

# Lecture Notes of Advanced Machine Learning (CS 7140)

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# 1 Overview

## 1.1 What is this course about? (Lecture 1)

Machine learning has been increased used in technology platforms and products, affecting our daily lives.<sup>1</sup> Machine learning involves a collection of models, algorithms, and engineering frameworks:

- Regression and classification: least squares estimation, logistic regression, LDA, bias-variance tradeoff, cross-validation.
- Neural networks and deep learning: CNNs, backpropagation, foundation models, language modeling.
- Unsupervised learning: dimension reduction (e.g., PCA), clustering, contrastive learning.
- Causal machine learning: study the cause-and-effect with a powerful machine learning model.
- Generative AI: diffusion models, multi-modal learning.
- NumPy, Sklearn, PyTorch, TensorFlow, Hugging Face.

This course aims to uncover the common **statistical principles** underlying the diverse array of methods. This class is mostly about the theoretical analysis of learning algorithms and models. Many of the techniques introduced in this course—which involve a beautiful blend of probability, linear algebra, and optimization—are separate fields in their respective discipline with independent interests outside of machine learning. For example, we will study the supreme of a complex random variable corresponding to the outcome of a learning algorithm applied to train a neural network model. We will show how to design estimation algorithms when we are working under distribution shifts between training and test datasets.

From a practical point of view, studying the underlying working mechanisms of a learning algorithm can deepen our understanding of how things work. For example, suppose we want to build a classifier to predict the topic of a document (e.g., sports, politics, technology, etc). We train a logistic regression model with word frequencies as features and obtain a training accuracy of 90% on 1000 training documents and a test accuracy of 85% on 1000 test documents.

- How reliable are these numbers? If we resample the training data, can we expect the same results?
- How much will the training and test accuracies increase if we double the number of training documents?
- What if we increase the number of features (e.g., use tri-occurrence of words)? Does regularization help?

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<sup>1</sup>ChatGPT reportedly has 300 million weekly active users: [CNCB news, 2024](#); Claude reportedly has 4.5 million monthly active users, [anthropic](#).

There is obviously a clear gap between theoretical analysis and the practical performance of an algorithm. For instance, theoretical analysis is usually conducted under strong assumptions, which limit the implications one could draw from the theoretical results. The goal, instead, is to build a deeper understanding through theoretical analysis.

The course materials are divided into three parts: *fundamental concepts of statistical learning* (January), *generalization of neural networks and deep learning* (February), *statistical modeling of representation learning, reinforcement learning, and beyond* (March).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Basic setup of supervised learning (Lecture 1)

Central questions: *Does minimizing training error lead to low test error? How does the generalization ability depend on the model architecture and the training algorithm?* It turns out that answering these questions is highly non-trivial as it also depends on the underlying data distribution.<sup>3</sup>

To formally study these questions, let us first describe the mathematical setup:

- Let  $\mathcal{X}$  denote the feature space. Let  $\mathcal{Y}$  denote the space of all possible outcomes. Binary classification example:  $\mathcal{X} = \mathbb{R}^d$ ,  $\mathcal{Y} = \{+1, -1\}$
- Consider the problem of predicting an output  $y \in \mathcal{Y}$  given an input  $x \in \mathcal{X}$ .
- Let  $\mathcal{H}$  be a set of hypotheses. Linear model example:

$$\mathcal{H} = \left\{ x \rightarrow \beta^\top x + \eta : \forall \beta \in \mathbb{R}^d, \eta \in \mathbb{R} \right\}$$

- Let  $\ell : (\mathcal{X}, \mathcal{Y}) \times \mathcal{H} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  be a loss function. For example, the mean squared error (MSE) applied to linear models is

$$\ell((x, y), \beta) = (\beta^\top x + \eta - y)^2, \forall \beta \in \mathbb{R}^d, \forall \eta \in \mathbb{R}$$

- Given  $n$  training data samples, denoted by  $(x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2), \dots, (x_n, y_n)$ , the training loss (or empirical risk) of a hypothesis  $h \in \mathcal{H}$  is defined as

$$\hat{L}(h) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \ell(h(x_i), y_i), \forall h \in \mathcal{H} \quad (1)$$

We make a critical assumption about the data-generating process. We assume that every  $x_i, y_i$  pair is drawn independently and identically from an unknown distribution  $\mathbb{P}^*$ , supported on  $\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y}$ .

The test loss (or expected risk) of a hypothesis  $h \in \mathcal{H}$  is then given by

$$L(h) = \mathbb{E}_{(x,y) \sim \mathbb{P}^*} [\ell(h(x), y)]. \quad (2)$$

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<sup>2</sup>April will be dedicated to course project presentations.

<sup>3</sup>A recent empirical study highlights empirical scaling laws as key metrics for training large language models: [paper](#) (see also [openai](#) page).

### Remarks:

- We have assumed the training and test distributions are the same. While this assumption does not hold exactly in practice, morally speaking, the training and test distributions have to be related.
- Formulating what it means to be related and not related, and dealing with the discrepancy between training and test data is studied under the area of domain adaptation or transfer learning.
- The independence assumption, which also does not hold exactly in practice, ensures that more training data gives us more information.

**Empirical risk minimization:** Consider minimizing the training loss

$$\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}} \leftarrow \operatorname{argmin}_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \hat{L}(h). \quad (3)$$

What can say that the relationship between  $\hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$  and  $L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$ ? A key challenge is that the randomness of  $\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}$  now depends on  $\hat{L}$ . Thus,  $\hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$  involves a correlation between the training data samples and the minimizing hypothesis. A central aspect we will tackle in the first part of the course is to develop the machinery to tackle this challenge.

**Uniform convergence:** We show provide statements of the following flavor

With probability at least  $1 - \delta$ , the gap between test loss and training loss of any hypothesis is upper bounded by some small  $\epsilon$ , that is,  $L(h) - \hat{L}(h) \leq \epsilon$ , where the  $\epsilon$  is generally a function that depends on  $\delta$  and other aspects of the learning algorithm/model

More rigorously, we would like to show statements of the following:

$$\Pr \left[ L(h) - \hat{L}(h) > \epsilon \right] \leq 1 - \delta, \quad (4)$$

where the randomness is on the training data samples drawn from  $\mathbb{P}^*$ .

Equipped with such a statement, we will then apply the statement to the empirical risk minimizer  $\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}$ , since the result essentially holds for any  $h \in \mathcal{H}$ , which also subsumes  $\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}$  as a special case.

### 1.3 Basic setup of neural networks (Lecture 1)

Consider the case of a basic one-layer network:

$$x \rightarrow \sum_{i=1}^m a_i \sigma(w_i^\top x + b_i), \text{ where} \quad (5)$$

- $\sigma$  is the nonlinear activation function. Typical choices of  $\sigma$ : ReLU  $x \rightarrow \max(0, x)$ , sigmoid  $x \rightarrow \frac{1}{1+\exp(-x)}$
- $Z = \{\alpha = (a_i, w_i, b_i)\}_{i=1}^m$  are trainable parameters of the network. By varying them we could define the function class  $\mathcal{H}$  as

$$\mathcal{H} = \{f_\alpha : \forall \alpha \in Z\}$$

- $\mathcal{H}$  essentially represents a set of one-hidden-layer neural networks with  $m$  neurons
- We can define the weight matrix  $W = [w_1, w_2, \dots, w_m]$ , and the bias vector  $b = [b_1, b_2, \dots, b_m]$ . Thus, we may write map (5) as  $x \rightarrow a^\top \sigma(Wx + b)$ .

By extending the above setup, we may write a deep network as

$$f_\alpha(x) = \sigma_L(W_L \sigma_{L-1}(\dots \sigma_2(W_2 \sigma_1(W_1 x + b_1) + b_2) \dots)) \quad (6)$$

The depth of the network is given by  $L$ . The width is given by  $\max(m_1, m_2, \dots, m_l)$ , i.e., the layer with the most neurons in the layer.

Motivating questions: *How could we analyze the training and test losses of a deep network? How well does a deep network generalize, and how does it depend on its depth and width? How does this ability to learn and to generalize rely on the data distributions, and what is the role of optimization algorithms used to train the network?*

**Next lecture:** In the next lecture, we will wrap up this overview by giving a setup about how to rigorously model transfer learning, and reason about estimation procedures whose test data is different from the training data. Then, we will dive deeper into the uniform convergence framework.

## 1.4 Statistical transfer learning (Lecture 2)

An important learning paradigm that has emerged in the past few years is transfer learning—transferring the knowledge from one task to help solve another task. How could we develop a more rigorous statistical modeling of transfer learning? A better understanding of this question has applications in NLP and language modeling, CV, robotics, to name a few.

**Linear regression:** Perhaps the simplest modeling framework is to examine transfer learning in linear regression tasks. For example, we may consider the case of two linear regression tasks, one called the source task and the other called the target task.

Suppose we have  $n_1$  samples from the source task. We have  $n_2$  samples from the target task. How could we use the samples from the source task to help estimate the target task? Concretely, let the samples of the source task be denoted by  $(x_1^{(1)}, y_1^{(1)}), (x_2^{(1)}, y_2^{(1)}), \dots, (x_{n_1}^{(1)}, y_{n_1}^{(1)})$ , where every  $x_i^{(1)}$  is a  $p$ -dimensional vector and  $y_i^{(1)}$  is a real-valued outcome. We shall assume that they follow a linear relation specified by an unknown parameter  $\beta^{(1)} \in \mathbb{R}^p$ :

$$y_i^{(1)} = x_i^{(1)\top} \beta^{(1)} + \epsilon_i^{(1)}, \text{ for all } i = 1, 2, \dots, n_1 \quad (7)$$

Similarly, we denote the samples of the target task as  $(x_1^{(2)}, y_1^{(2)}), (x_2^{(2)}, y_2^{(2)}), \dots, (x_{n_2}^{(2)}, y_{n_2}^{(2)})$ . In addition, they follow a linear relation specified by another unknown parameter  $\beta^{(2)} \in \mathbb{R}^p$ , which can be different from that of the source task:

$$y_i^{(2)} = x_i^{(2)\top} \beta^{(2)} + \epsilon_i^{(2)}, \text{ for all } i = 1, 2, \dots, n_2 \quad (8)$$

Now we can ask a few more concrete questions:

- How does the difference between  $\beta^{(1)}$  and  $\beta^{(2)}$  affect transfer learning performance?
- How does the difference between the feature vectors of source task and target task affect transfer learning?

More generally, we may say that the source task and the target task involve a distribution shift between their them. In the area of domain adaptation (Kouw and Loog, 2018):

- Covariate shift refers to scenarios where both tasks follow the same model conditioned on the features (i.e.,  $\beta^{(1)} = \beta^{(2)}$ ), but they have different feature distributions.
- Model shift refers to scenarios where the two tasks follow different models conditioned on the same features, that is  $\beta^{(1)} \neq \beta^{(2)}$ .

We may now ask, how does covariate shift and model shift affect transfer learning performance?

**Transfer learning estimator:** Typically, there are two strategies for transfer learning, one called hard transfer, where we hard-code the shared component across tasks, the other called soft transfer, where we use separate components for task, and encourage the separate components to be close to each other (Ruder, 2017).

In the context of linear regression, we can define an hard parameter sharing estimator as follows:

$$\hat{L}^{HPS}(\beta) = \frac{1}{n_1 + n_2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \left( x_i^{(1)\top} \beta - y_i^{(1)} \right)^2 + \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} \left( x_j^{(2)\top} \beta - y_j^{(2)} \right)^2 \right) \quad (9)$$

We may also elect to use a soft parameter sharing estimator instead:

$$\hat{L}^{SPS}(\beta, z) = \frac{1}{n_1 + n_2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \left( x_i^{(1)\top} (\beta + z) - y_i^{(1)} \right)^2 + \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} \left( x_j^{(2)\top} \beta - y_j^{(2)} \right)^2 \right) + \lambda \|z\|^2 \quad (10)$$

Essentially, by adjusting  $\lambda$ , we can adjust the magnitude of  $z$ , which then determines how far (and how close) the source and target task models are.

**Optimality of the estimator:** The above estimation algorithms are based on the best practices of practitioner (see the surveys above). Suppose we analyze their performances. However, how can we know that there are no better estimators out there? How could we understand the fundamental limits of estimation and optimization procedures? These are often called *lower bounds* on the performance of estimators, and it usually falls into the area of information theory (Duchi, 2019). In particular, we will touch on the framework of minimax lower bounds for transfer learning (though the scope of this is much broader than we'll cover in our lectures).

## 2 Uniform convergence and generalization

Recall that we have introduced the empirical risk and the expected risk of a hypothesis (denoted by  $L(h)$  and  $\hat{L}(h)$ ) for some  $h$  in a hypothesis class  $\mathcal{H}$ . Suppose we minimize the empirical risk to get  $\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}$ . Two questions:

- Generalization gap: how does the expected and empirical risks compare for ERM, i.e.,  $L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - \hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$ ? This is called the **generalization gap**.
- Excess risk: how well does ERM do with respect to the best possible hypothesis in the hypothesis class, i.e.,  $L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - \min_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L(h)$ ? This is also called the **excess risk**.

A particularly fruitful framework for analyzing learning algorithms is the probably approximately correct (PAC) framework (Valiant, 1984):

A learning algorithm  $A$  PAC learns a hypothesis class  $\mathcal{H}$  if

- a) For any distribution  $\mathbb{P}^*$  supported over  $\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y}$ , and any  $\epsilon > 0$ ,  $\delta > 0$
- b) Upon taking  $n$  I.I.D. samples from  $\mathbb{P}^*$ ,  $A$  produces an output  $\hat{h} \in \mathcal{H}$  such that with probability at least  $1 - \delta$  (over the randomness of the samples)

$$L(\hat{h}) - \hat{L}(\hat{h}) \leq \epsilon$$

- c) Further,  $A$  runs in time polynomial in  $n, d, \epsilon^{-1}, \delta^{-1}$  (where  $d$  is the dimension of the input)

**Remark:** Notice that the running time complexity places a bound on the sample complexity as well. We will assume that the empirical risk minimizer can be computed efficiently. For instance, think of a large neural network whose training loss can be efficiently reduced to reach zero using stochastic gradient descent

### 2.1 Learning a realizable, finite hypothesis class (Lecture 2)

The ERM framework is very general – we now give a concrete example to illustrate some basic results.

**Assumptions (realizable, finite hypothesis):** i) The size of the hypothesis space,  $\mathcal{H}$ , is finite; ii) There exists a hypothesis  $h^* \in \mathcal{H}$  such that  $h^*$  achieves perfect performance, i.e.,

$$L(h^*) = \mathbb{E}_{(x,y) \in \mathbb{P}^*} [\ell(h^*(x), y)] = 0.$$

Under these assumptions, we shall prove the following property of ERM:

Under the above assumptions, with probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) \leq \frac{\log(|\mathcal{H}|) + \log(\delta^{-1})}{n} \quad (11)$$

In particular, to reduce the expected risk below  $\epsilon$ , we want  $n \geq \frac{\log(|\mathcal{H}|) + \log(\delta^{-1})}{\epsilon}$ . Remarks:

- The excess risk only grows logarithmically with the size of the hypothesis class, so we afford to use an exponentially large hypothesis space.
- The result is independent of  $\mathbb{P}^*$ . This is nice because typically we don't know the true distribution.

*Proof.* We'd like to upper bound the probability of the bad event that  $L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) > \epsilon$ :

- Let  $B \subseteq \mathcal{H}$  be the set of bad hypotheses:  $\{B \in \mathcal{H} : L(h) > \epsilon\}$
- We can rewrite our goal as upper bounding the probability of selecting a bad hypothesis  $\Pr[L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) > \epsilon] = \Pr[\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}} \in B]$
- Recall the empirical risk of ERM is always zero because at least  $\hat{L}(h^*) = 0$
- Hence for any “bad” hypothesis in  $B$ , they must have zero empirical risk

$$\Pr[\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}} \in B] \leq \Pr[\exists h \in B : \hat{L}(h) = 0]$$

- Now we shall deal with the above in two steps. First, bound  $\Pr[\hat{L}(h) = 0]$  for a fixed  $h \in B$ .

Notice that on a random example from  $\mathcal{P}^*$ , the accuracy of  $h$  should be  $1 - L(h)$ . Since the training data is drawn IID from  $\mathcal{P}^*$ , and  $L(h) \geq \epsilon$  for any  $h \in B$ , we get that

$$\Pr[\hat{L}(h) = 0] \leq (1 - L(h))^n \leq (1 - \epsilon)^n \leq \exp^{-\epsilon n},$$

where we use the fact that  $1 - x \leq \exp(-x)$ .

- Second, we want the above to hold simultaneously for all  $h \in B$ . We can apply the union bound to bound the probability of all bad events:

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr[\exists h \in B : \hat{L}(h) = 0] &\leq \sum_{h \in B} \Pr[\hat{L}(h) = 0] \\ &\leq |B| \exp(-\epsilon n) \\ &\leq |\mathcal{H}| \exp(-\epsilon n) \end{aligned}$$

By setting the above at most  $\delta$ , we conclude that  $\epsilon$  must be at least  $\frac{\log(|\mathcal{H}|) + \log(\delta^{-1})}{n}$ .

This concludes the proof for learning finite, realizable hypothesis spaces.

**Takeaway:** The proof of this result is elementary but illustrates an important pattern that will recur in more complex scenarios. We are interested in the expected risk, but only have access to empirical risk to choose the ERM:

- Step 1 (convergence): for a fixed  $h$ , show that  $\hat{L}(h)$  is close to  $L(h)$  with high probability
- Step 2 (uniform convergence): show that the above holds simultaneously for all hypotheses  $h \in \mathcal{H}$

However, the assumptions are restrictive. There exists a perfect hypothesis (realizability). What happens when the problem is not realizable? To answer this, we introduce the tools of concentration estimates.

Second, the hypothesis class is finite. What happens when the number of hypotheses is infinite? To answer this, we need better ways of measuring the “size” of a set – leading to Rademacher complexity, VC, PAC-Bayes, etc.

## 2.2 Using uniform convergence to reason about generalization (Lecture 2)

We now give a high-level picture of the logic behind how we can use uniform convergence to reason about generalization (in the context of ERM). We’d like to show that ERM’s excess risk is small:

$$\Pr \left[ L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - L(h^*) \geq \epsilon \right] \leq \delta \quad (12)$$

We can expand the excess risk as

$$L(\hat{h}) - L(h^*) = \underbrace{\left( L(\hat{h}) - \hat{L}(\hat{h}) \right)}_{\text{Uniform convergence}} + \underbrace{\left( \hat{L}(\hat{h}) - \hat{L}(h^*) \right)}_{\leq 0} + \underbrace{\left( \hat{L}(h^*) - L(h^*) \right)}_{\text{Concentration}} \quad (13)$$

We’ll see how concentration estimates can be used to control this difference in the third part. However, the same reasoning does not apply to the first part because the ERM  $\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}$  depends on the training examples  $\hat{L}$ . In particular,

$$\hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \ell(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}(x_i), y_i). \quad (14)$$

Due to the correlation, the above is not a sum of independent random variables. The central thesis of uniform convergence is that if we could ensure that  $L(h)$  and  $\hat{L}(h)$  are close for all  $h \in \mathcal{H}$ , then  $L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$  must be close to  $\hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$  as well.

In summary, our goal of deriving a uniform convergence result can be stated as

$$\Pr[L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - L(h^*) \geq \epsilon] \leq \Pr \left[ \left( \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)| \right) \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] \leq \delta \quad (15)$$

In particular, the  $1/2$  above comes from combining the error terms from the first and third parts together. Put it in words, we’d like to upper bound the probability that the largest difference between the empirical risk and the expected risk is larger than  $\epsilon/2$ .

## 2.3 Concentration estimates (Lecture 3)

**Concentration inequalities** are powerful tools from probability theory that show the average of independent random variables will be concentrated around its expectation. Concentration estimates are the basis of a large branch of learning theory (Bach, 2024) and high-dimensional statistics (Wainwright, 2019). They are one of the most basic tools for studying supervised learning algorithms and models (Zhang, 2023), primarily because much of supervised learning deals with in-distribution samples.

**Example (mean estimation):** Let  $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n$  be independent and identically distributed random variables with mean  $\mu = \mathbb{E}[X_i]$ , for all  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ . Define the empirical mean as

$$\hat{\mu}_n = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$$

How does  $\hat{\mu}_n - \mu$  behave?

Three types of statements from probability:

- **Consistency:** by law of large numbers,

$$\hat{\mu}_n - \mu \rightarrow 0$$

- **Asymptotic normality:** let the variance of  $X_i$  (for all  $i$ ) be equal to  $\sigma^2$ , by the central limit theorem, we have

$$\sqrt{n}(\hat{\mu}_n - \mu) \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$$

- **Tail estimates:** for our purpose, we would like to draw a statement of the following type

$$\Pr[|\hat{\mu}_n - \mu| \geq \epsilon] \leq \delta$$

For getting such tail estimates, we typically need to study the tail of a distribution, for instance, the tail of a Gaussian distribution, etc.

**Markov's inequality:** Let  $Z \geq 0$  be a non-negative random variable. Then

$$\Pr[Z \geq t] \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[Z]}{t}$$

**Proof:** Since  $Z$  is a non-negative quantity, we always have the condition that

$$t\mathbb{1}_{Z \geq t} \leq Z$$

To see this, notice that if  $Z \geq t$ , then the above is true. On the other hand, if  $Z < t$ , then the left-hand side above is zero, whereas  $Z \geq 0$ . Next, take the expectation over  $Z$  on both sides, we get

$$\mathbb{E}[t\mathbb{1}_{Z \geq t}] \leq \mathbb{E}[Z] \Rightarrow \mathbb{E}[\mathbb{1}_{Z \geq t}] \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[Z]}{t}$$

Notice that  $\mathbb{E}[\mathbb{1}_{Z \geq t}] = \Pr[Z \geq t]$ . Thus, we have shown that Markov's inequality is true.

**Chebyshev's inequality:** Let  $X$  be a random variable with mean equal to  $\mu$ . Then

$$\Pr[|X - \mu| \geq \epsilon] \leq \frac{\text{Var}[X]}{\epsilon^2}$$

**Proof:** We will use Markov's inequality to get this result. Let  $Z = (X - \mu)^2$  and let  $t = \epsilon^2$ . Notice that  $Z \geq 0$ . Thus, based on Markov's inequality

$$\Pr[Z \geq t] \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[Z]}{t} = \frac{\mathbb{E}[(Z - \mu)^2]}{t} = \frac{\text{Var}[Z]}{t},$$

which completes the proof.

**Hoeffding's inequality:** Let  $Z_1, Z_2, \dots, Z_n$  be  $n$  independent and identically distributed random variables drawn from a distribution with expectation  $\mu$  and whose values are bounded from above by one.

Let  $\hat{\mu}_n = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n Z_i$  denote the mean of the  $n$  random variables. Then, for any  $\epsilon \in (0, 1)$ , we have

$$\Pr[|\hat{\mu}_n - \mu| > \epsilon] \leq 2 \exp(-2\epsilon^2 n)$$

The Hoeffding's inequality is a very powerful result when we work with the average of  $n$  random variables. Variants of this inequality (which is restricted to bounded random variables) are also called Chernoff bound.<sup>4</sup> Next, we shall see a proof through the use of moment generating functions (MGF).

**Definition (Moment generating function):** For a random variable  $X$ , its MGF is given by

$$M_X(t) := \mathbb{E}[\exp(tX)]$$

One can also think of the MGF in terms of Taylor's expansion of  $\exp(tX)$  as

$$M_X(t) = 1 + t \mathbb{E}[X] + \frac{t^2}{2} \mathbb{E}[X^2] + \frac{t^3}{6} \mathbb{E}[X^3] + \dots$$

Thus, the first moment is the mean of  $X$ . The second moment is the variance of  $X$  (assuming the mean of  $X$  is zero). And so on.

**Property:** The MGF of the sum of two independent random variables  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  is the product of the MGF of  $X_1$  and  $X_2$ , respectively.

- To see this, notice that

$$M_{X+Y}(t) = \mathbb{E}\left[e^{t(X+Y)}\right] = \mathbb{E}\left[e^{tX}e^{tY}\right] = \mathbb{E}\left[e^{tX}\right]\mathbb{E}\left[e^{tY}\right] = M_X(t)M_Y(t)$$

- Here we have used that  $X$  and  $Y$  are independent, and hence  $e^{tX}$  and  $e^{tY}$  are independent, to conclude that  $\mathbb{E}\left[e^{tX}e^{tY}\right] = \mathbb{E}\left[e^{tX}\right]\mathbb{E}\left[e^{tY}\right]$

The high-level idea for showing the Hoeffding's inequality is obtained by applying Markov's inequality to  $e^{tX}$  for some well-chosen value  $t$ . From Markov's inequality, we can derive the following useful inequality: for any  $t > 0$ ,

$$\Pr[X \geq a] = \Pr\left[e^{tX} \geq e^{ta}\right] \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[e^{tX}]}{e^{ta}}$$

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<sup>4</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernoff\\_bound](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernoff_bound)

In particular,

$$\Pr[X \geq a] \leq \min_{t>0} \frac{\mathbb{E}[e^{tX}]}{e^{ta}} \quad (16)$$

Similarly, for any  $t < 0$ ,

$$\Pr[X \leq a] = \Pr[e^{tX} \geq e^{ta}] \leq \min_{t<0} \frac{\mathbb{E}[e^{tX}]}{e^{ta}}$$

Bounds for specific distributions are obtained by choosing appropriate values for  $t$ .

### 2.3.1 Chernoff bounds for the sum of Poisson trials

We now develop the most commonly used version of the Chernoff bound for the tail distribution of a sum of independent 0-1 random variables, which are also known as Poisson trials.<sup>5</sup>

Let  $X_1, \dots, X_n$  be a sequence of independent Poisson trials with  $\Pr[X_i = 1] = p_i$ . Let  $X = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$ , and let

$$\mu = \mathbb{E}[X] = \mathbb{E}\left[\sum_{i=1}^n X_i\right] = \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{E}[X_i] = \sum_{i=1}^n p_i$$

For a given  $\delta > 0$ , we are interested in bounds on  $\Pr[X \geq (1 + \delta)\mu]$  and  $\Pr[X \leq (1 - \delta)\mu]$ , that is, the probability that  $X$  deviates from its expectation  $\mu$  by  $\delta\mu$  or more. To develop a Chernoff bound, we need to compute the moment generating function of  $X$ . We start with the MGF of each  $X_i$ :

$$\begin{aligned} M_{X_i}(t) &= \mathbb{E}[e^{tX_i}] = p_i e^t + (1 - p_i) = 1 + p_i(e^t - 1) \\ &\leq e^{p_i(e^t - 1)}, \end{aligned}$$

where in the last step, we have used the fact that, for any  $y$ ,  $1 + y \leq e^y$ . Since the  $X_i$ 's are independent from each other, we take the product of the  $n$  MGF to obtain

$$\begin{aligned} M_X(t) &= \prod_{i=1}^n M_{X_i}(t) \leq \prod_{i=1}^n e^{p_i(e^t - 1)} \\ &= \exp\left(\sum_{i=1}^n p_i(e^t - 1)\right) = e^{(e^t - 1)\mu} \end{aligned}$$

Based on this result, we now apply Markov's inequality: for any  $t > 0$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr[X \geq (1 + \delta)\mu] &= \Pr[e^{tX} \geq e^{t(1+\delta)\mu}] \\ &\leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[e^{tX}]}{e^{t(1+\delta)\mu}} \\ &\leq \frac{e^{(e^t - 1)\mu}}{e^{t(1+\delta)\mu}} \end{aligned}$$

For any  $\delta > 0$ , we can set  $t = \ln(1 + \delta) > 0$  to get

$$\Pr[X \geq (1 + \delta)\mu] \leq \left(\frac{e^\delta}{(1 + \delta)^{1+\delta}}\right)^\mu$$

---

<sup>5</sup>Poisson trials differ from Poisson random variables.

For  $0 < \delta \leq 1$ , we need to show that

$$\frac{e^\delta}{(1+\delta)^{1+\delta}} \leq e^{-\delta^2/3}$$

Taking the logarithm of both sides, we obtain

$$f(\delta) = \delta - (1+\delta)\ln(1+\delta) + \frac{\delta^2}{3} \leq 0$$

Computing the derivatives of  $f(\delta)$ , we have:

$$\begin{aligned} f'(\delta) &= 1 - \frac{1+\delta}{1+\delta} - \ln(1+\delta) + \frac{2\delta}{3} \\ f''(\delta) &= -\frac{1}{1+\delta} + \frac{2}{3} \end{aligned}$$

We see that the second derivative is less than zero if  $\delta < 1/2$ , and it is positive otherwise. Hence,  $f'(\delta)$  first decreases and then increases in the interval  $[0, 1]$ . Since  $f'(0) = 0$  and  $f'(1) < 0$ , we conclude that  $f'(\delta) \leq 0$  in the interval  $[0, 1]$ . Since  $f(0) = 0$ , it follows that  $f(\delta) \leq 0$ , which shows that for any  $\delta$  between 0 and 1, we have

$$\Pr[X \geq (1+\delta)\mu] \leq e^{-\mu\delta^2/3}$$

### 2.3.2 Example: Coin flips

Let  $X$  be the number of heads in a sequence of  $n$  independent fair coin flips. Applying the Chernoff bound, we have

$$\Pr\left[\left|X - \frac{n}{2}\right| \geq \frac{1}{2}\sqrt{6n\ln n}\right] \leq 2\exp\left(-\frac{1}{3}\frac{n}{2}\frac{6\ln n}{n}\right) = \frac{2}{n}$$

This demonstrates that the concentration of the number of heads around the mean  $n/2$  is very tight. Most of the time, the deviations from the mean are on the order of  $O(\sqrt{n\ln n})$ .

#### Other use cases of Chernoff bound:

- Suppose we are interested in evaluating the probability that a particular gene mutation occurs in the population. Given a DNA sample, a lab test can determine if it carries the mutation. However, the lab test is expensive and we would like to obtain a relatively reliable estimate from a small number of tests.

### 2.3.3 Example: Gaussian random variables

In the next example, we look at the MGF of Gaussian random variables. Let  $X \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$ . Then,  $M_X(t) = e^{\sigma^2 t^2/2}$ . To derive this, we use the definition of Gaussian probability density:

$$\begin{aligned} M_X(t) &= \mathbb{E}[e^{tX}] = \int \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma^2}} \exp\left(-\frac{x^2 - 2\sigma^2 tx}{2\sigma^2}\right) dx \\ &= \int \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma^2}} \exp\left(-\frac{(x - \sigma^2 t)^2 - \sigma^4 t^2}{2\sigma^2}\right) dx \\ &= \exp\left(\frac{\sigma^2 t^2}{2}\right) \end{aligned}$$

Based on the above MGF, we can derive a tail bound by plugging the form of MGF to equation (16) to get:

$$\Pr[X \geq \epsilon] \leq \inf_t \exp\left(\frac{\sigma^2 t^2}{2} - t\epsilon\right)$$

The infimum of the RHS is attained by setting  $t = \frac{\epsilon}{\sigma^2}$ , yielding:

$$\Pr[X \geq \epsilon] \leq \exp\left(-\frac{\epsilon^2}{2\sigma^2}\right)$$

What about non-Gaussian random variables? Notice that the bound still holds if we replace  $M_X(t)$  with an upper bound. This motivates the following definition.

**Sub-Gaussian:** A mean zero random variable  $X$  is **sub-Gaussian** with parameter  $\sigma^2$  if its MGF is bounded as follows:

$$M_X(t) \leq \exp\left(\frac{\sigma^2 t^2}{2}\right) \quad (17)$$

It follows that for sub-Gaussian  $X$ , we again have that  $\Pr[X \geq \epsilon] \leq \exp(-\epsilon^2/(2\sigma^2))$ .

## 2.4 Learning finite hypothesis space (Lecture 4)

Recall from last lecture that we developed the Hoeffding's inequality. Next we use this result to bound the excess risk of learning a finite hypothesis class (without the realizable condition).

**Learning finite hypothesis classes:** Let  $\mathcal{H}$  be a finite hypothesis class. Let  $\ell$  be the zero-one loss function:  $\ell(h(x), y) = \mathbb{1}_{h(x) \neq y}$ . Suppose we minimize the empirical risk to get the minimizer  $\hat{h} \in \mathcal{H}$ . Then, with probability at least  $1 - \delta$  over the randomness of training samples, the excess risk must be bounded by

$$L(\hat{h}) - L(h^*) \leq \sqrt{\frac{2(\log(|\mathcal{H}|) + \log(2\delta^{-1}))}{n}} \quad (18)$$

We can contrast this result with (11) (of learning finite, realizable hypothesis space). The difference is that we now get a slower convergence rate ( $n^{-1}$  to  $n^{-1/2}$ ).

**Proof:** Recall that the excess risk can be decomposed to

$$L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - L(h^*) = L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - \hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) + \underbrace{\hat{L}(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - \hat{L}(h^*)}_{\leq 0} + \hat{L}(h^*) - L(h^*)$$

Notice that the second term is at most zero. Thus, we focus on the first and the third terms.

- Use the Hoeffding's inequality to deal with the third term.
- Apply uniform convergence to upper bound the first term by  $\sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)|$  (Use the union bound).

Step 1: bound  $\Pr[L(h) - \hat{L}(h) \geq \epsilon]$  for a fixed  $h \in \mathcal{H}$ . For a fixed  $h \in \mathcal{H}$ , notice that  $\hat{L}(h)$  is the averaged loss among  $n$  IID samples. Each of the loss term is bounded between zero and one (with expectation equal to  $L(h)$ ). Therefore, by Hoeffding's inequality,

$$\Pr \left[ |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)| \geq \epsilon \right] \leq 2 \exp(-2n\epsilon^2)$$

Step 2: apply Step 1 uniformly over all possible  $h \in \mathcal{H}$ . In particular, we can apply union bound over all the possible bad events to get

$$\Pr \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)| \geq \epsilon \right] \leq |\mathcal{H}| \cdot 2 \exp(-2n\epsilon^2) = \delta$$

By setting  $\epsilon = \sqrt{\frac{2(\log|\mathcal{H}| + \log(2\delta^{-1}))}{n}}$ , we can get the probability set to  $\delta$ .

**Remarks:** We have removed the realizable assumption by suffering a  $\sqrt{n}$  factor in the generalization bound. The  $\sqrt{n}$  factor arises from sampling noise. It makes sense that learning is faster when there is no noise.

## 2.5 Rademacher complexity I (Lecture 4)

Both of our generalization bounds require finite hypothesis classes. What about infinite hypothesis classes?

We can't directly apply the union bound to infinite hypothesis classes. Need a more sophisticated way to measure complexity of a hypothesis class.

With Rademacher complexity, the key idea is **symmetrization**. Along the way, we need an extension of the Hoeffding's inequality to some function of bounded random variables, which is known as McDiarmid's inequality. Let us first start by motivating why we need these tools.

### 2.5.1 Motivation

Recall that, within the uniform convergence framework, we want to get a statement of the following

$$\Pr \left[ L(\hat{h}) - L(h^*) \geq \epsilon \right] \leq \Pr \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)| \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] \leq \delta \quad (19)$$

Since there are two cases here, let us denote

$$G_n := \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L(h) - \hat{L}(h), \quad G'_n := \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \hat{L}(h) - L(h)$$

Then we have that

$$\Pr \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)| \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] \leq \Pr \left[ G_n \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] + \Pr \left[ G'_n \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2} \right]$$

Let us focus on the first case, since the second case will be similar.

Now, our main object becomes  $G_n$ : This is a rather non-trivial function, because of taking the supremum over a sum of random variables.

Hence, let's look at its expectation first! Usually, when we encounter a complicated random variable, we start by examining its first moment, then second moment, and so on.

### 2.5.2 Defintion of Rademacher complexity

Our main object of interest is now  $\mathbb{E}[G_n] = \mathbb{E}\left[\sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}}(L(h) - \hat{L}(h))\right]$ . Recall that  $\hat{L}(h)$  is the empirical risk, and  $L(h)$  is the expected risk.

This quantity is still quite difficult because it depends on the expected risk, an expectation over the unknown data distribution. The key idea of symmetrization is to remove this expected risk term with a “simpler” term.

**Definition of Rademacher complexity:** Let us imagine  $n$  data points  $Z'_1 = (x'_1, y'_1), Z'_2 = (x'_2, y'_2), \dots, Z'_n = (x'_n, y'_n)$ , sampled from the true data distribution. Then, clearly  $L(h) = \mathbb{E}\left[\hat{L}'(h)\right]$ , where  $\hat{L}'(h)$  is the empirical risk on this “copy” dataset.

Hence,

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}[G_n] &= \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} (L(h) - \hat{L}(h)) \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \mathbb{E}_{Z'_{1:n}} [\hat{L}'(h) - \hat{L}(h)] \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}} \left[ \mathbb{E}_{Z'_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} (\hat{L}'(h) - \hat{L}(h)) \right] \right]\end{aligned}$$

Let us remove the dependence on the copy dataset. To that end, we introduce IID Rademacher random variables  $\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \dots, \sigma_n$  sampled uniformly from  $\{+1, -1\}$ .

Notice that

$$\hat{L}'(h) - \hat{L}(h) = \sum_{i=1}^n (\ell(h(x'_i), y'_i) - \ell(h(x_i), y_i)),$$

is symmetric around zero. Hence, multiplying each individual term by  $\sigma_i$  does not change its distribution. Thus,

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}[G_n] &\leq \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}, Z'_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} (\hat{L}'(h) - \hat{L}(h)) \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}, Z'_{1:n}, \sigma_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i (\ell(h(x'_i), y'_i) - \ell(h(x_i), y_i)) \right] \\ &\leq 2 \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}, \sigma_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i \ell(h(x_i), y_i) \right]\end{aligned}\tag{20}$$

The last line (without the factor of 2) is the **Rademacher complexity** of  $\mathcal{H}$ .

In summary, let  $\mathcal{H}$  be a hypothesis class consisting of a class of real-valued functions. Example: two-layer neural nets, linear models. Define the Rademacher complexity (or Rademacher average) of  $\mathcal{H}$  to be

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) := \mathbb{E}_{Z_{1:n}, \sigma_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i \ell(h(x_i), y_i) \right],$$

where  $Z_i = (x_i, y_i)$  is a random sample from the underlying data distribution, and  $\sigma_i$  is sampled uniformly from  $\{+1, -1\}$ .

### 2.5.3 Generalization bounds based on Rademacher complexity

To see the power of the concept we just introduced, here is a very general statement where we can always rely on when we work with supervised learning algorithms and models.

**Generalization bounds based on Rademacher complexity:** Define

$$\mathcal{A} = \{(x, y) \rightarrow \ell(h(x), y) : h \in \mathcal{H}\}$$

to be the loss function composed with the hypothesis space. Let  $\mathcal{R}_n(\mathcal{A})$  denote the Rademacher complexity of the function class  $\mathcal{A}$ .

With probability at least  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - L(h^*) \leq 4\mathcal{R}_n(\mathcal{A}) + \sqrt{\frac{2 \log(2\delta^{-1})}{n}} \quad (21)$$

To be clear, recall that  $\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}$  is the empirical risk minimizer (ERM),  $h^*$  is the expected risk minimizer, and  $n$  is the size of the training set.

**Proof sketch:**

- Show that empirical Rademacher complexity is close to the expectation
- Use McDiarmid's inequality, which is essentially a concentration result for functions of IID random variables. We'll introduce this tool shortly
- Show that the Rademacher complexity upper bounds the excess risk. We've seen this logic from the motivation

In more detail, recall that  $G_n = \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L(h) - \hat{L}(h)$ . Our first claim is to show that  $G_n$  is close to  $\mathbb{E}[G_n]$ :

$$\Pr[G_n \geq \mathbb{E}[G_n] + \epsilon] \leq \exp(-2n\epsilon^2) \quad (22)$$

This shows that  $G_n$  is indeed close to its expectation plus a small error. Hence it suffices to upper bound its expectation.

Our second claim is to show that  $\mathbb{E}[G_n]$  is upper bounded by the Rademacher complexity.

$$\mathbb{E}[G_n] \leq 2\mathcal{R}_n(\mathcal{A}).$$

We have already seen the proof of this claim. Combined together, we can derive (21).

### 2.5.4 Properties of Rademacher complexity

**Boundedness:**

$$\mathcal{R}_n(\mathcal{H}) \leq \max_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \max_{x, y} \ell(h(x), y)$$

This only shows that the Rademacher complexity is bounded by some constant. Usually, we'd like to show it goes to zero as  $n$  goes to infinity.

**Monotonicity:** If  $\mathcal{H}_1 \subseteq \mathcal{H}_2$ , then  $\mathcal{R}_n(\mathcal{H}_1) \leq \mathcal{R}_n(\mathcal{H}_2)$ .

This is because we now take the supreme over a larger set, hence  $\mathcal{R}_n$  increases.

**Scaling:**  $R_n(c \cdot \mathcal{H}) = c \cdot R_n(\mathcal{H})$ .

**Lipschitz composition:** Suppose  $\phi$  is a Lipschitz-continuous function, bounded by some constant  $c_\phi$ . Recall a function is Lipschitz-continuous if changing  $x$  only changes the function value by  $c_\phi$  times. In addition,  $\phi(0) = 0$ .

Let  $\phi \circ \mathcal{H} = \{(x, y) \rightarrow \phi(h(x), y) : h \in \mathcal{H}\}$ , i.e., compose  $\phi$  with  $h$ . Then, we have that

$$R_n(\phi \circ \mathcal{H}) \leq c_\phi \cdot R_n(\mathcal{H}).$$

The proof essentially uses the contraction property of the sum of Rademacher random variables. For details, see Corollary 3.17 of Ledoux and Talagrand, 2013. This property is useful because we can start by studying a simpler hypothesis class, and then compose more functions with the class without going through the calculation again.

**Convex hull:** The convex hull of a set  $\mathcal{H}$  is when we take all possible linear combinations of the hypotheses in  $\mathcal{H}$ . One useful property is that taking the convex of  $\mathcal{H}$  preserves the Rademacher complexity:  $R_n(\mathcal{H}) = R_n(\text{convex-hull}(\mathcal{H}))$ .

Proof: Notice that the supreme over the convex hull must be attained at a vertex of the convex hull. This property is quite useful if we want to calculate the Rademacher complexity of a polytope. Though it is an infinite set, it suffices to examine the vertices of the polytope. We'll use this property when we examine the  $\ell_1$ -regularization.

### 2.5.5 Wrapping up the proof of (21) (Lecture 6)

Recall that (22) that we'd like to show  $G_n$  and its expectation  $\mathbb{E}[G_n]$  are close to each other. In order to complete this result, we'll use a tool called McDiarmid's inequality.

**McDiarmid's inequality:** the bounded differences inequality

- Let  $f$  be a function satisfying the following bounded differences condition for all  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$  and all  $x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n$ , and any  $x'_i$ :

$$|f(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) - f(x_1, \dots, x_{i-1}, x'_i, x_{i+1}, \dots, x_n)| \leq c_i$$

In other words, modifying one coordinate does not change the function value too much.

- Let  $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n$  be independent random variables. Then

$$\Pr [|f(X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n) - \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n)]| \geq \epsilon] \leq \exp\left(-\frac{2\epsilon^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n c_i^2}\right) \quad (23)$$

**Remark:** McDiarmid's inequality generalizes Hoeffding's inequality. Let the function  $f(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n x_i$  be the empirical mean. Suppose every  $x_i$  and  $x'_i$  are bounded from above by one. Then, changing  $x_i$  to  $x'_i$  changes the function value by at most  $\frac{2}{n}$ , leading to  $c_i = \frac{2}{n}$  for all  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ . Hence, the sum of  $c_i^2$  is equal to  $\frac{4}{n}$ . Plugging this to (23) recovers the Hoeffding's inequality.

This result is quite powerful, since it holds for any independent random variables, and  $f$  can be complex (say a neural net). As long as this function is not too sensitive to perturbations in one coordinate, we get good concentration.

**Proof of McDiarmid's inequality:** Recall the definition of a Martingale sequence

- A sequence of  $Z_0, Z_1, \dots, Z_n$  is a martingale sequence with respect to another sequence of random variables  $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n$  if and only if  $Z_i$  only depends on  $X_{1:i}$  and  $\mathbb{E}[Z_i | X_{1:i-1}] = Z_{i-1}$
- For a Martingale sequence, we have the concentration because of Azuma-Hoeffding's inequality: Suppose  $Z_{1:t}$  is a martingale sequence such that  $\mathbb{E}[Z_i | Z_{<i}] = 0$  and  $\mathbb{E}[Z_i] \leq R$ . Then with probability at least  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$\sum_{i=1}^t Z_i \leq R\sqrt{2t \log(\delta^{-1})} \quad (24)$$

For reference, see chapter 12.4 of Mitzenmacher and Upfal (2017).

We're going to construct a sequence

$$Z_i = \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:i}] \quad (25)$$

Let's check the following properties

- Clearly,  $Z_i$  only depends on the values of  $X_{1:i}$ , but not of the remaining sequence
- Besides,

$$\mathbb{E}[Z_i | X_{1:i-1}] = \mathbb{E}[\mathbb{E}[f(X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:i}] | X_{1:i-1}] = Z_{i-1}$$

- Note that for  $i = 0$ ,

$$Z_0 = \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n)]$$

- For  $i = n$ ,

$$Z_n = \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:n}] = f(X_1, \dots, X_n)$$

Using these notations, we'd like to bound the following

$$\Pr[Z_n - Z_0 \geq \epsilon]$$

Let  $D_i = Z_i - Z_{i-1}$ . Clearly,  $Z_n - Z_0 = \sum_{i=1}^n D_i$ . We're going to show that  $|D_i|$  is bounded by  $c_i$ . Therefore, using Azuma-Hoeffding's inequality, we can get an exponentially decreasing tail bound for  $Z_n - Z_0$ . We write down both  $Z_i$  and  $Z_{i-1}$  as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} Z_{i-1} &= \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:i-1}] \\ Z_i &= \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:i}] \end{aligned}$$

The key difference is whether we condition on  $X_i$  or not above. Imagine the set of possible realizations of  $X_i$ . We'll consider the maximum and minimum achieving realizations

$$\begin{aligned} L_i &= \inf_x \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}, X_i = x, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:i-1}, X_i = x] - Z_{i-1} \\ U_i &= \sup_x \mathbb{E}[f(X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}, X_i = x, \dots, X_n) | X_{1:i-1}, X_i = x] - Z_{i-1} \end{aligned}$$

Clearly,  $D_i$  is somewhere between  $L_i$  and  $U_i$ . Suppose  $L_i$  is achieved by  $X_i = x_L$  and  $U_i$  is achieved by  $X_i = x_U$ .

By the bounded difference assumption, for any fixed values  $X_{1:n}$  except  $X_i$  (being  $x_L$  or  $x_U$ ), they are at most  $c_i$  apart. Taking expectation over  $X_{1:i-1}$  and note that they are independent of  $X_i$  (key!), we have that

$$\begin{aligned}|U_i| &= |\mathbb{E}[f(X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}, X_i = x_U, \dots, X_n) - f(X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}, X_i, \dots, X_n) \mid X_{1:i-1}]| \\ &\leq c_i,\end{aligned}$$

by the bounded difference condition on  $X_i$ . And similarly,  $|L_i| \leq c_i$ . Thus, we have verified that the sequence  $D_1, D_2, \dots, D_n$  is bounded. In addition, we can check that they are a Martingale sequence based on the properties listed above.

Having checked through McDiarmid's inequality, it remains to show that  $G_n$  satisfies the bounded difference condition. Recall that  $G_n = \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L(h) - \hat{L}(h)$ . This quantity naturally arises as we derive a uniform convergence claim. Recall that  $\hat{L}$  is the empirical risk. Consider changing  $Z_i$  to  $Z'_i$  in  $G_n$ , we'd like to bound the difference

$$\left| \left( \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L(h) - \hat{L}(h) \right) - \left( \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \left( L(h) - \hat{L}(h) + \frac{1}{n} (\ell(Z_i, h) - \ell(Z'_i, h)) \right) \right) \right| \leq \frac{1}{n}$$

This is because the loss values are within 0 and 1. Taking supreme cannot increase the difference.

In summary, we now put all the pieces together to complete the proof of (21).

- We'd like to show that, for  $\epsilon = 4R_n(\mathcal{H}) + \sqrt{\frac{2\log(2\delta^{-1})}{n}}$ ,

$$\Pr[L(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) - L(h^*) \geq \epsilon] \leq \Pr \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} |L(h) - \hat{L}(h)| \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] \leq \delta$$

- The latter reduces to showing that

$$\Pr \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{\epsilon}{2} \leq \Pr[G_n \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2}] + \Pr[G'_n \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2}] \right]$$

- By the steps above, we have

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr[G_n \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2}] &\leq \Pr \left[ G_n - \mathbb{E}[G_n] \geq \sqrt{\frac{\log(2\delta^{-1})}{2n}} \right] \\ &\leq \exp \left( -2n \left( \frac{\log(2\delta^{-1})}{2n} \right) \right) = \frac{\delta}{2}\end{aligned}$$

The first line is because by (20),  $\mathbb{E}[G_n] \leq 2R_n(\mathcal{H})$ .

- A similar proof applies to show that  $\Pr[G'_n \geq \frac{\epsilon}{2}] \leq \frac{\delta}{2}$

## 2.6 Examples of Rademacher complexity (Lecture 5)

So far, we have set up Rademacher complexity for bounding the complexity of an infinite hypothesis class. Now, let's apply Rademacher complexity for the case when the function class is finite. Recall that we have already derived a nice generalization bound for finite hypothesis classes, using concentration inequalities (see result (18)). Still, this is a nice sanity check through a different route. Besides, we'll derive a useful result that will be helpful later on.

### 2.6.1 Learning finite hypothesis classes

**Massart's finite lemma:** Let  $\mathcal{H}$  be a set of functions/hypotheses. Let  $M^2$  be a bound on the second moment of functions of  $\mathcal{H}$ :

$$\sup_{f \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (f(Z_i))^2 \leq M^2,$$

where  $Z_i = (x_i, y_i)$  denotes an input data sample. Then, the empirical Rademacher complexity is bounded by:

$$\hat{R}_n(F) \leq \sqrt{\frac{2M^2 \log(|\mathcal{H}|)}{n}} \quad (26)$$

Notice that if we combine the above result (26) with the Rademacher complexity-based generalization bound of equation (21), we recover the result in equation (18).

**Proof:** For simplicity, let us denote  $W_f = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i f(Z_i)$ . Recall that the empirical Rademacher complexity is defined as

$$\hat{R}_n(F) = \mathbb{E}_{\sigma_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{f \in \mathcal{H}} W_f \mid Z_{1:n} \right]$$

Let us write down the moment generating function of  $\sup_{f \in \mathcal{H}} W_f$ , and we'll use the convexity of the exponential function

$$\begin{aligned} \exp \left( t \cdot \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{f \in \mathcal{H}} W_f \mid Z_{1:n} \right] \right) &\leq \mathbb{E} \left[ \exp \left( t \cdot \sup_{f \in \mathcal{H}} W_f \right) \mid Z_{1:n} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{f \in \mathcal{H}} \exp(t \cdot W_f) \mid Z_{1:n} \right] \end{aligned}$$

The above can be further bounded by

$$|\mathcal{H}| \cdot \mathbb{E} [\exp(t \cdot W_f) \mid Z_{1:n}]$$

Finally, recall that  $W_f$  is the sum of  $n$  independent random variables. Hence, we invoke the product property of the individual MGFs, to get that  $M_{W_f}(t)$  is the product of the individual random variables. Recall that we've conditioned on  $Z_{1:n}$ , which can be treated as constants. Thus, the randomness is now just on  $\sigma_{1:n}$ —each  $\sigma_i$  is either  $+1$  or  $-1$ , scaled by  $f(Z_i)$  (which is a constant conditioned on  $Z_i$ ). We can show that  $\sigma_i$  is sub-Gaussian with parameter 1, since we have the fact that for any random variable  $X$  bounded between  $a$  and  $b$  (for some  $a < b$ ), then  $X$  must be  $(b-a)^2/4$  sub-Gaussian.<sup>6</sup>

As a result,  $W_f$  is sub-Gaussian with parameter at most  $\frac{1}{n^2} \sum_{i=1}^n (f(Z_i))^2 \leq M^2/n$ . Therefore, we now get that

$$\mathbb{E} [\exp(t \cdot W_f) \mid Z_{1:n}] \leq \exp \left( \frac{t \cdot M^2}{2n} \right)$$

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<sup>6</sup>For a proof see this blog post: <https://statisticaloddsandends.wordpress.com/2018/10/05/bounded-random-variables-are-sub-gaussian/>

We can now conclude that

$$\exp(t\hat{R}_n(f)) \leq |\mathcal{H}| \exp\left(\frac{tM^2}{2n}\right)$$

Taking log on both sides and divide by  $t$ , we get:

$$\hat{R}_n(\mathcal{H}) \leq \frac{\log(|\mathcal{H}|)}{t} + \frac{tM^2}{2n}$$

By setting  $t$  to minimize the right-hand side above, we conclude that  $\hat{R}_n(\mathcal{H}) \leq \sqrt{\frac{2\log(|\mathcal{H}|)M^2}{n}}$ .

We can apply the above result along with (21) to derive the result for learning from a bounded set of 0-1 valued functions.

### 2.6.2 Generalization bounds for $\ell_2$ -norm/ $\ell_1$ -norm constrained linear models

The next two examples involve learning a linear model from a norm-bounded hypothesis space. The first example applies to Ridge regression, for instance, training models with weight decay. The second example applies to LASSO regression, i.e., training with  $\ell_1$ -regularization instead. Next, we'll derive the Rademacher complexity of these two examples.

**Rademacher complexity of  $\ell_2$  balls:** Let  $\mathcal{H} = \{z \rightarrow \langle w, z \rangle \mid w \in \mathcal{W}\}$  be a set of linear functions such that  $\|w\| \leq B$  for any  $w \in \mathcal{W}$ . Furthermore, assume the data distribution has a bounded second moment:

$$\mathbb{E}_{z \sim \mathbb{P}} [\|z\|^2] \leq C^2$$

Then we have

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) = \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n h(z_i) \right] \leq \frac{B \cdot C}{\sqrt{n}}$$

**Proof:** The key idea is to exploit the linear algebraic structure of the Rademacher complexity

$$\begin{aligned} R_n(\mathcal{H}) &= \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i h(z_i) \right] = \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{w \in \mathcal{W}} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i \langle w, z_i \rangle \right] \\ &\leq \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{w \in \mathcal{W}} \left\| \frac{w}{n} \right\| \cdot \left\| \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i z_i \right\| \right] \\ &\leq \frac{B}{n} \cdot \mathbb{E} \left[ \left\| \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i z_i \right\| \right] \end{aligned}$$

by the condition placed on  $\mathcal{W}$ . Finally, by Jensen's inequality, the above is at most

$$\frac{B}{n} \cdot \sqrt{\mathbb{E} \left[ \left\| \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i z_i \right\|^2 \right]} = \frac{B}{n} \cdot \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{E} [\|z_i\|^2]} \leq \frac{B \cdot C}{\sqrt{n}}$$

**Rademacher complexity of  $\ell_1$  balls:** In some applications, we have a finite but large set of features, and we believe that only a small subset of them are relevant to our task. For such applications,  $\ell_1$ -regularization has proven to be a working strategy (e.g., pruning, compression). Assume that the entries of the input vector are bounded from above by some constant  $C > 0$ :  $\max_{j=1}^d z_i[j] \leq C$ , for  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ . Let  $\mathcal{H} = \{z \rightarrow \langle w, z \rangle \mid \|w\|_1 \leq B\}$  be a set of linear functions. Then, the Rademacher complexity of  $\mathcal{H}$  is bounded as follows

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) \leq \frac{B \cdot C \cdot \sqrt{2 \log(2d)}}{\sqrt{n}}$$

**Proof:** The key idea is that the  $\ell_1$  ball is the convex hull of  $2d$  weight vectors aligned with the basis

$$W = \{Be_1, -Be_1, Be_2, -Be_2, \dots, Be_d, -Be_d\}$$

Since the Rademacher complexity of this class is equal to the Rademacher complexity of its convex hull, we just look at the finite class  $W$  since

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) = \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{w \in W} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \sigma_i \langle w, z_i \rangle \right]$$

Since  $W$  is a finite set, we can apply Massart's finite lemma (see (26)). In order to do so, we shall first check the moment condition:

$$\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (\sigma_i \langle w, z_i \rangle)^2 \leq \|w\|_1^2 \cdot \|z\|_\infty^2 = B^2 \cdot C^2$$

Thus, by result (26), we now get that

$$\hat{R}_n(\mathcal{H}) \leq \sqrt{\frac{2B^2C^2 \log(2d)}{n}}$$

### 2.6.3 Binary classification

In the next example, we study the case of binary classification. For an input with feature  $x$  and label  $y$ , we focus on the set of linear predictors with bounded  $\ell_2$ -norm:  $\mathcal{W} = \{w : \|w\| \leq B\}$ . Next, we select a loss function for our linear predictor. The output of the linear predictor is given by  $y \cdot \langle w, x \rangle$ .

- Zero-one loss:  $\ell(m) = \mathbb{1}_{m \leq 0}$
- Hinge loss:  $\ell(m) = \max(0, 1 - m)$
- Logistic loss:  $\ell(m) = \log(1 + \exp(-m))$

The function class is  $\mathcal{H} = \{z \rightarrow \langle z, w \rangle \mid w \in \mathcal{W}\}$ . The loss function composed with  $\mathcal{H}$  is thus

$$\mathcal{A} = \{(x, y) \rightarrow \ell(y \langle w, x \rangle) \mid w \in \mathcal{W}\}$$

- The linear predictors are constrained inside an  $\ell_2$ -norm bounded ball
- Both the Hinge loss and the logistic loss are Lipschitz-continuous

- Using the composition property of Rademacher complexity (see Section 2.5.4), we get a generalization bound for solving binary classification using Hinge/logistic loss

The zero-one loss, however, is not Lipschitz, so we cannot directly apply our result to the zero-one loss. Notice that the zero-one loss is not sensitive to the norm of  $w$ . Think of two points close to zero, one positive and the other negative. To handle this situation, we can use the margin loss.

**Margin loss:** Penalizes whenever we don't predict correctly by at least a margin of  $\gamma$

$$\phi_\gamma(m) = \mathbb{1}_{m \leq \gamma}$$

Then, we smooth the margin loss between 0 and  $\gamma$  into a straight line, leading to the following somewhat complicated form

$$\tilde{\phi}_\gamma(m) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } m \leq 0 \\ 1 - \frac{m}{\gamma} & \text{if } 0 < m < \gamma \\ 0 & \text{if } m \geq \gamma \end{cases}$$

Key observation:  $\tilde{\phi}_\gamma$  is  $\gamma^{-1}$ -Lipschitz continuous (meaning that  $|\tilde{\phi}_\gamma(m_1) - \tilde{\phi}_\gamma(m_2)| \leq \frac{|m_1 - m_2|}{\gamma}$ ).

**Margin-sensitive zero-one loss for linear classifiers:** Let  $\mathcal{H}$  be a set of linear models. With probability at least  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$L_0(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) \leq \min_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L_\gamma(h) + \frac{4R_n(\mathcal{H})}{\gamma} + \sqrt{\frac{2 \log(2\delta^{-1})}{n}}$$

Proof sketch:

- Using composition of  $R_n$ , we have:  $R_n(\tilde{\phi}_\gamma \circ \mathcal{H}) \leq \gamma^{-1} R_n(\mathcal{H})$
- Using Rademacher complexity applied to  $\tilde{L}_\gamma$ , we get the relation between  $\tilde{L}_\gamma(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$  and  $\min_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \tilde{L}_\gamma(h)$
- Notice that  $\phi_0 \leq \tilde{\phi}_\gamma \leq \phi_\gamma$ . Thus,  $\min_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \tilde{L}_\gamma \leq \min_{h \in \mathcal{H}} \min_{h \in \mathcal{H}} L_\gamma$ , and  $L_0(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}}) \leq \tilde{L}_\gamma(\hat{h}_{\text{ERM}})$ .

## 2.7 Matrix completion (Lecture 6)

Suppose you are asked to build a recommendation system. This system is used to predict the review rating of a movie. Related examples: Book reviews on Amazon and music recommendations on YouTube.

**Rank-constrained minimization:** Given an input array  $X$ , find  $Z$  as close to  $X$  as possible on the observed entries, while subject a (low) rank constraint:

$$\begin{aligned} \min_X \quad & \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} (X_{i,j} - Z_{i,j})^2 \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \text{rank}(X) = r \end{aligned}$$

**Nuclear norm relaxation:** The rank constraint makes the problem non-convex, search space increases at a combinatorial rate (although good algorithms exist). Instead, we could relax the rank constraint into a nuclear norm constraint: given a matrix  $Z$ , let  $\|Z\|_* = \sum_j \lambda_j(Z)$ —the sum of the singular values of  $Z$ . One could show that  $\|Z\|_*$  is convex in  $Z$ ; this is called the “nuclear” norm of  $Z$ . Instead, solve the following, which is convex in  $Z$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \min_X \quad & \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} (X_{i,j} - Z_{i,j})^2 \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \|X\|_* \leq r \end{aligned}$$

**Low-rank factorization:** An alternative way to formulate the above is by writing it as a convex optimization problem:

$$\min \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} (X_{i,j} - Z_{i,j})^2 + \lambda \|X\|_*$$

This is a semi-definite program (SDP), which is convex in  $Z$ . Instead, we may consider the re-parametrized optimization problem:

$$\min \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} (U_i^\top V_j - Z_{i,j})^2,$$

where  $U_i, V_j$  are both  $r$ -dimensional vectors, for any  $i, j$ . Put together,  $U = [U_1, U_2, \dots, U_{d_1}]$ ,  $V = [V_1, V_2, \dots, V_{d_2}]$  are both rank- $r$  matrices.

**How well does nuclear norm minimization work?** Imagine we want to recover an unknown low-rank matrix  $M \in \mathbb{R}^{d_1 \times d_2}$ . We observe  $m$  entries from  $M$  uniformly at random. Then, given another matrix  $X$ , we may define the mean squared recovery error as

$$\frac{1}{d_1} \frac{1}{d_2} \sum_{i=1}^{d_1} \sum_{j=1}^{d_2} (X_{i,j} - M_{i,j})^2$$

Without further assumptions, we would need to see the entire matrix:

- Imagine the unknown matrix only has an extremely large entry but remains nonzero elsewhere
- Without sampling this entry, we are only observing zeros

Therefore, we shall assume that  $M$  is bounded in all entries—this is a reasonable assumption for modeling many applications (e.g., movie ratings). In general, one may assume that  $M$  is incoherent (meaning that the row norms of the low-rank factors are bounded at the order of  $O(n^{-1})$ ).

**Recovery result:** Let  $dr$  be the upper bound we place on the matrix in the nuclear norm minimization program. Let  $\hat{M}$  denote the output of the program. Then, the recovery error of  $\hat{M}$  is at most:

$$2r \sqrt{\frac{\log(d)}{md}},$$

where  $d = \max(d_1, d_2)$ . For example, if we want the test error less than  $\epsilon$ , then the number of samples needs to be at least

$$m \geq \frac{dr^2}{\epsilon^2 \log(d)}$$

We're going to use Rademacher complexity to tackle this. Here we can think that nuclear norm minimization constrains how large the matrix can be. Thus, we define the hypothesis class to be the set of nuclear norm bounded and entrywise bounded matrices as follows:

$$\mathcal{H} = \{X \in \mathbb{R}^{d_1 \times d_2} \mid \|X\|_* \leq dr, \|X\|_\infty \leq 1\}$$

Let  $\Omega \subseteq [d_1] \times [d_2]$  be the indices of the set of observed entries. Let  $X_\Omega$  denote the observed matrix that pads zero for the unobserved entries. Then, we define the Rademacher complexity of  $\mathcal{H}$  as

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) = \mathbb{E}_{\Omega, \sigma_{1:m}} \left[ \sup_{X \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{m} \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} \sigma_{i,j} \cdot |X_{i,j} - M_{i,j}| \right]$$

Here we're going to use the following result. Suppose  $\mathcal{H}$  is a set of matrices whose nuclear norm is bounded by  $C$ :

$$\mathcal{H} = \{X \in \mathbb{R}^{d_1 \times d_2} \mid \|X\|_* \leq C\}$$

Then, the Rademacher complexity of nuclear norm bounded matrices is at most

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) = \mathbb{E}_\Omega \left[ \sup_{X \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{m} \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} \sigma_{i,j} |X_{i,j} - M_{i,j}| \right] \leq 2C \sqrt{\frac{\log d}{md}} \quad (27)$$

Recall our result from (21), if  $m \geq dr^2 \log(d\delta^{-1})/\epsilon^2$ , then the above Rademacher complexity is at most  $\epsilon$ . Therefore, based on (21), we could say that with probability at least  $1 - \delta$ , the recovery error of the minimizer must be at most  $O(\epsilon)$ .

It remains to show that (27) is true. By symmetry, the absolute function inside  $R_n(\mathcal{H})$  can be skipped:

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) = \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{X \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{m} \sum_{(i,j) \in \Omega} \sigma_{i,j} (X_{i,j} - M_{i,j}) \right]$$

Let us introduce a zero-one matrix  $\Sigma$  such that  $\Sigma_{i,j} = \sigma_{i,j}$  if  $(i, j) \in \Omega$ , and  $\Sigma_{i,j} = 0$  otherwise. Hence, the above is equal to

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{E}_{\Omega, \sigma_{1:n}} \left[ \sup_{X \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{m} \langle \Sigma, X - M \rangle \right] &\leq \mathbb{E} \left[ \sup_{X \in \mathcal{H}} \frac{1}{m} \|\Sigma\|_2 \cdot \|X - M\|_* \right] \\ &\leq \frac{2C}{m} \mathbb{E} [\|\Sigma\|_2] \end{aligned}$$

Above we use this fact and both  $X, M$  have nuclear norm bounded above by  $C$ . Hence, to finish the proof, we are left to deal with the expectation of  $\|\Sigma\|_2$ . Here we'll use the claim that

$$\mathbb{E} [\|\Sigma\|_2] \leq \sqrt{\frac{m \log d}{d}}$$

Showing this result requires using some facts related to the spectrum of random matrices, we'll cover this result at a later point in class. In summary, we have thus shown that

$$R_n(\mathcal{H}) \leq 2C \sqrt{\frac{\log(d)}{md}}$$

**Next lecture:** use Rademacher complexity to study two-layer neural networks. **Suggested readings:** Chapter 3.8 of Liang, [2016](#), Chapter 11 of Zhang, [2023](#).

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