

A Short Introduction to Working With Data in R

EXTRAS

Jonathan Whiteley

2023-09-19

- 1 Reading a csv file with base R
- 2 File Encoding, Windows, & Microsoft Excel™
- 3 Downloading Data From the Internet
- 4 Reading Data in Other Formats
- 5 Exporting to other formats
- 6 Programming
- 7 Some Advanced dplyr Examples

Section 1

Reading a csv file with base R

Load a csv file using read.csv()

?read.csv

- If `read.csv()` encounters problems reading a file, it is more likely to trigger an **error** than `read_csv()`, which gives a warning more often.

```
DF_path <- file.path("../", "data", "data_example.csv")  
try( read.csv(DF_path) )
```

```
# Error in read.table(file = file, header = header, sep = sep, quote = quote,  
#   more columns than column names
```

Check the file contents

- Let's take a peek at the first few lines and see if we can identify the problem (this is more often necessary with `read.csv()`):

```
readLines(DF_path, n = 4)
```

```
# [1] "Data from an experiment on the cold tolerance of the grass s  
# [2] "Modified from `data(CO2)`. See `?CO2`."  
# [3] "Type,Treatment,PlantNum,95,175,250,350,500,675,1000"  
# [4] "Quebec,nonchilled,1,16,30.4,34.8,37.2,35.3,39.2,39.7"
```

- The first **2** lines don't look like comma-separated values!
- They look like extra information that is not part of the data table *structure*.

Load a csv file into R

- We can tell R to skip the lines with no data:

```
DF <- read.csv(DF_path, skip = 2)
DF_readr <- readr::read_csv(DF_path, skip = 2)
```

- Just because there were no Errors from R, doesn't mean there's nothing wrong with the data!

Loading data: readr vs base R functions

readr		base R	
<code>read_csv()</code>	comma separated values	<code>read.csv()</code>	
<code>read_csv2()</code>	';' as delimiter (allows ',' for decimals)	<code>read.csv2()</code>	',' for decimals, ';' as separator
<code>read_tsv()</code>	tab separated values	<code>read.delim()</code>	delimited files (tab is default)
<code>read_delim()</code>	(generic) files with any delimiter	<code>read.table()</code>	
<code>read_fwf()</code>	fixed width files	<code>read.fwf()</code>	

readr descriptions based on [#dsbox](#)

Comparison of `read.csv()` and `read_csv()`

- In keeping with Tidyverse conventions, functions are names with words separated by “_”
 - ▶ instead of “.” or camelCase, as in many base R functions
- The column names are different
 - ▶ `read.csv()` automatically applies `make.names()` to the column names to make ‘syntactically valid’ names to use in R.
 - ▶ convenient, but not always what we want.
 - ▶ there are other ‘cleaning’ functions available (e.g., `clean_names()` in the `janitor` package)
- `read_csv()` automatically replaced empty strings in the Treatment column with `NA`s.
- `read_csv()` left the ‘675’ column as numeric, but ignored the commas, resulting in larger numbers.
- `read_csv()` produces a “tbl_df” (*tibble*) object, not a simple `data.frame`

Tibble examples

- Tibbles have an enhanced `print()` method
- and they will *not* do partial matching on variable names, triggering a *warning* instead for columns that do not exist.

```
print(DF_readr, n=2)
```

```
# # A tibble: 13 x 10
#   Type      Treatment PlantNum `95` `175` `250` `350` `500`
#   <chr>    <chr>         <dbl> <dbl> <dbl> <dbl> <dbl> <chr>
# 1 Quebec nonchilled         1  16    30.4  34.8  37.2  35.3
# 2 Quebec <NA>              2 13.6   27.3  37.1  41.8  40.6
# # i 11 more rows
# # i 2 more variables: `675` <dbl>, `1000` <dbl>
```

```
is.null(DF$Treat)
```

```
# [1] FALSE
```

```
is.null(DF_readr$Treat)
```

```
# Warning: Unknown or uninitialised column: `Treat`.
```

```
# [1] TRUE
```

Writing data: readr vs base R functions

readr		base R
<code>write_csv()</code>	← comma separated values	<code>write.csv()</code>
<code>write_csv2()</code>	← allows ';' as delimiter and ',' for decimals (depending on locale)	<code>write.csv2()</code> ' ,' for decimals, ' ; ' as separator
<code>write_tsv()</code>	← tab separated values	
<code>write_delim()</code>	← (generic) files with an arbitrary delimiter	<code>write.table()</code>
<code>write_excel_csv()</code> , <code>write_excel_csv2()</code>	← include a UTF-8 Byte order mark, which indicates to Excel the csv is UTF-8 encoded	

Section 2

File Encoding, Windows, & Microsoft Excel™

Encoding non-English characters

- If you are running R in Windows, you may notice that some text values (character) look strange when read with `read.csv()`:
“**QuÃ©bec**” instead of “Québec”
- There is nothing wrong with the file — this indicates a *mismatch* between the *encoding* used to write the file, and what R used to read it.
- Even though ‘.csv’ files are plain text, letters (especially non-english characters) can be *encoded* in different ways to represent them in the computer.
- “**UTF-8**” is a character encoding standard designed to handle many non-english characters.
 - ▶ The example data file was written in “UTF-8”
 - ▶ Most OSes and many programs use “UTF-8” encoding by default.
 - ▶ But *Windows* uses “latin1” by default, and so does R (< 4.2.0) when running in Windows.
 - ▶ Starting with v4.2.0, R uses “UTF-8” as the default encoding on Windows.

Read a csv file with a different encoding

- You can specify the encoding used in the file with the 'encoding' argument of `read.csv()`

```
DF <- read.csv(DF_path, skip = 2, encoding = "UTF-8")
```

- If reading a file that was created on a Windows computer and encoded in "latin1", on a different system (mac, Unix, linux, etc.) — or a recent version of R (≥ 4.2) on Windows — you can specify that, too:

```
read.csv(DF_path, skip = 2, encoding = "latin1")
```

Encoding & Microsoft Excel™

- Excel can save a .csv file using UTF-8 encoding, but in doing so, it adds “**byte order mark**” (“BOM”) to the file.
 - ▶ This is a special character that Excel also uses to recognize that the file is encoded using UTF-8.
 - ▶ Thus a BOM can make the file “easier” to use with Excel, by allowing it to automatically recognize the UTF-8 encoding, but it can also **cause problems for other programs** (like R) that do not expect such a non-Unicode character.
- Without the BOM, Excel will assume the file is encoded in “latin1” if you double-click on the csv file to open it in Excel, even if it was actually encoded with UTF-8.
 - ▶ This can cause special characters to appear incorrectly.
 - ▶ You can still import a .csv file encoded in UTF-8 into Excel correctly, but it requires opening the file within Excel, or **importing it using commands in the “Data” ribbon / menu**

Read a file with a BOM using `read.csv()` in R

- Reading a .csv file with a BOM using the usual method may cause the BOM to be included in the name of the first column (on Windows).

```
bom_bad <- read.csv("../data/data_example_bom.csv",  
                    encoding = "UTF-8")  
names(bom_bad)
```

- The solution with `read.csv()` is to use the argument 'fileEncoding = "UTF-8-BOM"' (instead of the 'encoding' argument)

```
bom <- read.csv("../data/data_example_bom.csv",  
                fileEncoding = "UTF-8-BOM")  
bom[4, 1:4]
```

```
#      Type Treatment PlantNum  X95  
# 4 Québec    chilled         1 14.2
```

Read a file with a BOM using read_csv()

- The readr package uses “UTF-8” encoding by default, and **automatically ignores a BOM**, if present.

```
bom_readr <- readr::read_csv("../data/data_example_bom.csv")  
bom_readr[4, 1:4] |> knitr::kable()
```

Type	Treatment	PlantNum	95
Québec	chilled	1	14.2

- write_csv() (in the readr package) automatically encodes output files using “UTF-8”, for greater portability across systems.
 - ▶ *except* for older versions of base R (read.csv()) on Windows :(

!

Hopefully, these examples have demonstrated that the readr package makes it easy to work with “UTF-8” files by default, on any platform.

Add a BOM to an output file

- It is possible to add a BOM to a csv file, but it must be done *manually* with base R:
 - ▶ code adapted from [this StackOverflow answer](#)

```
writeChar(  
  iconv("\ufeff", to = "UTF-8"),  
  "output.csv",  
  eos = NULL  
)  
write.csv(Data, "output.csv", append = TRUE, ... )
```

- The readr package can do this directly with a special `write_excel_csv` function:

```
write_excel_csv(Data, "output.csv", ... )
```

!

R does not recommend doing this (see `?file`), so use with caution.

Using other encodings with readr

- You can control the encoding used by readr functions with the **locale** argument.

```
write_csv(Data, "data.csv",  
          locale = locale(encoding = "latin1")  
)  
  
read_csv(Data, "data.csv",  
         locale = locale(encoding = "latin1")  
)
```

- See `?readr::read_csv` and `?readr::locale` for details.

Section 3

Downloading Data From the Internet

Read data directly from a URL

- You can use `read.csv()` & `read_csv()` with URLs as file paths:

```
csv_web <-  
  read_csv( paste0(  
    "https://raw.githubusercontent.com/jawwhiteley/",  
    "R_training_jaw/main/R2_data_scripts/",  
    "data/data_example.csv"  
  ),  
  skip = 2  
)
```

```
# Rows: 13 Columns: 10  
# -- Column specification -----  
# Delimiter: ","  
# chr (3): Type, Treatment, 500  
# dbl (6): PlantNum, 95, 175, 250, 350, 1000  
# num (1): 675  
#  
# i Use `spec()` to retrieve the full column specification for this
```

Packages: Canadian sources

Some packages provide convenient ways to download data from online sources.

- An ecosystem of R packages to access and process Canadian data
 - ▶ `cansim`: download public data from [Statistics Canada \(CODR\)](#).
 - ▶ `cancensus`: “access, retrieve, and work with [Canadian Census](#) data and geography”.
requires a valid CensusMapper API key
 - ▶ `cmhc`: API wrapper for extracting CMHC data out of the [CMHC Housing Market Information Portal](#).
 - ▶ `tongfen`: prepare “data on disparate geographies for comparison by converting them to a common geography” (“slightly coarser least common denominator geography”).
 - ▶ See also: [Analyzing Canadian Demographic and Housing Data](#)

Section 4

Reading Data in Other Formats

Other tidyverse packages

- The [Data Import Chapter of R for Data Science \(2e\)](#) describes these tidyverse packages for other types of data:
 - ▶ `haven` reads SPSS, Stata, and SAS files.
 - ▶ DBI, along with a database specific backend (e.g. `RMySQL`, `RSQLite`, `RPostgreSQL`, etc.) allows you to run SQL queries on a **database** and return a data frame.

Other options

- The [foreign package](#) can read data in a variety of formats, including: 'Minitab', 'S', 'SAS', 'SPSS', 'Stata', and others
 - ▶ *May require access to external software to read their formats*
- Parquet files: an efficient columnar format, popular with Big Data and cloud computing
 - ▶ [Apache Arrow](#) (i.e., the 'arrow' package)
- See the [Import Section](#) of [R for Data Science \(2nd edition\)](#) For more details on getting data into R from these and other sources.
- Other options are also described in the [R Data Import/Export](#) manual.

Section 5

Exporting to other formats

Writing to Microsoft Excel™ files

Packages that can write to Excel files:

- **xlsx**: read, write, format Excel 2007 (.xlsx) and Excel 97/2000/XP/2003 (.xls) files.
 - ▶ Requires Java and the rJava package
- **XLConnect**: comprehensive and cross-platform R package for manipulating Microsoft Excel files (.xlsx & .xls) from within R.
 - ▶ Requires a Java Runtime Environment (JRE)
- **openxlsx**: simplified creation of Excel .xlsx files (**not** .xls).
 - ▶ *No dependency on Java*
- **writexl**: portable, light-weight data frame to **xlsx** exporter.
 - ▶ No Java or Excel required

!

I recommend *avoiding* exporting data to Excel files if possible. csv files are easier to read to & write from, and can be read by a wider variety of software (they are more portable).

Automated reports can be produced with R Markdown and output to a variety of more portable formats (pdf, HTML, etc.) instead.

Section 6

Programming

Control flow: `if` conditions

?Control

- Control what code in a script actually runs with conditional expressions and `if` statements

```
if (condition) {  
  message("The condition is TRUE")  
}
```

- **IF** the *expression* (condition) in the parentheses () evaluates to **TRUE**, **then** the code inside the braces {} will run.
 - ▶ Otherwise, it will not.

Control flow: `if` & `NA`

- The conditional expression *must* result in *either* `TRUE` **or** `FALSE`; anything else causes an **error**.
 - ▶ `NA` is a common source of problems here.
 - ▶ `isTRUE()` and `isFALSE()` are useful to ensure a `TRUE/FALSE` result.

```
if (NA) {  
  message("The condition is NA")  
}
```

```
# Error in if (NA) { : missing value where TRUE/FALSE needed
```

```
if (isTRUE(NA)) {  
  message("The condition is NA")  
}  
  
if (is.na(NA)) {  
  message("The condition is TRUE")  
}
```

```
# The condition is TRUE
```

Control flow: `if`, `else` conditions

- An `else` condition is optional:
IF the *expression* (condition) in the `if` statement evaluates to `FALSE`, **then** the code inside the braces `{}` *after* `else` will run.

```
if (isTRUE(condition)) {  
  message("The condition is TRUE")  
} else {  
  warning("The condition is FALSE")  
}
```

```
if (isFALSE(0 == 1)) {  
  message("The condition is TRUE")  
} else {  
  warning("The condition is FALSE")  
}
```

```
# The condition is TRUE
```

Control flow: multiple `if`, `else` conditions

- You can have multiple “if-else” statements, as long as each `if` after the first follows immediately after the `else` keyword.

```
if (isTRUE(NA)) {  
  stop("NA is TRUE")  
} else if (isFALSE(NA)) {  
  warning("NA is FALSE")  
} else {  
  message("NA is neither TRUE nor FALSE")  
}
```

```
# NA is neither TRUE nor FALSE
```

Control flow: `for` loops

?Control

- Tell R to run a block of code multiple times in a row with a *loop*

```
for (i in 1:3) {  
  print( paste("i =", i) )  
}
```

```
# [1] "i = 1"  
# [1] "i = 2"  
# [1] "i = 3"
```

`for` loops

- Put inside the parentheses (), in order:
 - ▶ The **name of a variable** to update each time through the loop (*iteration*)
 - ▶ The keyword '`in`'
 - ▶ A **vector** of values
- The code inside the the braces {} is run with the specified *variable* assigned each value in the *vector*, in sequence.

User-defined function

- Define your own functions with the `function` function!
 - ▶ function code goes between braces: `{}`
 - ▶ specify what value is returned with the `return()` function

```
'%==' <- function (v1, v2) {  
  same <- (v1 == v2) | (is.na(v1) & is.na(v2))  
  same[is.na(same)] <- FALSE  
  return(same)                # return the result  
}
```

test it:

```
c(1, NA, 3, 4 , NaN) %==% c(1, NA, 1, NA, NaN)
```

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

```
c(1, NA, 3, 4 , NaN) == c(1, NA, 1, NA, NaN)
```

```
# [1] TRUE NA FALSE NA NA
```

- This code defines a function that compares two vectors, accounting for missing values (`NA`) (code adapted from *Cookbook for R*)

An infix operator

```
c(1, NA, 3, 4, NaN) %==% c(1, NA, 1, NA, NaN)
```

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

- This function is also a special type called an “*infix operator*”, which goes between two objects (it's arguments) like an operator, instead of a ‘typical’ function call
 - ▶ it has exactly **2** arguments (lhs, rhs)
 - ▶ the name begins *and* ends with a percent symbol (%)

Debugging

These are some useful functions for troubleshooting or *debugging* code that is not doing what you want:

- `?traceback`: prints a list (“stack”) showing the order of expressions that triggered the last error
 - ▶ useful in cases where functions call other functions iteratively, and you want to know which function in the “stack” caused the error.
- `?debug`: flag a function for debugging
 - ▶ The next time the function is called, it will open an interactive ‘browser’ session that lets you run the code in the function 1 line at a time, and even explore how objects change between lines.
- `?browser`: open the same interactive session as `debug()`, but at a specific location in the code (*anywhere*)

For more information, check out these (and other) sources: [Advanced R](#), [R Programming for Data Science](#), [Debugging with the RStudio IDE](#)

Section 7

Some Advanced dplyr Examples

Find values systematically

- Find columns that are character, but we expect to be numeric:

```
cols_charn <- DF %>%  
  select(starts_with("X") & where(is.character)) %>%  
  names()
```

- Loop through the identified column names (using `for`) and print values that would be `NA` if converted to numeric
 - `suppressWarnings()` suppresses the warnings we expect from `as.numeric()` in this case.

```
for (col in cols_charn) {  
  DF %>% select(1:3, all_of(col)) %>%  
    filter( get(col) %>% as.numeric() %>% is.na() %>%  
      suppressWarnings() ) %>%  
    print()  
}
```

```
#      Type Treatment PlantNum      X500  
# 1 Québec   chilled         1 32.5 (umol/m^2 sec)  
#      Type Treatment PlantNum X675  
# 1 Québec   chilled         1 35,4  
# 2 Québec           2 37,5  
# 3 Québec           3 39,6
```

summarize() multiple columns with across()

- `summarize()` uses *mutate semantics*, but `across()` applies a **function** to multiple columns, specified using *select semantics*
 - ▶ i.e., `across()` lets you use *select semantics* in a context where you would normally use *mutate semantics*
- A function can be specified by name

```
DF %>%
```

```
  summarize( across(where(is.numeric), max) )
```

```
#   PlantNum   X95 X175 X250 X350 X1000
# 1           3 16.2 32.4   NA 42.1    NA
```

```
DF %>% group_by(Treatment) %>%
```

```
  summarize( across(starts_with("X"), max) )
```

```
# # A tibble: 3 x 8
#   Treatment      X95   X175   X250   X350   X500      X675   X1000
#   <chr>         <dbl> <dbl> <dbl> <dbl> <chr>    <chr> <dbl>
# 1 ""           16.2   32.4   NA    42.1 42.9     43.9   NA
# 2 "chilled"     14.2   24.1   30.3   34.6 32.5 (um~ 35,4   38.7
# 3 "nonchilled"  16      30.4   34.8   37.2 35.3     39.2   39.7
```

summarize() across() with ad hoc function

- For more complex operations, you may have to define a *custom function* or define an *ad hoc function* to include additional arguments

```
DF %>%  
  summarize(  
    across(where(is.numeric),  
           function(x) max(x, na.rm = TRUE))  
  )  
)
```

```
#   PlantNum  X95 X175 X250 X350 X1000  
# 1           3 16.2 32.4 40.3 42.1  45.5
```

summarize() across() with “lambda notation”

- You can also define ad hoc functions using a special “lambda” notation
 - ▶ refer to the value in the column with ‘.x’

```
DF %>%
```

```
  summarize( across(everything(), ~ sum(is.na(.x))) )
```

```
#   Type Treatment PlantNum X95 X175 X250 X350 X500 X675
# 1      0          0        0  0    0    1    0    0    0
#   X1000
# 1      1
```

Tip

sum(is.na()) is a great way to count the number of missing values in a column.