Introduction to Writing functions

Revolution Analytics

Outline

1. **Overview**

2. Custom functions

3. Understanding scope

Overview

In this session you write your own functions and learn about scope

- Write your own functions
- Get familiar with scope

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Control Flow

- Repeating a command multiple times
- Conditional command execution
- "Distant" command execution

Distant command execution: `function` execution.

We can think of this as a subroutine.

Writing functions

A function is an `object` in the same way a vector, matrix or dataframe is.

We can name functions we write as objects in the R workspace, e.g.:

```
test <- function(a, b) return(a + b)
test


## function(a, b) return(a + b)
## <environment: 0x42a1948>


test(1, 2)


## [1] 3
```

Writing functions (continued)

Short functions can be contained on a single line, but typically the function and it's environment will be defined as:

```
function.name <- function(arguments) {
  # everything the function does in here
}
```

A Few Notes

- `arguments` denotes a comma-separated list of "inputs" or "arguments."
- These values are passed to the internal function environment during program execution.

See `help('function')` for details.

Writing functions with default values

- Often the function you use in R will have default values for the arguments that you modify.
- These values are passed to the internal function environment during program execution.

```
test <- function(a = 1, b = 2) return(a + b)
test()
```

```
## [1] 3
```

```
test(a = 3, b = 5)
```

```
## [1] 8
```

Exercise: Write a function

Your turn:

- Write a function to compute the maximum and minimum value of a vector
- Write another function to compute the 25th and 75th percentiles of a vector.

Hint: `look up quantile()`

Remember the quadratic formula?

$$ax^2 + bx + c = 0$$

Solving for x:

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Exercise

- Write your own function to compute it.
- How do you handle imaginary numbers?

Questions about function definition?

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Scope

Multiple local environments can be nested within each other, e.g. in more complicated programs.

When we define a function, we create "local environment" separate from the global environment/out environment and only stored for the duration of program execution.

Scope Example 1

For example, if you have a `my.var` in the global environment and you assign another number to `my.var` in your function, R makes a local variable `my.var` and the global variable `my.var` will be intact.

```
my.var <- 1
temp.func <- function() my.var <- 5
temp.func()
my.var
```

```
## [1] 1
```

Global and local scope

But global variables are accessible inside the function:

```
my.var <- 1
temp.func2 <- function() print(5 + my.var)
temp.func2()
```

```
## [1] 6
```

Scope (continued)

Objects from one local environment only enter an outer environment via `return()` and `<<-`

```
a <- 0
env.function <- function() {
  a <<- 1
}
env.function()
a


## [1] 1
```

Notes

Generally, it is considered bad practice to use <<−.

You can perform the same kind of operation using the function `assign()`.

Coding conventions

There are many (unofficial) coding conventions out there.

Check out the Google style guide for further guidance:
http://google-styleguide.googlecode.com/svn/
trunk/google-r-style.html

Write a summary stats function

Use `mtcars`, and write a function that accepts:

1. cylinder size (`cyl`) and
2. the name of any other column

and then returns the `mean` of that column-cylinder size subset.

How does `cyl` relate to `hp`?

Module review questions

- How do you define a `function` in R?
- How do you specify default arguments?
- What is meant by a `global` versus `local` environment?
- How do you pass values from one local environment to a different, outer environment?

Questions?

Thank you

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