

Bar Charts in ggplot2

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1 Background

While ggplot2, and the ideas of an underlying “grammar of graphics”, make some kinds of graphing easier, ggplot2 can make other types of graphing more difficult.

One often tricky type of graph is the bar chart. I have come to think that part of the difficulty with thinking about bar charts in ggplot2 is that sometimes **three very different types of bar charts look similar.**

2 Introduction

Many bar charts look **something like** the bar chart below.

However, there are actually three slightly separate underlying “grammars of graphics” that might underlie a bar chart:

1. Bar charts where the height of the bars is the **number of observations** in each category.
2. Bar charts where the height of the bars is the **average value of the y variable** for that category.
3. Bar charts where the height of the bars is the **actual value of the y variable** for that **individual observation**.

Let’s look at each situation in turn, since each situation demands a slightly different syntax.

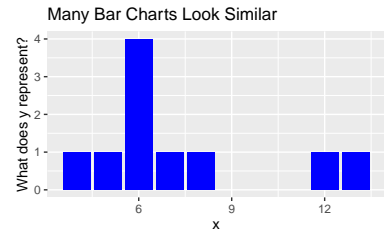
3 Our Data

x	y
1	10
2	5
2	9
3	8
3	9
3	10

4 Bar charts where the height of the bars is the number of observations in each category.

```
library(ggplot2)

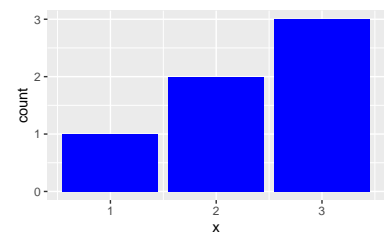
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x)) + # 'aesthetic' only includes x
  geom_bar(fill = "blue") # using bars to graph
```



4.1 Stacked Bar Chart

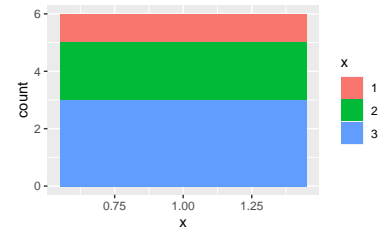
A simple change to the above *aesthetic* yields a stacked bar chart. Note that *fill* now becomes part of the *aesthetic* so that color fill differentiates the parts of the bar.

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = 1, # x is 1
          fill = factor(x))) + # fill is x as a factor
```



```
geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
scale_fill_discrete(name = "x") # modify name of legend
```

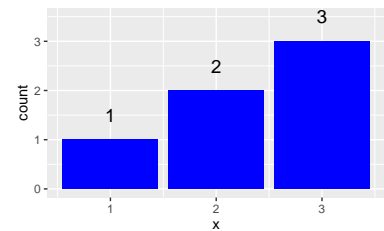
We then return to an unstacked bar chart to consider the syntax for adding labels.



4.2 Add Labels

Adding labels requires adding an extra geom, `geom_text`. We have to add a new, non-intuitive aesthetic to `geom_text` to tell it where the labels are located, and that they represent the count of observations in each category.

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x)) + # 'aesthetic' only includes x
  geom_bar(fill = "blue") + # using bars to graph
  geom_text(stat = "count",
           aes(label = ..count.., # text of the label
              y = ..count.. + .5), # location of the label
           size = 5) # size of the label
```

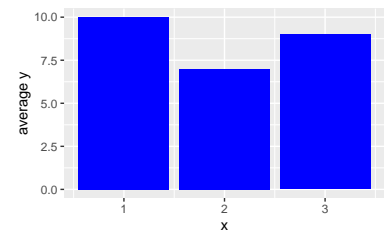


5 Bar charts where the height of the bars is the average value of the y variable for that category.

For this kind of bar chart, we need ask R to summarize the value of y for different categories of x. The syntax is—shall we say—not very intuitive, but does make sense.

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x, # 'aesthetic' includes x
          y = y)) + # and y
  stat_summary(fun.y = mean, # summarizing y
              geom = "bar", # with bars
              fill = "blue") +
  labs(y = "average y")
```



5.1 What About a Line Chart?

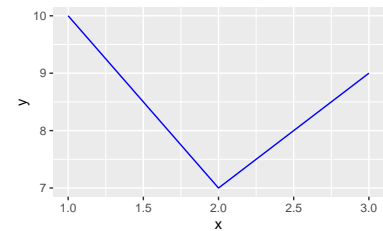
A line chart requires the addition of `group` to the `aesthetic`, and the use of a different geometry.

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x,
          y = y,
```

```

    group = 1)) + # add 'group'
  stat_summary(geom = "line", # with line
    fun.y = mean,
    color = "blue")

```



6 Bar charts where the height of the bars is the actual value of the y variable for that category.

Here is where things get complicated. We try something we've tried before, but now adding y to the aesthetic.

```

library(ggplot2)

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
  aes(x = x, # 'aesthetic' includes x
    y = y)) + # and y
  geom_bar()

```

This generates the following error message:

```
Error: stat_count() must not be used with a y aesthetic.
```

The reason that we are getting this error is that, by default, `geom_bar()` is trying to **count up** the number of x values, and in **counting up** the number of x values, `geom_bar()` does not know what to do with the y value.

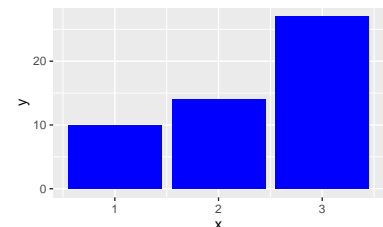
So we change this using `stat = "identity"` to indicate that y represents the *actual* height of the bars ...

```

library(ggplot2)

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
  aes(x = x, # 'aesthetic' includes x
    y = y)) + # and y
  geom_bar(stat = "identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
    fill = "blue")

```



If we go back and look at our data, we remember that we have some duplicate x's,

1, 2, 2, 3, 3 and 3

so some of the bars are actually **over-printing**.

We can see this if we make the bars semi-transparent, and outline the bars with a different color.

```

library(ggplot2)

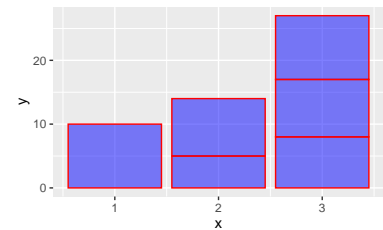
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using

```

```

aes(x = x,
    y = y)) + # 'aesthetic' only includes x
geom_bar(stat="identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
         fill = "blue", # fill
         color = "red", # outline
         alpha = .5) # transparency

```



7 Thinking Through The Issue

What is the solution? We may want to go back and look at our data to ensure that if we are using the actual y value for the height of the bars that we do **not** have duplicate values of x in our data.

Or, we may want to have the bars represent the **average value of y** rather than the **actual values of y**, as we did in one of the examples above.

8 Of Course The Problem Wouldn't Come Up If We Had Different Data, Without Those Duplicate x Observations

xREVISED	yREVISED
1	10
2	5
3	8

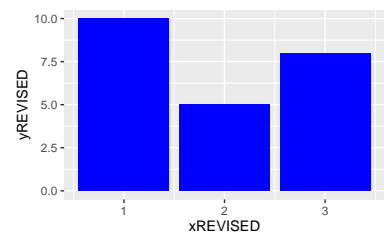
8.1 And Then A Bar Chart Is Easy

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```

ggplot(mydataREVISED, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = xREVISED, # 'aesthetic' includes x
           y = yREVISED)) + # and y
geom_bar(stat = "identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
         fill = "blue")

```



8.2 A Line Chart Is Easy Too

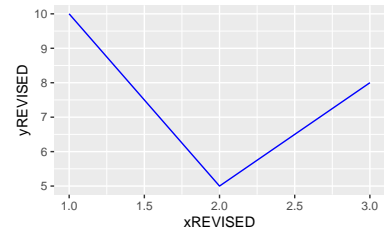
```
library(ggplot2)
```

```

ggplot(mydataREVISED, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = xREVISED, # 'aesthetic' includes x
           y = yREVISED)) + # and y

```

```
geom_line(stat = "identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
          color = "blue")
```



9 And Then There Are Pie Charts

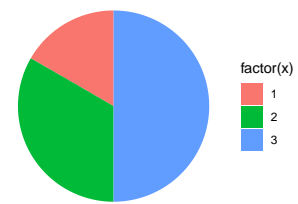
In some ways it is confusing, and in some ways it is helpful, that according to the underlying *grammar of graphics* in ggplot2, pie charts can be seen as **bar charts that use polar coordinates**. With that in mind, we take some of our earlier code, and add `coord_polar()`.

In the code below, I need to ensure that ggplot2 sees `x` as a **factor**, and to use `x` as a **fill**. **Fill** is a crucial piece of information in a pie chart.

```
library(ggplot2)

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = 1,
           fill = factor(x))) + # x is now the fill
  geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
  coord_polar(theta = "y") + # polar coordinates
  theme_void() # get rid of distracting numbers
```

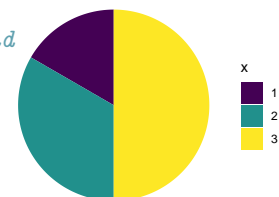
Unfortunately, pie charts are deprecated in some circles, so support for pie charts is not very strong in ggplot. It is certainly possible to create a pie chart in ggplot, but adding labels to a pie chart ends up being very very difficult.



9.1 Pie Chart With Better Colors

```
library(ggplot2)

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = 1,
           fill = factor(x))) +
  geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
  coord_polar(theta = "y") + # polar coordinates
  scale_fill_viridis_d(name = "x") + # beautiful colors; named legend
  theme_void() # get rid of distracting numbers
```



10 Bar Chart With Better Colors

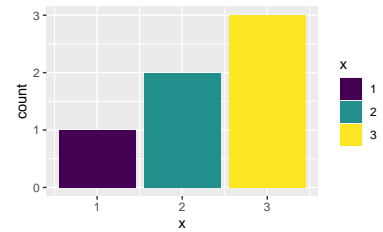
Up until now, we have had a *minimalist* vision of bar charts, where every bar is the same color, because color would not add **additional information**, over and above the information contained in the position on the `x` axis. However, for the sake of design, we may also choose to add some color to

our bar charts. `ggthemes`, `ggthemr` and `viridis` are all ways of adding color to `ggplot` graphs.

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
library(viridis) # wonderful colors
```

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
      aes(x = x, # x is on the x axis
          fill = factor(x))) + # x is also a factor for fill
  geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
  scale_fill_viridis_d(name = "x") # colors; named legend
```



11 More Examples

More examples can be found [here](#)