

# VARIANCE, JOINT DISTRIBUTIONS, COVARIANCE

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COMPUTER SCIENCE MENTORS 70

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## 1 Variance

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### 1.1 Introduction

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**Variance:** The variance of a random variable  $X$  is defined as

$$\text{Var}(X) = E((X - E(X))^2) = E(X^2) - E(X)^2$$

The latter version of variance is the one we usually use in computations.

The square root of  $\text{Var}(X)$  is called the standard deviation of  $X$ . It is usually denoted with the variable  $\sigma$ .

Important property of variance: for some constant  $c$ ,

$$\text{Var}(cX) = c^2 * \text{Var}(X)$$

### 1.2 Questions

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#### 1. True or False?

Assume that  $X$  is a discrete random variable. If  $\text{Var}(X) = 0$ , then  $X$  is a constant.

2. Show that  $\text{Var}(X) = E((X - \mu)^2) = E(X^2) - \mu^2$  where  $X$  is any random variable and  $\mu = E[X]$ .

3. Show that  $\text{Var}(aX + b) = a^2\text{Var}(X)$  where  $X$  is any random variable.
4. Let's consider the classic problems of flipping coins and rolling dice. Let  $X$  be a random variable for the number of coins that land on heads and  $Y$  be the value of the die roll.
  - (a) What is the expected value of  $X$  after flipping 3 coins? What is the variance of  $X$ ?
  - (b) Let  $Y$  be the sum of rolling a dice 1 time. What is the expected value of  $Y$ ?
  - (c) What is the variance of  $Y$ ?
5. You are at a party with  $n$  people where you have prepared a red solo cup labeled with their name. Before handing red cups to your friends, you pick up each cup and put a sticker on it with probability  $\frac{1}{2}$  (independently of the other cups). Then you hand back the cups according to a uniformly random permutation. Let  $X$  be the number of people who get their own cup back AND it has a sticker on it.
  - (a) Compute the expectation  $E(X)$ .
  - (b) Compute the variance  $\text{Var}(X)$

## 2 Independence, Joint Distributions

### 2.1 Introduction

**Joint Distribution:** We use a joint distribution to describe a probability distribution over multiple random variables. A joint distribution is characterized by its joint probability mass function:

$$p_{xy}(x, y) = P(X = x \cap Y = y).$$

We can recover the *marginal* distributions:

$$p_x(x) = P(X = x) = \sum_y P(X = x, Y = y) = \sum_y p_{xy}(x, y)$$

$$p_y(y) = P(Y = y) = \sum_x P(X = x, Y = y) = \sum_x p_{xy}(x, y).$$

Note that in general, we can't get the joint distribution just by knowing the marginal distributions: in order to get the joint distribution, we also have to know how the variables relate to each other. However, if two random variables are **independent**, then we know that

$$p_{xy}(x, y) = P(X = x \cap Y = y) = P(X = x)P(Y = y) = p_x(x)p_y(y).$$

We can say the following about the expectations and variances of independent variables:

$$E[XY] = E[X]E[Y]$$

$$\text{Var}(X + Y) = \text{Var}(X) + \text{Var}(Y)$$

These facts are proved in the notes.

### 2.2 Questions

1. You have a waste-disposal chute that trash is falling through. At the end of the chute, trash either falls into the right bin with probability  $3/4$ , or the left bin with probability  $1/4$ . The right bin can hold 3 pieces of trash, while the left bin can only hold 1 piece. Being the sanitary student that you are, if you notice that a bin is filled, you block off the chute so that no more trash can fall through the chute.

For this problem, let  $R$  be the pieces that fall into the right bin, and  $L$  be the number of pieces that fall into the left bin.

1. Determine the sample space (all possible outcomes of the falling trash), along with the probability of each sample point.

2. Compute the Joint Distribution of  $L$  and  $R$ . Fill in the table:

	R=0	R=1	R=2	R=3
L=0				
L=1				

3. Use the Joint Distribution to compute the Marginal Distribution of  $L$  and  $R$ . Fill out the tables.

P(L=0)	P(L=1)	P(R=0)	P(R=1)	P(R=2)	P(R=3)

4. Are  $L$  and  $R$  independent?
5. What is the total expected number of pieces of trash that will fall before you have to empty the bins?
2. Define a probability distribution over a set of events  $S$  to be *uniform* if the probability of each event in the set occurring is equal. Find a joint distribution on  $X$  and  $Y$  such that  $X$  and  $Y$  are each uniform on the set  $\{1, 2, 3, 4\}$ , but  $(X, Y)$  is not uniform on the set  $\{1, 2, 3, 4\} \times \{1, 2, 3, 4\}$ .
3. Say you're playing a game with a coin and die, where you flip the coin 3 times and roll the die once. In this game, your score is given by the number of heads that show multiplied with the die result. What is the expected value of your score? What's the variance?

### 3 Covariance, Correlation

#### 3.1 Introduction

The **covariance** of two random variables  $X$  and  $Y$  is defined as:

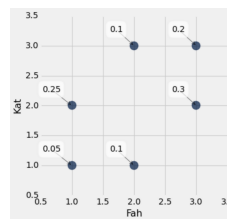
$$\text{Cov}(X, Y) := E((X - E(X)) \cdot (Y - E(Y)))$$

If  $\text{Cov}(X, Y) > 0$ ,  $X$  and  $Y$  are *positively* linearly correlated.

If  $\text{Cov}(X, Y) < 0$ ,  $X$  and  $Y$  are *negatively* linearly correlated.

#### 3.2 Questions

1. Prove that  $\text{Cov}(X, Y) = E[XY] - E[X]E[Y]$ .
2. Prove that  $\text{Cov}(X, X) = \text{Var}(X)$ .
3. Consider the following distribution with random variables Fah and Kat:



Find the covariance of Fah and Kat.

4. (a) Prove that if  $X$  and  $Y$  are independent, then  $\text{Cov}(X, Y) = 0$ .  
 (b) Prove that the converse is not necessarily true. In other words, give an example of 2 random variables whose covariance is 0 but are not independent.
5. Roll 2 dice. Let  $A$  be the number of 6's you get, and  $B$  be the number of 5's, find  $\text{Cov}(A, B)$ .