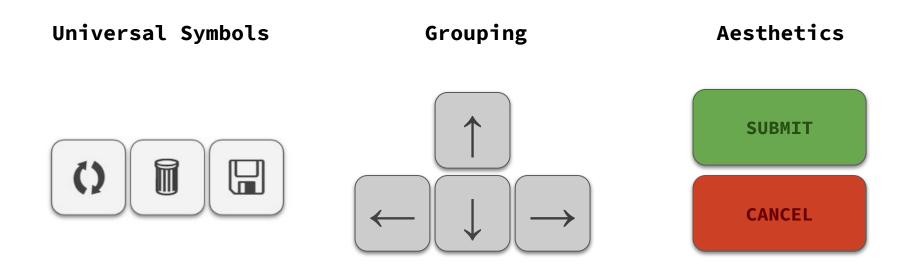
{"talk_title": "Column Names as Contracts",

```
"talk author": {
  "author_name": "Emily Riederer",
  "author_twtr": "@emilyriederer",
  "author_site": "emily.rbind.io"
"talk_forum": {
  "forum_name": "R User Group",
  "forum_locn": "Los Angeles",
  "forum date": "2021-04-27"
```

User interfaces make performance contracts



Column names are the user interface of our data

A	В	С	D	-	User Interface
1	10	11	1		
2	20	12	10		
3	30	13	100	←	Functionality
4	40	14	1,000		
5	50	15	10,000		
• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •		

Subtle design choices challenge analytical (re)producibility

<u>Origin</u>	Encoding	<u>Usage</u>
Field provenance	Indicator encoding	Feature leakage
When field loads	Metric definition	Date formats
Unique keys	Null handling	Allowed operations

Subtle design choices challenge analytical (re)producibility

Origin

Field provenance

"These data sets often have multiple files that...have unclear and sometimes duplicative variables. Such complexities are commonplace among many data systems... I would not be surprised if coding errors were fairly common, and that the ones discovered constitute only the "tip of the iceberg."

Retraction Watch

Encoding

Indicator encoding

Metric definition

Null handling

<u>Usage</u>

"We had a bunch of zeros that should have been coded ones and the ones should have been coded zeroes."

Retraction Watch

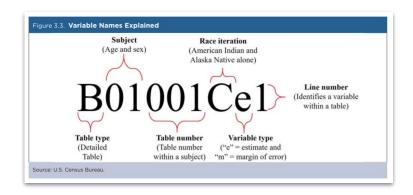
Date formats

Allowed operations

Column names rarely encode human-interpretable meaning

US Census Bureau

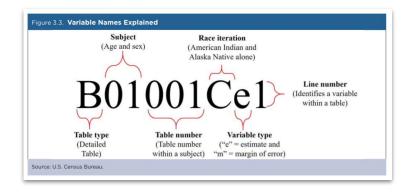
B19013_001 (median household income) P013001 (median age)



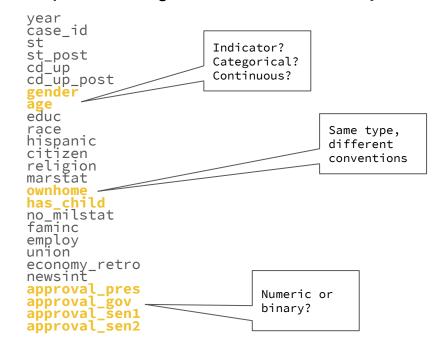
Column names rarely encode human-interpretable meaning

US Census Bureau

B19013_001 (median household income) P013001 (median age)



Cooperative Congressional Election Study



Column names can help align data collectors and consumers

From lab assistant



From you in the field



to you in the office

From the paper author



to the replicator

From the data engineer



to the analyst

Using controlled vocabularies for column names

WHAT

- 1. Establish a set of well-defined stubs
- 2. Stubs at different levels encode different semantics
- 3. Stubs may also carry associated contracts
- 4. Stubs are composed to communicate complex concepts

Stub
ID
IND / IS
BIN
N
AMT
VAL
DT
TM
CAT
CD

Stub	Semantics
ID	Unique entity identifier
IND / IS	Binary 0/1 indicator; rest of name describes 1 condition
BIN	Binary 0/1 indicator; rest of name describes 1 condition
N	Count of quantity or event occurrences
AMT	Sum-able real number amount ("denominator free")
VAL	Numeric variables that are not inherently summable
DT	Date of an event
ТМ	Timestamp of an event
CAT	Human-readable categorical variable; maps to a CD
CD	System-generated categorical variable; maps to a CAT

Stub	Semantics	Contracts
ID	Unique entity identifier	Numeric, primary / surrogate key
IND / IS	Binary 0/1 indicator; rest of name describes 1 condition	Always 0 or 1, non-null
BIN	Binary 0/1 indicator; rest of name describes 1 condition	Always 0 or 1
N	Count of quantity or event occurrences	Non-negative integer, non-null
AMT	Sum-able real number amount ("denominator free")	Numeric
VAL	Numeric variables that are not inherently summable	Numeric
DT	Date of an event	Date, ISO 8601 (YYYY-MM-DD)
ТМ	Timestamp of an event	Datetime, YYYY-MM-DD HH:MM:SS
CAT	Human-readable categorical variable; maps to a CD	-
CD	System-generated categorical variable; maps to a CAT	-

Stub	Semantics	Contracts
ID	Unique entity identifier	Numeric, primary / surrogate key
IND / IS	Binary 0/1 indicator; rest of name describes 1 condition	Always 0 or 1, non-null
BIN	Binary 0/1 indicator; rest of name describes 1 condition	Always 0 or 1
N	Count of quantity or event occurrences	Non-negative integer, non-null
AMT	Sum-able real number amount ("denominator free")	Numeric
VAL	Numeric variables that are not inherently summable	Numeric
DT	Date of an event	Date, ISO 8601 (YYYY-MM-DD)
ТМ	Timestamp of an event	Datetime, YYYY-MM-DD HH:MM:SS
CAT	Human-readable categorical variable; maps to a CD	One-to-one mapping with CD
CD	System-generated categorical variable; maps to a CAT	One-to-one mapping with CAT

Stub
COUNTY
CASE
HOSP

Stub	Semantics
COUNTY	Continental US county or county equivalents as defined by the US Census Bureau
CASE	Test-confirmed COVID-19 case as reported by state health department and as aligned by date of testing
HOSP	In-patient COVID-19 hospitalization as reported by the state health department

Stub	Semantics
COUNTY	Continental US county or county equivalents as defined by the US Census Bureau
CASE	Test-confirmed COVID-19 case as reported by state health department and as aligned by date of testing
HOSP	In-patient COVID-19 hospitalization as reported by the state health department

Stub	Semantics	Consequence
COUNTY	Continental US county or county equivalents as defined by the US Census Bureau	
CASE	Test-confirmed COVID-19 case as reported by state health department and as aligned by date of testing	Reports may continue to backfill, generally up to 7 days
HOSP	In-patient COVID-19 hospitalization as reported by the state health department	

Types		
ID		
IND / IS		
BIN		
N		
AMT		
VAL		
DT		
ТМ		
CAT		

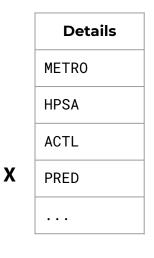
```
Subjects

COUNTY

STATE

CASE

HOSP
...
```



```
DT_COUNTY
ID_{COUNTY | STATE}
{DT | IND | PROP}_COUNTY_HPSA
IND_COUNTY_METRO
N_CASE_{ACTL | PRED}_{07|14|21|24}
N_HOSP_{ACTL | PRED}_{07|14|21|24}
. . .
```

Subtle design choices aid scientific (re)producibility

<u>Origin</u>	Encoding	<u>Usage</u>
Field provenance	Indicator encoding	Feature leakage
In 'entity' level	IND stub -> positive	<pre>select(data, -contains("POST"))</pre>
When field loads	Metric definition	Date formats
In 'entity' level	Clearly composed	DT stub -> ISO 8601
Unique keys	Null handling	Allowed operations
ID field	Non-null guarantees	VAL stub -> not summable

Using controlled vocabularies for column names

WHAT

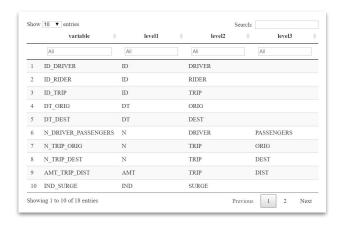
- 1. Establish a set of stubs with well-defined meanings
- 2. Stubs at different levels can encode different semantics
- 3. Stubs may also carry associated contracts
- 4. Stubs are composed to communicate complex concepts

WHY

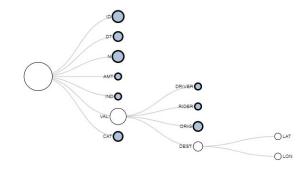
- Automate maintenance burden for collectors
- Reduce cognitive load for consumers
- Add clarity for reviewers

Data discoverability & documentation

Data dictionary



Variable exploration

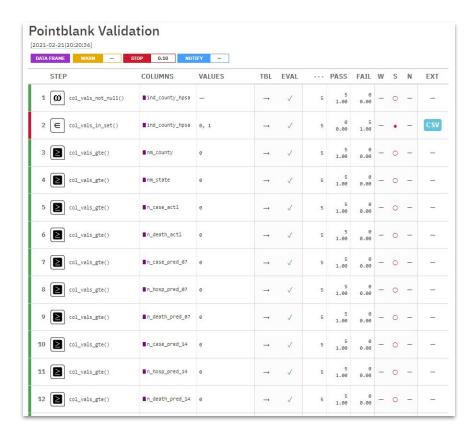


Autocomplete



Data validation

```
library(pointblank)
data %>%
 create_agent(actions =
               action_levels(stop_at = 0.1)) %>%
 col_vals_gte(starts_with("N"), 0) %>%
 col_vals_not_null(starts_with("IND")) %>%
 col_vals_in_set(starts_with("IND"), c(0,1)) %>%
 col_is_date(starts_with("DT")) %>%
  interrogate()
```



Data wrangling

```
library(dplyr)
data %>%
 group_by(NM_STATE) %>%
 summarize(
   across(starts_with("IND"), mean),
   across(contains("_ACTL_"), sum)
#> # A tibble: 51 x 4
    NM_STATE
                 IND_COUNTY_HPSA N_CASE_ACTL N_DEATH_ACTL
    <chr>
                        <dbl>
                                    <dbl>
                                                <dbl>
#> 1 Alabama
                       0.149
                                   455582
                                                7566
#> 2 Alaska
                       0.235
                                    51338
                                                 250
#> 3 Arizona
                       0
                                   753379
                                               13098
```

Data wrangling

```
library(dplyr)
data %>%
  group_by(NM_STATE) %>%
  summarize(
    across(starts_with("IND"), mean),
    across(contains("_ACTL_"), sum)
)
```

```
NM_STATE
                 IND_COUNTY_HPSA N_CASE_ACTL N_DEATH_ACTL
    <chr>
                         <dbl>
                                     <dbl>
                                                 <dbl>
#> 1 Alabama
                       0.149
                                    455582
                                                 7566
#> 2 Alaska
                       0.235
                                     51338
                                                  250
#> 3 Arizona
                       0
                                   753379
                                               13098
```

```
import pandas as pd

cols_n = [vbl for vbl in data.columns if vbl[0:2] == 'IND_']

cols_grp = ["NM_STATE"]

data.groupby(cols_grp)[cols_n].mean()
```

Data wrangling

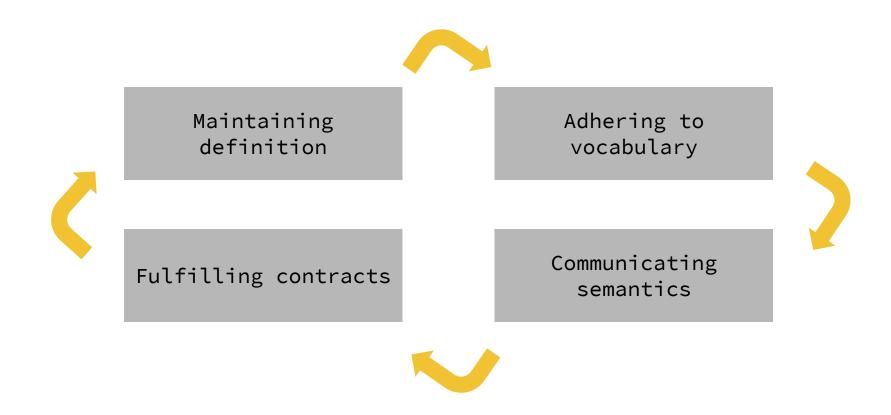
```
library(dplyr)
data %>%
 group_by(NM_STATE) %>%
 summarize(
   across(starts_with("IND"), mean, .names = "{gsub('IND', 'PROP', {.col})}"))
   across(contains("_ACTL_"), sum)
#> # A tibble: 51 x 4
    NM_STATE
                 PROP_COUNTY_HPSA N_CASE_ACTL N_DEATH_ACTL
    <chr>
                        <dbl>
                                    <dbl>
                                                <dbl>
#> 1 Alabama
                       0.149
                                   455582
                                                7566
#> 2 Alaska
                                                 250
                       0.235
                                    51338
#> 3 Arizona
                       0
                                   753379
                                              13098
```

Beyond tabular data

```
"url": "https://api.github.com/repos/octocat/Hello-World/pulls/1347".
 "title": "Amazing new feature",
 "user":
   "login": "octocat",
 "body": "Please pull these awesome changes in!",
 "milestone":
   "id": 1002604
   "title": "v1.0",
"description": "Tracking milestone for version 1.0",
                                                            -milestone
   "creator":
     "login": "octocat",
"id": 1
   "created at": "2011-04-10T20:09:31Z"
 "created_at": "2011-01-26T19:01:12Z",
 "assignee": {
                                                                                pull
   "login": "octocat",
   "id": 1,
                                                                                request
},
"requested_reviewers": [
     "login": "other_user",
],
"repo": {
     "id": 1296269,
     "node_id": "MDEwOlJlcG9zaXRvcnkxMjk2MjY5"
                                                   repo
     "name": "Hello-World"
     "full name": "octocat/Hello-World".
     "owner":
       "login": "octocat",
     "created at": "2011-01-26T19:01:12Z".
 "merged_by": {
   "login": "octocat",
   "id": 1.
```

- 2x "title"
- 6x "login"
- 3x "created"

Bad contracts are worse than no contracts



Automated tools can help us uphold contracts



R package

define & evaluate convo

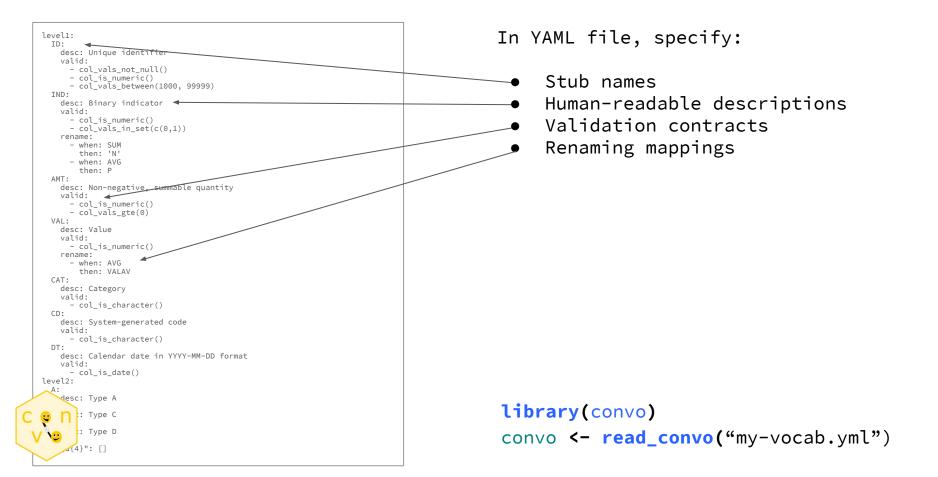
local data



templates, macros, tests

data in RDBMS

Describe a controlled vocabularies with YAML



Assess vocabulary quality

one meaning per stub

one stub per meaning



Assess vocabulary quality

one meaning per stub

one stub per meaning

```
bad_convo <- list(
   c("IND", "AMT", "CAT"),
   c("DOG", "CAT")
)
pivot_convo(bad_convo)

#> $CAT
#> [1] 1 2
```



Assess vocabulary quality

one meaning per stub

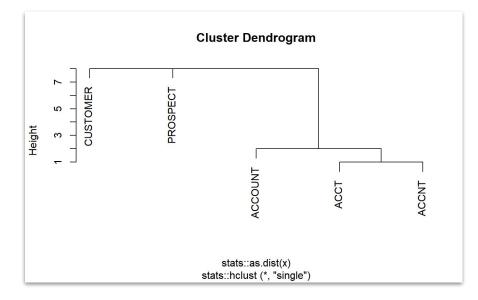
```
bad_convo <- list(
    c("IND", "AMT", "CAT"),
    c("DOG", "CAT")
)
pivot_convo(bad_convo)

#> $CAT
#> [1] 1 2
```



one stub per meaning

```
bad_convo <- list(
   c("IND", "IS", "AMT", "AMOUNT", "CAT", "CD"),
   c("ACCOUNT", "ACCT", "ACCNT", "PROSPECT", "CUSTOMER"))
clusts <- cluster_convo(bad_convo)
plot(clusts[[2]])</pre>
```



Challenge vocabulary realizations

evaluate names

discover new stubs



Challenge vocabulary realizations

evaluate names

discover new stubs

```
col_names <- c(
   "ID_A", "IND_A", "XYZ_D", "AMT_B",
   "AMT_Q", "ID_A_1234", "ID_A_12"
   )
evaluate_convo(convo, col_names, sep = "_")

#> Level 1
#> - XYZ_D
#> Level 2
#> - AMT_B
#> - AMT_Q
#> Level 3
#> - ID_A_12
```



Challenge vocabulary realizations

evaluate names

```
col_names <- c(
   "ID_A", "IND_A", "XYZ_D", "AMT_B",
   "AMT_Q", "ID_A_1234", "ID_A_12"
   )
evaluate_convo(convo, col_names, sep = "_")

#> Level 1
#> - XYZ_D
#> Level 2
#> - AMT_B
#> - AMT_B
#> - ID A 12
```

discover new stubs

```
convo_colnames <- parse_stubs(col_names)
compare_convo(
   convo_colnames,
   convo,
   fx = "setdiff"
)

#> Level 1
#> - XYZ
#> Level 2
#> - B
#> - Q
#> Level 3
#> - 12
```



Validate vocabulary promises

DATA FRAME tbl tbl											
STEP	COLUMNS	VALUES	TBL	EVAL		PASS	FAIL	W	S	N	EX
1 d col_is_numeric()	■IND_A	-	→	✓	1	1.00	0.00	_	_	-	-
2 d col_is_numeric()	■IND_B	_	→	✓	1	1 1.00	0.00	==	10=\$1	(0 <u>—</u> 21	N=4
3 Col_vals_in_set()	■IND_A	0, 1	→	✓	1	1 1.00	0.00	-	()	-	
4 Col_vals_in_set()	■IND_B	0, 1	→	✓	1	0 0.00	1 1.00	-	_	-	cs
5 D col_is_date()	■DT_B	_	→	✓	1	1.00	0.00	<u></u>	_	_	



Export validation infrastructure

```
read_fn: ~setNames(as.data.frame(matrix(1,
ncol = 2)), c("IND_A", "AMT_B"))
tbl_name: .na.character
label: '[2021-02-07|13:02:35]'
locale: en
steps:
- col_is_numeric:
    columns: vars(IND_A)
- col_vals_in_set:
    columns: vars(IND_A)
    set:
    - 0.0
    - 1.0
- col_is_numeric:
    columns: vars(AMT_B)
- col_vals_gte:
    columns: vars(AMT_B)
    value: 0.0
```



Generate data documentation





Generate dictionary documentation

	level +	stub 🌲	stub_desc	checks						
3	1	AMT	Non-negative, summable quantity	Expect that column is of type: numeric. Expect that values should be >= `0`.						
5	1	CAT	Category	Expect that column is of type: character.						
6	1	CD	System-generated code	Expect that column is of type: character.						
8	1	DT	Calendar date in YYYY-MM-DD format	Expect that column is of type: Date.						
9	1	ID	Unique identifier	Expect that all values should not be NULL. Expect that column is of type: numeric. Expect that values should be between `1000` and `99999`.						
10	1	IND	Binary indicator	Expect that column is of type: numeric. Expect that values should be in the set of `0`, `1`.						
11	1	VAL	Value	Expect that column is of type: numeric.						
2	2	Α	Type A							
4	2	С	Type C							
7	2	D	Type D							



Open questions

- Alternative ways to specify convo (spreadsheet? CSV? better R constructors?)
- More convo-level metadata (e.g. delimiters)
- Increased flexibility in convo structure
 - Alternatives orders (e.g. suffix based, hierarchical)
 - Optional levels
 - Better regex support and documentation thereof
- Better aesthetics for documentation
 - Or better integration with fantastic {pointblank} docs



dbt makes it possible to systemized column-name contracts further up the pipeline

Jinja Templating

Custom Macros

In-Pipeline Testing

Makes SQL more "programmable" with local variables and control flow

Enables creation of custom helper functions

Inject tests within data transformations to detect errors before they occur



dbt makes it possible to systemized column-name contracts further up the pipeline

Jinja Templating

Custom Macros

In-Pipeline Testing

Makes SQL more "programmable" with local variables and control flow

Enables creation of custom helper functions

Inject tests within data transformations to detect errors before they occur



Operate on columns based on names



Test validity of operations and contract adherence

Create valid names and avoid typos



SQL templating standardizes metric definition and naming

```
select
  id_county,
  dt_county,
  {% for l in var('lags') %}
    lag(cases, \{\{1\}\})
         over (partition by id_county
               order by dt_county)
         as n_{case\_pred_{-}\{\{\bar{1}\}\}}
  {% if not loop.last %},{% endif %}
  {% endfor %}
from predictions_source_table
```



```
select
   id_county.
  dt_county,
  lag(cases, 14
        over (partition by id_county order by dt_county) as n_cases_pred_14,
   lag(cases, 2
        over (partition by id_county order by dt_county) as n_cases_pred_21,
   lag(cases, 24
        over (partition by id_county order by dt_county) as n_cases_pred_24,
. . .
```



Custom macros enable programmatic wrangling of data to enforce contracts

```
{% set cols = get_column_names( ref('data') ) %}
{% set cols_n = starts_with(cols, 'n') %}
{% set cols_dt = starts_with(cols, 'dt') %}
{% set cols_ind = starts_with(cols, 'ind') %}
{% set cols_oth =
         not_one_of(cols.
               cols n + cols dt + cols ind %}
select
  {{ across(cols_oth, "{var}") }},
 {{ across(cols_n, "cast({var} as int)")}},
 {{ across(cols_dt, "date({var}) as {var})")}},
  {{ across(cols_ind, "coalesce({c}, 0)") }}
from {{ ref('data') }}
```



```
select
  amt_a,
  amt_b.
  cast(n_a as int64) as n_a,
  cast(n_c as int64) as n_c,
  date(dt_b) as dt_b.
  date(dt d) as dt d.
  coalesce(ind_b,0) as ind_b,
  coalesce(ind_c,0) as ind_c
from db.schema.data
```



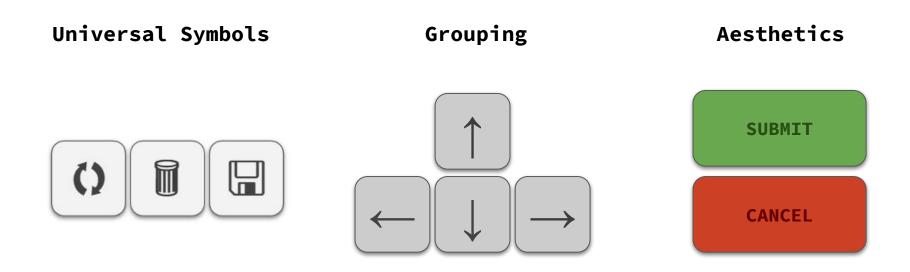
Testing confirms any non-enforceable contracts are upheld

```
{% set cols = get_column_names(ref('prep')) %}
{% set cols_n = starts_with(cols, 'n') %}
select *
from {{ ref('model_monitor_staging') }}
where
 {%- for c in cols_n %}
  abs(\{\{c\}\} - cast(\{\{c\}\} \text{ as int64})) > 0.01 \text{ or}
 {% endfor %}
 FALSE
```

```
with dbt CTE INTERNAL test as (
select *
from `sonorous-wharf-302611`.`dbt_emily`.`model_monitor_staging`
where
   abs(n_case_actl - cast(n_case_actl as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_death_actl - cast(n_death_actl as int64)) > 0.01 or
   abs(n_case_pred_07 - cast(n_case_pred_07 as int64)) > 0.01 or
   abs(n_hosp_pred_07 - cast(n_hosp_pred_07 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_death_pred_07 - cast(n_death_pred_07 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n case pred 14 - cast(n case pred 14 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n hosp pred 14 - cast(n hosp pred 14 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_death_pred_14 - cast(n_death_pred_14 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_case_pred_21 - cast(n_case_pred_21 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_hosp_pred_21 - cast(n_hosp_pred_21 as int64)) > 0.01 or
   abs(n_death_pred_21 - cast(n_death_pred_21 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_case_pred_28 - cast(n_case_pred_28 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_hosp_pred_28 - cast(n_hosp_pred_28 as int64)) > 0.01 or
    abs(n_death_pred_28 - cast(n_death_pred_28 as int64)) > 0.01 or
   FALSE
select count(*) from dbt CTE INTERNAL test
```



Column names can make performance contracts



Thank you!

More thoughts on my website:

- Under the `data` tag: emily.rbind.io/tags/data/
- Column Names as Contracts
- <u>Introducing {convo}</u> + open design questions!
- Embedding column-name contracts in dbt pipelines
- {convo} package website
- <u>dbtplyr</u> GitHub repo