A Crash Course on Discrete Probability

Events and Probability

Consider a random process (e.g., throw a die, pick a card from a deck)

- Each possible outcome is a **simple event** (or sample point).
- The **sample space** Ω is the set of all possible simple events.
- An **event** is a set of simple events (a subset of the sample space).
- With each simple event E we associate a real number $0 \leq \Pr(E) \leq 1$ which is the **probability** of E.

Probability Space

Definition

A probability space has three components:

1. A sample space Ω, which is the set of all possible outcomes of the random process modeled by the probability space;
2. A family of sets $\mathcal{F}$ representing the allowable events, where each set in $\mathcal{F}$ is a subset of the sample space Ω;
3. A probability function $\Pr : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow \mathrm{R}$, satisfying the definition below.

In a discrete probability space the we use $\mathcal{F} =$ "all the subsets of Ω"

Probability Function

Definition

A probability function is any function $\Pr : \mathcal{F} \to \mathrm{R}$ that satisfies the following conditions:

1. For any event E, $0 \leq \Pr(E) \leq 1$;
2. $\Pr(\Omega) = 1$;
3. For any finite or countably infinite sequence of pairwise mutually disjoint events $E_1, E_2, E_3, \ldots$

$$\Pr\left(\bigcup_{i \geq 1} E_i\right) = \sum_{i \geq 1} \Pr(E_i).$$

The probability of an event is the sum of the probabilities of its simple events.

Examples:

Consider the random process defined by the outcome of rolling a die.

$$\Omega = \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6\}$$

We assume that all "facets" have equal probability, thus

$$\text{Pr}(1) = \text{Pr}(2) = \ldots.\text{Pr}(6) = 1/6.$$

The probability of the event "odd outcome"

$$= \text{Pr}(\{1, 3, 5\}) = 1/2$$

Assume that we roll two dice:
$\Omega =$ all ordered pairs $\{(i, j), 1 \leq i, j \leq 6\}$.
We assume that each (ordered) combination has probability $1/36$.

Probability of the event "sum $= 2$"

$$\Pr(\{(1, 1)\}) = 1/36.$$

Probability of the event "sum $= 3$"

$$\Pr(\{(1, 2), (2, 1)\}) = 2/36.$$

Let $E_1 =$ "sum bounded by 6",

$$E_1 = \{(1,1),(1,2),(1,3),(1,4),(1,5),(2,1),(2,2),$$

$$(2,3),(2,4),(3,1),(3,2),(3,3),(4,1),(4,2),(5,1)\}$$

$$\Pr(E_1) = 15/36$$

Let $E_2 =$ "both dice have odd numbers", $\Pr(E_2) = 1/4$.

$$\Pr(E_1 \cap E_2) =$$

$$\Pr(\{(1,1),(1,3),(1,5),(3,1),(3,3),(5,1)\}) =$$

$$6/36 = 1/6.$$

The union bound

Theorem

Consider events $E_1, E_2, \ldots, E_n$. Then we have

$$\Pr\left(\bigcup_{i=1}^{n} E_i\right) \leq \sum_{i=1}^{n} \Pr(E_i).$$

Example: I roll a die:

- Let $E_1 =$ "result is odd"
- Let $E_2 =$ "result is ≤ 2"

The Monty Hall problem

The Monty Hall problem - Sample space

Let's assume that

- The car is in a random door.
- The player chooses a random door.
- Whenever there's a choice the presenter chooses a random door.

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We can define as a sample space the set of triples (p, c, s):

- p: The door with the car
- c: The door the player chooses
- s: The door opened by the presenter

$$\Omega = \{(1,1,2),(1,1,3),(1,2,3),(1,3,2),(2,1,3),(2,2,1),\\ (2,2,3),(2,3,1),(3,1,2),(3,2,1),(3,3,1),(3,3,2)\}$$

The Monty Hall problem - Probabilities

Event	Prob.	Stay Wins	Switch Wins
$(1,1,2)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{2}$	$\surd$	
$(1,1,3)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{2}$	$\surd$	
$(1,2,3)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}$		$\surd$
$(1,3,2)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}$		$\surd$
$(2,1,3)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}$		$\surd$
$(2,2,1)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{2}$	$\surd$	
$(2,2,3)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{2}$	$\surd$	
$(2,3,1)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}$		$\surd$
$(3,1,2)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}$		$\surd$
$(3,2,1)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}$		$\surd$
$(3,3,1)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{2}$	$\surd$	
$(3,3,2)$	$\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{3}\cdot\frac{1}{2}$	$\surd$	
		$6/18 = 1/3$	$6/9 = 2/3$

Independent Events

Definition

Two events E and F are independent if and only if

$$\Pr(E \cap F) = \Pr(E) \cdot \Pr(F).$$

Independent Events, examples

Example: You pick a card from a deck.

- $E =$ "Pick an ace"
- $F =$ "Pick a heart"

Example: You roll a die

- $E =$ "number is even"
- $F =$ "number is ≤ 4"

Basically, two events are independent if when one happends it doesn't tell you anything about if the other happened.

Conditional Probability

What is the probability that a random student at Sapienza was born in Roma.
$E_1 =$ the event "born in Roma."
$E_2 =$ the event "a student in Sapienza."
The conditional probability that a a student at Sapienza was born in Roma is written:

$$\Pr(E_1 \mid E_2).$$

Computing Conditional Probabilities

Definition

The conditional probability that event E occurs given that event F occurs is

$$\Pr(E \mid F) \;=\; \frac{\Pr(E \cap F)}{\Pr(F)}.$$

The conditional probability is only well-defined if $\Pr(F) > 0$.

By conditioning on F we restrict the sample space to the set F. Thus we are interested in $\Pr(E \cap F)$ “normalized” by $\Pr(F)$.

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$\Pr(E_2) = 1/2 = 18/36.$

$$\Pr(E_1 \mid E_2) = \frac{\Pr(E_1 \cap E_2)}{\Pr(E_2)} = \frac{5/36}{1/2} = 5/18.$$

Example - a posteriori probability

We are given 2 coins:

- one is a fair coin A
- the other coin, B, has head on both sides

We choose a coin at random, i.e. each coin is chosen with probability $1/2$. We then flip the coin.

Given that we got head, what is the probability that we chose the fair coin A???

Define a sample space of ordered pairs $(coin, outcome)$.
The sample space has three points

$$\{(A, h), (A, t), (B, h)\}$$

$$\Pr((A, h)) = \Pr((A, t)) = 1/4$$

$$\Pr((B, h)) = 1/2$$

Define two events:
$E_1 =$ "Chose coin A".
$E_2 =$ "Outcome is head".

$$\Pr(E_1 \mid E_2) = \frac{\Pr(E_1 \cap E_2)}{\Pr(E_2)} = \frac{1/4}{1/4 + 1/2} = 1/3.$$

Independence

Two events A and B are independent if

$$\Pr(A \cap B) = \Pr(A) \times \Pr(B),$$

or

$$\Pr(A \mid B) = \frac{\Pr(A \cap B)}{\Pr(B)} = \Pr(A).$$

A Useful Identity

What is the probability that *Roma* will win *Ajax* tomorrow?
Assume we know that

- the probability that *Juventus* will win *Ajax* is 62% if tomorrow it does not rain.
- the probability that *Juventus* will win *Ajax* is 40% if tomorrow it rains.
- the probability that tomorrow rains is 78%.

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Assume two events A and B.

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr(A) &= \Pr(A \cap B) + \Pr(A \cap B^c) \\ &= \Pr(A \mid B) \cdot \Pr(B) + \Pr(A \mid B^c) \cdot \Pr(B^c)\end{aligned}$$

Random Variable

Definition

A random variable X on a sample space Ω is a function on Ω; that is, $X : \Omega \to \mathcal{R}$.

A discrete random variable is a random variable that takes on only a finite or countably infinite number of values.

Examples:

In practice, a random variable is some random quantity that we are interested in:

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4. I pick a card, $X = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if card is an Ace} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$

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5. I pick 10 random students, $X =$ "average weight"
6. $X =$ "Running time of quicksort"

Independent random variables

Definition

Two random variables X and Y are independent if and only if

$$\Pr((X = x) \cap (Y = y)) \quad = \quad \Pr(X = x) \cdot \Pr(Y = y)$$

for all values x and y.

Independent random variables

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- I pick a random card from a deck. The value that I got and the suit that I got are independent.
- I pick a random person in Rome. The age and the weight are not independent.

Expectation

Definition

The expectation of a discrete random variable X, denoted by $\mathrm{E}[X]$, is given by

$$\mathrm{E}[X] = \sum_i i \Pr(X = i),$$

where the summation is over all values in the range of X.

Examples:

- The expected value of one die roll is:

$$E[X] = \sum_{i=1}^{6} i \Pr(X = i) = \sum_{i=1}^{6} \frac{i}{6} = 3.5.$$

- The expectation of the random variable X representing the sum of two dice is

$$\mathrm{E}[X] = \frac{1}{36} \cdot 2 + \frac{2}{36} \cdot 3 + \frac{3}{36} \cdot 4 + \ldots \frac{1}{36} \cdot 12 = 7.$$

- Let X take on the value 2^i with probability $1/2^i$ for $i = 1, 2, \ldots$.

$$\mathrm{E}[X] = \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^i} 2^i = \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} 1 = \infty.$$

Consider a game in which a player chooses a number in $\{1, 2, \ldots, 6\}$ and then rolls 3 dice.
The player wins \$1 for each die that matches the number, he loses \$1 if no die matches the number.
What is the expected outcome of that game:

Consider a game in which a player chooses a number in $\{1, 2, \ldots, 6\}$ and then rolls 3 dice.
The player wins $1 for each die that matches the number, he loses $1 if no die matches the number.
What is the expected outcome of that game:

$$-1(\frac{5}{6})^3 + 1 \cdot 3(\frac{1}{6})(\frac{5}{6})^2 + 2 \cdot 3(\frac{1}{6})^2(\frac{5}{6}) + 3(\frac{1}{6})^3 = -\frac{17}{216}.$$

Linearity of Expectation

Theorem

For any two random variables X and Y

$$E[X+Y] \;=\; E[X] \;+\; E[Y].$$

Theorem

For any constant c and discrete random variable X,

$$\mathrm{E}[cX] = c\mathrm{E}[X].$$

Note: X and Y do not have to be independent.

Examples:

- The expectation of the sum of n dice is...

Examples:

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- The expectation of the outcome of one die plus twice the outcome of a second die is...

- Assume that N people checked coats in a restaurants. The coats are mixed and each person gets a random coat.
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$$X_i = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if person } i \text{ got his coat,} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

- $E[X_i] \; = \; 1 \cdot \Pr(X_i = 1) \; + \; 0 \cdot \Pr(X_i = 0) =$
- $\Pr(X_i = 1) = \dfrac{1}{N}$
- $E[X] \; = \; E\left[\sum_{i=1}^{N} X_i\right] \; = \; \sum_{i=1}^{N} E[X_i] \; = \; 1$

Bernoulli Random Variable

A Bernoulli or an indicator random variable:

$$Y = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the experiment succeeds,} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

$$E[Y] = p \cdot 1 + (1 - p) \cdot 0 = p = \Pr(Y = 1).$$

Binomial Random Variable

Assume that we repeat n independent Bernoulli trials that have probability p.

Examples:

- I flip n coins, $X_i = 1$, if the ith flip is "head" ($p = 1/2$)
- I roll n dice, $X_i = 1$, if the ith die roll is a 4 ($p = 1/6$)
- I choose n cards, $X_i = 1$, if the ith card is a J, Q, K ($p = 12/52$.)

Let $X = \sum_{i=1}^{n} X_i$.

X is a Binomial random variable.

Binomial Random Variable

Definition

A binomial random variable X with parameters n and p, denoted by $B(n, p)$, is defined by the following probability distribution on $j = 0, 1, 2, \ldots, n$:

$$\Pr(X = j) = \binom{n}{j} p^j (1-p)^{n-j}.$$

$\binom{n}{k} = \frac{n!}{k! \cdot (n-k)!}$ is the number of ways that we can select k elements out of n.

Expectation of a Binomial Random Variable

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathrm{E}[X] &= \sum_{j=0}^{n} j \Pr(X = j) \\
&= \sum_{j=0}^{n} j \binom{n}{j} p^j (1-p)^{n-j}
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\mathrm{E}[X] &= \sum_{j=0}^{n} j \Pr(X = j) \\
&= \sum_{j=0}^{n} j \binom{n}{j} p^j (1-p)^{n-j} \\
&= \sum_{j=0}^{n} j \frac{n!}{j!(n-j)!} p^j (1-p)^{n-j} \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{n!}{(j-1)!(n-j)!} p^j (1-p)^{n-j} \\
&= np \sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{(n-1)!}{(j-1)!((n-1)-(j-1))!} p^{j-1} (1-p)^{(n-1)-(j-1)} \\
&= np \sum_{k=0}^{n-1} \frac{(n-1)!}{k!((n-1)-k)!} p^k (1-p)^{(n-1)-k}
\end{aligned}
$$

Expectation of a Binomial R. V. - 2nd way

Using linearity of expectations

$$\mathsf{E}[X] = \mathsf{E}\left[\sum_{i=1}^{n} X_i\right] = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \mathsf{E}[X_i] = np.$$