

# Generalisation in theory and practice

Christos Dimitrakakis

November 14, 2025

# Outline

## Quality metrics

- Supervised machine learning problems

## Generalisation

## Estimating quality

- Methodology

## Learning and generalisation

- Introduction

- Bias and variance

- Generalisation

## PAC Learning

- The realisable setting

## Quality metrics

Supervised machine learning problems

## Generalisation

## Estimating quality

Methodology

## Learning and generalisation

Introduction

Bias and variance

Generalisation

## PAC Learning

The realisable setting

# Classification

## The classifier as a decision rule

A decision rule  $\pi(a|x)$  generates a **decision**  $a \in [m]$ . It is the conditional probability of  $a$  given  $x$ .

# Classification

## The classifier as a decision rule

A decision rule  $\pi(a|x)$  generates a **decision**  $a \in [m]$ . It is the conditional probability of  $a$  given  $x$ .

## Deterministic predictions given a model $P(y|x)$

Here, we pick the most likely class:

$$\pi(a|x_t) = \mathbb{I} \left\{ a = \arg \max_y P(y|x_t) \right\}$$

# Classification

## The classifier as a decision rule

A decision rule  $\pi(a|x)$  generates a **decision**  $a \in [m]$ . It is the conditional probability of  $a$  given  $x$ .

## Deterministic predictions given a model $P(y|x)$

Here, we pick the most likely class:

$$\pi(a|x_t) = \mathbb{I} \left\{ a = \arg \max_y P(y|x_t) \right\}$$

## Randomised predictions given a model $P(y|x)$

Here, we randomly select a class according to our model:

$$\pi(a|x_t) = P(y_t = a|x_t)$$

# Accuracy as a classification metric

# Accuracy as a classification metric

## The accuracy of a single decision

$$U(a_t, y_t) = \mathbb{I}\{a_t = y_t\} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } a_t = y_t \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$



# Accuracy as a classification metric

## The accuracy of a single decision

$$U(a_t, y_t) = \mathbb{I}\{a_t = y_t\} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } a_t = y_t \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

## The accuracy on a dataset

Let  $D = \{(x_t, y_t) : t \in [T]\}$  be a dataset. We can measure the accuracy:

$$U(\pi, D) \triangleq \frac{1}{T} \sum_{t=1}^T \pi(y_t | x_t)$$

## The expected accuracy of a decision rule

# Accuracy as a classification metric

## The accuracy of a single decision

$$U(a_t, y_t) = \mathbb{I}\{a_t = y_t\} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } a_t = y_t \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

## The accuracy on a dataset

Let  $D = \{(x_t, y_t) : t \in [T]\}$  be a dataset. We can measure the accuracy:

$$U(\pi, D) \triangleq \frac{1}{T} \sum_{t=1}^T \pi(y_t | x_t)$$

## The expected accuracy of a decision rule

If  $(x, y) \sim P$ , the accuracy  $U$  of a stochastic decision rule  $\pi$  under the distribution  $P$  is the probability it predicts correctly

$$U(\pi, P) \triangleq \int_{\mathcal{X}} dP(x) \sum_{y=1}^m P(y|x) \pi(y|x)$$

## Beyond classification: Generalised decision rules

Consider a spam application, where the e-mail client can decide between different action for emails. Different actions being best for each type of e-mail. The quality of each action can be captured through a utility function.

### Utility of the spam decision problem

What utility function would you use for the spam detection problem?

Utility	Pass	Flag	Trash
Normal			
Spam			
Virus			

### The utility function $U : \mathcal{Y} \times \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$

The utility function  $U(y, a)$  is a real-valued function so that, for a label  $y$ , we prefer taking action  $a$  to  $a'$  iff  $U(y, a) > U(y, a')$ .

# The optimal decision

- ▶ A **model**  $P(y|x)$  of class probabilities
- ▶ A **utility**  $U(y, a)$  for each class and action combination

# The optimal decision

- ▶ A **model**  $P(y|x)$  of class probabilities
- ▶ A **utility**  $U(y, a)$  for each class and action combination

## Expected utility

We can calculate the expected utility of any decision

$$\mathbb{E}[U|a, x] = \sum_y P(y|x, a)U(y, a) = \sum_y P(y|x)U(y, a)$$

Here the first equality follows from the definition of conditional expectation and  $P(y|x, a) = P(y|x)$  as the label does not depend on our actions.

# The optimal decision

- ▶ A **model**  $P(y|x)$  of class probabilities
- ▶ A **utility**  $U(y, a)$  for each class and action combination

## Expected utility

We can calculate the expected utility of any decision

$$\mathbb{E}[U|a, x] = \sum_y P(y|x, a)U(y, a) = \sum_y P(y|x)U(y, a)$$

Here the first equality follows from the definition of conditional expectation and  $P(y|x, a) = P(y|x)$  as the label does not depend on our actions.

## The optimal decision

For any observation  $x$ , and  $P$ , we take the action maximising expected utility:

$$a^* = \arg \max_a \mathbb{E}_P[U|a, x]$$

This defines a function  $\mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{A}$ , which is the Bayes-optimal decision rule.

# The optimal decision rule

- ▶ A **model**  $P(y|x)$  of class probabilities
- ▶ A **utility**  $U(y, a)$  for each class and action combination
- ▶ A **decision rule**  $\pi(a|x)$  assigning probability to action  $a$  for every possible input  $x$

## The optimal decision rule

- ▶ A **model**  $P(y|x)$  of class probabilities
- ▶ A **utility**  $U(y, a)$  for each class and action combination
- ▶ A **decision rule**  $\pi(a|x)$  assigning probability to action  $a$  for every possible input  $x$

## Expected utility over a dataset.

We obtain the expected utility of the **decision rule** by marginalising over all actions

$$U(\pi, D) \triangleq \mathbb{E}[U|\pi, D] \stackrel{D=(x_t, y_t)_{t=1}^T}{=} \sum_{t=1}^T \mathbb{E}[U|\pi, x_t] = \sum_{t=1}^T \sum_{a \in \mathcal{A}} U(y_t, a) \pi(a|x_t)$$

Here the first equality follows from the definition of conditional expectation and  $P(y|x, a) = P(y|x)$  as the label does not depend on our actions.



## The optimal decision rule

- ▶ A **model**  $P(y|x)$  of class probabilities
- ▶ A **utility**  $U(y, a)$  for each class and action combination
- ▶ A **decision rule**  $\pi(a|x)$  assigning probability to action  $a$  for every possible input  $x$

## Expected utility over a dataset.

We obtain the expected utility of the **decision rule** by marginalising over all actions

$$U(\pi, D) \triangleq \mathbb{E}[U|\pi, D] \stackrel{D=(x_t, y_t)_{t=1}^T}{=} \sum_{t=1}^T \mathbb{E}[U|\pi, x_t] = \sum_{t=1}^T \sum_{a \in \mathcal{A}} U(y_t, a) \pi(a|x_t)$$

Here the first equality follows from the definition of conditional expectation and  $P(y|x, a) = P(y|x)$  as the label does not depend on our actions.

## Expected utility over $P$

We can marginalise over possible datasets  $D$

$$U(\pi, P) \triangleq \mathbb{E}_P[U|\pi] = \int_{\mathcal{D}} dP(D) U(\pi, D) \stackrel{\text{i.i.d.}}{=} \int_{\mathcal{X}} dP(x) \sum_y P(y|x) \sum_a \pi(a|x) U(y, a)$$

# Taking into account the probability

- ▶ For classification, it makes sense to look at the probability of the labels.
- ▶ If we are not very confident about our prediction, this should be taken into account:
- ▶ Define  $P(y|x)$  to be our classifier's probability for label  $y$ , given features  $x$ . Then we can use two simple metrics:

# Precision

The average probability of the actual class:

$$\sum_{t=1}^T P(y_t|x_t) / T$$

- ▶ If we always assign probability 1 to the correct label, this score is 1.
- ▶ If we always assign probability  $1/m$  to all labels, the score is  $1/m$ .

# Negative Log-Loss

Here we assign look at the **logarithm** of the probability. This really penalises bad guesses.

$$\sum_{t=1}^T \ln P(y_t|x_t) / T$$

- ▶ If we always assign probability 1 to the correct label, this score is 0.
- ▶ If we assign probability 0 to even a single label, the score is  $-\infty$ .

```
from sklearn.metrics import log_loss
```

in scikitlearn implements log-loss (**not** negative)

# Regression

## The regressor as a deterministic decision rule

A decision rule  $\pi$  generates a **decision**  $a \in \mathbb{R}^m$ .

- ▶ For **deterministic** rules  $\pi(x)$  is the prediction for  $x$ .
- ▶ Since we can almost never guess correctly, we need to define the quality of our predictions somehow, either as a utility  $U(y_t, a_t)$  or a loss function  $\ell(y_t, a_t)$ .

## Mean-Squared Error Loss on a Dataset

This is the squared difference in predicted versus actual values:

$$\frac{1}{T} \sum_{t=1}^T [y_t - \pi(x_t)]^2$$

## Expected MSE

If  $(x, y) \sim P$ , the expected MSE of a deterministic decision rule  $\pi : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is

$$\int_{\mathcal{X}} \int_{\mathcal{Y}} dP(x, y) [y - \pi(x)]^2.$$

# Probabilistic regression

## The regressor as a stochastic decision rule

A decision rule  $\pi$  generates a **decision**  $a \in \mathbb{R}^m$ .

- ▶ For **stochastic** rules  $\pi(a|x)$  defines a density over predictions.
- ▶ In this case it is natural to define  $\pi(y_t, x_t)$  as our metric.

## Likelihood on a Dataset

The mean-square error is simply the squared difference in predicted versus actual values:

$$\prod_{t=1}^T \pi(y_t|x_t)$$

We will later see a link between this metric, mean-square error and estimation.

## Quality metrics

Supervised machine learning problems

## Generalisation

## Estimating quality

Methodology

## Learning and generalisation

Introduction

Bias and variance

Generalisation

## PAC Learning

The realisable setting

# Training and overfitting

## Training data

- ▶  $D = ((x_t, y_t) : t = 1, \dots, T)$ .
- ▶  $x_t \in \mathcal{X}, y_t \in \mathcal{Y}$ .



# Training and overfitting

## Training data

- ▶  $D = ((x_t, y_t) : t = 1, \dots, T)$ .
- ▶  $x_t \in \mathcal{X}, y_t \in \mathcal{Y}$ .

Assumption: The data is generated i.i.d.

- ▶  $(x_t, y_t) \sim P$  for all  $t$  (identical)
- ▶  $D \sim P^T$  (independent)

# Training and overfitting

## Training data

- ▶  $D = ((x_t, y_t) : t = 1, \dots, T)$ .
- ▶  $x_t \in \mathcal{X}, y_t \in \mathcal{Y}$ .

Assumption: The data is generated i.i.d.

- ▶  $(x_t, y_t) \sim P$  for all  $t$  (identical)
- ▶  $D \sim P^T$  (independent)

## The optimal decision rule for $P$

$$\max_{\pi} U(\pi, P) = \max_{\pi} \int_{\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y}} dP(x, y) \sum_a \pi(a|x) U(a, y).$$

Here we measure performance for the data **distribution  $P$** .

# Training and overfitting

## Training data

- ▶  $D = ((x_t, y_t) : t = 1, \dots, T)$ .
- ▶  $x_t \in \mathcal{X}, y_t \in \mathcal{Y}$ .

Assumption: The data is generated i.i.d.

- ▶  $(x_t, y_t) \sim P$  for all  $t$  (identical)
- ▶  $D \sim P^T$  (independent)

## The optimal decision rule for $P$

$$\max_{\pi} U(\pi, P) = \max_{\pi} \int_{\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y}} dP(x, y) \sum_a \pi(a|x) U(a, y).$$

Here we measure performance for the data **distribution**  $P$ .

## The optimal decision rule for $D$

$$\max_{\pi} U(\pi, D) = \max_{\pi} \sum_{(x, y) \in D} \sum_a \pi(a|x) U(a, y).$$

Performance is measured over the **data**  $D$

# Generalisation

## The fundamental problem

- ▶ We want to maximise  $U(\pi, P)$ , the **actual** performance.
- ▶ We can only measure  $U(\pi, D)$ , over **some data**.
- ▶ We have a **learning algorithm**  $\lambda$
- ▶ If  $\pi = \lambda(D)$ , then we instead measure  $U(\lambda(D), D)$ .
- ▶ However  $\mathbb{E}_P[U(\lambda(D), D)] \geq U(\pi, P) \forall \pi$  (**biased** estimator)

# Generalisation

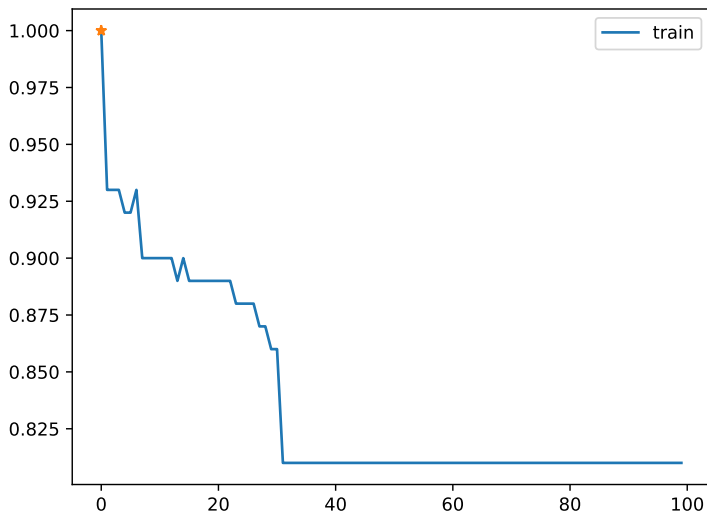
## The fundamental problem

- ▶ We want to maximise  $U(\pi, P)$ , the **actual** performance.
- ▶ We can only measure  $U(\pi, D)$ , over **some data**.
- ▶ We have a **learning algorithm**  $\lambda$
- ▶ If  $\pi = \lambda(D)$ , then we instead measure  $U(\lambda(D), D)$ .
- ▶ However  $\mathbb{E}_P[U(\lambda(D), D)] \geq U(\pi, P) \forall \pi$  (**biased** estimator)

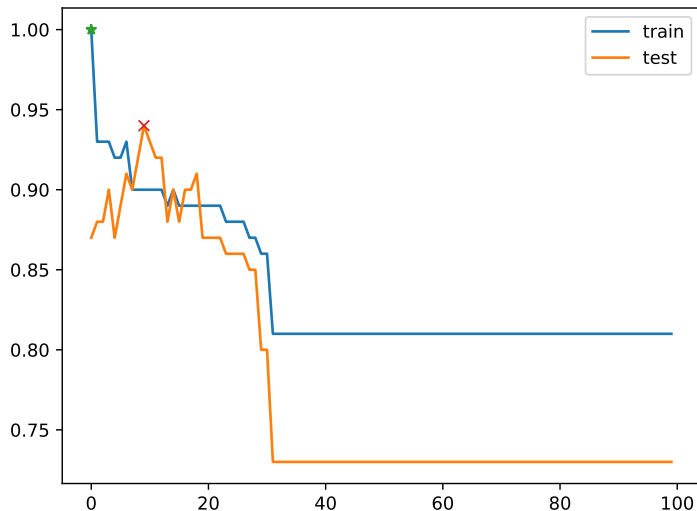
## Training and testing

- ▶ Split  $D$  in  $D_{\text{train}}, D_{\text{test}}$
- ▶ Obtain  $\pi = \lambda(D_{\text{train}})$
- ▶ Calculate  $U(\pi, D_{\text{test}})$
- ▶ For all  $\pi$ ,  $\mathbb{E}_P[U(\pi, D_{\text{test}})] = U(\pi, P)$  (**unbiased** estimator)

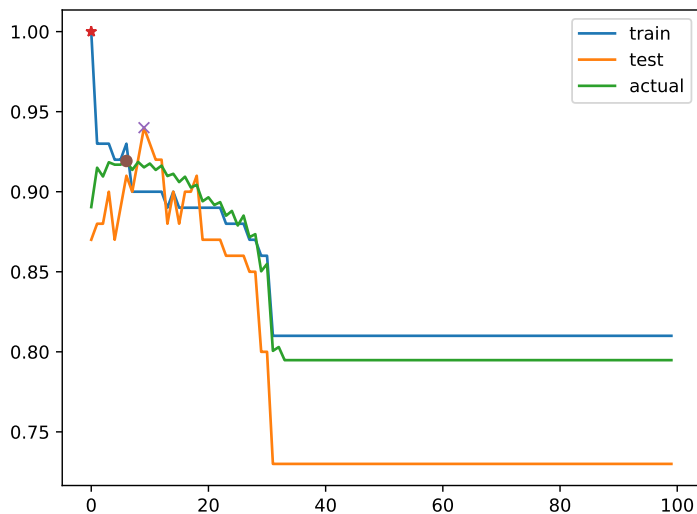
# kNN Classifier Accuracy on a single dataset



# kNN Classifier Accuracy on a single dataset



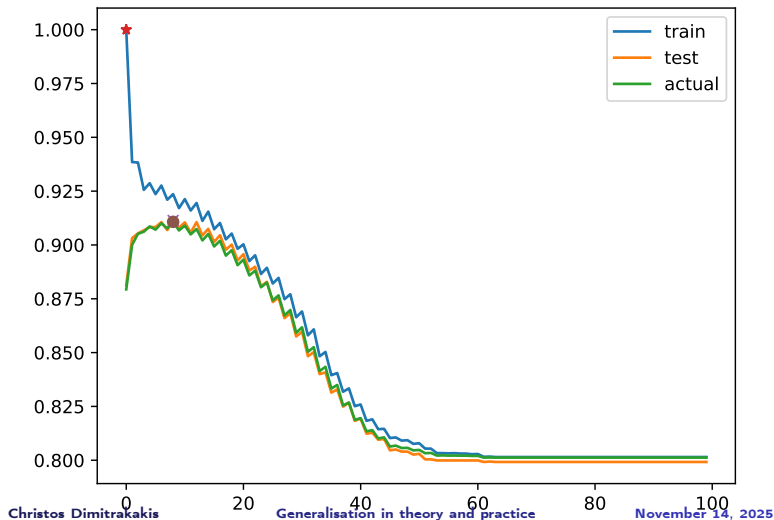
# kNN Classifier Accuracy on a single dataset





# Expected kNN Classifier Accuracy

Expectation approximated over 100 datasets  $D$  sampled from  $P$ .



## Quality metrics

Supervised machine learning problems

## Generalisation

## Estimating quality

Methodology

## Learning and generalisation

Introduction

Bias and variance

Generalisation

## PAC Learning

The realisable setting

# The Train/Validation/Test methodology

## Main idea

Use each piece of data once to make decisions and measure

## Training set

Use to decide low-level model parameters

## Validation set

Use to decide between:

- ▶ different hyperparameters (e.g.  $K$  in nearest neighbours)
- ▶ model (e.g. neural networks versus kNN)

## Test set

Use to measure the final quality of a model

# Cross-validation (XV)

## Idea

- ▶ Use XV to select hyperparameters instead of a single train/valid test.

## Methodology

- ▶ Split training set  $D$  in  $k$  different subsets
- ▶ At iteration  $i$
- ▶ Use the  $i$ -th subset for validation
- ▶ Use all the remaining  $k - 1$  subsets for training
- ▶ Average results on validation sets

# Bootstrapping

- ▶ Express uncertainty by resampling the data.
- ▶ Repeat your calculations for each resample

## BootstrapSample( $D$ )

```

input Data  $D = (z_1, \dots, z_T)$ , of size  $T$ 
for  $t \in \{1, \dots, T\}$  do
    Select  $i$  uniformly in  $[T]$ 
    Add the  $i$ -th point to  $D_b$ 
end for
return  $D_b$ 
  
```

## BootstrapEstimate( $D, \lambda, N$ )

```

input Data  $D \in \mathcal{D}$ , algorithm  $\lambda : \mathcal{D} \rightarrow \Theta$ ,  $N > 0$  number of samples
for  $n \in \{1, \dots, N\}$  do
     $\theta_n = \lambda(\text{BootstrapSample}(D))$ 
end for
return  $\{\theta_n : n \in [N]\}$ 
  
```

# Bootstrapping example: A mean estimate

# The wrong way to do XV for subset selection

1. Screen the predictors: find a subset of “good” predictors that show fairly strong (univariate) correlation with the class labels.
2. Using just this subset of predictors, build a multivariate classifier.
3. Use cross-validation to estimate the unknown tuning parameters and to estimate the prediction error of the final model.

## Is this a correct application of cross-validation?

Consider a scenario with  $N = 50$  samples in two equal-sized classes, and  $p = 5000$  quantitative predictors (standard Gaussian) that are independent of the class labels. The true (test) error rate of any classifier is 50%.

# The right way to do XV for feature selection

1. Divide the samples into  $K$  cross-validation folds (groups) at random.
2. For each fold  $k = 1, 2, \dots, K$
3. Find a subset of “good” predictors that show fairly strong (univariate) correlation with the class labels, using all of the samples except those in fold  $k$ .
4. Using just this subset of predictors, build a multivariate classifier, using all of the samples except those in fold  $k$ .
5. Use the classifier to predict the class labels for the samples in fold  $k$ .



## Quality metrics

Supervised machine learning problems

## Generalisation

## Estimating quality

Methodology

## Learning and generalisation

Introduction

Bias and variance

Generalisation

## PAC Learning

The realisable setting

# Learning and generalisation

How well can decision rule perform?

## Estimation theory view

- ▶ Bias: The expected difference between the estimated value and the unknown parameter
- ▶ Variance: The expected difference between the estimated value and the unknown parameter

## Learning theory view

- ▶ Approximation ability: How well a class of rules can approximate the optimal one.
- ▶ Statistical error: How easy it is to choose the best rule in the class.

# Unbiased estimators

## Definition (Estimator)

An estimator is a function  $f : \mathcal{D} \rightarrow \Theta$ , where  $\Theta$  is a set of parameters. For any given dataset  $D \in \mathcal{D}$ , it returns a single estimate  $\hat{\theta} = f(D)$ .

## Definition (Unbiased estimator)

An estimator is **unbiased** if, for any  $\theta$  and corresponding distribution  $P(D|\theta)$ :

$$\mathbb{E}[f \mid \theta] = \sum_D f(D)P(D|\theta) = \theta.$$

## Example (Sample mean estimator)

Consider  $D = (x_1, \dots, x_T)$  with  $x_t \sim P$  being i.i.d samples with  $\mathbb{E}[x_t] = \theta$ . The sample mean estimator  $f(D) = \sum_t x_t / T$  is unbiased, as :

$$\mathbb{E}[f] = \mathbb{E} \left[ \sum_{t=1}^T x_t / T \right] = \frac{1}{T} \sum_{t=1}^T \mathbb{E}[x_t] = \frac{1}{T} \sum_{t=1}^T \theta = \theta.$$

## Example of a biased and unbiased estimator: Training error

- ▶  $U(\pi, D)$  is the measured accuracy of a classifier  $\pi$  on  $D$
- ▶  $U(\pi, P) = \mathbb{E}_{D \sim P}[U(\pi, D)]$  is the actual accuracy. So  $U(\pi, D)$  is unbiased.
- ▶  $\lambda(D) = \arg \max_{\pi} U(\pi, D)$  is a learning algorithm picking the best classifier for a dataset  $D$ .
- ▶ Then  $U(\lambda(D), D)$  is biased, as for any  $\pi'$

$$\mathbb{E}_{D \sim P}[U(\lambda(D), D)] = \int_D dP(D) U(\lambda(D), D) \quad (1)$$

$$= \int_D dP(D) \max_{\pi} U(\pi, D) \quad (2)$$

$$\geq \int_D dP(D) U(\pi', D) \quad (3)$$

$$= U(\pi', P) \quad (4)$$

i.e. the expected value of the training accuracy is higher than the accuracy of **any** classifier.

# The bias/variance trade-off

- ▶ Dataset  $D \sim P$ .
- ▶ Predictor  $f_D(x)$
- ▶ Target function  $y = f(x) + \epsilon$
- ▶  $\mathbb{E} \epsilon = 0$  zero-mean noise with variance  $\sigma^2 = \mathbb{V}(\epsilon)$

## MSE decomposition

$$\mathbb{E}[(f - f_D)^2] = \mathbb{V}(f_D) + \mathbb{B}(f_D)^2 + \sigma^2$$

## Variance

How sensitive the estimator is to the data

$$\mathbb{V}(f_D) = \mathbb{E}[(f_D - \mathbb{E}(f_D))^2]$$

## Bias

What is the expected deviation from the true function

$$\mathbb{B}(f_D) \triangleq \mathbb{E}[(f_D - f)]$$

## Example: mean estimation

- ▶ Data  $D = y_1, \dots, y_T$  with  $\mathbb{E}[y_t] = \mu$ .
- ▶ Goal: estimate  $\mu$  with some estimator  $f_D$  to minimise
- ▶ MSE:  $\mathbb{E}[(y - f_D)^2]$ , the expected square difference between new samples our guess.

## Optimal estimate

To minimise the MSE, we use  $f^* = \mu$ . This gives us two ideas:

## Empirical mean estimator:

- ▶  $f_D = \sum_{t=1}^T x_t / T$ .
- ▶  $\mathbb{V}(f_D) = \mathbb{E}[f_D - \mu] = 1/\sqrt{T}$
- ▶  $\mathbb{B}(f_D) = 0$ . (unbiased estimator)

## Laplace mean estimator:

- ▶  $f_D = \sum_{t=1}^T (\lambda + x_t) / T$ .
- ▶  $\mathbb{V}(f_D) = \mathbb{E}[f_D - \mu] = \frac{1}{1+\sqrt{T}}$
- ▶  $\mathbb{B}(f_D) = O(1/T)$ .

# A proof of the bias/variance trade-off

- ▶ RV's  $y_t \sim P$ ,  $\mathbb{E}[y_t] = \mu$ ,  $y_t = \mu + \epsilon_t$ .
- ▶ Estimator  $f_D$ ,  $D = y_1, \dots, y_{t-1}$ .

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}[(f_D - y_t)^2] &= \mathbb{E}[f_D^2] - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D y_t] + \mathbb{E}[y_t^2] \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + \mathbb{E}[f_D]^2 - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D y_t] + \mathbb{E}[y_t^2] \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + \mathbb{E}[f_D]^2 - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D]\mathbb{E}[y_t] + \mathbb{E}[y_t^2] \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + \mathbb{E}[f_D]^2 - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D]\mu + \mathbb{E}[y_t^2] \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + \mathbb{E}[f_D]^2 - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D]\mu + \mathbb{E}[(\mu + \epsilon_t)^2] \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + \mathbb{E}[f_D]^2 - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D]\mu + \mathbb{E}[\mu^2 + 2\mu\epsilon_t + \epsilon_t^2] \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + \mathbb{E}[f_D]^2 - 2\mathbb{E}[f_D]\mu + \mu^2 + \sigma^2 \\ &= \mathbb{V}[f_D] + (\mathbb{E}[f_D] - \mu)^2 + \sigma^2 \\ &= \mathbb{V}(f_D) + \mathbb{B}(f_D)^2 + \sigma^2\end{aligned}$$

# Generalisation error

## Regret decomposition

Let the optimal rule be  $\pi^* \in \Pi$ , the best approximate rule be  $\hat{\pi}^* \in \Pi$  and our rule be  $\hat{\pi} \in \hat{\Pi}$ . We call the difference between the performance of  $\pi^*$  and  $\hat{\pi}$  our **regret**:

$$\underbrace{U(\pi^*, P) - U(\hat{\pi}, P)}_{\text{regret}} = \underbrace{U(\pi^*, P) - U(\hat{\pi}^*, P)}_{\text{approximation error}} + \underbrace{U(\hat{\pi}^*, P) - U(\hat{\pi}, P)}_{\text{estimation error}}$$

We can bound the regret by bounding each term separately.

- ▶ The **approximation error** tells us how expressive our class of rules is, i.e. how much we lose by looking at a restricted class  $\hat{\Pi}$  of rules. It is similar to estimator **bias**.
- ▶ The **statistical error** tells us how well the empirical performance on  $D$  approximates the true performance. It is similar to estimator **variance**.
- ▶ As a rule of thumb, the larger our class, the better the possible approximation but the higher the statistical error.



# Approximation error

- ▶ Our model limits us to a set of decision rules  $\hat{\Pi} \subset \Pi$ .
- ▶ The most we could do is find the best rule in  $\hat{\Pi}$ .
- ▶ This still leaves a gap:

$$\Delta \triangleq \max_{\pi \in \Pi} U(\pi, P) - \max_{\hat{\pi} \in \hat{\Pi}} U(\hat{\pi}, P)$$

The gap can be characterised in some cases.

Example:  $\epsilon$ -net on Lipschitz  $U(\cdot, P)$ .

- ▶ Assume  $U(\pi, P)$  is a Lipschitz function of  $\pi$  for all  $P$ , i.e.  $|U(\pi, P) - U(\pi', P)| \leq Ld(\pi, \pi')$  for some metric  $d$ .
- ▶ Let  $\hat{\Pi}$  be an  $\epsilon$ -net on  $\Pi$ , i.e.  $\max_{\pi \in \Pi} \min_{\pi' \in \hat{\Pi}} d(\pi, \pi') = \epsilon$ .
- ▶ Then  $\Delta \leq L\epsilon$ .

## Estimation error

- First, let us bound  $U(\hat{\pi}^*, P) - U(\hat{\pi}, P)$  by making an assumption.
- Then, we can prove that our assumption holds with high probability.

### Lemma

Let  $f, g : S \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ . If  $\|f - g\|_{\infty} \leq \epsilon$  and  $f(x) \geq f(z)$ , while  $g(y) \geq g(z)$ , for all  $z$ , i.e.  $x, y$  maximise  $f, g$  respectively

$$f(x) - f(y) \leq 2\epsilon.$$

This holds as:  $f(x) - f(y) \leq g(x) + \epsilon - f(y) \leq g(y) + \epsilon - f(y) \leq 2\epsilon$ .

### Corollary

If  $|U(\pi, P) - U(\pi, D)| \leq \epsilon$  for all  $\pi$  then

$$U(\hat{\pi}^*, P) - U(\hat{\pi}, P) \leq 2\epsilon$$

- Let us now prove that, with high probability,  $|U(\pi, P) - U(\pi, D)| \leq \epsilon$ .

## Bounding the estimation error

For any fixed rule  $\pi \in \Pi$  and utility function  $U : \Pi \times \mathcal{X}^T \rightarrow [0, 1]$ ,

$$P^T(|U(\pi, D) - U(\pi, P)| \geq \epsilon) \leq 2 \exp(-2T\epsilon^2).$$

This is a direct application of Hoeffding's inequality<sup>1</sup>. Taking the union bound over the set  $\hat{\Pi}$  gives:

$$P^T(\exists \pi \in \hat{\Pi} : |U(\pi, D) - U(\pi, P)| \geq \epsilon) \leq 2|\hat{\Pi}| \exp(-2T\epsilon^2).$$

Setting the right side equal to  $\delta$  and re-arranging,

$$P^T \left( \max_{\pi \in \hat{\Pi}} |U(\pi, D) - U(\pi, P)| \geq \sqrt{\frac{\ln(2|\hat{\Pi}|/\delta)}{2T}} \right) \leq \delta.$$

### Example: $\epsilon$ -net.

In a  $n$  dimensional space we require  $|\hat{\Pi}| = O(\epsilon^{-n})$ . This means that our statistical error is  $O(\sqrt{n \ln(1/\epsilon\delta)/T})$ .

<sup>1</sup>See Hoeffding's inequality in the confidence intervals presentation 

# The finite hypothesis algorithm

- ▶ Input: a finite set of rules  $\hat{\Pi}$ , data  $D$ , utility  $U$
- ▶ Return  $\hat{\pi} \in \arg \max_{\pi \in \hat{\Pi}} U(\pi, D)$ .

## Regret of the finite hypothesis algorithm.

With probability  $1 - \delta$

$$U(\hat{\pi}, P) \geq U(\hat{\pi}^*, P) - \sqrt{2 \ln(2|\hat{\Pi}|/\delta)/T} \quad (5)$$

$$U(\pi^*, P) - U(\hat{\pi}, P) \leq \Delta + \sqrt{2 \ln(2|\hat{\Pi}|/\delta)/T} \quad (6)$$

## Examples

- ▶ ML estimation:  $U(\theta, D) = P_{\theta}(D)$  is the data likelihood.
- ▶ Accuracy, etc:  $U(\pi, D)$ .

# VC Dimension

Here we consider sets  $\Pi$  of deterministic rules  $\pi : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ .

## Shattering

If a  $S \subset \mathcal{X}$  can with  $|S| = m$ , can be assigned any labelling  $y_1, \dots, y_m$  by a  $\pi \in \Pi$ , then we say  $\Pi$  shatters  $S$ .

## The VC dimension

This is the largest-size set  $S$  that  $\Pi$  can shatter.

## Example: Perceptrons on $\mathbb{R}^2$

This class has VC dimension 3 on the plane.

## Quality metrics

Supervised machine learning problems

## Generalisation

## Estimating quality

Methodology

## Learning and generalisation

Introduction

Bias and variance

Generalisation

## PAC Learning

The realisable setting

# Binary classification

## Learning algorithm $\lambda$

- ▶ Takes data  $D = \{(x_t, y_t)\}$  as input
- ▶ Generates deterministic decision rules  $\pi : X \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ ,

## The loss of a rule $\pi$ .

- ▶ Assume an existing concept class  $\pi^* \in \Pi$
- ▶ Distribution  $x_t \sim P$  is i.i.d. and  $x_1, \dots, x_T \sim P^T$ .
- ▶ The loss under distribution  $P$  is

$$L(\pi) = P(\{x : \pi(x) \neq \pi^*(x)\})$$

## Realisable PAC learner

- ▶  $\lambda : (\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y})^* \rightarrow \Pi$  is  $(\epsilon, \delta)$ -PAC, if for any  $P$  and  $\epsilon, \delta > 0$ , and any concept  $\pi^* \in \Pi$ , there is  $T$  such that

$$P^T(\{D : L[\lambda(D)] > \epsilon\}) < \delta, \quad D = (\{x_t, \pi^*(x_t)\}), x_t \sim P.$$