

SVM Dual Problem

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¹Slides based on Lecture 4c from David Rosenberg's [course material](#).

SVM as a Quadratic Program

- The SVM optimization problem is equivalent to

$$\begin{aligned} \text{minimize} \quad & \frac{1}{2} \|w\|^2 + \frac{c}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \xi_i \\ \text{subject to} \quad & -\xi_i \leq 0 \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, n \\ & (1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b]) - \xi_i \leq 0 \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, n \end{aligned}$$

- Differentiable objective function
- $n + d + 1$ unknowns and $2n$ affine constraints.
- A **quadratic program** that can be solved by any off-the-shelf QP solver.
- Let's learn more by examining the dual.

Why Do We Care About the Dual?

The Lagrangian

The general [inequality-constrained] optimization problem is:

$$\begin{array}{ll}\text{minimize} & f_0(x) \\ \text{subject to} & f_i(x) \leq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, m\end{array}$$

Definition

The **Lagrangian** for this optimization problem is

$$L(x, \lambda) = f_0(x) + \sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i f_i(x).$$

- λ_i 's are called **Lagrange multipliers** (also called the **dual variables**).
- Weighted sum of the objective and constraint functions
- Hard constraints \rightarrow soft constraints

Lagrange Dual Function

Definition

The **Lagrange dual function** is

$$g(\lambda) = \inf_x L(x, \lambda) = \inf_x \left(f_0(x) + \sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i f_i(x) \right)$$

- $g(\lambda)$ is **concave** (why?)
- **Lower bound property**: if $\lambda \succeq 0$, $g(\lambda) \leq p^*$ where p^* is the optimal value of the optimization problem.
- $g(\lambda)$ can be $-\infty$ (uninformative lower bound)

The Primal and the Dual

- For any **primal form** optimization problem,

$$\begin{array}{ll}\text{minimize} & f_0(x) \\ \text{subject to} & f_i(x) \leq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, m,\end{array}$$

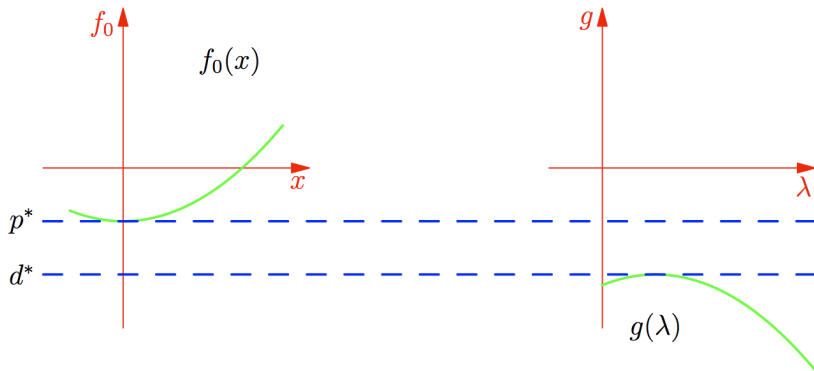
there is a recipe for constructing a corresponding **Lagrangian dual problem**:

$$\begin{array}{ll}\text{maximize} & g(\lambda) \\ \text{subject to} & \lambda_i \geq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, m,\end{array}$$

- The dual problem is always a convex optimization problem.
- The dual variables often have interesting and relevant interpretations.
- The dual variables provide certificate for optimality.

Weak Duality

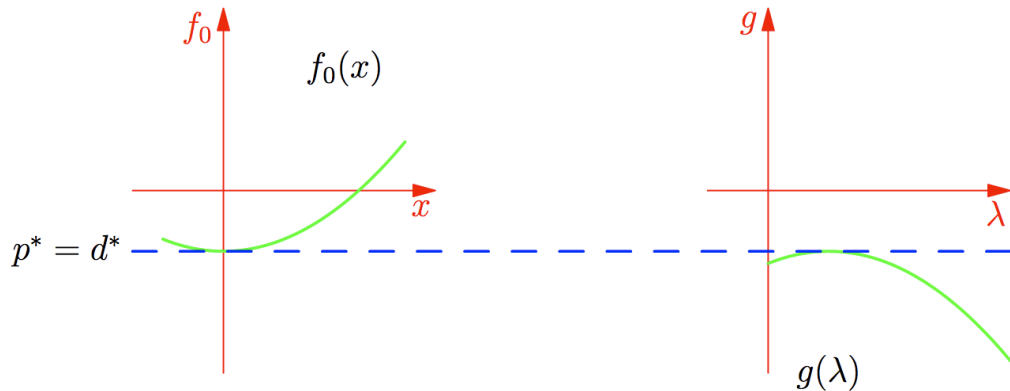
We always have **weak duality**: $p^* \geq d^*$.



Plot courtesy of Brett Bernstein.

Strong Duality

For some problems, we have **strong duality**: $p^* = d^*$.



For convex problems, strong duality is fairly typical.

Plot courtesy of Brett Bernstein.

Complementary Slackness

- Assume strong duality. Let x^* be primal optimal and λ^* be dual optimal. Then:

$$\begin{aligned} f_0(x^*) &= g(\lambda^*) = \inf_x L(x, \lambda^*) \quad (\text{strong duality and definition}) \\ &\leq L(x^*, \lambda^*) \\ &= f_0(x^*) + \sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i^* f_i(x^*) \\ &\leq f_0(x^*). \end{aligned}$$

Each term in sum $\sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i^* f_i(x^*)$ must actually be 0. That is

$$\lambda_i > 0 \implies f_i(x^*) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad f_i(x^*) < 0 \implies \lambda_i = 0 \quad \forall i$$

This condition is known as **complementary slackness**.

The SVM Dual Problem

SVM Lagrange Multipliers

$$\begin{array}{ll}\text{minimize} & \frac{1}{2}\|w\|^2 + \frac{c}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \xi_i \\ \text{subject to} & -\xi_i \leq 0 \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, n \\ & (1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b]) - \xi_i \leq 0 \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, n\end{array}$$

Lagrange Multiplier	Constraint
λ_i	$-\xi_i \leq 0$
α_i	$(1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b]) - \xi_i \leq 0$

$$L(w, b, \xi, \alpha, \lambda) = \frac{1}{2}\|w\|^2 + \frac{c}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \xi_i + \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i (1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b] - \xi_i) + \sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i (-\xi_i)$$

Dual optimum value: $d^* = \sup_{\alpha, \lambda \succeq 0} \inf_{w, b, \xi} L(w, b, \xi, \alpha, \lambda)$

Strong Duality by Slater's Constraint Qualification

The SVM optimization problem:

$$\begin{array}{ll}\text{minimize} & \frac{1}{2} \|w\|^2 + \frac{c}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \xi_i \\ \text{subject to} & -\xi_i \leq 0 \text{ for } i = 1, \dots, n \\ & (1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b]) - \xi_i \leq 0 \text{ for } i = 1, \dots, n\end{array}$$

Slater's constraint qualification:

- Convex problem + affine constraints \implies strong duality iff problem is feasible
- Do we have a feasible point?
- For SVM, we have **strong duality**.

SVM Dual Function: First Order Conditions

Lagrange dual function is the inf over primal variables of L :

$$g(\alpha, \lambda) = \inf_{w, b, \xi} L(w, b, \xi, \alpha, \lambda)$$
$$= \inf_{w, b, \xi} \left[\frac{1}{2} w^T w + \sum_{i=1}^n \xi_i \left(\frac{c}{n} - \alpha_i - \lambda_i \right) + \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i (1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b]) \right]$$

$$\partial_w L = 0 \iff w - \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i x_i = 0 \iff w = \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i x_i$$

$$\partial_b L = 0 \iff - \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0 \iff \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0$$

$$\partial_{\xi_i} L = 0 \iff \frac{c}{n} - \alpha_i - \lambda_i = 0 \iff \alpha_i + \lambda_i = \frac{c}{n}$$

SVM Dual Function

- Substituting these conditions back into L , the second term disappears.
- First and third terms become

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{2}w^T w &= \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_i^T x_j \\ \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i (1 - y_i [w^T x_i + b]) &= \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i - \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_j^T x_i - b \underbrace{\sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i}_{=0}.\end{aligned}$$

- Putting it together, the dual function is

$$g(\alpha, \lambda) = \begin{cases} \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_j^T x_i & \begin{array}{l} \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0 \\ \alpha_i + \lambda_i = \frac{\epsilon}{n}, \text{ all } i \end{array} \\ -\infty & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

SVM Dual Problem

- The **dual function** is

$$g(\alpha, \lambda) = \begin{cases} \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_j^T x_i & \begin{array}{l} \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0 \\ \alpha_i + \lambda_i = \frac{c}{n}, \text{ all } i \end{array} \\ -\infty & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

- The **dual problem** is $\sup_{\alpha, \lambda \succeq 0} g(\alpha, \lambda)$:

$$\begin{aligned} \sup_{\alpha, \lambda} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_j^T x_i \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0 \\ & \alpha_i + \lambda_i = \frac{c}{n} \quad \alpha_i, \lambda_i \geq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, n \end{aligned}$$

Insights from the Dual Problem

KKT Conditions

For **convex** problems, if **Slater's condition** is satisfied, then **KKT conditions** provide **necessary and sufficient** conditions for the optimal solution.

- Primal feasibility: $f_i(x) \leq 0 \quad \forall i$
- Dual feasibility: $\lambda \succeq 0$
- Complementary slackness: $\lambda_i f_i(x) = 0$
- First-order condition:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x} L(x, \lambda) = 0$$

The SVM Dual Solution

- We found the SVM dual problem can be written as:

$$\begin{aligned} \sup_{\alpha} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_j^T x_i \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0 \\ & \alpha_i \in \left[0, \frac{c}{n}\right] \quad i = 1, \dots, n. \end{aligned}$$

- Given solution α^* to dual, primal solution is $w^* = \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i^* y_i x_i$.
- The solution is in the space spanned by the inputs.
- Note $\alpha_i^* \in [0, \frac{c}{n}]$. So c controls max weight on each example. (**Robustness!**)
 - What's the relation between c and regularization?

Complementary Slackness Conditions

- Recall our primal constraints and Lagrange multipliers:

Lagrange Multiplier	Constraint
λ_i	$-\xi_i \leq 0$
α_i	$(1 - y_i f(x_i)) - \xi_i \leq 0$

- Recall first order condition $\nabla_{\xi_i} L = 0$ gave us $\lambda_i^* = \frac{c}{n} - \alpha_i^*$.
- By strong duality, we must have **complementary slackness**:

$$\alpha_i^* (1 - y_i f^*(x_i) - \xi_i^*) = 0$$

$$\lambda_i^* \xi_i^* = \left(\frac{c}{n} - \alpha_i^* \right) \xi_i^* = 0$$

Consequences of Complementary Slackness

By strong duality, we must have **complementary slackness**.

$$\alpha_i^* (1 - y_i f^*(x_i) - \xi_i^*) = 0$$
$$\left(\frac{c}{n} - \alpha_i^* \right) \xi_i^* = 0$$

Recall “**slack variable**” $\xi_i^* = \max(0, 1 - y_i f^*(x_i))$ is the hinge loss on (x_i, y_i) .

- If $y_i f^*(x_i) > 1$ then the margin loss is $\xi_i^* = 0$, and we get $\alpha_i^* = 0$.
- If $y_i f^*(x_i) < 1$ then the margin loss is $\xi_i^* > 0$, so $\alpha_i^* = \frac{c}{n}$.
- If $\alpha_i^* = 0$, then $\xi_i^* = 0$, which implies no loss, so $y_i f^*(x) \geq 1$.
- If $\alpha_i^* \in (0, \frac{c}{n})$, then $\xi_i^* = 0$, which implies $1 - y_i f^*(x_i) = 0$.

Complementary Slackness Results: Summary

If α^* is a solution to the dual problem, then primal solution is

$$w^* = \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i^* y_i x_i \quad \text{where } \alpha_i^* \in [0, \frac{c}{n}].$$

Relation between margin and example weights (α_i 's):

$$\alpha_i^* = 0 \implies y_i f^*(x_i) \geq 1$$

$$\alpha_i^* \in (0, \frac{c}{n}) \implies y_i f^*(x_i) = 1$$

$$\alpha_i^* = \frac{c}{n} \implies y_i f^*(x_i) \leq 1$$

$$y_i f^*(x_i) < 1 \implies \alpha_i^* = \frac{c}{n}$$

$$y_i f^*(x_i) = 1 \implies \alpha_i^* \in [0, \frac{c}{n}]$$

$$y_i f^*(x_i) > 1 \implies \alpha_i^* = 0$$

- If α^* is a solution to the dual problem, then primal solution is

$$w^* = \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i^* y_i x_i$$

with $\alpha_i^* \in [0, \frac{c}{n}]$.

- The x_i 's corresponding to $\alpha_i^* > 0$ are called **support vectors**.
- Few margin errors or “on the margin” examples \implies **sparsity in input examples**.

The Bias Term: b

- For our SVM primal, the complementary slackness conditions are:

$$\alpha_i^* (1 - y_i [x_i^T w^* + b] - \xi_i^*) = 0 \quad (1)$$

$$\lambda_i^* \xi_i^* = \left(\frac{c}{n} - \alpha_i^* \right) \xi_i^* = 0 \quad (2)$$

- Suppose there's an i such that $\alpha_i^* \in (0, \frac{c}{n})$.
- (2) implies $\xi_i^* = 0$.
- (1) implies

$$y_i [x_i^T w^* + b^*] = 1$$

$$\iff x_i^T w^* + b^* = y_i \text{ (use } y_i \in \{-1, 1\})$$

$$\iff \boxed{b^* = y_i - x_i^T w^*}$$

The Bias Term: b

- We get the same b^* for any choice of i with $\alpha_i^* \in (0, \frac{c}{n})$

$$b^* = y_i - x_i^T w^*$$

- With numerical error, more robust to average over all eligible i 's:

$$b^* = \text{mean} \left\{ y_i - x_i^T w^* \mid \alpha_i^* \in \left(0, \frac{c}{n}\right) \right\}.$$

- If there are no $\alpha_i^* \in (0, \frac{c}{n})$?
 - Then we have a **degenerate SVM training problem**²⁵ ($w^* = 0$).

²⁵See Rifkin et al.'s "A Note on Support Vector Machine Degeneracy", an MIT AI Lab Technical Report.

Teaser for Kernelization

Dual Problem: Dependence on x through inner products

- SVM Dual Problem:

$$\begin{aligned} \sup_{\alpha} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^n \alpha_i \alpha_j y_i y_j x_j^T x_i \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i y_i = 0 \\ & \alpha_i \in \left[0, \frac{C}{n}\right] \quad i = 1, \dots, n. \end{aligned}$$

- Note that all dependence on inputs x_i and x_j is through their inner product: $\langle x_j, x_i \rangle = x_j^T x_i$.
- We can replace $x_j^T x_i$ by other products...
- This is a “kernelized” objective function.