

Strings/Characters

What is a string?

A string is a collection of characters. It can be very helpful to be able to manipulate strings to make data usable.

Strings via an Example

Let's consider the Celtics data on my teaching page,

```
data <-  
  read.delim("https://.../sportsref_download_5.txt")
```

This data has 3 character variables:

- ▶ Player, player name
- ▶ Pos, player position
- ▶ Awards, player awards

Counting the Number of Characters

The function `nchar` applied to a string counts the number of characters.

For example,

```
nchar("Celtics")
```

```
[1] 7
```

When applied to a vector of strings, `nchar` counts the number of characters per element of the vector.

```
nchar(data$Pos)
```

```
[1] 2 2 2 2 2 2 1 1 1 2 2 1 2 2 2 2 2 2
```

Subsetting a String By Character Position

Sometimes we might want to take a substring by extracting the characters in certain positions, e.g. we may want to extract just the first character.

```
substr(data$Pos, 1, 1)
```

```
[1] "P" "S" "S" "P" "P" "S" "C" "C" "C" "S" "S" "C" "P" "P"
```

The first number tells `substr` the position of the first character to extract, and the last number tells `substr` the position of the last character.

```
substr(data$Pos, 2, 2)
```

```
[1] "F" "G" "F" "G" "G" "F" "" "" "" "F" "F" "" "F" "C"
```

Note - if a string only has one character, then extracting the second character returns nothing, "".

Subsetting a String By Character Position

You can pass **vectors** of starting and ending positions to `substr`. For instance, suppose you wanted to extract the last letter of variable `Player` for each player.

How would you do it?

Subsetting a String By Character Position

We can create new variables by subsetting, e.g. we might want to make a new variable based on Pos that just indicates whether a player is a center, a forward, or a guard.

```
data$CGF <- ifelse(nchar(data$Pos) == 1, data$Pos,  
                   substr(data$Pos, 2, 2))
```

```
table(data$CGF)
```

C	F	G
4	9	6

Splitting Strings

Suppose we want to break a string apart. For instance, we may want to do this if we want to create separate variables for first and last name.

The `strsplit` function takes a vector of strings and splits them wherever the string indicated by the `split` argument appears.

```
names <- strsplit(data$Player, split = " ")
```

It returns a **list** with the same length as the vector of strings.

Each element of the list has a variable number of elements, depending on how the string used to split appeared.

What strsplit Returns

```
names[[1]]
```

```
[1] "Jayson" "Tatum"
```

```
names[[13]]
```

```
[1] "Xavier" "Tillman" "Sr."
```

We will want to manipulate the output of `strsplit` using the functions we learned about for working with lists, `lapply` and `unlist`.

Summarizing Strings Created by strsplit

We can summarize the number of substrings created by splitting player names wherever a space appears.

```
table(unlist(lapply(names, length)))
```

```
 2  3  
18  1
```

Extracting Individual Substrings

Since the player's first name is always the first substring returned by splitting on spaces, we can create a new variable that corresponds to the first substring.

```
data$First <-  
  unlist(  
    lapply(  
      strsplit(data$Player, " "),  
      function(x) {x[1]}))
```

Extracting and Combining Individual Substrings

Some players have last names that include a space, which leads to last names being made up of multiple substrings created by splitting on spaces.

This means that creating a last name variable will require learning how to **combine** strings.

Combining Strings

The `paste` function allows us to combine strings.

It takes a collection of strings and an argument called `sep`, which describes how the strings are separated when combined.

```
paste("Boston", "Celtics")
```

```
[1] "Boston Celtics"
```

The default when `sep` is not specified is to separate strings with a single space.

```
paste("Boston", "Celtics", sep = " ")
```

```
[1] "Boston Celtics"
```

```
paste("Boston", "Celtics", sep = "")
```

```
[1] "BostonCeltics"
```

Combining Strings

The `paste` function can also be applied to vectors, in multiple ways.

If multiple vectors are specified, it will paste them together element by element and return a vector that is the same length as the longest vector that was supplied.

```
paste(c("Boston", "Los Angeles"), c("Celtics", "Lakers"))
```

```
[1] "Boston Celtics"      "Los Angeles Lakers"
```

Does paste “Recycle”?

Yes. Be careful!

```
paste(c("Boston", "Los Angeles"), c("Celtics"))
```

```
[1] "Boston Celtics"      "Los Angeles Celtics"
```

It returns a vector that is the same length as the longest vector that was supplied.

```
paste(c("Boston"), c("Celtics", "Lakers"))
```

```
[1] "Boston Celtics" "Boston Lakers"
```

Combining Elements of a Vector

Sometimes, we may want to use `paste` to combine all elements of a single vector. To do this, we need to specify the `collapse` argument instead of the `sep` argument.

```
paste(c("Boston", "Celtics"), collapse = " ")
```

```
[1] "Boston Celtics"
```

The string provided to `collapse` will be used to separate elements of the provided vector when they are combined.

Creating a Last Name Variable

We can use what we just learned to create a last name variable!

```
data$Last <- unlist(  
  lapply(strsplit(data$Player, " "),  
    function(x) {  
      paste(x[2:length(x)], collapse = " ")  
    })  
)
```

Creating Indicators for Awards

We can use what we've learned to create indicator variables for:

- ▶ Defensive Player of the Year
- ▶ All Star

An indicator or dummy variable takes on value of 1 or 0 depending on whether or not a statement is true.

Try it!

Searching Strings

There are two useful functions for searching strings:

- ▶ `grep`, which takes string to search for, a vector of strings to search in, and returns a vector of indices for which the searched string appears
- ▶ `grepl`, which takes string to search for, a vector of strings to search in, and returns a logical vector of that is TRUE when the searched string appears

```
grep("Ja", data$First)
```

```
[1]  1  3 15
```

```
grepl("Ja", data$First)
```

```
[1] TRUE FALSE TRUE FALSE FALSE FALSE FALSE FALSE  
[13] FALSE FALSE TRUE FALSE FALSE FALSE FALSE
```

Creating Indicators for Awards with `grep1`

You can use `grep1` to create Defensive Player of the Year and All Star indicators.

Try it!

Modifying Strings with `sub` and `gsub`

There are two useful functions for modifying strings via substitution:

- ▶ `sub` takes a string to look for, a new string to replace the string to look for with (once), and a vector of strings to apply the replacement to
- ▶ `gsub` takes a string to look for, a new string to replace the string to look for with (as many times as needed), and a vector of strings to apply the replacement to

Demonstration of sub and gsub

```
data$Awards[1:4]
```

```
[1] "MVP-6,CPOY-9,AS,NBA1" "DPOY-8"          "AS"  
[4] "DPOY-6"
```

```
sub("-", "", data$Awards[1:4])
```

```
[1] "MVP6,CPOY-9,AS,NBA1" "DPOY8"          "AS"  
[4] "DPOY6"
```

```
gsub("-", "", data$Awards[1:4])
```

```
[1] "MVP6,CPOY9,AS,NBA1" "DPOY8"          "AS"  
[4] "DPOY6"
```

Creating CGF Variable with sub or gsub

We can remake the new variable based on Pos that just indicates whether a player is a center, a forward, or a guard more easily with sub or gsub.

Try it!

Finding Starting Position

There are two useful functions for finding the position where a specified string begins:

- ▶ `regexpr`, takes a string to look for (once), and a vector of strings to look in
- ▶ `gregexpr`, takes a string to look for (multiple times), and a vector of strings to look in

Finding Starting Position with regexpr

```
data$Player[1]
```

```
[1] "Jayson Tatum"
```

```
regexpr("a", data$Player[1])
```

```
[1] 2
```

```
attr(,"match.length")
```

```
[1] 1
```

```
attr(,"index.type")
```

```
[1] "chars"
```

```
attr(,"useBytes")
```

```
[1] TRUE
```

Finding Starting Position with regexpr

```
data$Player[1]
```

```
[1] "Jayson Tatum"
```

```
gregexpr("a", data$Player[1])
```

```
[[1]]
```

```
[1] 2 9
```

```
attr(,"match.length")
```

```
[1] 1 1
```

```
attr(,"index.type")
```

```
[1] "chars"
```

```
attr(,"useBytes")
```

```
[1] TRUE
```

Finding Starting Position for Vectors

```
regexpr("a", data$Player)
```

```
gregexpr("a", data$Player)
```