



# Intro to working with strings

- We have already seen a lot of strings in this course (anytime something is in quotes)
- You can have a vector of strings, which is class `character`
- Typing within either single or double quotes will create a string

# Importing data as text

- With `read.csv`, `read.table`, etc., use `stringsAsFactors = FALSE` if you want to do text processing on a column
- (Leave `stringsAsFactors = TRUE` if you just want to treat it as a categorical variable)
- `readLines` will import a file as a character vector rather than data frame

# String operators

- ==, !=, >, <, >= , <= all work
  - (> and < refer to alphabetical order)
- + does not work (sorry Python fans)

```
mysequence == "AGG"
```

# paste

- Very handy function for concatenating strings together
- Element-wise concatenation of strings from multiple vectors
  - `sep` argument indicates the separator string
- Concatenation of all strings within one vector
  - `collapse` argument indicates the separator string

"Height:"

1.5

"meters"




"Height: 1.5 meters"

# nchar

- Returns the number of characters in a string
- Vectorized; you can give it a vector of strings and get the length of each element

"Height: 1.5 meters"



18 characters

# substring

- Returns part of a string, as specified by positions
- Give it the string, the start position, the end position.
- All three of those arguments can be vectors

"Height: 1.5 meters"



first = 2, last = 5

"eigh"

# strsplit

- Splits a string into multiple strings
- The `split` argument is a character or longer string that is used for delimiting the new strings
- Returns a list, one vector for each original string
- (Note that even if you pass it just one string, it still returns a list)

"Height: 1.5 meters"



split = " "

"Height:"

"1.5"

"meters"



# formatC and prettyNum


- Convert number to text
- Can set number of significant digits or number of digits after decimal place
- Trailing or leading zeros `"1.80"` `"015"`
- Scientific notation `"5.36e-04"`
- Commas `"1,246,782"`
- Handy for output to a table for publication, getting the right format for a file, numbering a list of genes, etc.

# Mini exercise

- Make a new column for our table of plant germplasm information
- It should contain a new sample id, in the format “Sample001” to “Sample558”.

# match

- Works for numbers or strings
- Find first match of a value inside another vector
- Handy for reordering one data set based on another

match { `c("a", "b")`  
`c("b", "d", "a", "e")` }  3, 1

# Indexing with strings – named vectors

- Any vector can have a “names” attribute giving a name to each element
- Ideally all names are unique
- Many functions will carry names over to results
- Functions to retrieve or assign
  - `names` for vectors and lists
  - `rownames`, `colnames` for data frames and matrices
- Can set up at vector creation without quotes  
`c(a = 5, b = 6)`

# Mini exercise

- Take the “X.sample” column of the plant germplasm data table, and assign these same values to the row names of the table using `rownames`.
- Index the data frame by row names to get just the rows for JY001, JY012, and JY028.

# Pattern matching

- **grep**: find matches across a vector of strings
  - Returns numeric index or string itself (**value** arg)
  - **grep1** returns TRUE/FALSE vector
  - Named after Unix command

grep { "ember"  
c("September", "October", "November") } → 1, 3

# Pattern matching

- “find and replace” functions for strings:
  - **sub**: replaces first instance of pattern
  - **gsub**: replaces all instances of pattern

gsub { "ember", "month"  
c("September", "October", "November")



c("Septmonth", "October", "Novmonth")

# Pattern matching

- Functions to give positions and lengths of pattern matches within a string:
  - `regexpr` returns vector with first match position
  - `gregexpr` returns list with all match positions

`gregexpr` { `"e"`  
`c("September", "October", "November")`



2, 5, 8

6

4, 7



# The `fixed` argument

- `fixed = TRUE` means pattern must be matched exactly
- `fixed = FALSE` (the default) matches strings using **regular expressions**
- If you already know regular expressions in Perl, you can use `perl = TRUE` to use that syntax

# Regular expressions

- Used by `grep`, `grep1`, `gsub`, `sub`, `regexpr`, `gregexpr`, `strsplit`
- For when you need to match not an exact string, but an overall pattern
- For example, “Chr” followed by two numbers, and it must be at the beginning of a string

```
"^Chr[0-9]{2}"
```

# Regular expression basics

- Most characters (letters and numbers) match themselves
- `.` (period) indicates any character
- `^` indicates the beginning of the string
- `$` indicates the end of the string

`"^Chr..$"`



Start with `^` and end with `$` to indicate that this must be the whole string. This would match “Chr26” but not “Chr30A”.

# Repeating characters

- Put one of these after a character to indicate how many times that character should repeat:
  - `?` : one or zero matches
  - `*` : zero or more matches
  - `+` : one or more matches
  - `{2}` : two matches
  - `{2,}` : two or more matches
  - `{2,4}` : two to four matches
- Enclose a group of characters in parentheses if you want to repeat a group

# Matching one of several characters or strings

- Group characters with square brackets `[]`
  - Start with `^` to indicate any character *except* any of these
  - Use hyphen to indicate range, e.g. `[3-6]`
- Group strings with parentheses, with pipe to separate them `(|)`

```
"(Chr|Scaffold)"
```

To match "Chr" or "Scaffold"

# Mini exercise

- Find all sample names from the plant germplasm table that start with "JM2014-S" or "JM2014-K"
- Use `grep` and regular expressions

# Escaping characters

- Say you actually want to search for the characters ^, [, \$, etc. in your string.
- A backslash before the character **escapes** that character, meaning it should be interpreted literally
- Since a backslash is also an escape character for creating strings in R, you generally need to type two of them out.

```
"locus2\\.5"
```

Searches for “locus2.5”, rather than using the period as a wildcard character.

# Character classes

- `[ :digit:]` : any number
- `[ :alpha:]` : any letter
- `[ :blank:]` : space or tab
- `[ :space:]` : space, tab, or newline
- `[ :punct:]` : any punctuation
- `[ :upper:]` : upper case letters
- `[ :lower:]` : lower case letters
- `[ :alnum:]` : letters and numbers



# Using character classes

- Generally have to enclose them in brackets again
  - `[[:digit:]]+` : one or more digits
  - `[[:digit:]][[:punct:]]` : a digit or punctuation mark

# Mini exercise

- Write a regular expression to find samples that start with "JY" and then three numbers
- Make it so that it will not match "JY118-1"