# K-means Description

**k-means clustering** (aka kmeans, k means) is a method of vector quantization, originally from signal processing, that is popular for **cluster analysis**in data mining. k-means clustering aims to **partition** n observations into k clusters in which each observation belongs to the **cluster** with the nearest **mean**, serving as a prototype of the cluster. This results in a partitioning of the data space into Voronoi cells.

The problem is computationally difficult (NP-hard); however, there are efficient **heuristic algorithms** that are commonly employed and converge quickly to a local optimum. These are usually similar to the expectation-maximization algorithm for mixtures of Gaussian distributions via an iterative refinement approach employed by both k-means and Gaussian Mixture Modeling. Additionally, they both use cluster centers to model the data; however, k-means clustering tends to find clusters of comparable spatial extent, while the expectation-maximization mechanism allows clusters to have different shapes.

The algorithm has a loose relationship to the k-nearest neighbor classifier, a popular machine learning technique for classification that is often confused with k-means because of the k in the name. One can apply the 1-nearest neighbor classifier on the cluster centers obtained by k-means to classify new data into the existing clusters. This is known as nearest centroid classifier or Rocchio algorithm.