

# Knit, Commit, and Push

*Teaching version control in undergraduate statistics courses*

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Toronto Workshop on Reproducibility  
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 [bit.ly/teach-version-control](https://bit.ly/teach-version-control)

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# Teaching a reproducible workflow

- Part of replicating a scientific study is the ability to **reproduce the statistical analysis**
- Students need facility with **professional statistical analysis software** - 2014 ASA Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs
- **Workflow and reproducibility** are important components of “data acumen” - 2018 National Academies report *Data Science for Undergraduates: Opportunities and Options*
- **Version control** as key topic for statistical analysis, particularly for coordinating work across a team - Nolan and Temple Lang (2010)

# Key terms

**Version control:** recording changes to a file or set of files over time

**Git:** Version control software system

**GitHub:** Commercial hosting service for Git repositories (folders)

# Why teach version control in statistics courses?

## ✓ Important component of reproducible workflow

- More easily track analysis history and provide analysis provenance
- Keep track of files being modified by multiple people

## ✓ Equip students with important computing skills

- Students can do a lot using basic functionality
- Develop skills throughout curriculum if introduced in early courses

# Beckman et al. (2021)

- Instructors from multiple institutions share experience implementing version control using Git and GitHub in their courses
  - Represents courses throughout statistics curriculum from introductory to graduate-level
- Focus on implementation: computing toolkit, first exposure in class, assessment
- Discussion on pedagogical approach

**This talk focuses on implementation in a second semester course**



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# Course description



~ 90 students who have taken introductory statistics, data science, or probability course

**Topics:** Linear regression, logistic regression, and ANOVA with focus on application

**Activities:** In-class exercises, computing labs, homework, quizzes, group project

# Computing toolkit



- R Markdown for write up
- Run Git commands using point-and-click interface
- Server-based RStudio\*
  - Git already configured
  - Same set up for all students



- Assign and submit assignments
- Facilitates collaboration on group assignments
- Course management using **ghclass** R package (or GitHub Classroom\*\*)

\*Çetinkaya-Rundel, M., and Rundel, C. (2018), "Infrastructure and Tools for Teaching Computing Throughout the Statistical Curriculum," The American Statistician, 72, 58–65,

\*\*Fiksel, J., Jager, L. R., Hardin, J. S., and Taub, M. A. (2019), "Using GitHub Classroom to Teach Statistics," Journal of Statistics Education, 27, 100–119.

# First exposure in class

- Lecture introducing reproducible workflow and computing toolkit
  - Help students understand value early on
- Start with individual assignments and using scaffolding to ease students into the new workflow

## Individual assignment

This is another good place to knit, commit, and push changes to your remote lab-01 repo on GitHub. Write an informative commit message (e.g. “Completed exercises 5 - 8”), and push every file to GitHub by clicking the checkbox next to each file in the Git pane. After you push the changes, the Git pane in RStudio should be empty.

## Group assignment

✓ ↑ **Team Member 1:** Knit, commit and push your changes to GitHub with an appropriate commit message again. Make sure to commit and push all changed files so that your Git pane is cleared up afterwards.

All other team members: **Pull** to get the updated documents from GitHub. Click on the .Rmd file, and you should see the responses to exercises 1- 4.

**Team Member 2:** It's your turn! Type the team's response to exercises 5 - 7.



# Ghc1ass

- R package for managing courses on GitHub
- Use R functions to distribute assignments, manage teams, collect student work
- Reproducible administrative workflow

[rundel.github.io/ghclass](https://rundel.github.io/ghclass)

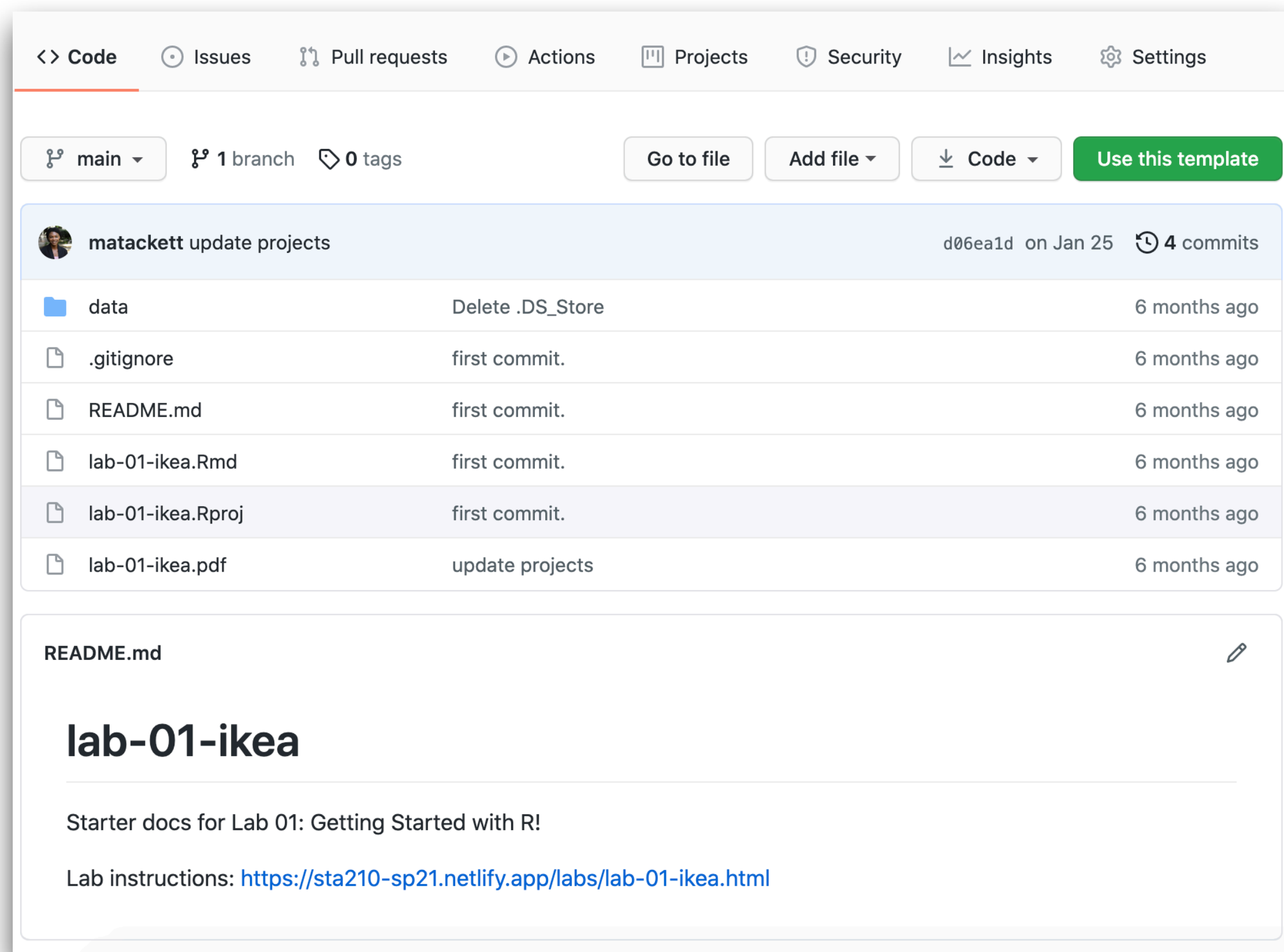


Developed by Colin Rundel &  
Mine Çetinkaya-Rundel

# Assignment workflow

## Instructor

- Create starter repo in GitHub.
  - Includes R Markdown documents, data set, etc.
- Make a copy of the starter repo for each student (or group) using **ghclass**



# Assignment workflow

## Student

- Find private assignment repo on GitHub
- Clone repo and create a new project in RStudio

The screenshot shows the GitHub organization page for 'STA 210: Regression Analysis (Spring 2021)'. The organization has 30 repositories, 114 people, and 0 teams. A search for 'lab' yields 2 results. The repository 'lab-01-ikea-maria-student' is highlighted with a green oval. The repository details for 'lab-01-ikea-maria-student' are shown, including the file list and the 'Clone' button, which is also highlighted with a green oval.

**STA 210: Regression Analysis (Spring 2021)**  
GitHub organization for STA 210: Regression Analysis at Duke University.  
maria.tackett@duke.edu

Repositories 30 Packages People 114 Teams Projects

Pinned repositories

- website**  
Forked from sta210-fa20/website  
Course website for STA 210: Regression Analysis (Fall 2020)  
HTML ☆ 1

Search: lab  
2 results for repositories matching lab sorted by last updated

- lab-02-trails-maria-student** (Private)  
0 stars 0 forks 0 watchers Updated on Feb 1
- lab-01-ikea-maria-student** (Private)  
0 stars 0 forks 0 watchers Updated on Jan 26

Repository details for **lab-01-ikea-maria-student**:

- main 1 branch 0 tags
- Go to file Add file Code
- Clone HTTPS SSH GitHub CLI  
https://github.com/sta210-sp21/lab-01  
Use Git or checkout with SVN using the web URL.
- Open with GitHub Desktop
- Download ZIP

File list:

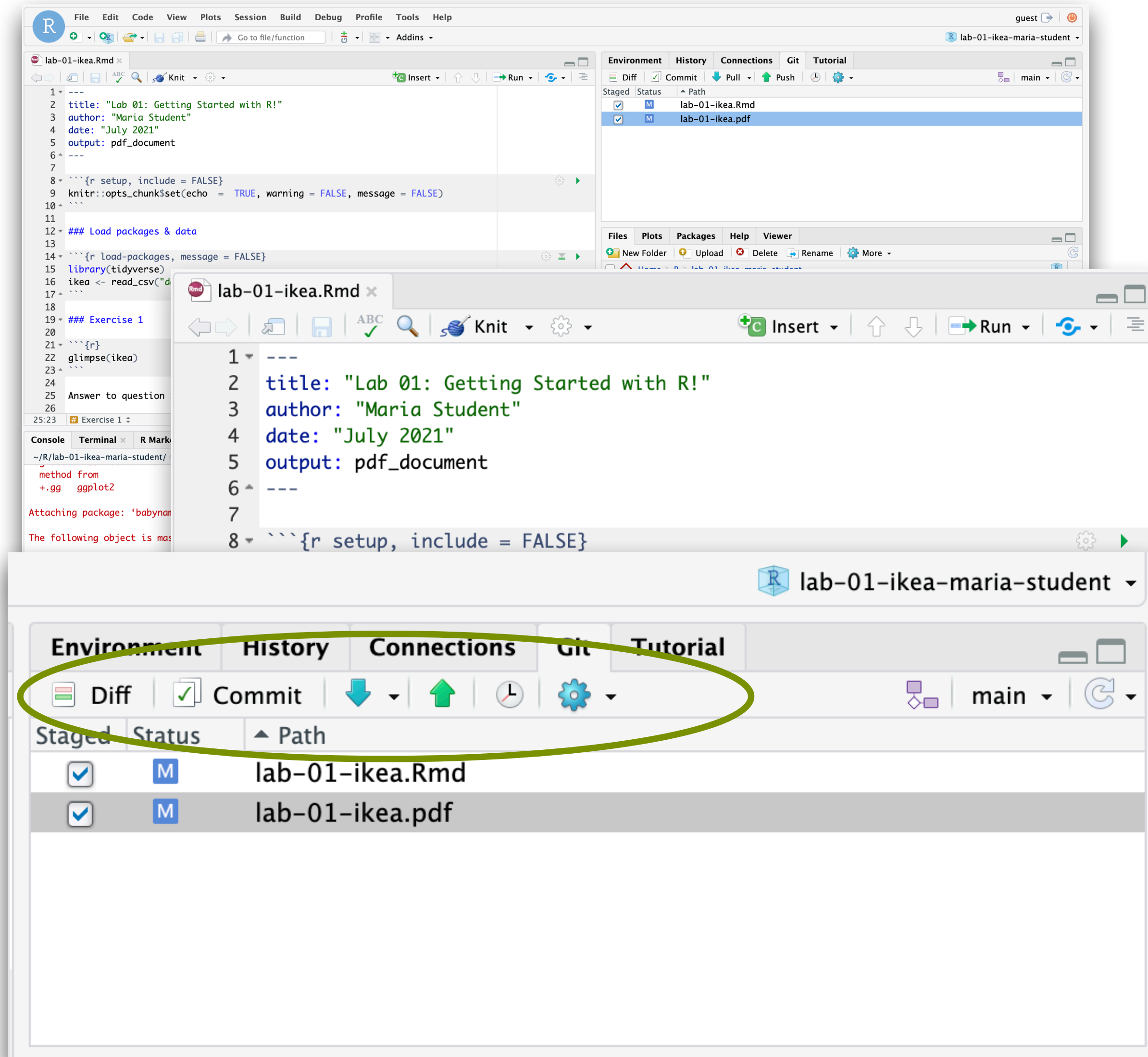
File	Commit
data	Initial commit
.gitignore	Initial commit
README.md	Initial commit
lab-01-ikea.Rmd	updated file
lab-01-ikea.Rproj	Initial commit
lab-01-ikea.pdf	Changed author name and date.



# Assignment workflow

## Student

- As they work on assignment:
  - Write code and narrative in R Markdown document
  - ***“Knit, commit, and push”*** work to GitHub repo
- Submit PDF for grading on Gradescope





# Assessment

## Individual assignments

- ~ 10% of grade for formatting, reproducibility, and version control
- Assessed based on regular commits (3+) and informative commit messages

## Group assignments

- ~ 10% of grade for formatting, reproducibility, version control, and collaboration
- Each group member's contribution assessed based on commit history

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# Challenges + lessons learned

## New workflow + computing tools

- Students have an established computing workflow
- Emphasize the value of a reproducible workflow, particularly for collaboration

## Getting over learning curve

- Learning curve with learning this workflow
- Keep it simple (basic functionality, start with individual assignments)

## Remembering the value

- Can be a disconnect when students submit work in the “usual” way
- Reiterate the role of version control share experiences from academia and industry

# Resources for implementation

## Pedagogy

- Beckman, M. D., Çetinkaya-Rundel, M., Horton, N. J., Rundel, C. W., Sullivan, A. J., & Tackett, M. (2021). Implementing version control with Git and GitHub as a learning objective in statistics and data science courses. *Journal of Statistics and Data Science Education*, 29, 132-144. DOI: [10.1080/10691898.2020.1848485](https://doi.org/10.1080/10691898.2020.1848485)
- Çetinkaya-Rundel, M. (2020), "Data Science in a Box," available at <https://www.datasciencebox.org>

## Computing

- Bryan, J. (2018), "Happy Git and GitHub for the useR," GitHub, available at <https://happygitwithr.com>.
- Çetinkaya-Rundel, M., and Rundel, C. (2018), "Infrastructure and Tools for Teaching Computing Throughout the Statistical Curriculum," *The American Statistician*, 72, 58–65, DOI: [10.1080/00031305.2017.1397549](https://doi.org/10.1080/00031305.2017.1397549).
- Fiksel, J., Jager, L. R., Hardin, J. S., and Taub, M. A. (2019), "Using GitHub Classroom to Teach Statistics," *Journal of Statistics Education*, 27, 100–119. DOI: [10.1080/10691898.2019.1617089](https://doi.org/10.1080/10691898.2019.1617089)
- Rundel, C., Çetinkaya-Rundel, M., and Anders, T. (2020), "ghclass: Tools for Managing Classes With GitHub," available at <http://github.com/rundel/ghclass>

# Additional resources

## Computing in statistics and data science curriculum

- Nolan, D., and Temple Lang, D. (2010), “Computing in the Statistics Curriculum,” *The American Statistician*, 64, 97–107. DOI: [10.1198/tast.2010.09132](https://doi.org/10.1198/tast.2010.09132)
- National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (2018), “Data Science for Undergraduates: Opportunities and Options,” available at <https://nas.edu/envisioningds>
- American Statistical Association (2014), “Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs in Statistical Science,” available at <http://www.amstat.org/education/curriculumguidelines.cfm>
- (2021). Computing in the Statistics and Data Science Curriculum [Special issue]. *Journal of Statistics and Data Science Education*, 29(sup1), available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ujse21/29/sup1>
- **Minimal GitHub website:** <https://nicholasjhorton.github.io/Minimal-GitHub/>



# Thank You!



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