

1.3: Populations and Samples

Data may come from a population or from a sample. Small letters like x or y generally are used to represent data values. Most data can be put into the following categories:

- Qualitative
- Quantitative

Qualitative data are the result of categorizing or describing attributes of a population. Hair color, blood type, ethnic group, the car a person drives, and the street a person lives on are examples of qualitative data. Qualitative data are generally described by words or letters. For instance, hair color might be black, dark brown, light brown, blonde, gray, or red. Blood type might be AB+, O-, or B+. Researchers often prefer to use quantitative data over qualitative data because it lends itself more easily to mathematical analysis. For example, it does not make sense to find an average hair color or blood type.

Quantitative data are always numbers. Quantitative data are the result of *counting* or *measuring* attributes of a population. Amount of money, pulse rate, weight, number of people living in your town, and number of students who take statistics are examples of quantitative data. Quantitative data may be either *discrete* or *continuous*.

All data that are the result of counting are called *quantitative discrete data*. These data take on only certain numerical values. If you count the number of phone calls you receive for each day of the week, you might get values such as zero, one, two, or three.

All data that are the result of measuring are *quantitative continuous data* assuming that we can measure accurately. Measuring angles in radians might result in such numbers as $\frac{\pi}{6}$, $\frac{\pi}{3}$, $\frac{\pi}{2}$, π , $\frac{3\pi}{4}$, and so on. If you and your friends carry backpacks with books in them to school, the numbers of books in the backpacks are discrete data and the weights of the backpacks are continuous data.

Sample of Quantitative Discrete Data

The data are the number of books students carry in their backpacks. You sample five students. Two students carry three books, one student carries four books, one student carries two books, and one student carries one book. The numbers of books (three, four, two, and one) are the **quantitative discrete data**.

Sample of Quantitative Continuous Data

The data are the weights of backpacks with books in them. You sample the same five students. The weights (in pounds) of their backpacks are 6.2, 7, 6.8, 9.1, 4.3. Notice that backpacks carrying three books can have different weights. Weights are **quantitative continuous data** because weights are measured.

Collaborative Exercise 1.3.1

Work collaboratively to determine the correct data type (quantitative or qualitative). Indicate whether quantitative data are continuous or discrete. Hint: Data that are discrete often start with the words "the number of."

- a. the number of pairs of shoes you own
- b. the type of car you drive
- c. where you go on vacation
- d. the distance it is from your home to the nearest grocery store
- e. the number of classes you take per school year.
- f. the tuition for your classes
- g. the type of calculator you use
- h. movie ratings
- i. political party preferences
- j. weights of sumo wrestlers
- k. amount of money (in dollars) won playing poker
- l. number of correct answers on a quiz
- m. peoples' attitudes toward the government
- n. IQ scores (This may cause some discussion.)

Answer

Items a, e, f, k, and l are quantitative discrete; items d, j, and n are quantitative continuous; items b, c, g, h, i, and m are qualitative.

Sampling

Gathering information about an entire population often costs too much or is virtually impossible. Instead, we use a sample of the population. **A sample should have the same characteristics as the population it is representing.** Most statisticians use various methods of random sampling in an attempt to achieve this goal. This section will describe a few of the most common methods. There are several different methods of **random sampling**. In each form of random sampling, each member of a population initially has an equal chance of being selected for the sample. Each method has pros and cons. The easiest method to describe is called a **simple random sample**. Any group of n individuals is equally likely to be chosen by any other group of n individuals if the simple random sampling technique is used. In other words, each sample of the same size has an equal chance of being selected. For example, suppose Lisa wants to form a four-person study group (herself and three other people) from her pre-calculus class, which has 31 members not including Lisa. To choose a simple random sample of size three from the other members of her class, Lisa could put all 31 names in a hat, shake the hat, close her eyes, and pick out three names. A more technological way is for Lisa to first list the last names of the members of her class together with a two-digit number, as in Table 1.3.2:

Table 1.3.3: Class Roster

ID	Name	ID	Name	ID	Name
00	Anselmo	11	King	21	Roquero
01	Bautista	12	Legeny	22	Roth
02	Bayani	13	Lundquist	23	Rowell
03	Cheng	14	Macierz	24	Salangsang
04	Cuarismo	15	Motogawa	25	Slade
05	Cunningham	16	Okimoto	26	Stratcher
06	Fontecha	17	Patel	27	Tallai
07	Hong	18	Price	28	Tran
08	Hoobler	19	Quizon	29	Wai
09	Jiao	20	Reyes	30	Wood
10	Khan				

Lisa can use a table of random numbers (found in many statistics books and mathematical handbooks), a calculator, or a computer to generate random numbers. For this example, suppose Lisa chooses to generate random numbers from a calculator. The numbers generated are as follows:

0.94360; 0.99832; 0.14669; 0.51470; 0.40581; 0.73381; 0.04399

Lisa reads two-digit groups until she has chosen three class members (that is, she reads 0.94360 as the groups 94, 43, 36, 60). Each random number may only contribute one class member. If she needed to, Lisa could have generated more random numbers.

The random numbers 0.94360 and 0.99832 do not contain appropriate two digit numbers. However the third random number, 0.14669, contains 14 (the fourth random number also contains 14), the fifth random number contains 05, and the seventh random number contains 04. The two-digit number 14 corresponds to Macierz, 05 corresponds to Cunningham, and 04 corresponds to Cuarismo. Besides herself, Lisa's group will consist of Marcierz, Cunningham, and Cuarismo.

Besides simple random sampling, there are other forms of sampling that involve a chance process for getting the sample. **Other well-known random sampling methods are the stratified sample, the cluster sample, and the systematic sample.**

To choose a **stratified sample**, divide the population into groups called strata and then take a **proportionate** number from each stratum. For example, you could stratify (group) your college population by department and then choose a proportionate simple random sample from each stratum (each department) to get a stratified random sample. To choose a simple random sample from

each department, number each member of the first department, number each member of the second department, and do the same for the remaining departments. Then use simple random sampling to choose proportionate numbers from the first department and do the same for each of the remaining departments. Those numbers picked from the first department, picked from the second department, and so on represent the members who make up the stratified sample.

To choose a **cluster sample**, divide the population into clusters (groups) and then randomly select some of the clusters. All the members from these clusters are in the cluster sample. For example, if you randomly sample four departments from your college population, the four departments make up the cluster sample. Divide your college faculty by department. The departments are the clusters. Number each department, and then choose four different numbers using simple random sampling. All members of the four departments with those numbers are the cluster sample.

To choose a **systematic sample**, randomly select a starting point and take every n^{th} piece of data from a listing of the population. For example, suppose you have to do a phone survey. Your phone book contains 20,000 residence listings. You must choose 400 names for the sample. Number the population 1–20,000 and then use a simple random sample to pick a number that represents the first name in the sample. Then choose every fiftieth name thereafter until you have a total of 400 names (you might have to go back to the beginning of your phone list). Systematic sampling is frequently chosen because it is a simple method.

A type of sampling that is non-random is convenience sampling. **Convenience sampling** involves using results that are readily available. For example, a computer software store conducts a marketing study by interviewing potential customers who happen to be in the store browsing through the available software. The results of convenience sampling may be very good in some cases and highly biased (favor certain outcomes) in others.

Sampling data should be done very carefully. Collecting data carelessly can have devastating results. Surveys mailed to households and then returned may be very biased (they may favor a certain group). It is better for the person conducting the survey to select the sample respondents.

True random sampling is done **with replacement**. That is, once a member is picked, that member goes back into the population and thus may be chosen more than once. However for practical reasons, in most populations, simple random sampling is done **without replacement**. Surveys are typically done without replacement. That is, a member of the population may be chosen only once. Most samples are taken from large populations and the sample tends to be small in comparison to the population. Since this is the case, sampling without replacement is approximately the same as sampling with replacement because the chance of picking the same individual more than once with replacement is very low.

In a college population of 10,000 people, suppose you want to pick a sample of 1,000 randomly for a survey. **For any particular sample of 1,000**, if you are sampling **with replacement**,

- the chance of picking the first person is 1,000 out of 10,000 (0.1000);
- the chance of picking a different second person for this sample is 999 out of 10,000 (0.0999);
- the chance of picking the same person again is 1 out of 10,000 (very low).

If you are sampling **without replacement**,

- the chance of picking the first person for any particular sample is 1000 out of 10,000 (0.1000);
- the chance of picking a different second person is 999 out of 9,999 (0.0999);
- you do not replace the first person before picking the next person.

Compare the fractions $999/10,000$ and $999/9,999$. For accuracy, carry the decimal answers to four decimal places. To four decimal places, these numbers are equivalent (0.0999).

Sampling without replacement instead of sampling with replacement becomes a mathematical issue only when the population is small. For example, if the population is 25 people, the sample is ten, and you are sampling **with replacement for any particular sample**, then the chance of picking the first person is ten out of 25, and the chance of picking a different second person is nine out of 25 (you replace the first person).

If you sample **without replacement**, then the chance of picking the first person is ten out of 25, and then the chance of picking the second person (who is different) is nine out of 24 (you do not replace the first person).

Compare the fractions $9/25$ and $9/24$. To four decimal places, $9/25 = 0.3600$ and $9/24 = 0.3750$. To four decimal places, these numbers are not equivalent.

When you analyze data, it is important to be aware of **sampling errors** and nonsampling errors. The actual process of sampling causes sampling errors. For example, the sample may not be large enough. Factors not related to the sampling process cause **nonsampling errors**. A defective counting device can cause a nonsampling error.

In reality, a sample will never be exactly representative of the population so there will always be some sampling error. As a rule, the larger the sample, the smaller the sampling error.

In statistics, a **sampling bias** is created when a sample is collected from a population and some members of the population are not as likely to be chosen as others (remember, each member of the population should have an equally likely chance of being chosen). When a sampling bias happens, there can be incorrect conclusions drawn about the population that is being studied.

Collaborative Exercise 1.3.8

As a class, determine whether or not the following samples are representative. If they are not, discuss the reasons.

- To find the average GPA of all students in a university, use all honor students at the university as the sample.
- To find out the most popular cereal among young people under the age of ten, stand outside a large supermarket for three hours and speak to every twentieth child under age ten who enters the supermarket.
- To find the average annual income of all adults in the United States, sample U.S. congressmen. Create a cluster sample by considering each state as a stratum (group). By using simple random sampling, select states to be part of the cluster. Then survey every U.S. congressman in the cluster.
- To determine the proportion of people taking public transportation to work, survey 20 people in New York City. Conduct the survey by sitting in Central Park on a bench and interviewing every person who sits next to you.
- To determine the average cost of a two-day stay in a hospital in Massachusetts, survey 100 hospitals across the state using simple random sampling.

Variation in Data

Variation is present in any set of data. For example, 16-ounce cans of beverage may contain more or less than 16 ounces of liquid. In one study, eight 16 ounce cans were measured and produced the following amount (in ounces) of beverage:

15.8; 16.1; 15.2; 14.8; 15.8; 15.9; 16.0; 15.5

Measurements of the amount of beverage in a 16-ounce can may vary because different people make the measurements or because the exact amount, 16 ounces of liquid, was not put into the cans. Manufacturers regularly run tests to determine if the amount of beverage in a 16-ounce can falls within the desired range.

Be aware that as you take data, your data may vary somewhat from the data someone else is taking for the same purpose. This is completely natural. However, if two or more of you are taking the same data and get very different results, it is time for you and the others to reevaluate your data-taking methods and your accuracy.

Variation in Samples

It was mentioned previously that two or more samples from the same population, taken randomly, and having close to the same characteristics of the population will likely be different from each other. Suppose Doreen and Jung both decide to study the average amount of time students at their college sleep each night. Doreen and Jung each take samples of 500 students. Doreen uses systematic sampling and Jung uses cluster sampling. Doreen's sample will be different from Jung's sample. Even if Doreen and Jung used the same sampling method, in all likelihood their samples would be different. Neither would be wrong, however.

Think about what contributes to making Doreen's and Jung's samples different.

If Doreen and Jung took larger samples (i.e. the number of data values is increased), their sample results (the average amount of time a student sleeps) might be closer to the actual population average. But still, their samples would be, in all likelihood, different from each other. This *variability in samples* cannot be stressed enough.

Size of a Sample

The size of a sample (often called the number of observations) is important. The examples you have seen in this book so far have been small. Samples of only a few hundred observations, or even smaller, are sufficient for many purposes. In polling, samples that

are from 1,200 to 1,500 observations are considered large enough and good enough if the survey is random and is well done. You will learn why when you study confidence intervals.

Be aware that many large samples are biased. For example, call-in surveys are invariably biased, because people choose to respond or not.

Collaborative Exercise 1.3.8

Divide into groups of two, three, or four. Your instructor will give each group one six-sided die. Try this experiment twice. Roll one fair die (six-sided) 20 times. Record the number of ones, twos, threes, fours, fives, and sixes you get in the following table (“frequency” is the number of times a particular face of the die occurs):

First Experiment (20 rolls)			Second Experiment (20 rolls)	
Face on Die	Frequency		Face on Die	Frequency
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

Did the two experiments have the same results? Probably not. If you did the experiment a third time, do you expect the results to be identical to the first or second experiment? Why or why not?

Which experiment had the correct results? They both did. The job of the statistician is to see through the variability and draw appropriate conclusions.

Critical Evaluation

We need to evaluate the statistical studies we read about critically and analyze them before accepting the results of the studies. Common problems to be aware of include

- Problems with samples: A sample must be representative of the population. A sample that is not representative of the population is biased. Biased samples that are not representative of the population give results that are inaccurate and not valid.
- Self-selected samples: Responses only by people who choose to respond, such as call-in surveys, are often unreliable.
- Sample size issues: Samples that are too small may be unreliable. Larger samples are better, if possible. In some situations, having small samples is unavoidable and can still be used to draw conclusions. Examples: crash testing cars or medical testing for rare conditions
- Undue influence: collecting data or asking questions in a way that influences the response
- Non-response or refusal of subject to participate: The collected responses may no longer be representative of the population. Often, people with strong positive or negative opinions may answer surveys, which can affect the results.
- Causality: A relationship between two variables does not mean that one causes the other to occur. They may be related (correlated) because of their relationship through a different variable.
- Self-funded or self-interest studies: A study performed by a person or organization in order to support their claim. Is the study impartial? Read the study carefully to evaluate the work. Do not automatically assume that the study is good, but do not automatically assume the study is bad either. Evaluate it on its merits and the work done.
- Misleading use of data: improperly displayed graphs, incomplete data, or lack of context
- Confounding: When the effects of multiple factors on a response cannot be separated. Confounding makes it difficult or impossible to draw valid conclusions about the effect of each factor.

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Review

Data are individual items of information that come from a population or sample. Data may be classified as qualitative, quantitative continuous, or quantitative discrete.

Because it is not practical to measure the entire population in a study, researchers use samples to represent the population. A random sample is a representative group from the population chosen by using a method that gives each individual in the population an equal chance of being included in the sample. Random sampling methods include simple random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and systematic sampling. Convenience sampling is a nonrandom method of choosing a sample that often produces biased data.

Samples that contain different individuals result in different data. This is true even when the samples are well-chosen and representative of the population. When properly selected, larger samples model the population more closely than smaller samples. There are many different potential problems that can affect the reliability of a sample. Statistical data needs to be critically analyzed, not simply accepted.

Footnotes

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Glossary

Cluster Sampling

a method for selecting a random sample and dividing the population into groups (clusters); use simple random sampling to select a set of clusters. Every individual in the chosen clusters is included in the sample.

Continuous Random Variable

a random variable (RV) whose outcomes are measured; the height of trees in the forest is a continuous RV.

Convenience Sampling

a nonrandom method of selecting a sample; this method selects individuals that are easily accessible and may result in biased data.

Discrete Random Variable

a random variable (RV) whose outcomes are counted

Nonsampling Error

an issue that affects the reliability of sampling data other than natural variation; it includes a variety of human errors including poor study design, biased sampling methods, inaccurate information provided by study participants, data entry errors, and poor analysis.

Qualitative Data

See [Data](#).

Quantitative Data

See [Data](#).

Random Sampling

a method of selecting a sample that gives every member of the population an equal chance of being selected.

Sampling Bias

not all members of the population are equally likely to be selected

Sampling Error

the natural variation that results from selecting a sample to represent a larger population; this variation decreases as the sample size increases, so selecting larger samples reduces sampling error.

Sampling with Replacement

Once a member of the population is selected for inclusion in a sample, that member is returned to the population for the selection of the next individual.

Sampling without Replacement

A member of the population may be chosen for inclusion in a sample only once. If chosen, the member is not returned to the population before the next selection.

Simple Random Sampling

a straightforward method for selecting a random sample; give each member of the population a number. Use a random number generator to select a set of labels. These randomly selected labels identify the members of your sample.

Stratified Sampling

a method for selecting a random sample used to ensure that subgroups of the population are represented adequately; divide the population into groups (strata). Use simple random sampling to identify a proportionate number of individuals from each stratum.

Systematic Sampling

a method for selecting a random sample; list the members of the population. Use simple random sampling to select a starting point in the population. Let $k = (\text{number of individuals in the population}) / (\text{number of individuals needed in the sample})$. Choose every k th individual in the list starting with the one that was randomly selected. If necessary, return to the beginning of the population list to complete your sample.

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