

Activity Worksheet: *R in Action* (Chapter 1)

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Before You Start...

Please ensure you have the latest version of R and RStudio installed on your machine. This is important, as some packages used in the workshop may not install correctly (or at all) if R is not up to date.

Download and install the latest version of R [here](#)

Download and install MikTeX [here](#)

Download and install RStudio [here](#)

Ref: R in Action (Section 1.2)

You must install base R before installing RStudio. In fact RStudio won't work without R installed.

Introduction to RStudio

Welcome to the *Introduction to R* class.

Throughout this lesson, we're going to teach you some of the fundamentals of the R language as well as some best practices for organizing code for scientific projects that will make your life easier.

We'll be using RStudio: a free, open source R integrated development environment. It provides a built in editor, works on all platforms (including on servers) and provides many advantages such as integration with version control and project management.

Basic layout

When you first open RStudio, you will be greeted by three panels:

- The interactive R console (entire left)
- Environment/History (tabbed in upper right)
- Files/Plots/Packages/Help/Viewer (tabbed in lower right)

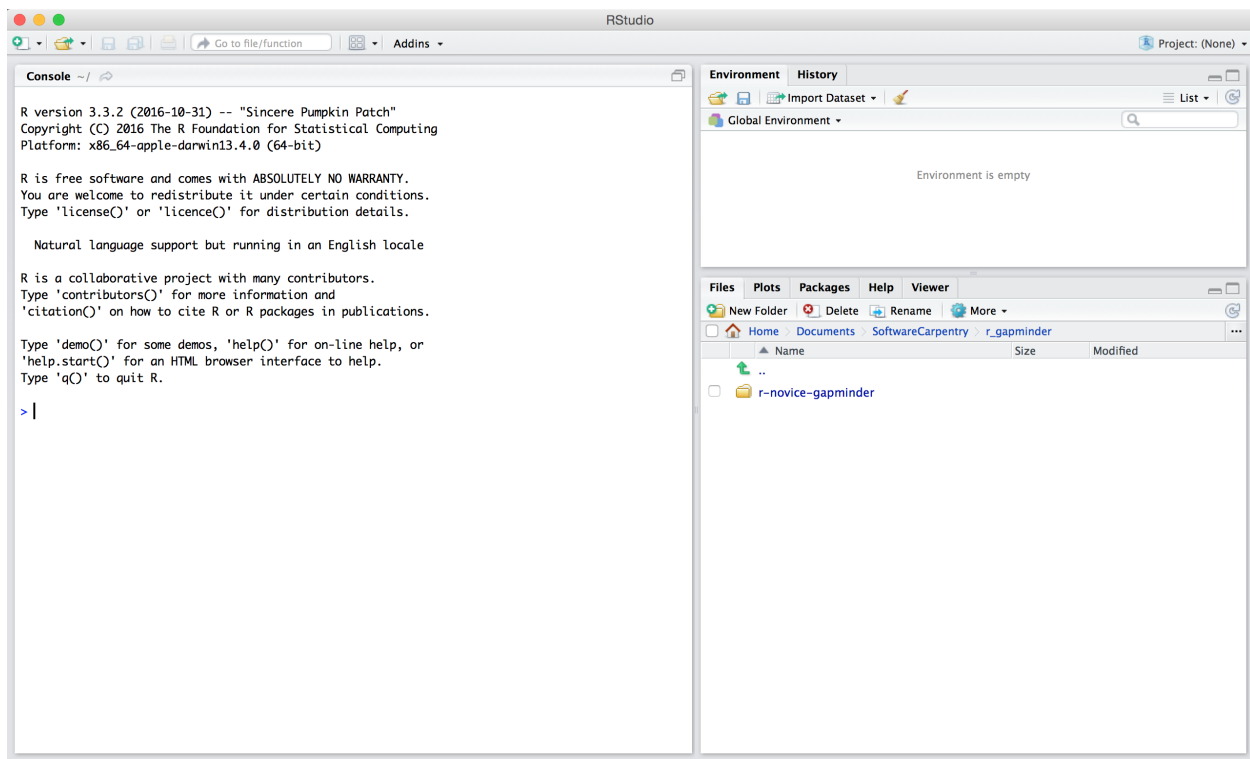


Figure 1: RStudio layout

Once you open files, such as R scripts, an editor panel will also open in the top left.

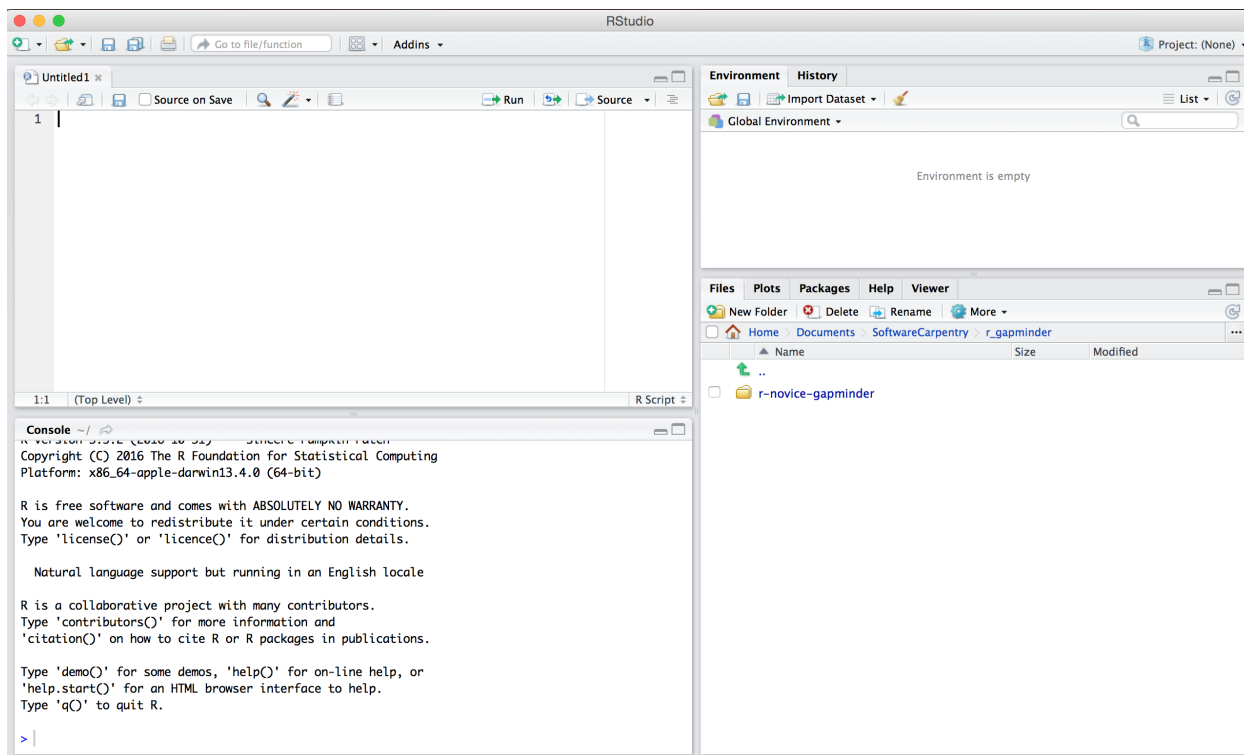


Figure 2: RStudio layout with .R file open

Work flow within RStudio

There are two main ways one can work within RStudio.

1. Test and play within the interactive R console then copy code into a .R file to run later.
 - This works well when doing small tests and initially starting off.
 - It quickly becomes laborious
2. Start writing in an .R file and use RStudio's command / short cut to push current line, selected lines or modified lines to the interactive R console.
 - This is a great way to start; all your code is saved for later
 - You will be able to run the file you create from within RStudio or using R's `source()` function.

Tip: Running segments of your code

RStudio offers you great flexibility in running code from within the editor window. There are buttons, menu choices, and keyboard shortcuts. To run the current line, you can 1. click on the **Run** button above the editor panel, or 2. select "Run Lines" from the "Code" menu, or 3. hit **Ctrl-Enter** in Windows or Linux or **Command-Enter** on OS X. (This shortcut can also be seen by hovering the mouse over the button). To run a block of code, select it and then **Run**. If you have modified a line of code within a block of code you have just run, there is no need to reselect the section and **Run**, you can use the next button along, **Re-run the previous region**. This will run the previous code block including the modifications you have made.

Introduction to R

Much of your time in R will be spent in the R interactive console. This is where you will run all of your code, and can be a useful environment to try out ideas before adding them to an R script file. This console in RStudio is the same as the one you would get if you typed in R in your command-line environment.

The first thing you will see in the R interactive session is a bunch of information, followed by a “>” and a blinking cursor. In many ways this is similar to the shell environment you learned about during the shell lessons: it operates on the same idea of a “Read, evaluate, print loop”: you type in commands, R tries to execute them, and then returns a result.

Using R as a calculator

The simplest thing you could do with R is do arithmetic:

```
1 + 100
```

```
## [1] 101
```

And R will print out the answer, with a preceding “[1]”. Don’t worry about this for now, we’ll explain that later. For now think of it as indicating output.

Like bash, if you type in an incomplete command, R will wait for you to complete it:

```
> 1 +  
+
```

Any time you hit return and the R session shows a “+” instead of a “>”, it means it’s waiting for you to complete the command. If you want to cancel a command you can simply hit “Esc” and RStudio will give you back the “>” prompt.

Tip: Cancelling commands

If you’re using R from the command line instead of from within RStudio, you need to use **Ctrl+C** instead of **Esc** to cancel the command. This applies to Mac users as well!

Cancelling a command isn’t only useful for killing incomplete commands: you can also use it to tell R to stop running code (for example if it’s taking much longer than you expect), or to get rid of the code you’re currently writing.

When using R as a calculator, the order of operations is the same as you would have learned back in school.

From highest to lowest precedence:

- Parentheses: (,)
- Exponents: ^ or **
- Divide: /
- Multiply: *
- Add: +
- Subtract: -

```
3 + 5 * 2
```

```
## [1] 13
```

Use parentheses to group operations in order to force the order of evaluation if it differs from the default, or to make clear what you intend.

```
(3 + (5 * (2 ^ 2))) # Hard to read
```

```
## [1] 23
```

```
3 + 5 * 2 ^ 2      # Clear, if you remember the rules
```

```
## [1] 23
```

```
3 + 5 * (2 ^ 2)    # If you forget some rules, this might help
```

```
## [1] 23
```

The text after each line of code is called a “comment”. Anything that follows after the hash (or octothorpe) symbol # is ignored by R when it executes code.

Really small or large numbers get a scientific notation:

```
2/10000
```

```
## [1] 2e-04
```

Which is shorthand for “multiplied by 10^{XX} ”. So 2e-4 is shorthand for $2 * 10^{(-4)}$.

You can write numbers in scientific notation too:

```
5e3 # Note the lack of minus here
```

```
## [1] 5000
```

Mathematical functions

R has many built in mathematical functions. To call a function, we simply type its name, followed by open and closing parentheses. Anything we type inside the parentheses is called the function’s arguments:

```
log10(10) # Base-10 logarithm.
```

```
## [1] 1
```

```
exp(1)    # Natural logarithm.
```

```
## [1] 2.718282
```

```
pi        # Some constants like pi are not functions.
```

```
## [1] 3.141593
```

Don’t worry about trying to remember every function in R. You can simply look them up on Google, or if you can remember the start of the function’s name, use the tab completion in RStudio.

Ref: R in Action (Section 1.3)

Kabacoff assumes that the reader already knows what a function is and how they are called. As defined by Wikipedia, a software function is “a named section of a program that performs a specific task.” By now, you should have already read the section on functions, written by Peter Dalgaard.

This is one advantage that RStudio has over R on its own, it has auto-completion abilities that allow you to more easily look up functions, their arguments, and the values that they take.

Typing a `?` before the name of a command will open the help page for that command. As well as providing a detailed description of the command and how it works, scrolling to the bottom of the help page will usually show a collection of code examples which illustrate command usage. We'll go through an example later.

Comparing things

We can also do comparison in R:

```
1 == 1 # Equality (note two equals signs, read as "is equal to")
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

```
1 != 2 # Inequality (read as "is not equal to")
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

```
1 < 2 # Less than
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

```
1 <= 1 # Less than or equal to
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

```
1 > 0 # Greater than
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

```
1 >= -9 # Greater than or equal to
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

Tip: Comparing Numbers

A word of warning about comparing numbers: you should never use `==` to compare two numbers unless they are integers (a data type which can specifically represent only whole numbers).

Computers may only represent decimal numbers with a certain degree of precision, so two numbers which look the same when printed out by R, may actually have different underlying representations and therefore be different by a small margin of error (called Machine numeric tolerance).

Instead you should use the `all.equal` function.

Further reading: <http://floating-point-gui.de/>

Variables and assignment

We can store values in variables using the assignment operator `<-`, like this:

```
x <- 1/40
```

Notice that assignment does not print a value. Instead, we stored it for later in something called a **variable**. `x` now contains the **value** 0.025:

```
x
```

```
## [1] 0.025
```

More precisely, the stored value is a *decimal approximation* of this fraction called a floating point number.

Look for the **Environment** tab in one of the panes of RStudio, and you will see that `x` and its value have appeared. Our variable `x` can be used in place of a number in any calculation that expects a number:

```
log(x)
```

```
## [1] -3.688879
```

Notice also that variables can be reassigned:

```
x <- 100
```

`x` used to contain the value 0.025 and now it has the value 100.

Assignment values can contain the variable being assigned to:

```
x <- x + 1 # Notice how RStudio updates its description of x on the top right tab
```

The right hand side of the assignment can be any valid R expression. The right hand side is *fully evaluated* before the assignment occurs.

Variable names can contain letters, numbers, underscores and periods. They cannot start with a number nor contain spaces at all. Different people use different conventions for long variable names, these include

- periods.between.words
- underscores_between_words
- camelCaseToSeparateWords

What you use is up to you, but **be consistent**.

It is also possible to use the `=` operator for assignment:

```
x = 1/40
```

But this is much less common among R users. The most important thing is to **be consistent** with the operator you use. There are occasionally places where it is less confusing to use `<=` than `=`, and it is the most common symbol used in the community. So the recommendation is to use `<=`.

Managing your environment

There are a few useful commands you can use to interact with the R session.

`ls` will list all of the variables and functions stored in the global environment (your working R session):

```
ls()
```

```
## [1] "x"
```

Tip: Hidden objects

Like in the shell, `ls` will hide any variables or functions starting with a “.” by default. To list all objects, type `ls(all.names=TRUE)` instead

Note here that we didn’t given any arguments to `ls`, but we still needed to give the parentheses to tell R to call the function.

If we type `ls` by itself, R will print out the source code for that function!

```
ls
```

```
## function (name, pos = -1L, envir = as.environment(pos), all.names = FALSE,  
##     pattern, sorted = TRUE)  
## {
```

```
##   if (!missing(name)) {
##       pos <- tryCatch(name, error = function(e) e)
##       if (inherits(pos, "error")) {
##           name <- substitute(name)
##           if (!is.character(name))
##               name <- deparse(name)
##           warning(gettextf("%s converted to character string",
##                           sQuote(name)), domain = NA)
##           pos <- name
##       }
##   }
##   all.names <- .Internal(ls(envir, all.names, sorted))
##   if (!missing(pattern)) {
##       if ((ll <- length(grep("[", pattern, fixed = TRUE))) &&
##           ll != length(grep("]", pattern, fixed = TRUE))) {
##           if (pattern == "[") {
##               pattern <- "\\["
##               warning("replaced regular expression pattern '[' by '\\\\['")
##           }
##           else if (length(grep("[^\\\\\\]\\\\[<-", pattern))) {
##               pattern <- sub("\\[<-", "\\\\[<-", pattern)
##               warning("replaced '['<- by '\\\\[<- in regular expression pattern")
##           }
##       }
##       grep(pattern, all.names, value = TRUE)
##   }
##   else all.names
## }
## <bytecode: 0x0000000006c6d940>
## <environment: namespace:base>
```

You can use `rm` to delete objects you no longer need:

```
rm(x)
```

If you have lots of things in your environment and want to delete all of them, you can pass the results of `ls` to the `rm` function:

```
rm(list = ls())
```

In this case we've combined the two. Like the order of operations, anything inside the innermost parentheses is evaluated first, and so on.

In this case we've specified that the results of `ls` should be used for the `list` argument in `rm`. When assigning values to arguments by name, you *must* use the `=` operator!!

If instead we use `<-`, there will be unintended side effects, or you may get an error message:

```
rm(list <- ls())
```

```
## Error in rm(list <- ls()): ... must contain names or character strings
```

Tip: Warnings vs. Errors

Pay attention when R does something unexpected! Errors, like above, are thrown when R cannot proceed with a calculation. Warnings on the other hand usually mean that the function has run, but it probably hasn't worked as expected.

In both cases, the message that R prints out usually give you clues how to fix a problem.

Ref: R in Action (Section 1.3.3)

For newcomers, the `getwd()` and `setwd()` functions are critically important because R sources files from your current working directory. Inevitably, students forget where they're at and then get an error message when trying to load a data file.

```
getwd()           # Get the working directory -- Where are we at?

## [1] "C:/informatics"
```

Memory and Large Datasets

Although advanced computer science topics such as memory management are not covered in this course, the following reference is of particular importance.

Ref: R in Action (Section 1.7)

Appendix F is worth the read, especially if you think you'll be working with very large datasets. Memory management in R is unique in that function arguments are passed by *value* and not by *reference*. What this means, in practical terms, is that R makes a copy of each object you pass to a function. So if you pass a dataframe to a function, you now have two copies of that dataframe in memory, one for the function and another for the program that called it. Because of this, R will gobble up a lot of memory when your datasets are really large.

R Packages

It is possible to add functions to R by writing a package, or by obtaining a package written by someone else. As of this writing, there are over 10,000 packages available on CRAN (the comprehensive R archive network). R and RStudio have functionality for managing packages:

- You can see what packages are installed by typing `installed.packages()`
- You can install packages by typing `install.packages("packagename")`, where `packagename` is the package name, in quotes.
- You can update installed packages by typing `update.packages()`
- You can remove a package with `remove.packages("packagename")`
- You can make a package available for use with `library(packagename)`

Challenge 1

Which of the following are valid R variable names?

```
min_height
max.height
_age
.mass
MaxLength
min-length
2widths
celsius2kelvin
```

Challenge 2

What will be the value of each variable after each statement in the following program?

```
mass <- 47.5  
age <- 122  
mass <- mass * 2.3  
age <- age - 20
```

Challenge 3

Run the code from the previous challenge, and write a command to compare mass to age. Is mass larger than age?

Challenge 4

Clean up your working environment by deleting the mass and age variables.

Challenge 5

Install the following packages: `dplyr`, `rshape2`, `gapminder`