

Simple example: suppose you're trying to figure out the wage effect of being married, being left-handed, and being married and left-handed. You would want to run the following model:

$$w_i = \alpha + \beta_1 D_i^1 + \beta_2 D_i^2 + \beta_3 D_i^1 \times D_i^2 + \varepsilon_i$$

Where  $w_i$  is your wage,  $D_i^1 = 1$  if the person is married, and  $D_i^2 = 1$  if the person is left-handed. The easiest way to think about the interpretation of your model is by considering what happens to the model about when you set the dummy variables to 1 or 0.

For example, suppose you wanted to get the average wage for un-married, right-handed people. This is the omitted category because  $D_i^1 = D_i^2 = 0$ . Plugging those two into our model gives that  $w_i = \alpha$ . So the average wage is just  $\alpha$ .

Next suppose you were interested in the average wage for married ( $D_i^1 = 1$ ), right-handed people ( $D_i^2 = 0$ ). Now we get that  $w_i = \alpha + \beta_1$ . Similarly, the average wage for unmarried ( $D_i^1 = 0$ ), left-handed ( $D_i^2 = 1$ ) people is  $w_i = \alpha + \beta_2$ .

Finally the average wage for married ( $D_i^1 = 1$ ), left-handed ( $D_i^2 = 1$ ) people is just the sum of all three:  $w_i = \alpha + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3$ .

In table form, this can be summarized as:

Description	$D_i^1$	$D_i^2$	Average wage
Un-married, right-handed	0	0	$\alpha$
Married, right-handed	1	0	$\alpha + \beta_1$
Unmarried, left-handed	0	1	$\alpha + \beta_2$
Married, left-handed	1	1	$\alpha + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3$

### Interpretation

But what about interpreting the coefficients  $\alpha$  and  $\beta_j$  themselves? Following the discussion above, the following is hopefully logical:

- $\alpha$ : The average wage for the omitted category (unmarried, right-handed)
- $\beta_1$ : The difference in average wage for married vs. people who are not
- $\beta_2$ : The difference in average wage for left-handed vs. people who are not
- $\beta_3$ : The difference in average wage for married AND left-handed people vs. people who are not

The last one is the head-scratcher. The idea of the coefficients is that they're the effect of "turning on" the variable they're attached to. That doesn't have a lot of real-world meaning in some context — it is difficult to "turn on" being left handed — but it might be the easiest way to think about it.