

Repetitive Tasks and Functional Programming

HES 505 Fall 2022: Session 4

Matt Williamson

Objectives

1. Describe the basic components of functions
2. Introduce the **apply** and **map** family of functions
3. Practice designing functions for repetitive tasks

What are functions?

- A specific **class** of **R** object (can call **function** inside **functions**)

```
1 rg <- paste("The range of mpg is", sum(mean(mtcars$mpg), sd(mtcars$mpg)), "  
2 rg
```

```
[1] "The range of mpg is 26.1175730520891 - 14.0636769479109"
```

- A self-contained (i.e., modular) piece of code that performs a specific task
- Allows powerful customization and extension of **R**

Why use functions?

- Copy-and-paste and repetitive typing are *prone to errors*
- Evocative names and modular code make your analysis more tractable
- Update in one place!

**If you are copy-and-pasting more than 2x,
consider a function!**

Designing Functions

Getting started

- Sketch out the steps in the algorithm (pseudocode!)
- Develop working code for each step
- Anonymize

```
1 do_something <- function(arg1, arg2, arg3){  
2   intermediate_process <- manipulate(arg1,arg2, arg3)  
3   clean_output <- cleanup(intermediate_process)  
4   return(clean_output)  
5 }
```

Structure of functions: Names

- What will your function do?
- Short, but clear!
- Avoid using reserved words or functions that already exist
- Use **snake_case**

```
1 something <- function(...)  
2 }
```

Not Great

```
1 do_something_ultraspecific  
2 }
```

Better

```
1 do_something <- function(.  
2 }
```

Pretty good

Structure of functions: Arguments

- Provide the data that the function will work on
- Provide other arguments that control the details of the computation (often with defaults)
- Called by name or position (names should be descriptive)

```
1 nums <- rnorm(n = 1000, mean=2, sd=1.5)
```

Same As

```
1 nums <- rnorm(1000, 2, 1.5)
```


Structure of functions: Body

- The body of the function appears between the `{}`
- This is where the function does its work

```
1 # Compute confidence interval around mean using normal approximation
2 mean_ci <- function(x, conf = 0.95) {
3   se <- sd(x) / sqrt(length(x))
4   alpha <- 1 - conf
5   mean(x) + se * qnorm(c(alpha / 2, 1 - alpha / 2))
6 }
7
8 x <- runif(100)
9 mean_ci(x)
```

```
[1] 0.4522242 0.5612360
```

```
1 mean_ci(x, conf = 0.99)
```

```
[1] 0.4350972 0.5783630
```

Structure of functions: Return

- Default is to return the last argument evaluated
- Can use `return()` to return an earlier value
- Can use `list` to return multiple values
- A note on the Environment

```
1 mean_ci <- function(x, conf = 0.95) {  
2   se <- sd(x) / sqrt(length(x))  
3   alpha <- 1 - conf  
4   ci <- mean(x) + se * qnorm(c(alpha / 2, 1 - alpha / 2))  
5   myresults <- list(alpha = alpha, ci = ci, se = se)  
6   return(myresults)  
7 }  
8  
9 ci_result <- mean_ci(x)
```

Structure of functions: Return

```
1 str(ci_result)
```

```
List of 3
```

```
$ alpha: num 0.05
```

```
$ ci    : num [1:2] 0.452 0.561
```

```
$ se    : num 0.0278
```

Repetitive Tasks

Iteration

- Another tool for reducing code duplication
- **Iteration** for when you need to repeat the same task on different columns or datasets
- **Imperative** iteration uses loops (**for** and **while**)
- **Functional** iteration combines functions with the **apply** family to break computational challenges into independent pieces.

Loops

- Use *counters* (**for**) or *conditionals* (**while**) to repeat a set of tasks
- 3 key components
 - **Output** - before you can loop, you need a place to store the results
 - **Sequence** - defines what you are looping over
 - **Body** - defines what the code is actually doing

Loops

```
1 library(tidyverse)
2 df <- tibble(
3   a = rnorm(10),
4   b = rnorm(10),
5   c = rnorm(10),
6   d = rnorm(10)
7 )
8
9 output <- vector("double", ncol(df)) # 1. output
10 for (i in seq_along(df)) {          # 2. sequence
11   output[[i]] <- median(df[[i]])    # 3. body
12 }
13 output
```

```
[1] 0.18970662 -0.03160902 -0.05779255 -0.10624501
```

```
1 #> [1] -0.24576245 -0.28730721 -0.05669771 0.14426335
```

The **apply** family

- Vectorized functions that eliminate explicit **for** loops
- Differ by the **class** they work on and the output they return
- **apply**, **lapply** are most common; extensions for parallel processing (e.g., **parallel::mclapply**)

The **apply** family

- **apply** for vectors and data frames
- Args: **X** for the data, **MARGIN** how will the function be applied, (1=rows, 2=columns), **FUN** for your function, **...** for other arguments to the function

```
1 apply(mtcars, 2, mean)
```

mpg	cyl	disp	hp	drat	wt	qsec
20.090625	6.187500	230.721875	146.687500	3.596563	3.217250	17.848750
vs	am	gear	carb			
0.437500	0.406250	3.687500	2.812500			

The **apply** family

- **lapply** for lists (either input or output)
- Args: **X** for the data, **FUN** for your function, **...** for other arguments to the function

```
1 data <- list(item1 = 1:4,  
2             item2 = rnorm(10),  
3             item3 = rnorm(20, 1),  
4             item4 = rnorm(100, 5))  
5  
6 # get the mean of each list item  
7 lapply(data, mean)
```

```
$item1  
[1] 2.5
```

```
$item2  
[1] 0.1799642
```

```
$item3
```

```
[1] 1.115704
```

```
$item4
```

```
[1] 5.073581
```

The **map** family

- Similar to **apply**, but more consistent input/output
- All take a vector for input
- Difference is based on the output you expect
- Integrates with **tidyverse**

The **map** family

- **map()**: output is a list
- **map_int()**: output is an integer vector
- **map_lgl()**: output is a logical vector
- **map_dbl()**: output is a double vector
- **map_chr()**: output is a character vector
- **map_df()**, **map_dfr()**, **map_dfc()**: output is a dataframe (**r** and **c** specify how to combine the data)

Some parting thoughts

- Transparency vs. speed
- Testing
- Moving forward

Back to our example

