

Statistics 360: Advanced R for Data Science

Lecture 8

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R6

S4

More object-oriented programming in R

- ▶ Last time:
 - ▶ base objects vs OO objects
 - ▶ OOP with S3 in R
- ▶ Today:
 - ▶ Brief introductions to OOP with R6 and S4
 - ▶ Reading: skim chapters 14 and 15 of Advanced R by Wickham

R6

Introduction to R6

- ▶ R6 is an “encapsulated” OOP system, so methods are bundled with objects, rather than being functions designed to act on objects.
 - ▶ R6 methods are called by `object$method()`, rather than `generic.objectclass()`
- ▶ R6 objects are implemented using environments and so can be modified in place.
- ▶ R6 will look familiar to programmers coming from another language.

```
#install.packages("R6")  
library(R6)
```

Defining classes and methods with R6

- ▶ Use `R6Class()` to create a class and its methods.
- ▶ Two important arguments to `R6Class()` are the `classname` argument and the `public` argument.
 - ▶ `classname` is self-explanatory
 - ▶ `public` specifies the methods and fields that are the public interface of the object. Methods access components of the object with `self`.

Example from the text

- Assign the output of `R6Class()` to a variable with the same name as the class name

```
Accumulator <- R6Class(classname="Accumulator",  
  public = list(  
    sum = 0,  
    add = function(x = 1) {  
      self$sum <- self$sum + x  
      invisible(self)  
    }  
  )  
)  
  
# Accumulator  
x <- Accumulator$new() # create an Accumulator object  
x$add(1) # method  
x$add(2)$add(3)$add(4) # methods can be "chained"  
x$sum # field
```

```
## [1] 10
```

Side-effect methods

- ▶ `$add()` is called for the “side-effect” of modifying the sum
- ▶ Side-effect methods should return invisibly. Otherwise the object is printed when the method is called.

```
Accumulator <- R6Class(classname="Accumulator",
  public = list(
    sum = 0,
    add = function(x = 1) {
      self$sum <- self$sum + x
      self
    }
  )
)
# Accumulator
x <- Accumulator$new()
x$add(1)
```

```
## <Accumulator>
##   Public:
##     add: function (x = 1)
##     clone: function (deep = FALSE)
```


... reset ...

```
Accumulator <- R6Class(classname="Accumulator",  
  public = list(  
    sum = 0,  
    add = function(x = 1) {  
      self$sum <- self$sum + x  
      invisible(self)  
    }  
  )  
)
```

initialize method

- ▶ Will make your class easier to use.
 - ▶ initialize is a constructor that over-rides the default new method and allows users to initialize an instance of the class with data values.

```
# version without initialize
Person <- R6Class("Person", list(
  name = NULL,
  age = NA
))
brad <- Person$new()
brad$name = "Brad"
brad$age = 55
brad
```

```
## <Person>
##   Public:
##     age: 55
##     clone: function (deep = FALSE)
##     name: Brad
```

```

# version with initialize
Person <- R6Class("Person", list(
  name = NULL,
  age = NA,
  initialize = function(name, age = NA) {
    stopifnot(is.character(name), length(name) == 1)
    stopifnot(is.numeric(age), length(age) == 1)
    self$name <- name
    self$age <- age
    #invisible(self) is not necessary
  })
brad <- Person$new("Brad", age = 55)
brad

```

```

## <Person>
##   Public:
##     age: 55
##     clone: function (deep = FALSE)
##     initialize: function (name, age = NA)
##     name: Brad

```

validate method

- The above constructor does some checking. More expensive checks should go in a validate method.

```
# version with initialize and validate
Person <- R6Class("Person", list(
  name = NULL,
  age = NA,
  initialize = function(name, age = NA) {
    self$name <- name
    self$age <- age
  },
  validate = function() {
    stopifnot(is.character(self$name), length(self$name) == 1)
    stopifnot(is.numeric(self$age), length(self$age) == 1)
  }
))
brad <- Person$new("Brad", age = c(55,65))
try(brad$validate())
```

```
## Error in brad$validate() : length(self$age) == 1 is not TRUE
```

print method

- Add a print method to make printing nicer.

```
# version with initialize and print
Person <- R6Class("Person", list( name = NULL, age = NA,
  initialize = function(name, age = NA) {
    stopifnot(is.character(name), length(name) == 1)
    stopifnot(is.numeric(age), length(age) == 1)
    self$name <- name; self$age <- age},
  print = function(...) {
    cat("Person: \n"); cat("Name:", self$name, "\n")
    cat("Age:", self$age, "\n")
    invisible(self)})
))
brad <- Person$new("Brad", age = 55)
brad
```

```
## Person:
## Name: Brad
## Age: 55
```

Inheritance

- ▶ Use `inherit` to create a child class that inherits methods and fields from a parent (super) class
- ▶ You can add or over-ride methods/fields in the child

```
AccumulatorChatty <- R6Class("AccumulatorChatty",  
  inherit = Accumulator,  
  public = list(  
    add = function(x = 1) {  
      cat("Adding ", x, "\n", sep = "")  
      super$add(x = x) # use the superclass implementation of add  
    }  
  )  
)  
x2 <- AccumulatorChatty$new()  
x2$add(10)$add(1)$sum
```

```
## Adding 10
```

```
## Adding 1
```

```
## [1] 11
```

class() and names()

- ▶ You can use `class()` and `names()` to query an R6 object.

```
class(x2)
```

```
## [1] "AccumulatorChatty" "Accumulator"      "R6"
```

```
names(x2)
```

```
## [1] ".__enclos_env__" "sum"              "clone"            "add"
```

Making copies

- ▶ R6 objects are implemented as environments.
 - ▶ Objects are modified in place.
 - ▶ The usual way of making copies in R with `<-` does not work:

```
x3 <- x2 # Are we copying x2?  
x3$add(100)
```

```
## Adding 100
```

```
x3$sum
```

```
## [1] 111
```

```
x2$sum # !!
```

```
## [1] 111
```


clone

- Make copies with the `$clone()` method.

```
x3 <- x2$clone()  
x3$add(-100)
```

```
## Adding -100
```

```
x3$sum
```

```
## [1] 11
```

```
x2$sum
```

```
## [1] 111
```

R6 topics not covered

- ▶ Private and active fields (Section 14.3)
- ▶ More on unexpected behaviour of R6 classes (Section 14.4)
- ▶ R6 *versus* the built-in reference classes (RC) system (Section 14.5)

S4

Introduction to S4

- ▶ S4 is a formal functional OOP system with strict rules for creating classes, generics and methods.
- ▶ Also has a more advanced implementation of inheritance/dispatch.
- ▶ Down-side is that it has a steeper learning curve than S3.
- ▶ Terminology: S4 objects have “slots”, accessed by @.
 - ▶ Similar in function to list elements in most S3 classes, which are accessed by \$.
- ▶ S4 is implemented in the `methods` package, which is loaded automatically in every R session.
 - ▶ However, the text recommends explicitly loading methods

Creating classes

- ▶ Use `setClass` to create a class and the `new()` method to create objects of that class.

```
library(methods)
setClass("Person",
  slots = c(
    name = "character",
    age = "numeric"
  )
)
brad <- new("Person", name = "Brad", age = 54)
```

Class prototype

- ▶ In addition to the class and slot names, you should provide a prototype for your class.
- ▶ The prototype specifies default values for the slots

```
setClass("Person",  
  slots = c(  
    name = "character",  
    age = "numeric"  
  ),  
  prototype = list(  
    name = NA_character_,  
    age = NA_real_  
  )  
)  
brad <- new("Person", name = "Brad")  
str(brad)
```

```
## Formal class 'Person' [package ".GlobalEnv"] with 2 slots  
## ..@ name: chr "Brad"  
## ..@ age : num NA
```

- ▶ You can use `is()` to see an S4 object's class, and `@` or `slot()` to access slots.
 - ▶ `@` is equivalent to `$` and `slot()` is equivalent to `[[`, and for most purposes they are equivalent to each other.

```
is(brad)
```

```
## [1] "Person"
```

```
brad@name
```

```
## [1] "Brad"
```

```
slot(brad,"name")
```

```
## [1] "Brad"
```

```
brad@name <- "Brad McNeney"
```

```
brad
```

```
## An object of class "Person"
```

```
## Slot "name":
```

```
## [1] "Brad McNeney"
```

```
##
```

```
## Slot "age":
```

```
## [1] NA
```

Inheritance

- The `contains` argument specifies a parent class to inherit slots and methods from.

```
setClass("Employee",  
  contains = "Person",  
  slots = c(  
    boss = "Person"  
  ),  
  prototype = list(  
    boss = new("Person")  
  )  
)  
brad <- new("Employee", name="Brad", boss=new("Person", name="Catherine"))  
is(brad, "Employee")
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```

```
is(brad, "Person")
```

```
## [1] TRUE
```


Helpers

- ▶ Just as with S3, you should write a user-friendly helper to create objects of your class.
- ▶ The helper can perform checks, coerce data to correct types, etc.
- ▶ Give the helper the same name as the class

```
Person <- function(name, age = NA) {  
  age <- as.double(age)  
  new("Person", name = name, age = age)  
}  
Person("Brad")
```

```
## An object of class "Person"  
## Slot "name":  
## [1] "Brad"  
##  
## Slot "age":  
## [1] NA
```

Validators

- ▶ For more complicated checks, write a validator with `setValidity()`
- ▶ `setValidity()` takes a class and a function that returns TRUE if the input is valid, and a character vector describing the problem if not:

```
setValidity("Person", function(object) {  
  if (length(object@name) != length(object@age)) {  
    "@name and @age must be same length"  
  } else {  
    TRUE  
  }  
})
```

```
## Class "Person" [in ".GlobalEnv"]  
##  
## Slots:  
##  
## Name:      name      age  
## Class: character  numeric  
##  
## Known Subclasses: "Employee"
```

```
# new("Person",name="Brad",age=54:55)  
# new("Employee",name=c("Brad","McNeney"))
```

Generics and methods

- ▶ Example: Write accessor functions for users to get and set data in your class.
 - ▶ Users shouldn't use @, and you shouldn't on other developers' classes
 - ▶ Write generics with `setGeneric()` and a call to `standardGeneric()`
 - ▶ Write methods with `setMethod()`.
 - ▶ Setting values has the potential to create invalid objects. Can call `validObject()` to ensure a valid object.

```
# Note: Don't use {} in the function definition of setGeneric.  
# get values with a **prefix** function  
setGeneric("age", function(x) standardGeneric("age"))
```

```
## [1] "age"  
setMethod("age", "Person", function(x) x@age)
```

```
# set values with a **replacement** function
setGeneric("age<=", function(x, value) standardGeneric("age<="))
```

```
## [1] "age<="

setMethod("age<=", "Person", function(x, value) {
  x@age <- value
  validObject(x) # check object validity
  x
})
age(brad) <- 55
age(brad)
```

```
## [1] 55

try({ age(brad) <- 55:56 })
```

```
## Error in validObject(x) :
##   invalid class "Employee" object: @name and @age must be same length
```

Signature

- ▶ The signature argument of `setGeneric()` specifies which arguments are used for method dispatch.
 - ▶ Default is all arguments.
- ▶ The second argument of `setMethod()` is also called signature, and specifies the classes that the method applies to.
- ▶ S4 allows for generics and methods to dispatch on multiple classes.
 - ▶ Can get quite confusing.
 - ▶ See Section 15.5 of text if interested.

```
setGeneric("age<-",function(x,value,...,verbose=TRUE) standardGeneric("age<-"),
          signature = "x") # dispatch on first arg only
```

```
## [1] "age<-"
```

```
setMethod("age<-", "Person", function(x,value,...,verbose=TRUE) {
  x@age <- value
  if(verbose) cat("Setting age to",value,"\n")
  x
})
age(brad) <- 56
```

```
## Setting age to 56
```

show method

- ▶ The `show()` method is the S4 equivalent of `print`.
- ▶ It should have one argument.

```
setMethod("show", "Employee", function(object) {  
  cat(is(object)[[1]], "\n",  
      "  Name: ", object@name, "\n",  
      "  Age:  ", object@age, "\n",  
      "  Boss: ", object@boss@name, "\n",  
      sep = "  
  ")  
})  
brad
```

```
## Employee  
##   Name: Brad  
##   Age:  56  
##   Boss: Catherine
```


List methods

- ▶ Use `methods("generic")` or `methods(class = "class")` to see all methods for a given generic or class.

```
methods("age")
```

```
## [1] age,Person-method  
## see '?methods' for accessing help and source code
```

```
methods(class="Employee")
```

```
## [1] age      age<-    coerce show  
## see '?methods' for accessing help and source code
```

```
methods(class="Person")
```

```
## [1] age      age<-    coerce  
## see '?methods' for accessing help and source code
```

Topics skimmed or not covered.

- ▶ Method dispatch, section 15.5
- ▶ Interfacing S4 and S3, section 15.6.