



1.3.3: Data Visualization

(Asynchronous-Online)

Session Objectives

1. To visualize data using different R packages.

Key points to cover:

1. Introduce to ggplot2 and other R packages.
 2. Visualize one, two, or more variables at a time.
 3. Introduce other resources (e.g., books, blogs, or websites) trainees can refer to.
-

0. Pework - Before You Begin

A. Install packages

If you do not have them already, install the following packages from CRAN:

- `ggplot2`
- `ggthemes`
- `readr`
- `dplyr`

B. Open/create your RStudio project

Let's start with the `myfirstRproject` RStudio project you created in [Module 1.3.2 - part 1](#). If you have not yet created this `myfirstRproject` RStudio project, go ahead and create a new RStudio Project for this lesson. *Feel free to name your project whatever you want, it does not need to be named `myfirstRproject`.*



C. Create a new R script and load data into your computing session

At the end of [Module 1.3.2 - part 6](#) you saved the `mydata` dataset in the `mydata.RData` R binary format.

1. Go ahead and create a new R script (*.R) for this computing session. *We did this already in [Module 1.3.1 - part 3](#) - refer to this section to remember how to create a new R script.*
2. Put this code into your new R script (*.R) to load `mydata.RData` into your current computing session.

```
# load mydata  
load(file = "mydata.RData")
```

! Data must/should be in your RStudio project

REMEMBER R/RStudio automatically looks in your current RStudio project folder for all files for your current computing session. So, make sure the `mydata.RData` file is in your current RStudio project `myfirstRproject` folder on your computer.

For a more detailed overview of RStudio projects:

- read “Chapter 6: R projects” in the *The Epidemiologist R Handbook* and
- refer to “Chapter 45 Directory interactions” in the *The Epidemiologist R Handbook*.

D. Get Inspired!

- Get Inspired at [The R Graph Gallery](#)
- Also see the [Top Curated R Graphs](#)
- Also see [Additional Resources - R Graphics](#)



1. Base R graphical functions

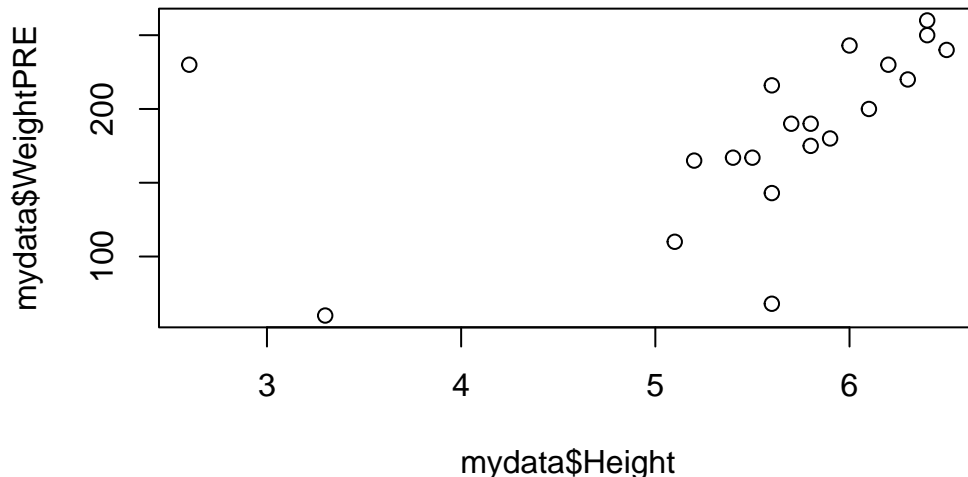
The base R `graphics` package is very powerful on its own. As you saw in [1.3.1: Introduction to R and R Studio](#), we can make a simple 2-dimensional scatterplot with the `plot()` function.

Base R - Scatterplot

For example, let's make a plot of `Height` on the X-axis (horizontal) and `WeightPRE` on the Y-axis (vertical) from the `mydata` dataset. Since we are using base R function, we have to use the `$`selector to identify the variables we want inside the `mydata` dataset.

Learn more about the `plot()` function and arguments by running `help(plot, package = "graphics")`.

```
plot(x = mydata$Height,  
     y = mydata$WeightPRE)
```



The plot does look a little odd - this is due to some data errors in the `mydata` dataset. We will fix these below. But for now, you can “see” that these data may have some issues that need to be addressed. For example:

- There are 2 people with heights < 5 feet tall which may be suspect

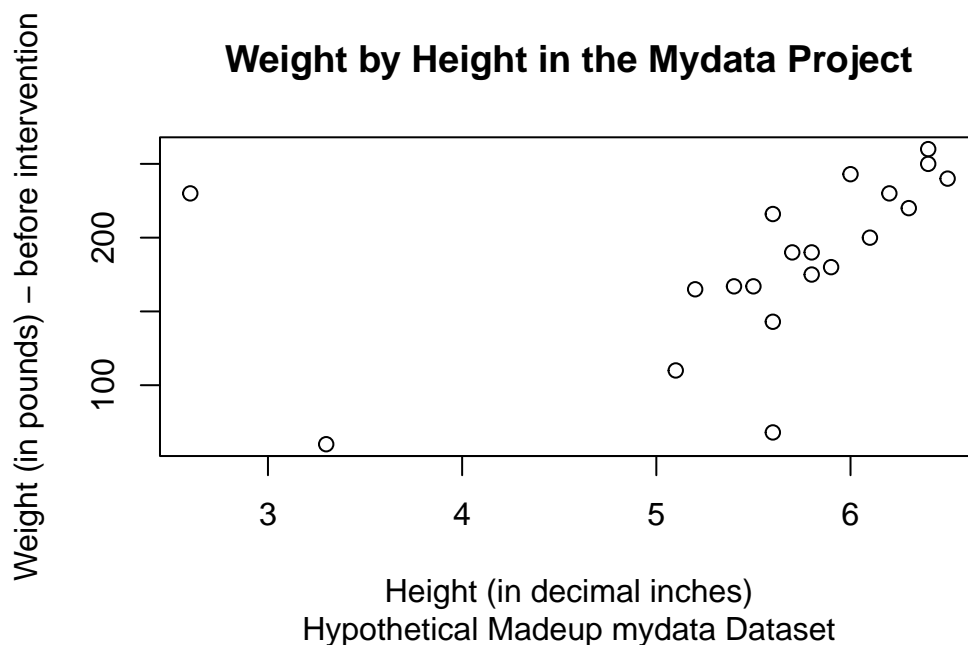


- There are 2 people with a weight < 100 pounds which may be data entry errors or incorrect units

For now, let's add some additional graphical elements:

- a better label for the x-axis
- a better label for the y-axis
- a title for the graph
- a subtitle for the graph

```
plot(x = mydata$Height,  
     y = mydata$WeightPRE,  
     xlab = "Height (in decimal inches)",  
     ylab = "Weight (in pounds) - before intervention",  
     main = "Weight by Height in the Mydata Project",  
     sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")
```



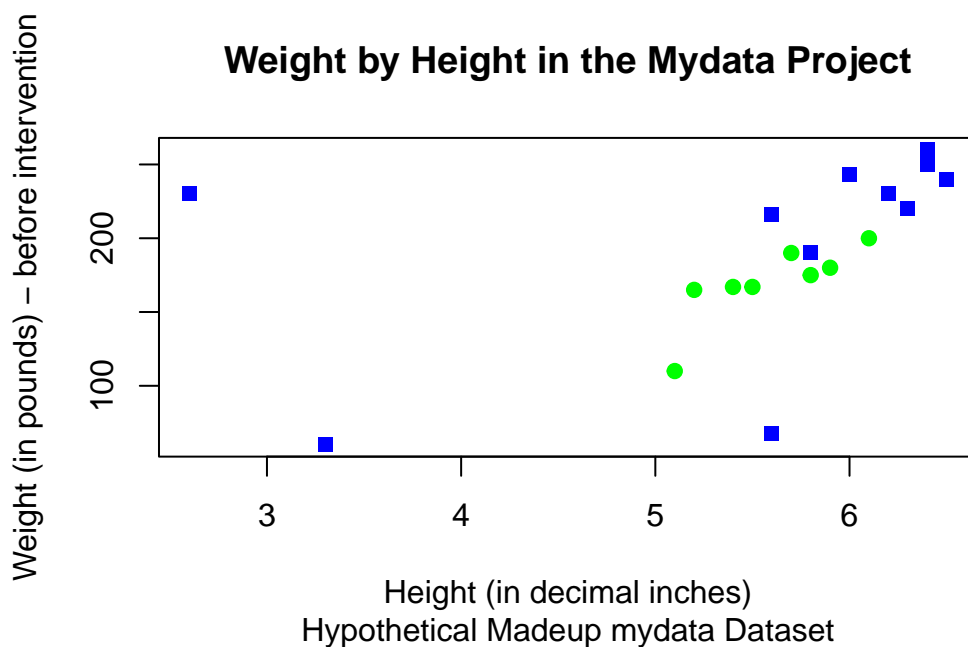
And we could also add color and change the shapes - for example, let's color and shape the points by `GenderCoded`, the numeric coding for gender where 1=Male, 2=Female.

**i** Plot code inspiration

I pulled this code together from code examples at:

- [Stackoverflow post on using pch](#)
- [STHDA post on point shapes](#)

```
plot(x = mydata$Height,  
     y = mydata$WeightPRE,  
     col = c("blue", "green")[mydata$GenderCoded],  
     pch = c(15, 19)[mydata$GenderCoded],  
     xlab = "Height (in decimal inches)",  
     ylab = "Weight (in pounds) - before intervention",  
     main = "Weight by Height in the Mydata Project",  
     sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")
```



The [STHDA website on “R Base Graphs”](#) has a nice walkthrough of using the base R `graphics` package to make really nice plots.

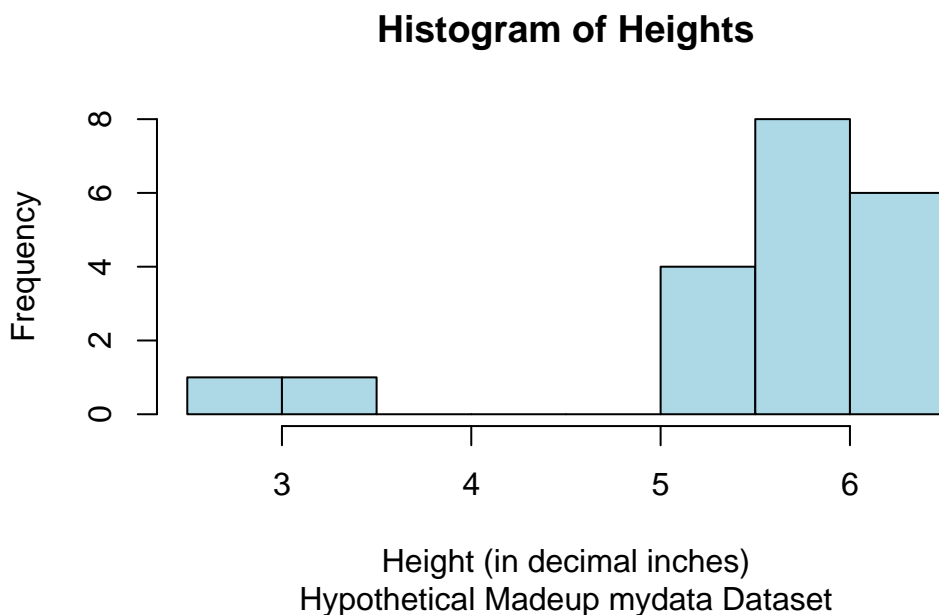
Base R - Histogram**Basic Histogram**



As we noted above, let's take a look at the distribution of the heights in the `mydata` dataset. There is a specific `hist()` function in the `graphics` package for making histograms, learn more by running `help(hist, package = "graphics")`.

Notice that we can use some of the same arguments as we did above for `plot()`.

```
hist(mydata$Height,  
     xlab = "Height (in decimal inches)",  
     col = "lightblue",  
     border = "black",  
     main = "Histogram of Heights",  
     sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")
```



Colors available

There are 657 names colors immediately available to you from the built-in `grDevices` Base R package which works in conjunction with `graphics`. You can view the names of all of these colors by running `colors()`. You can also learn more at:

- https://www.sthda.com/english/wiki/colors-in-r#google_vignette
- <https://r-graph-gallery.com/42-colors-names.html>
- <https://r-graph-gallery.com/ggplot2-color.html> - which explains how colors can be specified using the built-in color names, but can also be specified using RGB (red, green, blue) indexes or even Hexcodes for which there are many online tools like



<https://htmlcolorcodes.com/>.

```
# list built-in colors  
colors()
```

[1] "white"	"aliceblue"	"antiquewhite"
[4] "antiquewhite1"	"antiquewhite2"	"antiquewhite3"
[7] "antiquewhite4"	"aquamarine"	"aquamarine1"
[10] "aquamarine2"	"aquamarine3"	"aquamarine4"
[13] "azure"	"azure1"	"azure2"
[16] "azure3"	"azure4"	"beige"
[19] "bisque"	"bisque1"	"bisque2"
[22] "bisque3"	"bisque4"	"black"
[25] "blanchedalmond"	"blue"	"blue1"
[28] "blue2"	"blue3"	"blue4"
[31] "blueviolet"	"brown"	"brown1"
[34] "brown2"	"brown3"	"brown4"
[37] "burlywood"	"burlywood1"	"burlywood2"
[40] "burlywood3"	"burlywood4"	"cadetblue"
[43] "cadetblue1"	"cadetblue2"	"cadetblue3"
[46] "cadetblue4"	"chartreuse"	"chartreuse1"
[49] "chartreuse2"	"chartreuse3"	"chartreuse4"
[52] "chocolate"	"chocolate1"	"chocolate2"
[55] "chocolate3"	"chocolate4"	"coral"
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[61] "coral4"	"cornflowerblue"	"cornsilk"
[64] "cornsilk1"	"cornsilk2"	"cornsilk3"
[67] "cornsilk4"	"cyan"	"cyan1"
[70] "cyan2"	"cyan3"	"cyan4"
[73] "darkblue"	"darkcyan"	"darkgoldenrod"
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[481]	"mistyrose2"	"mistyrose3"	"mistyrose4"
[484]	"moccasin"	"navajowhite"	"navajowhite1"
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[496]	"olivedrab3"	"olivedrab4"	"orange"
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[604]	"slategrey"	"snow"	"snow1"
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[610]	"springgreen"	"springgreen1"	"springgreen2"
[613]	"springgreen3"	"springgreen4"	"steelblue"
[616]	"steelblue1"	"steelblue2"	"steelblue3"
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[622]	"tan2"	"tan3"	"tan4"



[625]	"thistle"	"thistle1"	"thistle2"
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[634]	"tomato4"	"turquoise"	"turquoise1"
[637]	"turquoise2"	"turquoise3"	"turquoise4"
[640]	"violet"	"violetred"	"violetred1"
[643]	"violetred2"	"violetred3"	"violetred4"
[646]	"wheat"	"wheat1"	"wheat2"
[649]	"wheat3"	"wheat4"	"whitesmoke"
[652]	"yellow"	"yellow1"	"yellow2"
[655]	"yellow3"	"yellow4"	"yellowgreen"

Histogram with Overlaid Density Curve

Statisticians often like seeing a histogram (*for the frequencies or probability of each value for the variable in the dataset*) with an overlaid density curve (*which is “smoothed” line for these probabilities*). Statistical software like SAS and SPSS make this really easy. However, in R, we need to think through the process to get this to work.

- First, we need to make the histogram using probabilities for the “bars” in the histogram instead of frequency counts.
- Second, we need to add a density line curve over the histogram “bars”.

See these online examples:

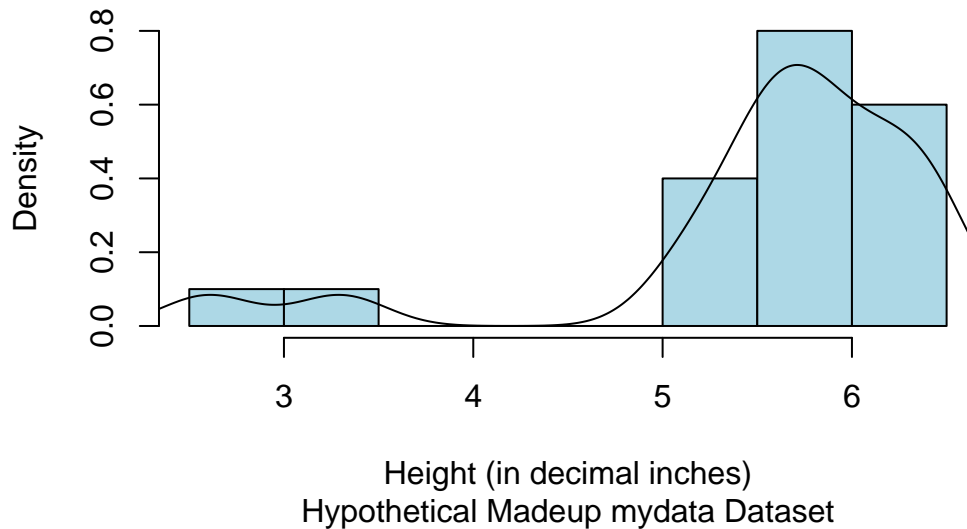
- <https://r-charts.com/distribution/histogram-curves/>
- <https://www.datacamp.com/doc/r/histograms-and-density>
- <https://www.r-bloggers.com/2012/09/histogram-density-plot-combo-in-r/>

```
# make histogram as we did above
# add freq = FALSE
hist(mydata$Height,
     freq = FALSE,
     xlab = "Height (in decimal inches)",
     col = "lightblue",
     border = "black",
     main = "Histogram of Heights",
     sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")

# add density curve line
# add na.rm=TRUE to remove
# the missing values in Height
lines(density(mydata$Height, na.rm=TRUE),
     col = "black")
```



Histogram of Heights



Fix the Heights

So as you can see in the histogram and in the scatterplot figures above for the **Height** variable, there are 2 people with heights under 4 feet tall.

```
# use dplyr::arrange()
library(dplyr)

mydata %>%
  select(SubjectID, Height) %>%
  arrange(Height) %>%
  head()
```

```
# A tibble: 6 x 2
  SubjectID Height
    <dbl>   <dbl>
1         28   2.6
2          8   3.3
3          9   5.1
4          6   5.2
5          2   5.4
6         12   5.5
```



Let's look at these values:

- SubjectID number 28 has a Height of 2.6 feet tall
 - If this wasn't a made-up dataset, we could ask the original data collectors to see if there is a way to check this value in their records or possibly to re-measure this individual.
 - For now, let's assume this was a simple typo where the 2 numbers were transposed where this individual should be 6.2 feet tall.
- SubjectID number 8 has a Height of 3.3 feet tall
 - Unfortunately, this is probably not a simple typo. Without further details, we should maybe set this to missing as an unvalidated data point.
 - As a side-note, I actually ran into this problem in a study where one of the participants was a paraplegic. So, this could be a legitimate height. But when computing BMI, adjustments need to be made or alternative body metrics are needed.
 - For now, we will set this to missing, `NA_real_` which is missing for "real" numeric variables.

```
# make a copy of the dataset
mydata_corrected <- mydata

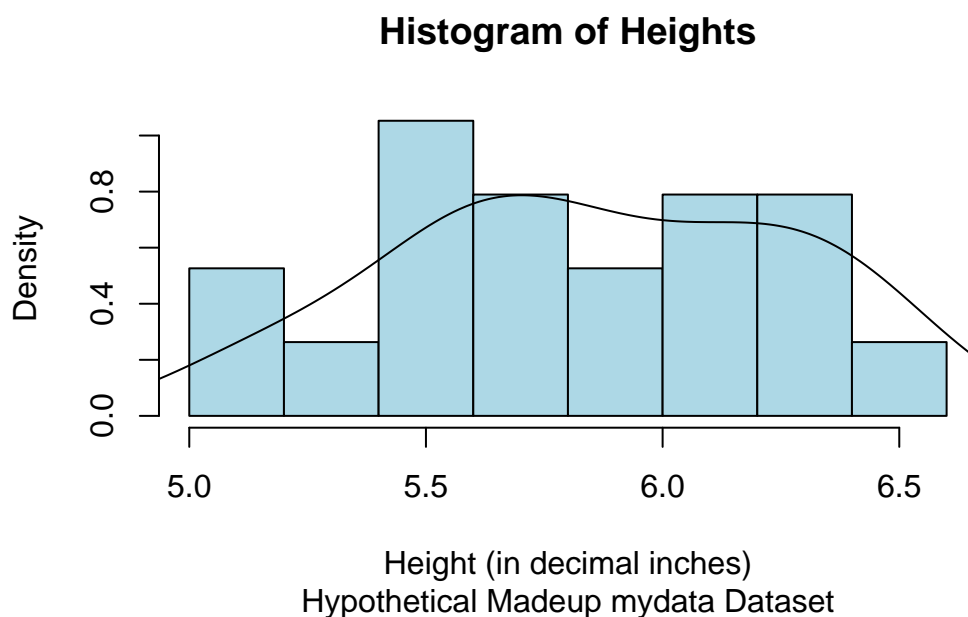
# compute a new corrected height
# fix heights for these 2 IDs
mydata_corrected <-
  mydata_corrected %>%
  mutate(Height_corrected = case_when(
    (SubjectID == 28) ~ 6.2,
    (SubjectID == 8) ~ NA_real_,
    .default = Height
  ))
```

Remake the histogram with the corrected heights.

```
# make histogram as we did above
# add freq = FALSE
hist(mydata_corrected$Height_corrected,
     freq = FALSE,
     xlab = "Height (in decimal inches)",
     col = "lightblue",
     border = "black",
     main = "Histogram of Heights",
     sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")
```



```
# add density curve line
# add na.rm=TRUE to remove
# the missing values in Height
lines(density(mydata_corrected$Height_corrected, na.rm=TRUE),
      col = "black")
```



Base R - Barchart

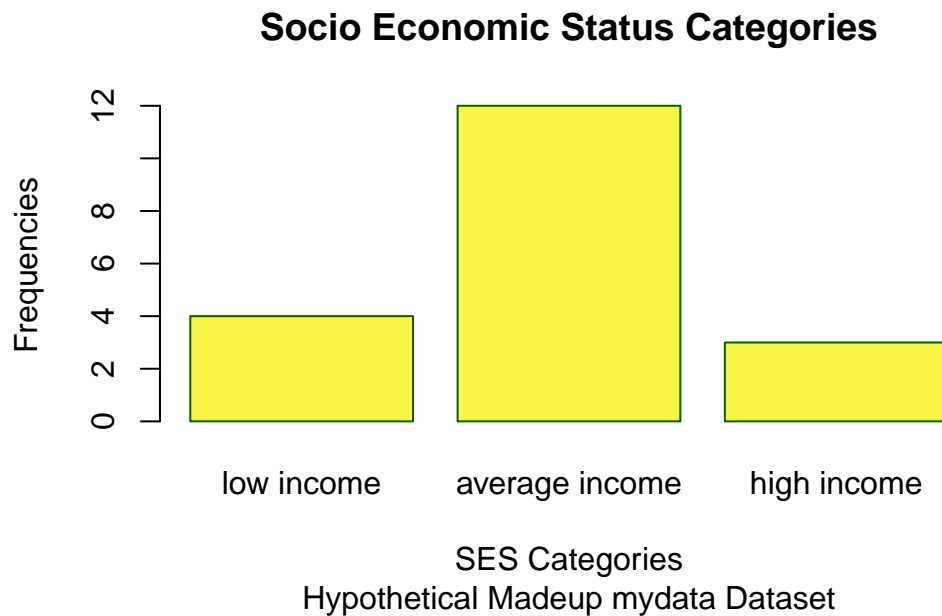
Let's make a bar chart for the frequencies for the 3 SES categories:

```
# get table of frequencies for each category
tab1 <- table(mydata_corrected$SES.f)

# make plot of the frequencies for
# each category
barplot(tab1,
        xlab = "SES Categories",
        ylab = "Frequencies",
        col = "#f7f445",
        border = "darkgreen",
```



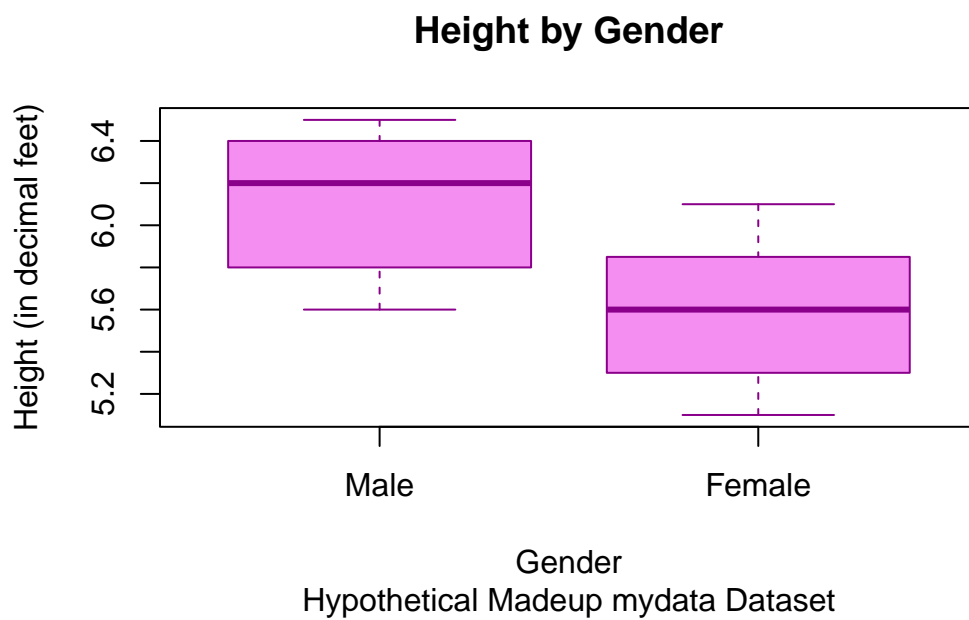
```
main = "Socio Economic Status Categories",  
sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")
```



Base R - Boxplot

Make side-by-side boxplots of the heights by gender.

```
boxplot(Height_corrected ~ GenderCoded.f,  
        data = mydata_corrected,  
        xlab = "Gender",  
        ylab = "Height (in decimal feet)",  
        col = "#f58ef1",  
        border = "darkmagenta",  
        main = "Height by Gender",  
        sub = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset")
```



2. ggplot2 package

The `ggplot2` package name starts with `gg` which stands for the “grammar of graphics” which is explained in the [“ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis \(3e\)” Book](#).

i Why is the package `ggplot2` and not `ggplot`?

Many people often ask Hadley Wickham (the developer of `ggplot2`) what happened to the first `ggplot`? Technically, there was a `ggplot` package and you can still view the [ggplot archived package versions on CRAN](#) which date back to 2006 with the last version posted in 2008. However, in 2007, Hadley redesigned the package and published the first version of `ggplot2` (*version 0.5.1*) [was posted on CRAN](#). So, `ggplot2` is the package that has stayed in production and actively maintained for nearly 20 years!!

Given that `ggplot2` has been actively maintained for nearly 20 years, it has become *almost* the defacto graphical standard for R graphics. If you take a look at the [list of packages on CRAN that start with the letter “G”](#), as of this morning 01/28/2025 at 8:23 am EST, USA, there are 230 packages that start with `gg` - nearly all of these are compatible packages that extend the functionality or work in concert with the `ggplot2` package. There are also currently 14 packages on the [Bioconductor repository](#) that start with `gg`.

Let’s make plots similar to the ones above but now using `ggplot2`. When making a `ggplot2` plot, we build the plots using layers that get added to the previous layers.

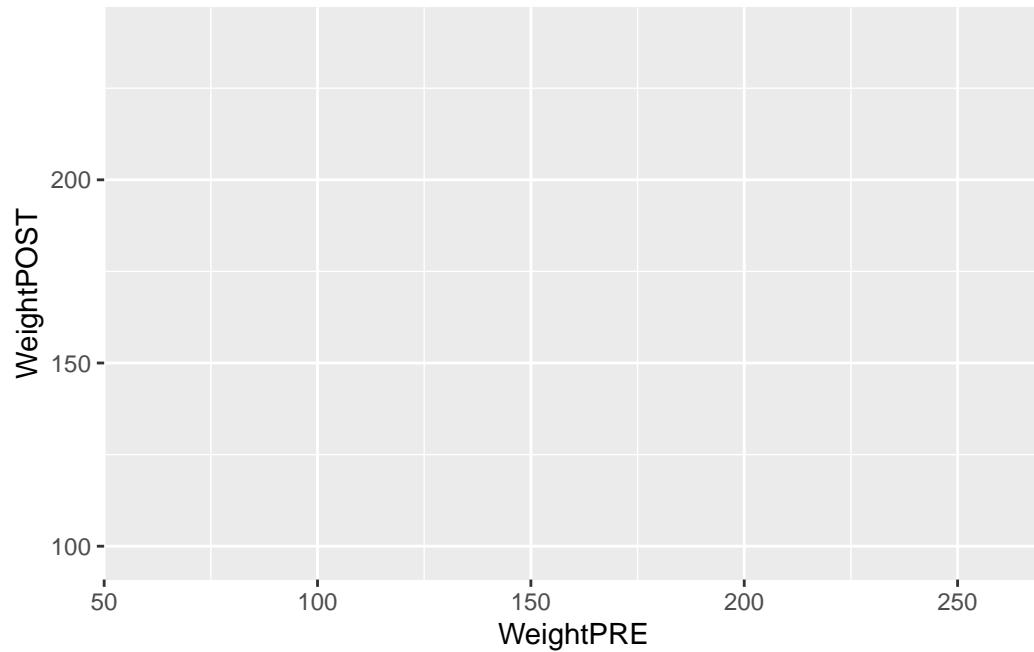
ggplot2 - Scatterplot

Here are the steps to building a scatterplot.

1. First, load the `ggplot2` package, designate the dataset and variables (aesthetics) to be included.

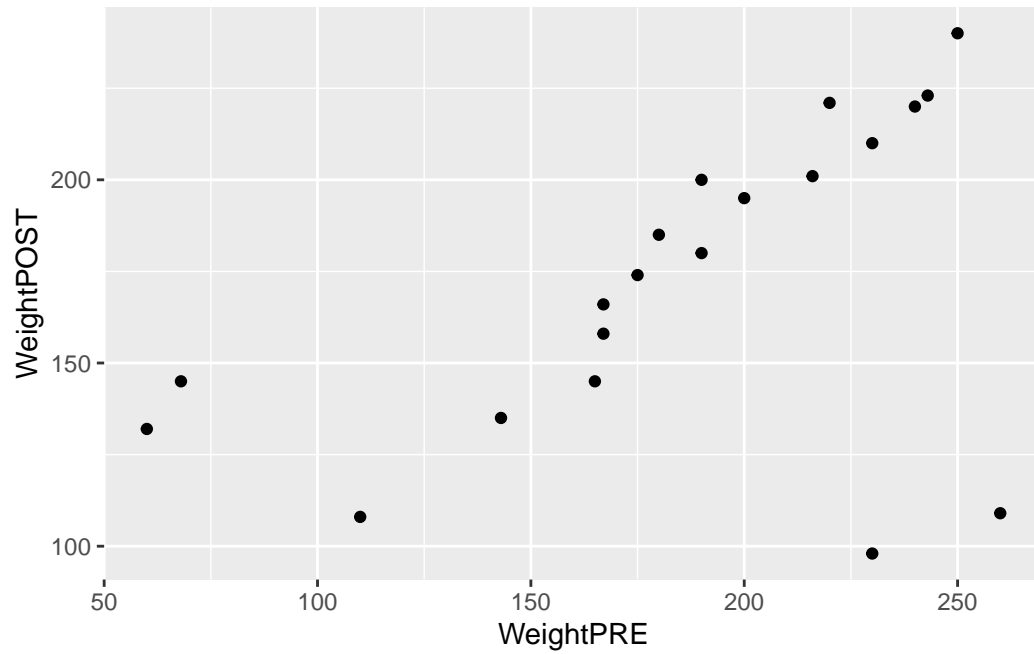
```
#load ggplot2
library(ggplot2)

# create the plot space
ggplot(data = mydata_corrected,
       aes(x = WeightPRE,
           y = WeightPOST))
```



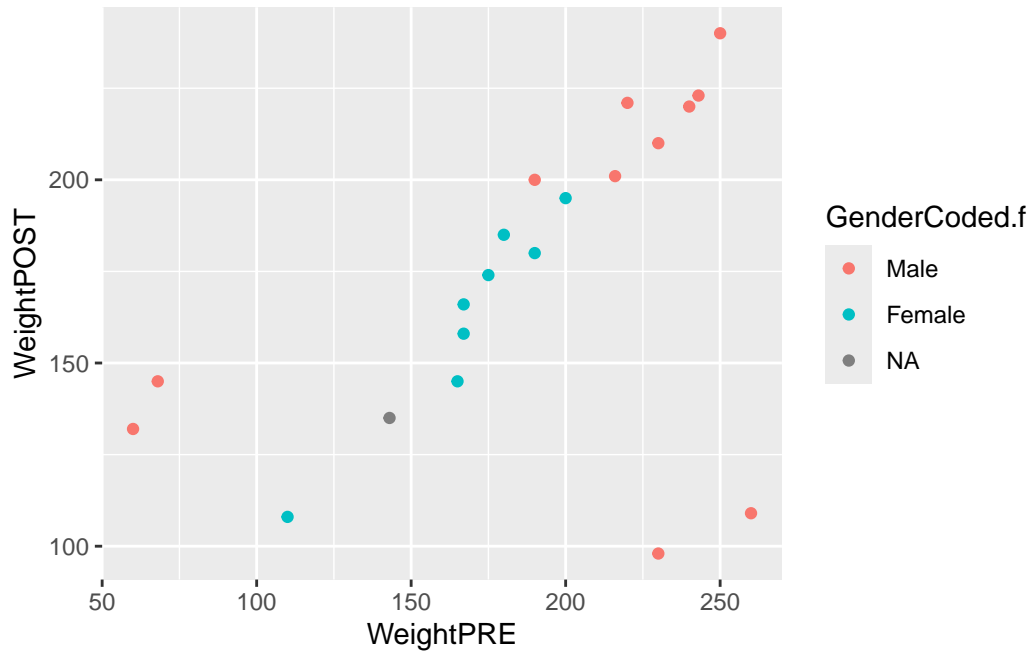
2. Next add + a “geometric object” or “geom” to show the data as points.

```
ggplot(data = mydata_corrected,  
       aes(x = WeightPRE,  
           y = WeightPOST)) +  
  geom_point()
```



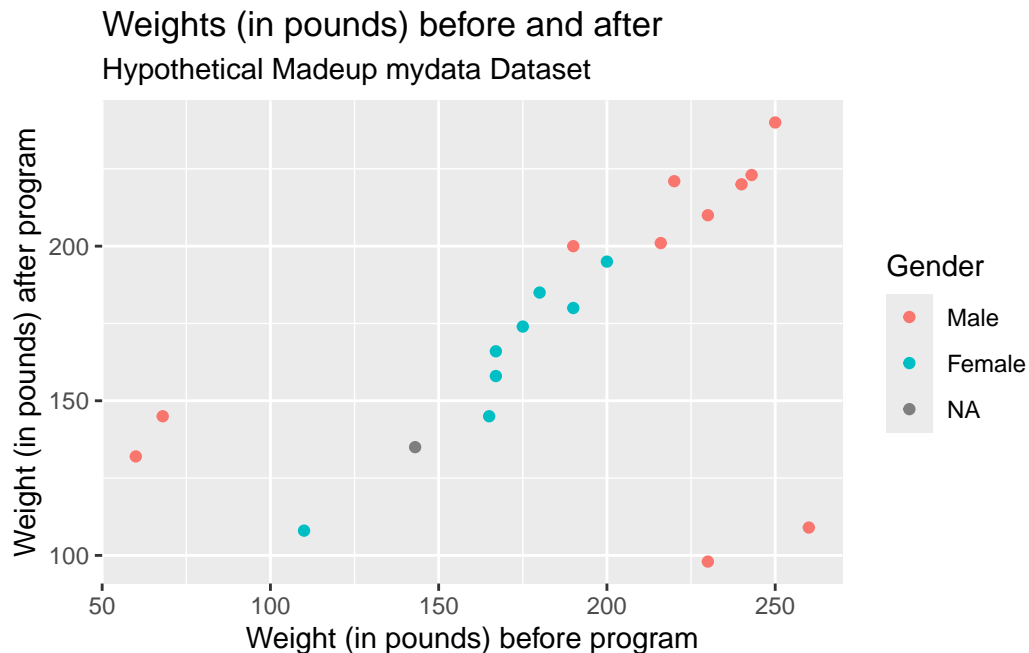
3. We can add color by GenderCoded.f

```
ggplot(data = mydata_corrected,  
  aes(x = WeightPRE,  
    y = WeightPOST,  
    color = GenderCoded.f)) +  
  geom_point()
```



4. We can also add labels, a title and better legend title

```
ggplot(data = mydata_corrected,  
  aes(x = WeightPRE,  
    y = WeightPOST,  
    color = GenderCoded.f)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  xlab("Weight (in pounds) before program") +  
  ylab("Weight (in pounds) after program") +  
  labs(  
    title = "Weights (in pounds) before and after",  
    subtitle = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset",  
    color = "Gender"  
  )
```



Notice that there are 4 weights that seem off. Also notice that the values are within a reasonable range when considering PRE or POST separately, but when you put them together in a scatterplot you can see that the values are off since we expect PRE and POST weights to be somewhat similar.

- Two individuals have PRE weights that are < 100 pounds (bottom left side of plot).
 - There is a good chance that these weights may have been accidentally recorded as kg (kilograms) instead of in pounds.
- And there are 2 individuals with POST weights around 100-120 lbs, but for whom their PRE weights are 225-260 lbs.
 - There is a good chance that these may have a typo in the first number (e.g. a weight of 110 should be 210).
- For this made-up dataset, it also appears that all 4 of these odd data points are Males.

Let's correct these values.

```
# for WeightPRE < 100, convert kg to lbs
mydata_corrected <- mydata_corrected %>%
  mutate(WeightPRE_corrected = case_when(
    (WeightPRE < 100) ~ WeightPRE * 2.20462,
    .default = WeightPRE
  ))
```

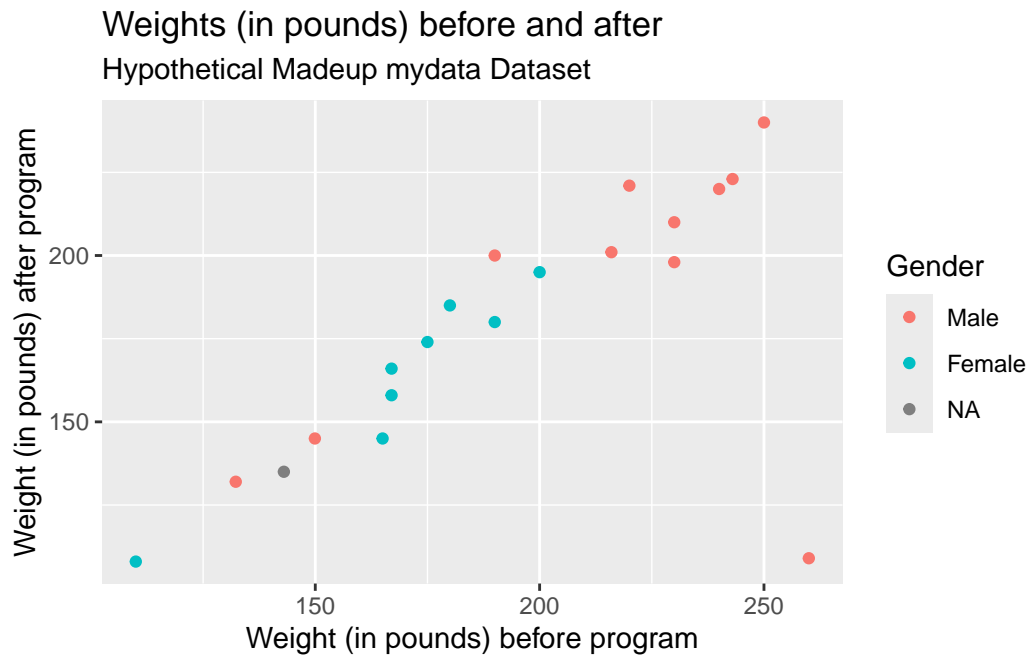


```
# For WeightPOST, for
# SubjectID 28, change WeightPOST=98 to 198
# since this person's WeightPRE was 230.
# also fix SubjectID= 20, for
# WeightPOST from 109 to 209 since
# their WeightPRE was 260

mydata_corrected <- mydata_corrected %>%
  mutate(WeightPOST_corrected = case_when(
    (SubjectID == 28) ~ 198,
    (SubjectID == 20) ~ 209,
    .default = WeightPOST
  ))
```

Let's redo the plot with these corrected values:

```
ggplot(data = mydata_corrected,
       aes(x = WeightPRE_corrected,
           y = WeightPOST_corrected,
           color = GenderCoded.f)) +
  geom_point() +
  xlab("Weight (in pounds) before program") +
  ylab("Weight (in pounds) after program") +
  labs(
    title = "Weights (in pounds) before and after",
    subtitle = "Hypothetical Madeup mydata Dataset",
    color = "Gender"
  )
```



ggplot2 - Histogram

ggplot2 - Barchart

ggplot2 - Boxplot



3. Get boilerplate code to start

R Gallery

R Graphics Cookbook



References

- R Core Team. 2024. *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*. Vienna, Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. <https://www.R-project.org/>.
- Wickham, Hadley. 2016. *Ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis*. Springer-Verlag New York. <https://ggplot2.tidyverse.org>.
- Wickham, Hadley, Winston Chang, Lionel Henry, Thomas Lin Pedersen, Kohske Takahashi, Claus Wilke, Kara Woo, Hiroaki Yutani, Dewey Dunnington, and Teun van den Brand. 2024. *Ggplot2: Create Elegant Data Visualisations Using the Grammar of Graphics*. <https://ggplot2.tidyverse.org>.
- Wickham, Hadley, Romain François, Lionel Henry, Kirill Müller, and Davis Vaughan. 2023. *Dplyr: A Grammar of Data Manipulation*. <https://dplyr.tidyverse.org>.

Other Helpful Resources

[Other Helpful Resources](#)