

Mathematics for Machine Learning

— Classification with Support Vector Machines

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Fall 2025

Credits for the resource

- The slides are based on the textbooks:
 - *Marc Peter Deisenroth, A. Aldo Faisal, and Cheng Soon Ong: Mathematics for Machine Learning. Cambridge University Press. 2020.*
 - *Howard Anton, Chris Rorres, Anton Kaul: Elementary Linear Algebra. Wiley. 2019.*
- We could partially refer to the monograph:
Francesco Orabona: A Modern Introduction to Online Learning.
<https://arxiv.org/abs/1912.13213>

Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Separating Hyperplanes
- 3 Primal Support Vector Machine
 - The Hard Margin SVM
 - The Soft Margin SVM
- 4 Dual Support Vector Machine
 - Convex Duality via Lagrange Multipliers
 - Kernels - A Sketch
- 5 Numerical Solution

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Binary Classification


- **Focus:** predictors of the form:

$$f : \mathbb{R}^D \mapsto \{+1, -1\}.$$

- **Given:** a set of example-label pairs $\{(\mathbf{x}_1, y_1), \dots, (\mathbf{x}_N, y_N)\}$ as the training dataset.
- **Goal:** a model of parameters giving the smallest classification error.

The model: **Hyperplane** (an affine subspace of dimension $D - 1$).

Chih-Jen Lin's libsvm (<https://github.com/cjlin1>)



Chih-Jen Lin
cjlin1

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National Taiwan University
cjlin@csie.ntu.edu.tw
<http://www.csie.ntu.edu.tw/~cjlin>

Popular repositories

libsvm Public

LIBSVM -- A Library for Support Vector Machines

Java 4.4k 1.6k

liblinear Public

LIBLINEAR -- A Library for Large Linear Classification

C++ 972 342

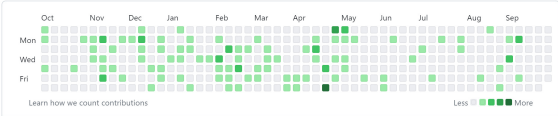
libmf Public

C++ 196 78

simpleNN Public

Python 47 16

195 contributions in the last year



Learn how we count contributions

Contribution activity

2023

October 2023

2022

2021

cjlin1 has no activity yet for this period.

Purpose of Using SVM

- SVM allows for a geometric way of thinking (supervised learning).
- Resort to a variety of optimization tools.

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Separating Hyperplanes

Separating Hyperplane

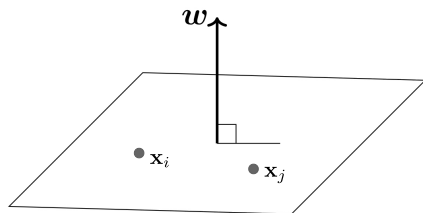
- Consider a function $f : \mathbb{R}^D \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ such that

$$f(\mathbf{x}) = \langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x} \rangle + b,$$

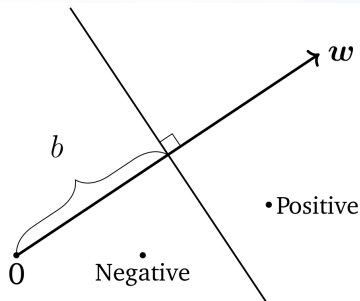
parametrized by $\mathbf{w} \in \mathbb{R}^D$ and $b \in \mathbb{R}$.

- We define the hyperplane that separates the two classes in the binary classification problem as

$$\{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^D : f(\mathbf{x}) = 0\}.$$

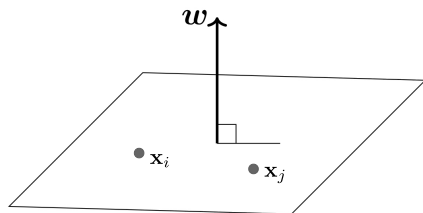


(a) Separating hyperplane in 3D

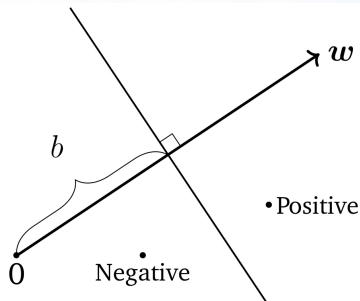


(b) Projection of the setting in (a) onto a plane

- w : a normal vector to the hyperplane (?)

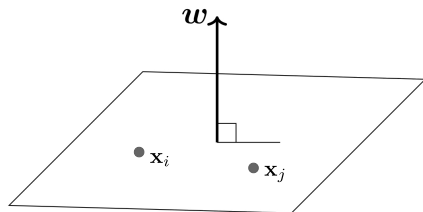


(a) Separating hyperplane in 3D

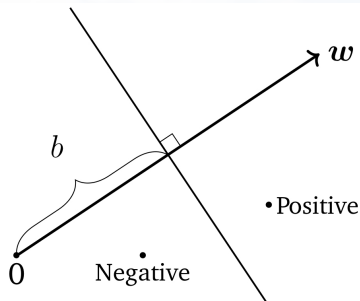


(b) Projection of the setting in (a) onto a plane

- \mathbf{w} : a normal vector to the hyperplane (?)
- $f(\mathbf{x}_i) = f(\mathbf{x}_j) = 0$ & $\mathbf{w} \perp (\mathbf{x}_i - \mathbf{x}_j)$ (?)



(a) Separating hyperplane in 3D



(b) Projection of the setting in (a) onto a plane

- \mathbf{w} : a normal vector to the hyperplane (?)
- $f(\mathbf{x}_i) = f(\mathbf{x}_j) = 0$ & $\mathbf{w} \perp (\mathbf{x}_i - \mathbf{x}_j)$ (?)
 - $f(\mathbf{x}_i) - f(\mathbf{x}_j) = \langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b - (\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle + b) = \langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i - \mathbf{x}_j \rangle$

Classifier: Separating Hyperplanes

Ensure that the examples with **positive** labels are on the **positive** side of the hyperplane.

$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b \geq 0 \text{ when } y_i = +1.$$

Ensure that the examples with **negative** labels are on the **negative** side of the hyperplane.

$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b < 0 \text{ when } y_i = -1.$$

Classifier: Separating Hyperplanes

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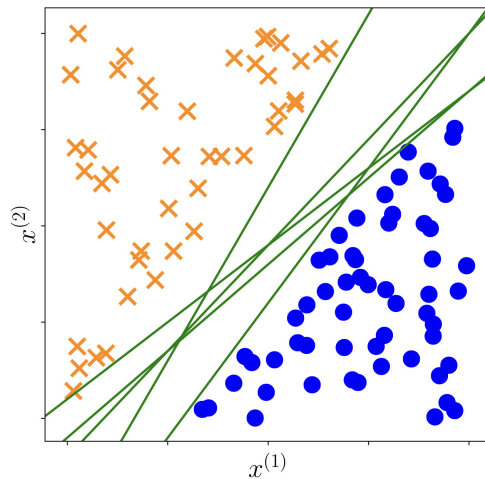
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Ensure that the examples with **negative** labels are on the **negative** side of the hyperplane.

$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b < 0 \text{ when } y_i = -1.$$

- These two conditions $\iff y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq 0$.

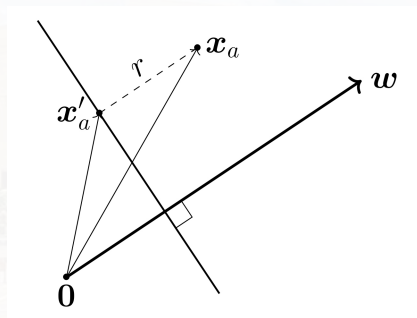
Possible Separating Hyperplanes



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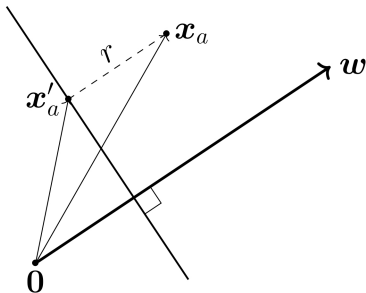
Concept of the Margin



$$\mathbf{x}_a = \mathbf{x}'_a + r \frac{\mathbf{w}}{\|\mathbf{w}\|}.$$

- We can choose \mathbf{w} of unit length:
 $\|\mathbf{w}\| = 1$ to simplify our discussion.
- The Euclidean norm:
 $\|\mathbf{w}\| = \sqrt{\mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{w}}.$

Concept of the Margin



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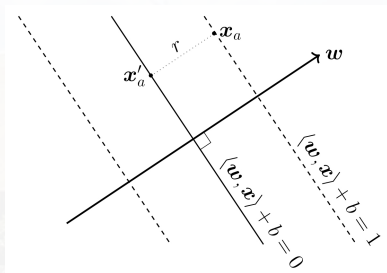
$$\mathbf{x}_a = \mathbf{x}'_a + r \frac{\mathbf{w}}{\|\mathbf{w}\|}.$$

- We can choose \mathbf{w} of unit length: $\|\mathbf{w}\| = 1$ to simplify our discussion.
- The Euclidean norm: $\|\mathbf{w}\| = \sqrt{\mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{w}}.$
- We choose \mathbf{x}_a to be the point **closest** to the hyperplane, and the distance r is the **margin**.

One single constrained optimization problem

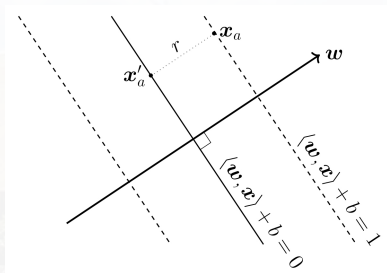
$$\begin{array}{ll} \max_{\mathbf{w}, b, r} & \underbrace{r}_{\text{margin}} \\ \text{subject to} & \underbrace{y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq r}_{\text{data fitting}}, \underbrace{\|\mathbf{w}\| = 1}_{\text{normalization}}, r > 0. \end{array}$$

An alternative explanation



- Rescale the data such that $\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x} \rangle + b = 1$ at the closest example \mathbf{x} .

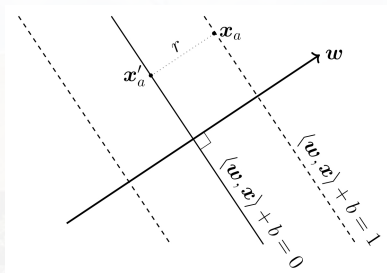
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- Rescale the data such that $\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x} \rangle + b = 1$ at the closest example \mathbf{x} .
- \mathbf{x}'_a is the orthogonal projection of \mathbf{x}_a onto the hyperplane

$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}'_a \rangle + b = 0.$$

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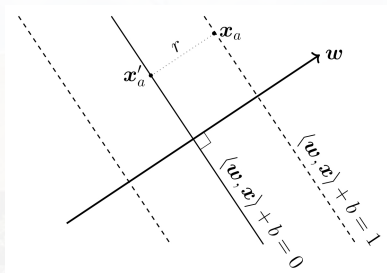


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$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}'_a \rangle + b = 0.$$

$$\left\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_a - r \frac{\mathbf{w}}{\|\mathbf{w}\|} \right\rangle + b = 0.$$

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$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}'_a \rangle + b = 0.$$

$$\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_a \rangle + b - r \frac{\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{w} \rangle}{\|\mathbf{w}\|} = 0$$

$$\Rightarrow r = \frac{1}{\|\mathbf{w}\|}.$$

$$\left\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_a - r \frac{\mathbf{w}}{\|\mathbf{w}\|} \right\rangle + b = 0.$$

Remark

We will show that setting the margin $r = \frac{1}{\|\mathbf{w}\|}$ to be 1 is equivalent to assuming $\|\mathbf{w}\| = 1$.

Combining the Two Conditions

$$\max_{\mathbf{w}, b} \quad \frac{1}{\|\mathbf{w}\|}$$

subject to $y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq 1$ for all $i = 1, \dots, N$.

Combining the Two Conditions

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subject to $y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq 1$ for all $i = 1, \dots, N$.

Instead, we often do the minimization:

Hard Margin SVM

$$\min_{\mathbf{w}, b} \quad \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2$$

subject to $y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq 1$ for all $i = 1, \dots, N$.

- “Hard”: no violation of the margin condition is allowed.

Why We Can Set the Margin to 1? (1/3)

Recall the original setting:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \max_{\mathbf{w}, b, r} \underbrace{r}_{\text{margin}} \\
 & \text{subject to } \underbrace{y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b)}_{\text{data fitting}} \geq r, \underbrace{\|\mathbf{w}\| = 1}_{\text{normalization}}, r > 0.
 \end{aligned}$$

Reparametrize the equation with a new weight vector \mathbf{w}' :

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \max_{\mathbf{w}', b, r} r^2 \\
 & \text{subject to } y_i \left(\left\langle \frac{\mathbf{w}'}{\|\mathbf{w}'\|}, \mathbf{x}_i \right\rangle + b \right) \geq r, r > 0.
 \end{aligned}$$

Why We Can Set the Margin to 1? (2/3)

Reparametrize the equation with a new weight vector \mathbf{w}' :

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Divide the constraint by r :

$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\mathbf{w}', b, r} \quad r^2 \\ & \text{subject to} \quad y_i \left(\left\langle \frac{\mathbf{w}'}{\|\mathbf{w}'\| r}, \mathbf{x}_i \right\rangle + \frac{b}{r} \right) \geq 1, r > 0. \end{aligned}$$

$$\mathbf{w}'' = \mathbf{w}' / (\|\mathbf{w}'\| r), \quad b'' = b/r.$$

Why We Can Set the Margin to 1? (2/3)

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$$\mathbf{w}'' = \mathbf{w}' / (\|\mathbf{w}'\| r), \quad b'' = b/r. \quad \text{So, } \|\mathbf{w}''\| = 1/r.$$

Why We Can Set the Margin to 1? (3/3)

Finally,

$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\mathbf{w}'', b''} \quad \frac{1}{\|\mathbf{w}''\|^2} \\ & \text{subject to} \quad y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}'', \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b'') \geq 1. \end{aligned}$$

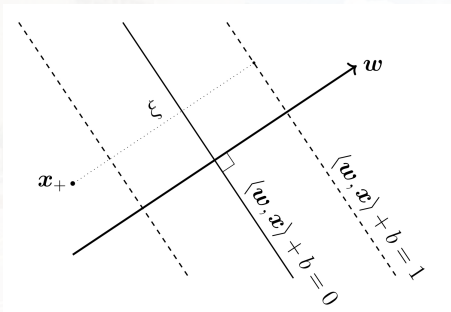
That is,

$$\begin{aligned} & \min_{\mathbf{w}'', b''} \quad \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}''\|^2 \\ & \text{subject to} \quad y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}'', \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b'') \geq 1. \end{aligned}$$

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Soft Margin?



- When the data is NOT linearly separable, we wish to allow some examples to **fall within** the margin region.
- We subtract the value ξ_i from the margin, constraining ξ_i to be non-negative.
- Purpose: Encourage correct classification

Add ξ_i 's to the objective, we get

The Soft Margin SVM

$$\min_{\mathbf{w}, b, \xi} \quad \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i$$

$$\text{subject to} \quad y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq 1 - \xi_i, \\ \xi_i \geq 0$$

for $i = 1, \dots, N$.

C : regularization parameter. $\|\mathbf{w}\|^2$: the regularizer.

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Primal SVM

- The primal SVM: the SVM in terms of variables \mathbf{w} and b .
- The input $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^D$ with D features, while \mathbf{w} has the same dimension as \mathbf{x} .
 - The number of parameters grows linearly with the number of features.

Equivalent Optimization Problem: The Dual View

- We consider the **dual problem**: Dual Support SVM, which is **independent** of the number of features.

Equivalent Optimization Problem: The Dual View

- We consider the **dual problem**: Dual Support SVM, which is **independent** of the number of features.
- An additional advantage: Allow **kernels** to be applied easily.

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Convex Duality

- We use $\alpha_i \geq 0$ and $\gamma_i \geq 0$ as the Lagrange multipliers.
 - α_i : w.r.t. the constraint that examples are correctly classified.
 - γ_i : w.r.t. the non-negativity constraint of the slack variable.

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{L}(\mathbf{w}, b, \xi, \alpha, \gamma) &:= \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i \\ &\quad - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i (y_i (\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) - 1 + \xi_i) - \sum_{i=1}^N \gamma_i \xi_i\end{aligned}$$

Convex Duality

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- Then we derive the partial derivatives of \mathcal{L} w.r.t \mathbf{w} , b and ξ_i for all i .

Partial Derivatives of the Lagrangian

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i (y_i (\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) - 1 + \xi_i) - \sum_{i=1}^N \gamma_i \xi_i$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \mathbf{w}} = \mathbf{w}^\top - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i y_i \mathbf{x}_i^\top$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial b} = - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i y_i$$

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Partial Derivatives of the Lagrangian

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- Maximizing the Lagrangian by setting $\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \mathbf{w}} = \mathbf{0}^\top$,

$$\mathbf{w} = \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i y_i \mathbf{x}_i.$$

- The optimal weight vector is a linear combination of the examples \mathbf{x}_i 's.
- \mathbf{x}_i 's with $\alpha_i > 0$: **support vectors**.

Substituting the expression for \mathbf{w} into the Lagrangian, we have

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{D}(\xi, \alpha, \gamma) &:= \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^N y_i y_j \alpha_i \alpha_j \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle - \sum_{i=1}^N y_i \alpha_i \left\langle \sum_{j=1}^N y_j \alpha_j \mathbf{x}_j, \mathbf{x}_i \right\rangle \\ &\quad + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i - b \sum_{i=1}^N y_i \alpha_i - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i \xi_i - \sum_{i=1}^N \gamma_i \xi_i.\end{aligned}$$

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- No terms involving the primal variable \mathbf{w} .

Partial Derivatives of the Lagrangian

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i (y_i (\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) - 1 + \xi_i) - \sum_{i=1}^N \gamma_i \xi_i$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \mathbf{w}} = \mathbf{w}^\top - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i y_i \mathbf{x}_i^\top$$

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- Maximizing the Lagrangian by setting $\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial b} = 0$,

$$\sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i y_i = 0.$$

With terms simplified, we obtain the Lagrangian

$$\mathfrak{D}(\xi, \alpha, \gamma) = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^N y_i y_j \alpha_i \alpha_j \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle + \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i + \sum_{i=1}^N (C - \alpha_i - \gamma_i) \xi_i.$$

Setting $\frac{\partial \mathfrak{L}}{\partial \xi_i} = 0$, we see that

$$C = \alpha_i + \gamma_i \Rightarrow \sum_{i=1}^N (C - \alpha_i - \gamma_i) \xi_i = 0.$$

With terms simplified, we obtain the Lagrangian

$$\mathfrak{D}(\xi, \alpha, \gamma) = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^N y_i y_j \alpha_i \alpha_j \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle + \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i + \sum_{i=1}^N (C - \alpha_i - \gamma_i) \xi_i.$$

Setting $\frac{\partial \mathfrak{L}}{\partial \xi_i} = 0$, we see that

$$C = \alpha_i + \gamma_i \Rightarrow \sum_{i=1}^N (C - \alpha_i - \gamma_i) \xi_i = 0.$$

Since $\gamma_i \geq 0$, we have that $\alpha_i \leq C$.

The Dual SVM

The Dual SVM

$$\min_{\alpha} \quad \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^N y_i y_j \alpha_i \alpha_j \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i$$

$$\text{subject to} \quad \sum_{i=1}^N y_i \alpha_i = 0,$$

$$0 \leq \alpha_i \leq C \text{ for all } i = 1, \dots, N.$$

- $\alpha = [\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_N]^T \in \mathbb{R}^N$: Lagrange multipliers.
- The set of **inequality constraints**: **box constraints**.

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Efficient to implement numerically!

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 - Hence, we can compute $b^* = y_i - \langle \mathbf{w}^*, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle$.

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 - Hence, we can compute $b^* = y_i - \langle \mathbf{w}^*, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle$.

Remark

- The primal SVM: # optimization variables: **feature dimension D** .
- The dual SVM: # optimization variables: **the number N of examples**.

The Dual SVM

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\alpha} \quad & \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^N y_i y_j \alpha_i \alpha_j \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^N y_i \alpha_i = 0, \\ & 0 \leq \alpha_i \leq C \text{ for all } i = 1, \dots, N. \end{aligned}$$

- We can see the inner product occurs only between examples. No inner products between examples and parameters!
- Kernel trick: consider $\phi(\mathbf{x}_i)$ to represent \mathbf{x}_i ($\phi : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathcal{H}$).

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- We can see the inner product occurs only between examples. No inner products between examples and parameters!
- Kernel trick: consider $\phi(\mathbf{x}_i)$ to represent \mathbf{x}_i ($\phi : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathcal{H}$).
- Consider a similarity function $k(\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j) = \langle \phi(\mathbf{x}_i), \phi(\mathbf{x}_j) \rangle_{\mathcal{H}}$ instead of defining $\phi(\cdot)$ and computing the resulting inner product.

Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Separating Hyperplanes
- 3 Primal Support Vector Machine
 - The Hard Margin SVM
 - The Soft Margin SVM
- 4 Dual Support Vector Machine
 - Convex Duality via Lagrange Multipliers
 - Kernels - A Sketch
- 5 Numerical Solution

Revisit Soft SVM as an Example

The Soft Margin SVM

$$\min_{\mathbf{w}, b, \xi} \quad \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{subject to} \quad & y_i(\langle \mathbf{w}, \mathbf{x}_i \rangle + b) \geq 1 - \xi_i, \\ & \xi_i \geq 0 \end{aligned}$$

A revised form:

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A revised form:

$$\min_{\mathbf{w}, b, \xi} \quad \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^N \xi_i$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{subject to} \quad & -y_i \mathbf{x}_i^\top \mathbf{w} - y_i b - \xi_i \leq -1, \\ & -\xi_i \leq 0 \end{aligned}$$

Concatenating the variables (Primal SVM)

$$\min_{\mathbf{w}, b, \xi} \frac{1}{2} \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{w} \\ b \\ \xi \end{bmatrix}^T \begin{bmatrix} I_D & \mathbf{0}_{D, N+1} \\ \mathbf{0}_{N+1, D} & \mathbf{0}_{N+1, N+1} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{w} \\ b \\ \xi \end{bmatrix} + [\mathbf{0}_{D+1, 1} \quad C\mathbf{1}_{N, 1}]^T \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{w} \\ b \\ \xi \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{subject to } \begin{bmatrix} -\mathbf{Y}\mathbf{X} & -\mathbf{y} & -I_N \\ \mathbf{0}_{N, D+1} & & -I_N \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{w} \\ b \\ \xi \end{bmatrix} \leq \begin{bmatrix} -\mathbf{1}_{N, 1} \\ \mathbf{0}_{N, 1} \end{bmatrix}.$$

- $[\mathbf{w}^T, b, \xi^T]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{D+1+N}$.
- $I_m \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times m}$: identity matrix.
- $\mathbf{0}_{m, n} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$: zeros of size $m \times n$, $\mathbf{1}_{m, n} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$: ones of size $m \times n$.
- $\mathbf{y} = [y_1, \dots, y_N]^T$
- $\mathbf{Y} = \text{diagonal}(\mathbf{y}) \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times N}$.
- $\mathbf{X} \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times D}$: concatenating all the examples.

Recall the Dual SVM

The Dual SVM

$$\min_{\alpha} \quad \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^N y_i y_j \alpha_i \alpha_j \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle - \sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i$$

$$\text{subject to} \quad \sum_{i=1}^N y_i \alpha_i = 0,$$

$$0 \leq \alpha_i \leq C \quad \text{for all } i = 1, \dots, N.$$

Concatenating the variables (Dual SVM)

K : kernel matrix for which $K_{ij} = k(\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j)$ (or simply $K_{ij} = \langle \mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{x}_j \rangle$).

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\alpha} \quad & \frac{1}{2} \alpha^\top \mathbf{Y} \mathbf{K} \mathbf{Y} \alpha - \mathbf{1}_{N,1}^\top \alpha \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{y}^\top \\ -\mathbf{y}^\top \\ -\mathbf{I}_N \\ \mathbf{I}_N \end{bmatrix} \alpha \leq \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{0}_{N+2,1} \\ C \mathbf{1}_{N,1} \end{bmatrix}. \end{aligned}$$

- Note that for equality constraints:

$\mathbf{Ax} = \mathbf{b}$ is replaced by $\mathbf{Ax} \leq \mathbf{b}$ and $-\mathbf{Ax} \leq -\mathbf{b}$.

Discussions