

Problem Sheet 3

Questions

1. The size of a standard croquet ball is $3 \frac{5}{8}$ inches¹. The height of a croquet hoop is $3 \frac{3}{4}$ inches. If a not very good croquet-ball making machine makes croquet balls whose mean matches the standard and with standard deviation $\frac{1}{8}$ inch, what is the chance it will make a ball too large to fit through the hoop. You can write the solution in terms of the error function.

Solution: So

$$z = \frac{x - \mu}{\sqrt{2}\sigma} \quad (1)$$

so for $x_1 = 3.75$ in, we have

$$z_1 = \frac{1/8}{\sqrt{2}/8} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \quad (2)$$

Any height bigger than this will not fit, so $z_2 = \infty$ and $\text{erf}\infty = 1$ so

$$\text{Prob}(x > 3.75) = \frac{1}{2}[1 - \text{erf}(1/\sqrt{2})] \approx 0.16 \quad (3)$$

where the 0.16 is given for interest, it wasn't expected as part of the answer.

2. This will look like a long question but it is almsot all background and the question is not too bad when you actually read through it. In particle physics when a collider is being used to find a new particle like the Higgs boson or the top squark scientists don't detect the sought after particle directly since it usually decays almost straight away, instead they detect the more common particles that particle will decay into, for example, a Higgs boson can decay in to two photons and these can be detected. Roughly speaking scientists count these events. However, the whole situation is very messy and there will always be some events even if the particle doesn't exist at the energy being examined. The amount of these background events will fluctuate from experiment to experiment, typically like a Gaußian. The scientific team is allowed to claim they have discovered the particle if the number of events they measure is more than five standard deviations above what would be expected if the particle didn't exist. What is the probability of this 'discovery' happening by chance?

Solution: So we are interested in the probability of a results bigger than $\mu + 5\sigma$. Now

$$z_1 = \frac{\mu + 5\sigma - \mu}{\sqrt{2}\sigma} = \frac{5}{\sqrt{2}} \quad (4)$$

and

$$\text{Prob}(x > \mu + 5\sigma) = \frac{1}{2}[1 - \text{erf}(5/\sqrt{2})] \quad (5)$$

which is about one chance in 3.5 million.

¹Everything in croquet is measured in old timey units

Extra question

- Another useful distribution is the exponential distribution:

$$p(x) = \begin{cases} \lambda e^{-\lambda x} & x \geq 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

What is the probability $\text{Prob}(x_1 < x < x_2)$ where x_1 and x_2 are both positive.

Solution:

$$\text{Prob}(x_1 < x < x_2) = \lambda \int_{x_1}^{x_2} e^{-\lambda y} dy = e^{-\lambda y} \Big|_{x_1}^{x_2} = e^{-\lambda x_1} - e^{-\lambda x_2} \quad (6)$$