

repliMAT: *A* Guide to Reproducible MATLAB

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3 May, 2023

Table of contents

Welcome!	4
Contributing	4
Issues	4
Contributing code	5
1 Introduction	6
1.1 What is research reproducibility?	6
1.2 Open Research & Reproducibility	6
1.3 Why MATLAB?	7
2 Getting Started	8
2.1 Technical setup	8
2.1.1 MATLAB versions	8
2.2 How to use these materials	8
2.2.1 Where to start	8
2.2.2 Prerequisites	8
I Writing cleaner code	9
3 Variables	11
4 Documentation	12
5 Functions	13
6 Project Organisation	14
II Reproducibility	15
7 Projects	17
III Version Control	18

IV Extra Credit	20
8 Testing	22
References	23
License	24
License text	24

Welcome!

Welcome to **repliMAT**!

:construction: **This book is very much under development** :construction:

This is a resource for learning and teaching about developing reproducible and sustainable code in the MATLAB programming language.

Here you will find content, exercises and videos intended to either be followed alone or with a group, or taught as part of a workshop.

The materials are primarily aimed at researchers and their specific demands, but are applicable to all uses of MATLAB.

Contributing

Contributions to the **repliMAT** materials are welcomed! Please follow the guidance below prior to making contributions to ensure that your kind efforts do not go to waste.

The project's source code and development is managed at its [GitHub repository](#). There are a few ways to contribute, depending on whether you want to make changes to the source code or not.

In all interactions, please abide by the [code of conduct](#)

Issues

[Open a new issue](#) to describe a bug, error or to request changes.

Contributing code

If contributing source code changes to the project please follow the following workflow:

1. Make a fork of [the repository](#) on GitHub.
2. Clone your fork to your local machine and make a new branch with a name relevant to the task you're working on.
3. Make some changes and ensure that the pages render as expected by following the instructions in the README to render the materials.
4. Commit those changes with meaningful commit messages.
5. Push your branch to GitHub and open a pull request against the [upstream repository](#)'s `main` branch.
6. In the pull request description, please reference the issue that you are resolving.
7. Someone will review your pull request and hopefully it will be merged! :tada:

1 Introduction

1.1 What is research reproducibility?

According to The Turing Way's definitions¹, the term *reproducibility* refers to performing the *same* analysis on the *same* data for the *same* result. Other terms such as replicability and generalisability are used to refer to using different analyses or different data. This may not be your definition, but it's the one meant here and derived from the research done by the authors of The Turing Way (an exemplary guide to reproducible research software).

The value of reproducibility in research is manifold. Research that is reproducible:

- is easier to validate (perhaps even *possible* to validate),
- has more long-term validity,
- is more extensible,
- reduces repetition,
- decreases likelihood of losing methodology,

among other benefits.

Code is great for research reproducibility in lots of ways. Code describes a proceduralised sequence of operations to some data, with (arguably) zero ambiguity - great! That's just what we need for research. Where appropriate, code is an excellent solution to capturing and reproducing the steps taken to go from some raw data/input to some research conclusions.

However, in practice it isn't always as easy as that. So this guide aims to provide researchers who code with the tools they need to make their MATLAB-based research (more) reproducible.

1.2 Open Research & Reproducibility

Open research is the idea that the entire research lifecycle should be transparent for all to see. As an approach, open research continues to grow and many funders now stipulate that the research that they fund must follow open principles including the open availability of publications, data and code. How does this fit in with reproducibility? I would argue that if you are required to make your code available, whether that's for a publication, thesis or just to share it with a colleague, it would be a good thing for the code to actually work, and for it

to be relatively easy to make it do so. It's commonplace in research to obtain some code and spend a significant period of time attempting to run it successfully, let alone validating that it produces something accurate. Therefore reproducibility is an important component of open research, though it need not be complicated.

1.3 Why MATLAB?

MATLAB is a popular language in research.

That's it.

Whatever your technical opinion of a language, or whether it is proprietary or open source, for all sorts of reasons, MATLAB is used by a lot of researchers. It has a relatively long history as being a tool with a lot of useful mathematical and analytical features, is relatively user friendly and a large number of universities have a license.

But, possibly because it's a proprietary language, most of the guidance and documentation comes from the organisation that develops it, MathWorks.

In comparison to other programming languages currently popular in research such as Python & R, the availability of guidance around reproducibility is relatively limited.

So that's why this guide has been developed, to allow those researchers who currently use MATLAB to make their research more reproducible and easier to share.

Not because I think MATLAB is the best, or the worst. I just think that all research should aim to be as reproducible as possible and that you should use the best tool for the job, even if that's just the one that you currently know.

Researchers have said to me:

I *know* I should rewrite this in python so that I can share it.

But realistically, the likelihood in most cases is that you'll just move on to your next project. The demands and incentives of the research world mean that investigating a new thing carries much more value than refining an existing project to a higher standard.

So let's make the projects we're working on **now** as good as they can be.

2 Getting Started

2.1 Technical setup

You'll need an installation of [MATLAB](#), preferably a recent version (i.e. in the last year or so). Where a specific version is needed, or doesn't work with an example, it should be indicated alongside the exercise. See Section [2.1.1](#) below for more info on versions.

Follow the instructions on [MathWorks.com](#) to install.

No specific toolboxes are required.

Note There is no guarantee that anything in these materials will work with [Octave](#). In fact it probably won't. But let us know if you try!

2.1.1 MATLAB versions

A new version of MATLAB is released twice a year. The version numbers are comprised of the letter 'R' followed by the calendar year and 'a' if it's the first release in the year and 'b' for the second. e.g. *R2022b*. Each version has improvements from the last and makes changes. It's a good idea to be using the most recent version of MATLAB in most cases.

2.2 How to use these materials

2.2.1 Where to start

Anywhere you like! Hopefully the structure of the exercises included here means that you can dip in to any point that takes your fancy.

2.2.2 Prerequisites

These materials assume that you're already familiar with the basics of programming in MATLAB. Variables, arrays, loops, reading in data and making plots *etc.*

Part I

Writing cleaner code

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

3 Variables

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

4 Docummentation

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

5 Functions

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

6 Project Organisation

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

Part II

Reproducibility

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

7 Projects

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

Part III

Version Control

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

Part IV

Extra Credit

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

8 Testing

:construction: *Nothing here yet! Check back later.* :construction:

References

1. The Turing Way Community. The Turing Way: A handbook for reproducible, ethical and collaborative research. (2022) doi:[10.5281/zenodo.3233853](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3233853).

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