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M-F-E-O: postcards + distill

By Alison Hill

December 22, 2020

This is a very brief “postcard to myself” about how to use the new [postcards package](#) by Sean Kross. What problem does postcards solve?

“Create simple, beautiful personal websites and landing pages using only R Markdown.”

— postcards [README.md](#)

Postcards includes four templates:

- [Jolla](#),
- [Jolla Blue](#),
- [Trestles](#), and
- [Onofre](#).

You can see postcards::trestles in action here: <http://jtleek.com/>

And here (this is where we are headed!):

mfeo



Alison Hill

I am a classic
Bay Area. Cur
talking about

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[Distill](#) is a package that *also* helps you make simple, beautiful websites and blogs using only R Markdown. They are M-F-E-O ('made for each other': this is a "Sleepless in

Seattle” reference with sadly, a complete lack of video to support). But if you’ve seen the movie this scene may sound familiar:

Becky: So I mailed your letter.

Annie: “Dear Annie, thanks for your letter. It was great. You sound neat. We’re very excited about meeting you in New York on Valentine’s Day and seeing if we are M-F-E-O. See you soon. Sleepless in Seattle.”

Becky: M-F-E-O?

Annie: “Made for each other.”

Becky: It’s cute. It’s like a little clue. So he can’t write. Big deal. Verbal ability is a highly over-rated thing in a guy and our pathetic need for it is what gets us into so much trouble.

— *Sleepless in Seattle*, script from <https://plantyourstory.com/mfeo-its-like-a-little-clue/>

Consider this post like a little clue (I’m using it as a sandbox before updating our distill documentation for this new feature). Here is our existing signpost in the [distill docs](#). With the CRAN versions of all three packages now, you can embed a postcards page within your distill site. This means the page will come with all your distill goodies like site navigation, theme, and google-analytics support.

You can see the demo site I made alongside this post here: <https://apreshill.github.io/mfeo/> (source: <https://github.com/apreshill/mfeo>).

Pre-requisites

You’ll need the CRAN versions of three packages:

- distill (v >= 1.2) (see: <https://pkgs.rstudio.com/distill/news/index.html#distill-v1-2-cran->)
- rmarkdown (v >= 2.7)
- postcards (v >= 0.2.0)

```
install.packages(c("distill", "rmarkdown", "postcards"))
```

You can check these package versions as follows:

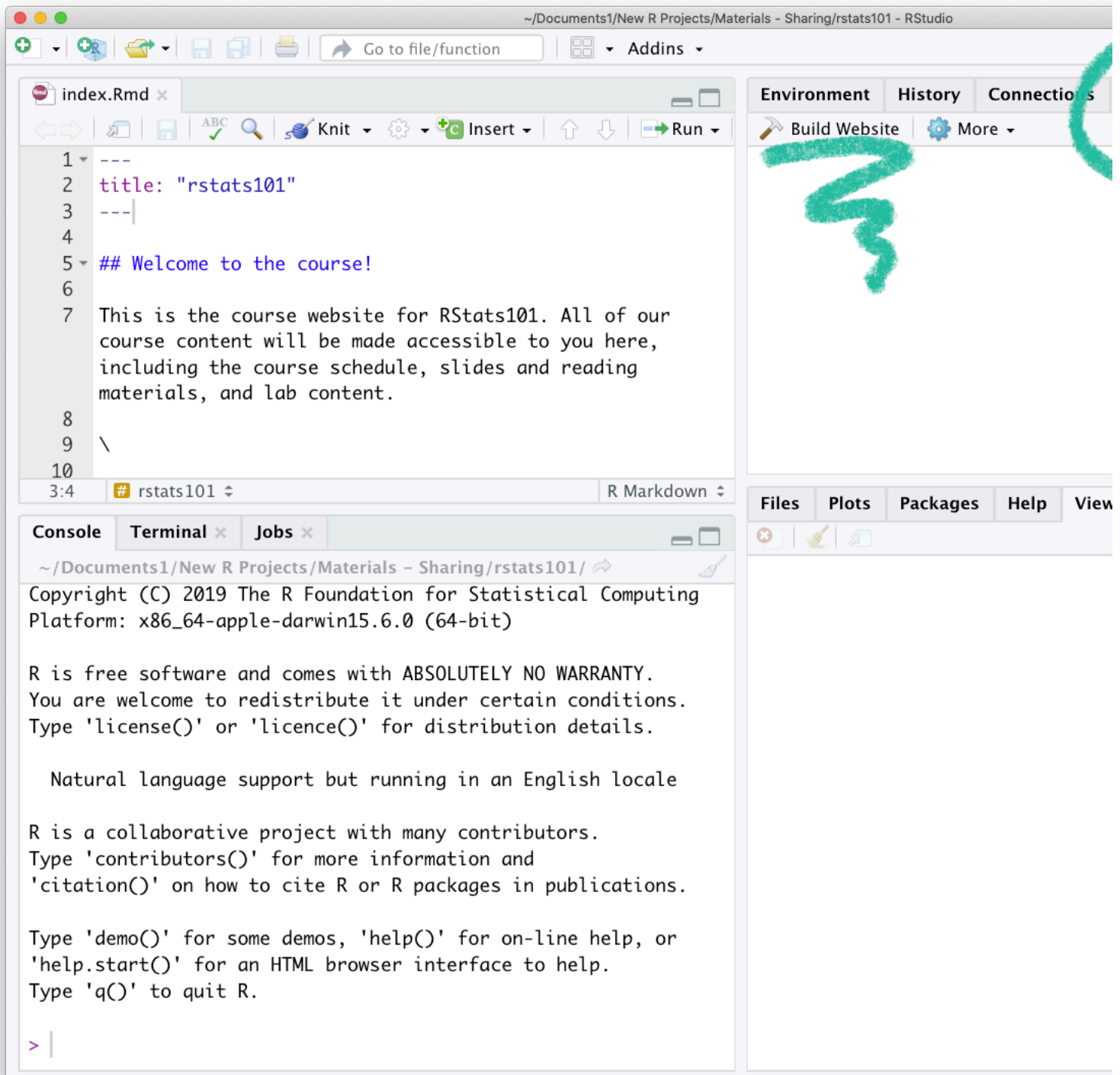
```
packageVersion("distill")
packageVersion("rmarkdown")
packageVersion("postcards")
```

Make a website

In RStudio, create a new project using *File > New Project > New Directory > New Project*. Then, inside your new empty project, use your R console to do the following:

```
library(distill)
create_website(dir = ".", title = "mfeo", gh_pages = TRUE)
```

At this point, I recommend closing RStudio completely and opening up your project again. This way you should see the “Build” tab.



The screenshot shows the RStudio IDE. The top pane displays the R Markdown file 'index.Rmd' with the following content:

```

1 ---
2 title: "rstats101"
3 ---
4
5 ## Welcome to the course!
6
7 This is the course website for RStats101. All of our
  course content will be made accessible to you here,
  including the course schedule, slides and reading
  materials, and lab content.
8
9 \
10

```

The bottom pane shows the R console output, which includes the R Foundation copyright notice and usage instructions:

```

~/Documents1/New R Projects/Materials - Sharing/rstats101/
Copyright (C) 2019 The R Foundation for Statistical Computing
Platform: x86_64-apple-darwin15.6.0 (64-bit)

R is free software and comes with ABSOLUTELY NO WARRANTY.
You are welcome to redistribute it under certain conditions.
Type 'license()' or 'licence()' for distribution details.

Natural language support but running in an English locale

R is a collaborative project with many contributors.
Type 'contributors()' for more information and
'citation()' on how to cite R or R packages in publications.

Type 'demo()' for some demos, 'help()' for on-line help, or
'help.start()' for an HTML browser interface to help.
Type 'q()' to quit R.

>

```

On the right side of the RStudio interface, there are tabs for 'Environment', 'History', and 'Connections'. The 'Environment' tab is active, showing a 'Build Website' button and a 'More' dropdown menu. A green squiggly line is drawn over the 'Build Website' button and the 'More' dropdown menu.

Now build your site! You should see the “boilerplate” website template at this point.

Add a postcard

In your R console, use the postcards package to create a new postcard:

```
create_postcard(file = "tobi.Rmd") # future name of .Rmd file
```

Alternatively, you could use `distill::create_article()` to make a new page. To make a postcard, specify the template (one of: jolla, jolla-blue, onofre,

trestles) and package = 'postcards':

```
create_article(file = "tobi",      # future name of .Rmd file
               template = "jolla",  # name of template
               package = "postcards") # package that includes the template
```

Let's add a link to our new file in the top navbar. Open up your `_site.yml` file and add:

```
name: "."
title: "mfeo"
description: |
  mfeo
output_dir: "docs"
navbar:
  right:
    - text: "Home"
      href: index.html
    - text: "About"
      href: about.html
    - text: "Tobi"      # add
      href: tobi.html   # add
output: distill::distill_article
```

Since my file is named `tobi.Rmd`, that means the rendered file will be `tobi.html`, so that is my `href` key in the `_site.yml`. If you save that file, you should see your website refresh, and look something like this!

mfeo



Tobi Burns

I am a classically trained data scientist living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Currently I work on the Oculus team at Facebook. I love talking about baseball, true crime podcasts, and causal inference.

[LinkedIn](#)[Twitter](#)[GitHub](#)[Email](#)

Add a theme

For fun, let's go ahead and add a custom distill theme while we're at it.

```
create_theme("postcards")
```

You can see copy my theme file from here: <https://github.com/apreshill/mfeo/blob/master/postcards.css>.

This should print to your R console:

```
v Created CSS file at postcards.css
o TODO: Customize it to suit your needs
o TODO: Add 'theme: postcards.css' to your site or article YAML
```

See docs at <<https://rstudio.github.io/distill/website.html#theming>>

I want a full-site theme, so I added theme: postcards.css to my _site.yml file. I followed the distill docs on theming [here](#). Re-build my website, and now I see:

mfeo



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Switch the homepage

Now you may be wishing that your postcards page was your homepage- the place where visitors first land when they visit your website. The homepage in a distill website is named `index.Rmd`, so we need to remove the current `index.Rmd` file and replace it with `tobi.Rmd`. But we cannot just rename the files...

If you open up `index.Rmd`, you should see this yaml:

```
---
title: "mfeo"
description: |
  Welcome to the website. I hope you enjoy it!
site: distill::distill_website
---
```

That `site` key is very important to keep in the `index.Rmd` file. Steps:

1. Let's start by adding `site: distill::distill_website` to the yaml of your postcards page, mine is named `tobi.Rmd`.
2. After doing that, you can delete `index.Rmd`.
3. Next, rename `tobi.Rmd` -> `index.Rmd`.
4. Finally, clean up your `_site.yml` - you can remove the link we added above to `tobi.html`.

Re-build your site and Tobi's shining face should greet you from the homepage!

Fill-in your postcard

Of course, you can add your own image file to the project root at this point, and then personalize your `index.Rmd` using the postcards template:

```
---
title: "Alison Hill"
image: "alison.jpg"
links:
  - label: LinkedIn
    url: "https://www.linkedin.com/in/alisonpresmaneshill/"
  - label: Twitter
    url: "https://twitter.com/apreshill"
  - label: GitHub
    url: "https://github.com/apreshill"
  - label: ORCID id
    url: "https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8082-1890"
site: distill::distill_website
output:
  postcards::jolla
---
```

Here is my "after":

mfeo



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Add a blog

Back in your console, we can add a blog, using distill:

```
create_post("welcome")
```

If you do this with a blog already, it just adds a single post. But if you do this without posts set up, it does some nice things for you:

1. Creates a directory called `_posts/` to hold all your future blog posts.
2. Creates a new post with a “slug” including the date and the name of the post (here, mine was “welcome”).

Your new post should open up - go ahead and knit this post. Posts in distill need to be knit intentionally, so they will never be automatically built when you rebuild your website.

We also probably want to add a listing page to list all our blog posts. Do this by adding a blank `.Rmd` file to your project root, I’ll call mine `blog.Rmd` but there is no magic to this file name:

```
file.edit("blog.Rmd")
```

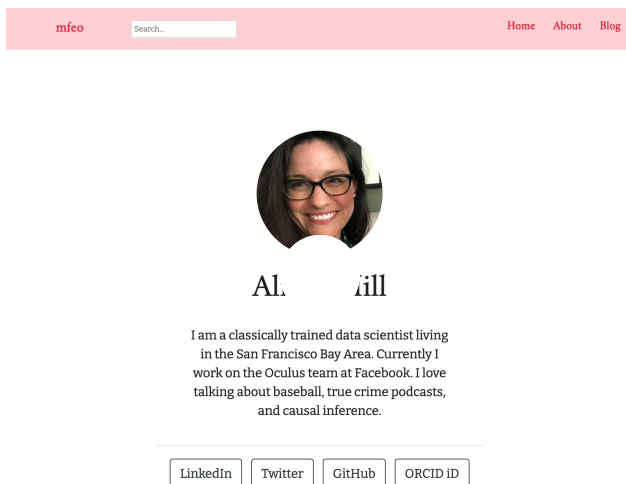
Then open up your new `blog.Rmd` and add a YAML (no content below the YAML):

```
---
title: "Blog" # any name you want here
listing: posts # do this exactly
---
```

Finally, add a link to your blog in your upper navbar so people can actually find it! Do this by editing `_site.yml` one last time (remember, since my listing `.Rmd` is named `blog.Rmd`, then the href I want to link to is `blog.html`):

```
navbar:
  right:
    - text: "Home"
      href: index.html
    - text: "About"
      href: about.html
    - text: "Blog" # add
      href: blog.html # add
```

Now, admire your final polished product!



Switch your postcard

Let’s say you decide you want to switch it up and use the `trestles` theme, instead of `jolla`. Easy. Open up your `index.Rmd` and find these lines in the YAML:

```
---
output:
  postcards::jolla
---
```

And change to:

```
---
output:
  postcards::trestles
---
```

Re-build your site!

mfeo



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Publishing

I won't be able to cover all the publishing options here, but you can read up on the options for [publishing distill websites here](#). If you want to take a site like mine that you built, I recommend GitHub Pages. You can use the `usethis` package to run:

```
usethis::use_git()  
usethis::use_github()
```

I also just learned about the new `usethis::use_github_pages()` to turn on and/or (re)configure GitHub Pages!

Then in the GitHub project, navigate over to “Settings” and *scroooooooll down* to choose:

GitHub Pages

GitHub Pages is designed to host your personal, organization, or p

Your site is ready to be published at <https://apreshill.github.io/r>

Source

Your GitHub Pages site is currently being built from the `/docs` fo

 Branch: master ▼

 `/docs` ▼

Save

Theme Chooser

Select a theme to publish your site with a Jekyll theme. [Learn m](#)

Choose a theme

For this to work, make sure your site is building to `docs/` locally, and that you are committing and pushing the `docs/` directory to GitHub.

► Details

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