

# Best Practices

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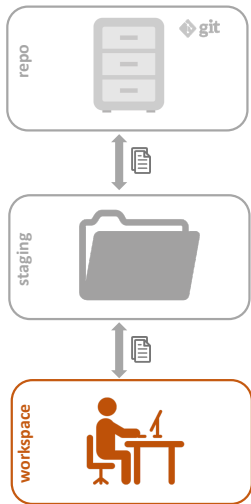
GR5072  
Modern Data Structures

Columbia University

Acknowledgement: These notes are originally from Professor Morales, when he taught MDS in R in 2022

```
8 // Dear programmer:
9 // When I wrote this code, only god and
10 // I knew how it worked.
11 // Now, only god knows it!
12 //
13 // Therefore, if you are trying to optimize
14 // this routine and it fails (most surely),
15 // please increase this counter as a
16 // warning for the next person:
17 //
18 // total_hours_wasted_here = 254
19 //
20
```

# Organizing your (local) workspace...



# A Data Science Project

- ▶ Three **aims** of a data science project
  - a) **reproducibility**
    - ▶ anyone should be able to arrive to your **same results**
  - b) **portability**
    - ▶ anyone should be able to **pick up where you left off** on any machine
- ▶ crucial tenets for **collaborative work**
  - c) **scalability**
    - ▶ your project should also work for **larger data sets** and/or be on the path of **automation**

# Structuring projects (locally)

some basic principles...

1. use **scripts for everything** you do
  - ▶ **NEVER** do things **manually**
2. organize your scripts in a sequence
  - ▶ **separate activities** in sections
  - ▶ keep an early section for **definitions**
  - ▶ call **other scripts** when necessary
3. write **efficient** (aka lazy) code
  - ▶ turn code used multiple times into **functions**
  - ▶ **re-use functions**: make them generic enough
4. rely on **version control** (git)

# Structuring projects (locally)

portability tricks...

- ▶ use a sensible **folder structure** (more later)
  - ▶ create folder clusters aligned with purposes
- ▶ use **relative paths** in your scripts
  - ▶ `"data//external//ARCH535.csv"` as opposed to `"C://users//data//external//ARCH535.csv"`
- ▶ take advantage of tools like `here()` package to ease your life

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src                <- Code  
|  
| -- data               <- Inputs  
|  
| -- reports            <- Outputs  
|  
| -- references         <- Data dictionaries,  
|                       explanatory materials.  
|  
| -- README.md  
| -- TODO               <- (opt)  
| -- LabNotebook        <- (opt)
```

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src  
|   |-- data          <- code to read/munge raw data  
|   |-- features      <- code to transform/append data  
|   |-- models        <- code to analyze data  
|   |-- visualizations <- code to create visualizations  
|  
| -- data  
|  
| -- reports  
|  
| -- references  
|  
| -- README.md  
| -- TODO  
| -- LabNotebook
```

► **principle:** separate function definition and application



# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

- ▶ use `src` to organize your code
- ▶ use **one script per purpose**
- ▶ use **version control to "update"** your scripts
- ▶ use code to document **"manual" changes**
- ▶ call **additional scripts** as needed
- ▶ if too many functions, keep a **script with functions**

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
# #####
#   File-Name:      MakeGraphs_CongressRollCall_160603.R
#   Version:       R 3.3.1
#   Date:         June 03, 2016
#   Author:       MM
#   Purpose:      Exploratory graphs of congressional roll call
#                  data for the 112th US Congress. Simple initial
#                  visualizations to find patterns and outliers.
#   Input Files:   ProcessedRollCall_160225.csv
#   Output Files:  Graph_RollCall_112Congress.gif
#   Data Output:   NONE
#   Previous files: MakeGraphs_CongressRollCall_160524.R
#   Dependencies:  GatherData_CongressRollCall_160222.R
#   Required by:   NONE
#   Status:       IN PROGRESS
#   Machine:      personal laptop
# #####
```

```
library(ggplot2)
library(dplyr)
```

► **principle:** include all relevant information for each script

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src  
|  
| -- data  
|   |-- raw          <- original, immutable data dump  
|   |-- external     <- data from third party sources  
|   |-- interim      <- intermediate transformed data  
|   |-- processed     <- final processed data set(s)  
|  
| -- reports  
|  
| -- references  
|  
| -- README.md  
| -- TODO  
| -- LabNotebook
```

- ▶ **principle:** input raw data and its format is always immutable

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

- ▶ ALWAYS keep your **raw data as immutable**
- ▶ keep **external data** separate and immutable
- ▶ if/when needed **keep interim data for validation**
- ▶ **processed data is ALWAYS replaceable!**
- ▶ all data should be linked to a script in `src`
- ▶ **document** origin of **raw & external data**

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src  
|  
| -- data  
|  
| -- reports  
|   |-- documents      <- documents synthesizing the analysis  
|   |-- figures        <- images generated by the code  
|  
| -- references  
|  
| -- README.md  
| -- TODO  
| -- LabNotebook
```

► **principle:** outputs are disposable

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

- ▶ use whichever **document works best** for your purpose
  - ▶ reports (R Markdown, Jupyter notebooks)
  - ▶ decks
  - ▶ papers
- ▶ **reports can be updated** and are **subject to change**
- ▶ use reports to document **deeper analysis/visualizations** in detail

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src  
|  
| -- data  
|  
| -- reports  
|  
| -- references          <- data dictionaries, explanatory materials  
|  
| -- README.md  
| -- TODO  
| -- LabNotebook
```

- ▶ **principle:** keep as much documentation as possible for your (future) reference and others'

# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
R version 3.4.3 (2017-11-30)
Platform: x86_64-apple-darwin15.6.0 (64-bit)
Running under: macOS High Sierra 10.13.2

Matrix products: default
BLAS: /System/Library/Frameworks/Accelerate.framework/Versions/.../A/libBLAS.dylib
LAPACK: /Library/Frameworks/R.framework/Versions/3.4/Resources/lib/libRlapack.dylib

locale:
[1] en_US.UTF-8/en_US.UTF-8/en_US.UTF-8/C/en_US.UTF-8/en_US.UTF-8

attached base packages:
[1] stats      graphics  grDevices  utils      datasets  methods   base

other attached packages:
[1] bindrcpp_0.2      reshape2_1.4.3   stringr_1.2.0    lubridate_1.7.1  magrittr_1.5
[6] dplyr_0.7.4       readxl_1.0.0     readr_1.1.1      here_0.1         tidyr_0.7.2

loaded via a namespace (and not attached):
[1] Rcpp_0.12.14      rprojroot_1.3-1  assertthat_0.2.0  plyr_1.8.4       cellranger_1.1.0
[6] backports_1.1.2   stringi_1.1.6    rlang_0.1.6       tools_3.4.3      glue_1.2.0
[11] hms_0.4.0         yaml_2.1.16      rsconnect_0.8.5   compiler_3.4.3   pkgconfig_2.0.1
[16] bindr_0.1         tibble_1.3.4
```

► ... and document as much as you can about your session



# Structuring projects (locally)

a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src  
|   |-- data          <- code to read/munge raw data  
|   |-- features      <- code to transform/append data  
|   |-- models        <- code to analyze data  
|   |-- visualizations <- code to create visualizations  
|  
| -- data  
|   |-- raw           <- original, immutable data dump  
|   |-- external      <- data from third party sources  
|   |-- interim       <- intermediate transformed data  
|   |-- processed     <- final processed data set  
|  
| -- reports  
|   |-- documents     <- documents synthesizing the analysis  
|   |-- figures       <- images generated by the code  
|  
| -- references       <- data dictionaries, explanatory materials  
|  
| -- README.md        <- high-level project description  
| -- TODO             <- future improvements, bug fixes (opt)  
| -- LabNotebook      <- chronological records of project (opt)
```

Sources: **Cookiecutter for Data Science**, **ProjectTemplate**

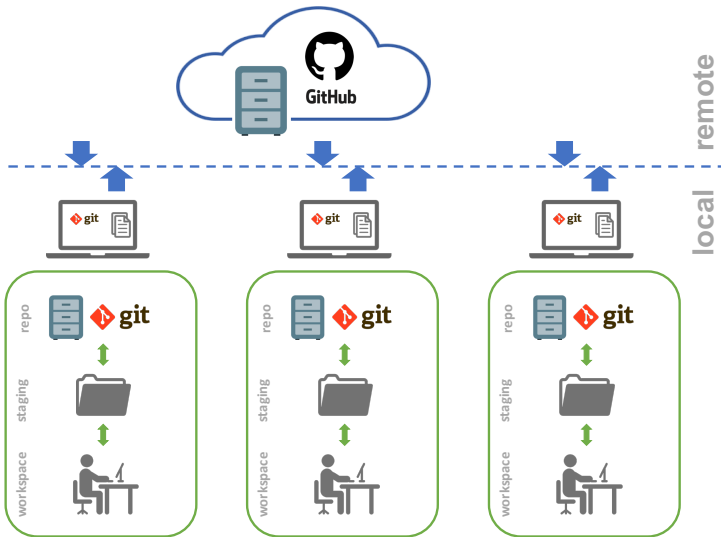
# Structuring projects (locally)

yet another layer for naming conventions...

`FinalProject_final_ThisOneForReal_LastOne.R`

- ▶ may not be easy to remember, or scalable for reproducibility
- ▶ A few pointers:
  - ▶ create a specific structure for your filenames  
`[FUNCTION]_[PROJECT]_[VERSION]`
  - ▶ use same function names consistently across projects  
i.e. `GatherData` for ETL, `MakeGraphs` for visualizations...
  - ▶ no special characters, replace spaces with underscores

# But your project is never just local



# What actually goes to your GitHub repo....

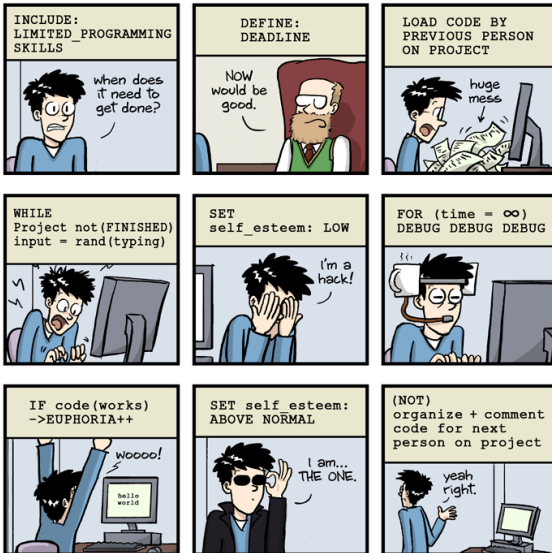
a thin layer...

```
project\  
|  
| -- src  
|   |-- data          <- code to read/munge raw data  
|   |-- features      <- code to transform/append data  
|   |-- models        <- code to analyze data  
|   |-- visualizations <- code to create visualizations  
|   |-- functions     <- scripts that centralize functions  
|   |-- config        <- configuration files  
|  
|  
| -- README.md
```

## ***ProTips:***

- ▶ **NEVER** push data to your GitHub repo
- ▶ **NEVER** push secret keys to your GitHub repo
- ▶ other reference materials would go to the repo's Wiki

# PROGRAMMING FOR NON-PROGRAMMERS



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# scripts

# purpose of your (pseudo) code

- ▶ (Markdown / Jupyter) **notebooks** are great for **sharing** work and (code) review
  - ▶ nice sandbox to **develop** / **test** code
  - ▶ nice way to **review code + outputs** without having to run it
  - ▶ (usually) terrible for scaling!
- ▶ **scripts** are preferred for **running processes**
  - ▶ scripts can be run directly from source
  - ▶ you may need to extract your code from a notebook if you developed there
- ▶ **define the purpose of your code** early on!
  - ▶ avoid doing the same task twice!

# create structured scripts





# create structured scripts

- ▶ each script should perform **only one task**
  - ▶ useful to **call additional scripts** from your script if/when needed
  - ▶ create a **global parameters** script if/when needed
  - ▶ if too many functions, create a **separate script defining all functions**
  - ▶ separate data manipulation from data analysis in different scripts
- ▶ your code should be **as simple as possible**
  - ▶ being clever can - and will! - come back to haunt you when sharing or revisiting code

## start with a meaningful script information section

```
# script information
```

```
</>
```

```
# global definitions
```

```
<code/>
```

```
# task 1
```

```
<code/>
```

```
# task 2
```

```
<code/>
```

```
# task 3
```

```
<code/>
```

```
.R
```

add a global definitions section at the beginning



# add a global definitions section at the beginning

- ▶ place all **important definitions** that will be used throughout the project in a **single section**

```
# :::::::::: SOME GLOBAL DEFINITIONS ::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

# packages to load
library(tidiverse)
library(here)

# additional scripts to call
source(modeling_functions.R)

# objects to use in the script
raw_data_confrontations <- here("data", "raw", "A-E.xlsx")
equivalence_table       <- here("data", "external", "ARCH535.csv")
```

# add a global definitions section at the beginning

- ▶ load **all packages** from a single location

```
# packages to load
library(tidiverse)
library(here)
```

- ▶ call **additional scripts** from a single location

```
# additional scripts to call
source(modeling_functions.R)
```

- ▶ always use **relative paths** when defining locations and files

```
# objects to use in the script
raw_data_confrontations <- here("data", "raw", "A-E.xlsx")
equivalence_table        <- here("data", "external", "ARCH535.csv")
```

## ***ProTips:***

- ▶ do not add them manually at different places in the code!
- ▶ place at beginning of the script if using a single short script
- ▶ place on separate script if working on a larger project

## separate tasks in sections

```
# script information
```

```
</>
```

```
# global definitions
```

```
<code/>
```

```
# task 1
```

```
<code/>
```

```
# task 2
```

```
<code/>
```

```
# task 3
```

```
<code/>
```

```
. R
```

# separate tasks in sections

- ▶ each section of your script should perform a **single task**

```
# .....  
# ..... LOADS DATA .....  
  
confrontations <- read_excel(  
  raw_data_confrontations,  
  sheet = 1,  
  na = "9999"    # converting sentinel value to null  
)  
  
# ..... SOME DATA PROCESSING .....  
  
forces_confrontations <- WrangleTable(forces_table_confrontations,  
  forces_name_lookup)  
  
forces_aggressions <- WrangleTable(forces_table_aggressions,  
  forces_name_lookup)
```

# syntax



# generate readable code

- ▶ improve the readability of your code with **spaces**, though never before a comma

```
#Good  
inner_join(forces_table, by = c("event_id" = "ID"))
```

```
#Bad  
inner_join(forces_table,by=c("event_id"="ID"))
```

- ▶ **indent and align** your code to enhance readability

```
confrontations <- read_excel(  
  raw_data_confrontations,  
  sheet = 1,  
  na = "9999"  
)
```

- ▶ ***ProTip:*** never mix spaces and tabs to indent your code

# name your objects meaningfully and consistently

- ▶ name objects **consistently** - and **meaningfully** - throughout your scripts
  - ▶ objects should always be **lowercase**
  - ▶ be consistent if you use **CamelCase**
  - ▶ use **\_** to **separate words**

# name your objects meaningfully and consistently

- ▶ use object names that have **substantive meaning**

```
rename(  
  detained = DE,  
  total_people_dead = PF  
)
```

- ▶ transform each object to correspond as closely as possible to a **verbal description of its contents**

```
rename(  
  female = ifelse(gender == "female", 1, 0)  
)
```

- ▶ use object names that indicate **direction** where possible

```
rename(  
  wounded_increase = ifelse(  
    total_wounded_change > 0, 1, 0)  
)
```

# name your objects meaningfully and consistently

- ▶ **do not use names of existing functions or variables** for your new objects

```
# Bad
mean <- function(x) median(x)
TRUE <- 0
FALSE <- T
```

- ▶ use only " or ' to wrap **strings** for the language you are working on

```
# R
"Text"

# Python
'Text'
```

# commenting code

# comment your code!!

- ▶ always start your comments with **# followed by a space**
- ▶ separate your code into distinguishable chunks using visually distinct characters like **:**, **-**, or **=**

```
# .....  
# ..... LOAD DATA .....  
  
raw_deaths_data <- read_csv(raw_confrontations)  
  
# .....
```

# comment your code!!

- ▶ include **comments before each block of code** describing its **purpose**

```
# :::::: LOADING NAME CONVERSION TABLE
# the original file treats numeric codes as strings, must convert to integers
# upon loading. Also, names of municipalities are in Spanish, so must specify
# the encoding as the file is read

name_table <- read_csv(conversion_table,
                      col_types = cols(
                        CVE_ENT = col_integer(),
                        NOM_ENT = col_character(),
                        NOM_ABR = col_character(),
                        CVE_MUN = col_integer(),
                        NOM_MUN = col_character()
                      ),
                      locale = locale(encoding = "ISO-8859-1")
)
```

# comment your code!!

## ► **comment your functions** thoroughly, including **inputs** and **outputs**

```
MungeData <- function(baseEventData, StateNames, ForcesTable, SourceString){  
  
  # :::::::::: DESCRIPTION  
  #  
  # The function performs the following transformations in the data to  
  # produce the desired output data:  
  #  
  # 1. add actual names of states and municipalities from a Census table;  
  #    currently the database only has their numeric codes  
  # 2. rename columns from Spanish to English (not everyone speaks both languages)  
  # 3. adding a new variable that indicates the armed force involved in the  
  #    confrontation event  
  # 4. replace all missing values with 0; this will come in handy as we start to  
  #    explore the data further  
  #  
  # :::::: INPUTS  
  #  
  # i) BaseEventData - the raw database to be munged  
  # ii) StatesName - a table with State/Municipality names  
  # iii) ForcesTable - a table that identifies armed forces involved in the event  
  # iv) SourceString - a string that will identify origin of the table  
  #  
  # :::::::::: OUTPUT  
  #  
  # the function returns a dataframe
```



# comment your code!!

- ▶ include comments for any line of code **if meaning would be ambiguous** to someone other than yourself

```
# filling in NAs with zeros, to facilitate graphing and basic computations
# replace_na() requires a list of columns and rules to apply. Code below
# provides that
replace_na(
  # creates an object with numeric column names
  setNames(
    lapply(
      # applies a function that links numeric column names
      # with the assignment of 0
      vector("list", length(select_if(., is.numeric))), # creates list len= 25
      function(x) x <- 0), # defines assignment of 0 to numeric col names
    names(select_if(., is.numeric)) # provides numeric column names
  )
```

- ▶ **ProTip:** if your code needs too many comments, you probably will have to simplify it when cleaning it up

# code validation

# validate that your code does what you think it does

- ▶ verify that **transformed variables** resemble what you intended

```
# create a new global unique ID
processed_data %<>%
+   mutate(
+     global_id = 1:nrow(.)
+   )

# verify there are no duplicates
length(processed_data$global_id) == length(unique(processed_data$global_id))
[1] TRUE

# a quick look to see the distribution of the variable
summary(processed_data$global_id)
```

	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
global_id	1	1350	2698	2698	4047	5396

# validate that your code does what you think it does

- ▶ verify that **missing data is handled correctly** on any recode or creation of a new variable

```
# computes lethality indices
processed_data %<>%
+   mutate(organized_crime_lethality =
+         organized_crime_dead /
+         organized_crime_wounded
+   )

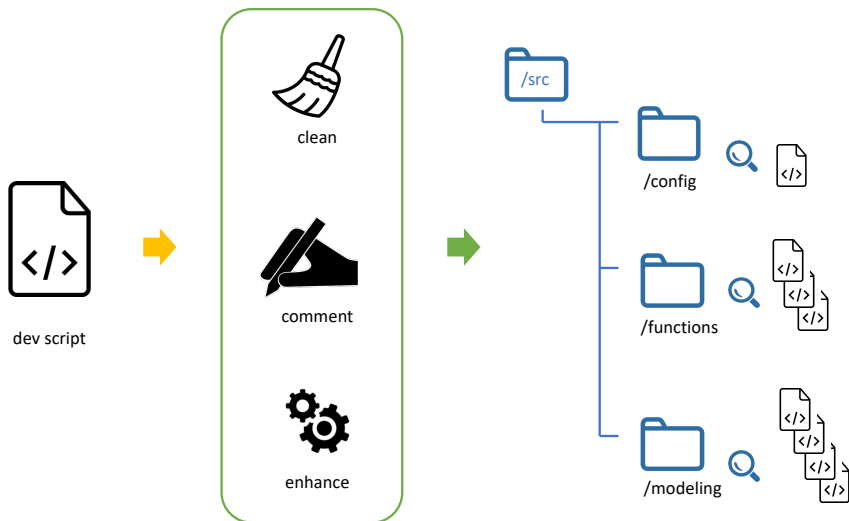
# exploration to identify undefined values
summary(processed_data$organized_crime_lethality)
  Min. 1st Qu.  Median    Mean 3rd Qu.    Max.    NA's
    0         1     Inf     Inf     Inf     Inf   3090
```

# workflow principles

# general workflow principles

- ▶ **80 characters** should be the maximum length of any line in your code
- ▶ if you find an **error** in your code, **correct it exactly where it happened**
  - ▶ do not try to fix it from a later chunk of code
- ▶ when you are done with your project, go back and:
  - ▶ **clean up** your code
  - ▶ **add comments** where appropriate (for the *you* of the future)
  - ▶ perform **stress tests** with as many **edge cases** as you can imagine
  - ▶ make sure to **document future enhancements** (especially to scale up)

# general workflow principles



# commit messages in git



## commit with informative messages

- ▶ **remember:** `commit` **small chunks of logically grouped changes**
  - ▶ you may want to undo a change, but only that change
- ▶ message summarizes **what changed**
  - ▶ use imperative mood
    - ▶ [*this commit will*] `Rename income variable`
  - ▶ start with a **capital letter** and **do not end with a period**
  - ▶ maximum length: **50 characters**
- ▶ if you need to provide more detail on the **what** and **why**:
  - ▶ add a **body** by adding a **blank line**
  - ▶ add a **paragraph** that wraps text at **72 characters**