Introduction to Probability

Lecture 2: Random variables, probability mass function, expectation

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Outline

Random variable

Probability mass function

Cumulative distribution function

Expectation

What is a random variable?

Random variable

A random variable X is a function from the sample space to the real numbers.

- We can interpret X as a quantity whose value depends on the outcome of an experiment (some probabilistic process).
  - Roll two dice, X: sum of dice
  - Toss 3 coins, X: number of heads
  - Give a student a test, X: score
  - Stock market index

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- Many different types of RV: indicator, binary, choice, Bernoulli, etc.
- Random variable can be discrete or continuous:
  - X has finitely many possible values: discrete.
  - X has every integer as a possible value: discrete.
  - X amount of time it takes to finish a race: continuous (possible value: $\{t : 0 \leq t < \infty\} = [0, \infty)$).

Examples of random variables

Example

We toss 3 fair coins. Let a random variable X be the total number of heads on the 3 coins. What are the probabilities of X taking on the following values: $X = 0, X = 1, X = 2, X = 3, X \geq 4$?

Answer

Random variables are NOT events

random variables $\neq$ events

Tossing 3 fair coins example			
$X = x$	$\mathbf{P}[X = x]$	Set of outcomes	Possible event E
$X = 0$	$\frac{1}{8}$	$\{(T,T,T)\}$	Toss 0 heads
$X = 1$	$\frac{3}{8}$	$\{(H,T,T),(T,H,T),(T,T,H)\}$	Toss exactly 1 head
$X = 2$	$\frac{3}{8}$	$\{(H,H,T),(T,H,H),(H,T,H)\}$	Event where $X = 2$
			Toss exactly 2 heads
$X = 3$	$\frac{1}{8}$	$\{(H,H,H)\}$	Toss 0 tails
$X \geq 4$	0	$\{\}$	Toss 4 or more heads

We can define events by condition of the value of a random variable (RV takes on values that satisfy a numerical test).

Another example

Example

Tossing a coin has the probability p that it comes up heads. Toss a coin 5 times. Let X: the number of heads in 5 tosses. What is the range of X (i.e., what are the values that X can take on with non-zero probability)? What is $\mathbf{P}[\,X = k\,]$ where k is in the range of X?

Answer

- Notice that each coin toss is an independent trial.

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Probability mass function definition (PMF)

Discrete random variable

A random variable X is discrete if its range has countably many values

$$X = x \text{ where } x \in \{x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots\}$$

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Probability mass function

The probability mass function (PMF) of a discrete random variable X is a function $p(a)$ of X that maps possible outcomes of a random variable to the corresponding probabilities:

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Recall that probabilities must sum to 1: $\sum_{i=1}^{\infty} p(a_i) = 1$.

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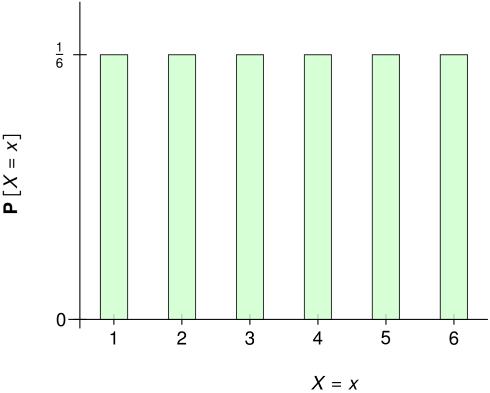

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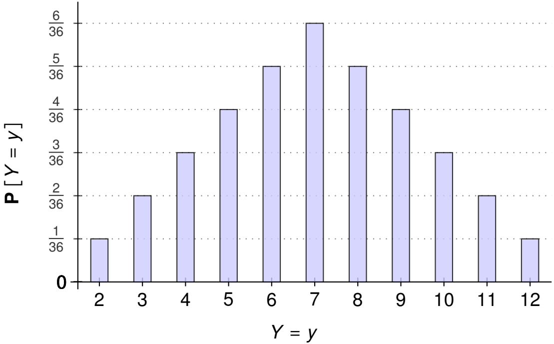

Properties of PMF

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5. For continuous RVs, these sums are replaced by integrals.

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Cumulative distribution function definition (CDF)

Another useful way to analyse probabilities.

Cumulative distribution function

The cumulative distribution function (CDF) of a random variable X is defined as

$$F(a) = F_X(a) = \mathbf{P}[\,X \leq a\,] \text{ where } -\infty < a < \infty$$

For a **discrete** random variable X, the CDF is

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Note that for a discrete RV the CDF is a step function, i.e., the value of F is constant in the intervals (x_{i-1}, x_i) and then takes a step of size $p(x_i)$ at x_i.

Example

- Let the PMF for X be given by $p(1) = \frac{1}{4}, p(2) = \frac{1}{2}, p(3) = \frac{1}{8}, p(4) = \frac{1}{8}$.

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- Then CDF is:

$$F(a) = \begin{cases} 0 & a < 1 \\ \frac{1}{4} & 1 \leq a < 2 \\ \frac{3}{4} & 2 \leq a < 3 \\ \frac{7}{8} & 3 \leq a < 4 \\ 1 & 4 \leq a \end{cases}$$

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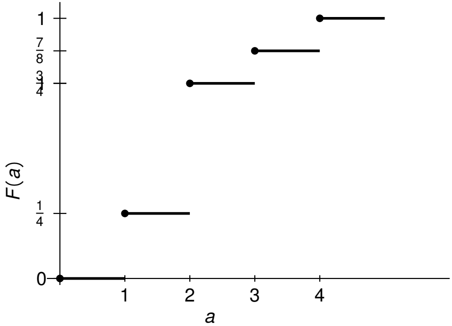
- Graphical depiction of function:



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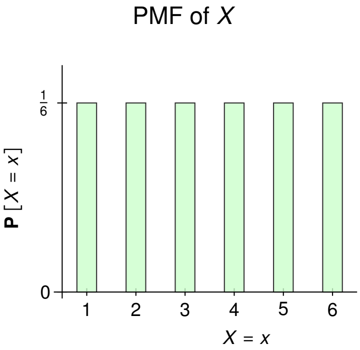

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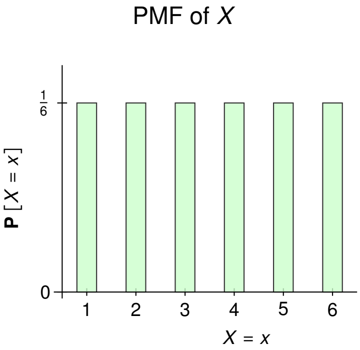

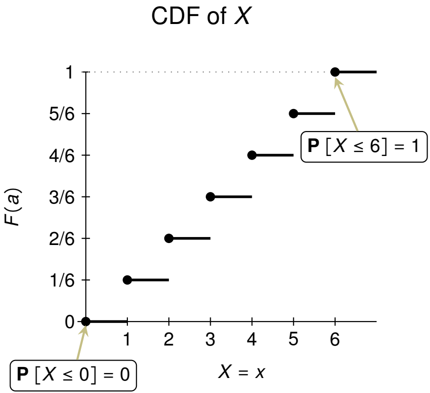

Properties of CDF

1. $0 \leq F(x) \leq 1$ for all x
2. $\lim_{x \to -\infty} F(x) = 0$
3. $\lim_{x \to \infty} F(x) = 1$
4. $F(x)$ is a non-decreasing function of x (if $x_1 < x_2$ then $F(x_1) \leq F(x_2)$)

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Expectation - expected value

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The expectation of a discrete random variable X is defined as

$$\mathbf{E}\left[\, X \,\right] = \sum_{x:\mathbf{P}[\, x \,]>0} x\mathbf{P}\left[\, x \,\right]$$

Expectation - expected value

Expectation

The expectation of a discrete random variable X is defined as

$$\mathbf{E}[X] = \sum_{x:\mathbf{P}[x]>0} x\mathbf{P}[x]$$

- Expectation is the average value of the random variable over many repetitions of the experiment it represents.
- It is the sum over all values of $X = x$ that have non-zero probability.
- AKA: mean, expected value, weighted average, centre of mass, first moment.

Example of a die roll

What is the expected value of a 6-sided die roll (i.e., what is the average value of a die roll)?

1. Define random variables:

$$X = \text{RV for value of roll}$$

$$\mathbf{P}[\,X = x\,] = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{6} & x \in \{1, \ldots, 6\} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

2. Solve:

Example of school classes

Example

A school has 3 classes with 5, 10 and 150 students. What is the average class size?

Answer

Interpretation 1: Randomly choose a class with equal probability. Thus, X = size of chosen class

Interpretation 2: Randomly choose a student with equal probability. Thus, Y = size of chosen class

This is a general phenomenon: it occurs because the more students are in a class, the more likely it is that a randomly chosen student would be in that class. As a result, bigger classes are given more weight than smaller classes.

Example of Roulette Version 1

Example

A roulette wheel has 36 places numbered from 1 to 36. In addition, 18 of them are coloured red and the other 18 are coloured black. A ball is thrown to take one of 36 places. A gambler can bet:

- on the colour of the place that the ball takes. A correct, either red or black, place wins them a 1 to 1 ratio payout;
- on the number of the place that the ball takes. A correct number wins them a 35 to 1 ratio payout.

What is the expected value if a gambler bets on

1. the colour of the place in the roulette;
2. the number of the place in the roulette that the ball will fall.

Are the two different betting games fair?

Answer

Example of Roulette Version 1 Cont.

Example

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Are the two different betting games fair?

Answer

1. Let E_X : bet on colour.

2. Let E_Y : bet on number.

Example of Roulette Version 2

Example

Change the game to add two green places, 0 and 00. Now there are a total of 38 places. Payouts are the same as before. What are the expected values now?

Answer

1. Let E_X : bet on red colour.

2. Let E_Y : bet on number 10.