

Project #1

Desperately Seeking Sutton

Problem

Description

One aspect of research in reinforcement learning (or any scientific field) is the replication of previously published results. There are a few benefits you might reap from replicating papers. One benefit of replication is that it augments your understanding of the material. Another benefit is that it puts you in a good position both to extend existing literature and consider new contributions to your field. Replication is also often challenging. You may find that values of key parameters are missing, that described methods are ambiguous, or even that there are subtle errors. Sometimes obtaining the same pattern of results is not possible.

For this project, you will read Richard Sutton's 1988 paper [Learning to Predict by the Methods of Temporal Differences](#). Then you will create an implementation and replication of the results found in figures 3, 4, and 5. (It might also be informative to compare these results with those in Chapter 7 of Sutton's textbook: "[Reinforcement Learning: An Introduction](#)".)

You will present your work in a written report of a maximum of 5 pages. The report should include a description of the experiment replicated, how the experiment was implemented (the environment, algorithms, etc), and the outcome of the experiment. You should describe how well your results match the results given in the paper as well as any significant differences. Describe any pitfalls you ran into while trying to replicate the experiment from the paper (e.g. unclear parameters, contradictory descriptions of the procedure to follow, results that differ wildly from the published results). What steps did you take to overcome those pitfalls? What assumptions did you make? And, why were these assumptions justified? Add anything else that you think is relevant to discuss.

Procedure

As noted, replicating results can be challenging. Expect some issues along the way and be prepared to resolve them.

- Read Sutton's Paper
- Write the code necessary to replicate Sutton's experiments
 - You will be replicating figures 3, 4, and 5 (Check Erratum at the end of paper)
- Create the graphs
 - Replicate figures 3, 4, and 5
 - Graphs of anything else you may think appropriate
- We've created a **private** Georgia Tech GitHub repository for your code. Push your code to the personal repository found here: <https://github.gatech.edu/gt-omscs-rldm>
 - The quality of the code is not graded. You don't have to spend countless hours adding comments, etc. But, it will be examined by the TAs.
 - Make sure to include a README.md file for your repository
 - Include thorough and detailed instructions on how to run your source code in the README.md
 - You will be penalized by **25 points** if you:
 - Do not have any code or do not submit your *full* code to the GitHub repository
 - Do not include the git hash for your last commit in your paper
- Write a paper describing the experiments, how you replicated them, and any other relevant information.
 - Include the hash for your last commit to the GitHub repository in the paper's header.
 - 5 pages maximum -- really, you will lose points for longer papers.
 - Make sure your graphs are legible and you cite sources properly. While it is not required, we recommend you use a [conference paper format](#).
 - Describe the problem
 - You should assume your reader has not read Sutton 88 and provide sufficient background for them to understand your work and its significance. Don't cut corners here. We've never read your take and analysis of the random walk.
 - Your graphs
 - And, discussions regarding them
 - Describe the experiments
 - Discuss the implementation

- Discuss the outcome
- The generated data
- Analyze your results
 - How do they match
 - How do they differ
 - Why is this the case and why is it important? Analyze your results in the context of the problem and the approach. Your analysis is where you demonstrate your understanding to the reader.
- Describe any problems/pitfalls you encountered
 - How did you overcome them
 - What were your assumptions/justifications for this solution
- Yes, it can be done within 5 pages and in normal font size
- Save this paper in PDF format
- Submit!

Resources

The concepts explored in this project are covered by:

- Lectures
 - Lesson 4: TD and Friends
- Readings
 - [Learning to Predict by the Methods of Temporal Differences](#)

Submission Details

The due date is indicated on the Canvas page for this assignment.


Due Date: Indicated as "Due" on Canvas

Late Due Date [20 point penalty per day]: Indicated as "Until" on Canvas

Make sure you have set your timezone in Canvas to ensure the deadline is accurate.

The submission consists of:

- Your written report in PDF format (Make sure to include the git hash of your last commit)
- Your source code in your personal repository that we created for you on Georgia Tech's private GitHub



To complete the assignment, submit your written report to Project 1 under your Assignments on Canvas: <https://gatech.instructure.com>

You may submit the assignment as many times as you wish up to the due date, but, we will only consider your last submission for grading purposes.

Late submissions will receive a cumulative 20 point penalty per day. That is, any projects submitted after midnight AOE on the due date get a 20 point penalty. Any projects submitted after midnight AOE the following day get a 40 point penalty and so on. No project will receive a score less than a zero no matter what the penalty. Any projects more than 4 days late and any unsubmitted projects will receive a 0.

Note: Late is late. It does not matter if you are 1 second, 1 minute, or 1 hour late. If Canvas marks your assignment as late, you will be penalized. **Additionally, if you resubmit your project and your last submission is late, you will incur the penalty corresponding to the time of your last submission.**


Finally, if you have received an exception from the Dean of Students for a personal or medical emergency we will consider accepting your project up to 7 days after the initial due date with no penalty. Students requiring more time should consider withdrawing from the course (if possible) or taking an incomplete for this semester as we will not be able to grade their project.

Grading and Regrading

When your assignments, projects, and exams are graded, you will receive feedback explaining your errors (and your successes!) in some level of detail. This feedback is for your benefit, both on this assignment and for future assignments. It is considered a part of your learning goals to internalize this feedback. This is one of many learning goals for this course, such as understanding game theory, random variables, and noise.

If you are convinced that your grade is in error in light of the feedback, you may request a regrade within a week of the grade and feedback being returned to you. A regrade request is only valid if it includes an explanation of where the grader made an error. Send a private Piazza post to **only** Timothy Bail and Miguel Morales. In the Summary add “[Request] Regrade Project 1”. In the Details add sufficient explanation as to why you think the grader made a mistake. Be concrete and specific. We will not consider requests that do not follow these directions.

It is important to note that because we consider your ability to internalize feedback a learning goal, we also assess it. This ability is considered 10% of each assignment. We default to assigning



you full credit. If you request a regrade and do not receive at least 5 points as a result of the request, you will lose those 10 points.

