width)) +
  geom_col() + labs(
    y = "Sepal Width (cm)",
    x = "Species",
    title = "Sepal Width by Species",
    subtitle = "using the iris dataset"
  ) + theme_classic()
```

Sepal Width by Species

using the iris dataset



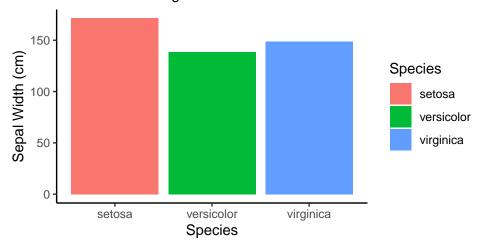
Now:

- theme_classic() just makes the background blank. I prefer the grid lines, that other themes have, though!
- We set out axis labels and titles. Note that the subtitle = argument adds a subtitle!

I don't know about you, but I *hate* it seeing the titles left-aligned. I'd rather they be in the center! Let's make that happen! Also, we're going to color the bar graphs, each according to their species:

```
iris |> ggplot(aes(x = Species, y = Sepal.Width, fill = Species)) +
  geom_col() + labs(
    y = "Sepal Width (cm)",
    x = "Species",
    title = "Sepal Width by Species",
    subtitle = "using the iris dataset"
) + theme_classic() +
  theme(plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5),
        plot.subtitle = element_text(hjust = 0.5))
```

Sepal Width by Species using the iris dataset



```
theme(plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5),
    plot.subtitle = element_text(hjust = 0.5))
```

• These lines allow us to center the title with hjust (horizontal adjustment). There's far, far more customizations you can make than just this—I encourage you to run help(theme) or type?theme in your R console to learn more!

```
ggplot(aes(x = Species, y = Sepal.Width, fill = Species))
```

• using fill = Species colors the bar by the corresponding species. We can change the position of the legend if we want! This is found in theme() as well.

If I was describing what I made to a friend, I'd say, "I was interested in seeing if the Sepal Width of iris flowers differed by species, so I made a bar graph where I plotted the total Sepal Width for each species."

(This is one aspect of *exploratory data analysis*, or EDA, where we investigate the data, looking for patterns or trends. This allows us to gain an understanding of the data in order to formulate statistical questions of interest. If you've taken ST 312, 350, 370, or 372, you'll see this is a question we could answer using ANOVA!)

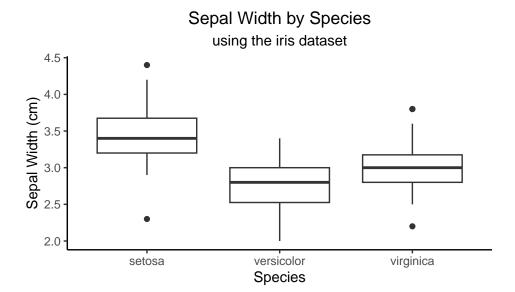
As mentioned, bar graphs, by default, sum the values of the categories to produce the bars. That is, if we wanted to find the number at which those above bars stopped, we could run:

```
iris |>
  dplyr::group_by(Species) |>
  dplyr::summarise(total petal length = sum(Sepal.Width))
## # A tibble: 3 x 2
                total_petal_length
##
     Species
##
     <fct>
                              <dbl>
## 1 setosa
                               171.
## 2 versicolor
                               138.
                               149.
## 3 virginica
```

You'll notice I specified dplyr directly; that's because I never actually loaded dplyr with library()!

We have no idea what the distribution of the variable of interest actually looks like! What is the most common value? How spread out is the data? Are there any outliers? In order to get this, we can use a **boxplot**:

```
iris |> ggplot(aes(x = Species, y = Sepal.Width)) +
  geom_boxplot() + labs(
    y = "Sepal Width (cm)",
    x = "Species",
    title = "Sepal Width by Species",
    subtitle = "using the iris dataset"
) + theme_classic() +
  theme(plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5),
        plot.subtitle = element_text(hjust = 0.5))
```

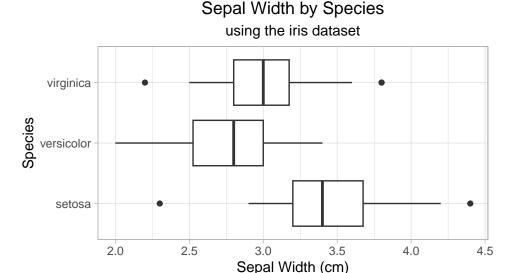


This code looks *eerily similar* to the bar graph code; I just took off the fill = Species option from the aes() argument inside of the ggplot statement. Also, geom_col() became geom_boxplot().

The bold, horizontal bar in the middle of the box is the median, while the two boxes on either side of the median represent the quarter (25%) of the data that lies below and above the median, respectively. The whiskers, or the lines jetting out from the boxes, represent the other 25% of data that lie below the first and third quartiles, respectively. This allows us to make statements about the shape of the data, letting us talk about symmetry, skewness, or outliers (the dots).

Alternatively can swap the axes, and it might read a bit better (or worse!):

```
iris |> ggplot(aes(y = Species, x = Sepal.Width)) +
  geom_boxplot() + labs(
    x = "Sepal Width (cm)",
    y = "Species",
    title = "Sepal Width by Species",
    subtitle = "using the iris dataset"
) + theme_light() +
  theme(plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5),
        plot.subtitle = element_text(hjust = 0.5))
```



Personally, I like this better, but that will depend on the number of categories in your categorical variable, and the spread of your data!

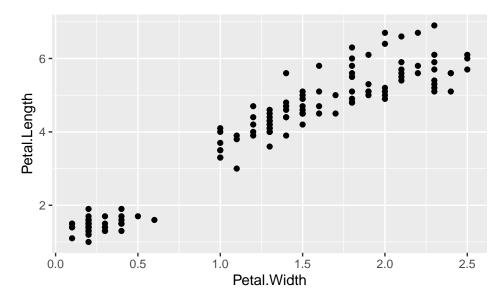
Two Variable Visualizations, Both Continuous

You might be wondering what happened to "two variable visualizations, both discrete"... for that, I refer you to the cheat sheet. We don't use it *super often*, but they are useful!

For the two variable case when they're both continuous, the main layer we'll use is $geom_point()$. This is for creating scatterplots. We'll often use this alongside $geom_smooth()$ to plot our regression line over the points. Without going into too much detail, this is effectively plotting y = mx + b from your grade-school math days on top of plotting and x and y against each other.

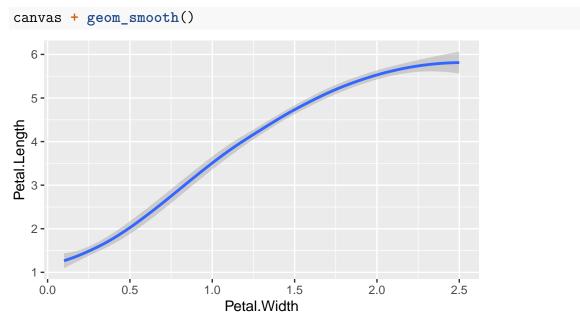
I don't know about you, but I know *very little* about flowers. That said, I *feel* like petal width and petal length should be related. Let's see if this is true!

```
canvas <- ggplot(iris, aes(y = Petal.Length, x = Petal.Width))
canvas + geom_point()</pre>
```



We see there is a **strong**, **positive linear relationship** between petal length and petal width (remember that phrase! It'll show up again! Just not in this class). Not sure what that gap is about, though.

If we used geom_smooth() without geom_point(), the points will go away, and we'll just have the line:

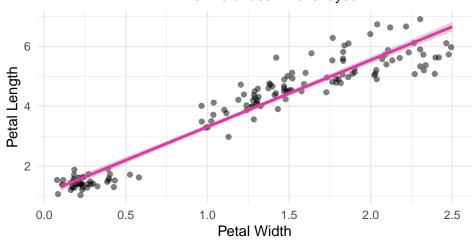


Boring! Let's put them together! (Also, I don't know about you, but I'm feeling 22 I don't like all those points vertically stacked on top of each other. Let's fix that too)

```
canvas + geom_point(position = "jitter", alpha = 0.5) +
  geom_smooth(method = "lm", color = "maroon2") +
  labs(
    x = "Petal Width", y = "Petal Length",
    title = "Petal Length vs. Petal Width",
```

```
subtitle = "with the line of best fit overlayed"
) + theme_minimal() + theme(
  plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5),
  plot.subtitle = element_text(hjust = 0.5)
)
```

Petal Length vs. Petal Width with the line of best fit overlayed



I know, I know. I just threw a lot into that code chunk; Let's go through it line-by-line:

• First, let's recall our canvas object, which if you recall:

```
canvas <- ggplot(iris, aes(y = Petal.Length, x = Petal.Width))</pre>
```

• This creates an object called canvas, which is blank plot with petal length on the y-axis and petal width on the x-axis.

```
canvas + geom_point(position = "jitter", alpha = 0.5) +
```

- geom_point() creates a scatterplot of petal length and petal width. That is, this line creates a layer that puts the actual dots on the background.
- The position = "jitter" argument is a position argument that moves the points so that they're not literally right on top of each other. This is purely a visual thing—it doesn't change the values themselves. We could also use geom_jitter() instead of geom_point(position = "jitter") as a shorthand.
- alpha controls the shading of the points. The default is alpha = 1, so alpha = 0.5 makes the points about half as dark as they normally are. This, together with the position = "jitter", makes it so that we can actually see our points!

```
geom_smooth(method = "lm", color = "maroon2") +
```

• geom_smooth() puts the line on top of the points. Order matters! If geom_smooth came before geom point, then the points would be on top of the line

- method = "lm" specifies the method to fit the line. I won't go into too much
 detail about it here, except that lm produces a straight line, and other methods
 produce curved lines! There are benefits and drawbacks to both.
- The gray outline you see is called the *standard error bands*, which is a fancy name for the confidence interval for the line of best fit.

```
labs(
    x = "Petal Width", y = "Petal Length",
    title = "Petal Length vs. Petal Width",
    subtitle = "with the line of best fit overlayed"
) +
```

• As we've seen before, labs() creates custom labels for our x-axis, y-axis, title, and subtitle.

```
theme_minimal() + theme(
   plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5),
   plot.subtitle = element_text(hjust = 0.5)
)
```

- theme_minimal() is my favorite theme :D
- the plot.title and plot.subtitle allow us to center our title and subtitle like we did earlier.

And, scene! That's all there is for the Week 12 Walkthrough. See you in class and/or office hours!