

3.3.1: Introduction to Measures of Central Tendency

We've seen that we can get a sense of data by plotting frequency data on a graph. These frequency charts show us what the numbers look like, approximately how big and small they are, and how similar and different they are from another. It is good to get a feeling about the numbers in this way. But, these visualization are not very precise. In addition to summarizing numbers with graphs, we can summarize numbers using numbers (NO, please not more numbers, we promise numbers can be your friend).

From many numbers to one

Measures of central have one important summary goal: to reduce a pile of numbers to a single number that we can look at. We already know that looking at thousands of numbers is hopeless. Wouldn't it be nice if we could just look at one number instead? We think so. It turns out there are lots of ways to do this. Then, if your friend ever asks the frightening question, "hey, what are all these numbers like?". You can say they are like this one number right here.

But, just like in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (highly recommended movie), you must choose your measure of central tendency wisely.

Each of the following sections will look at the mode, the median, and then the mean. So let's start with the easiest measure of central tendency- mode!

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