

2.5: Box Plots

Box plots (also called *box-and-whisker plots* or *box-whisker plots*) give a good graphical image of the concentration of the data. They also show how far the extreme values are from most of the data. A box plot is constructed from five values: the minimum value, the first quartile, the median, the third quartile, and the maximum value. We use these values to compare how close other data values are to them.

To construct a box plot, use a horizontal or vertical number line and a rectangular box. The smallest and largest data values label the endpoints of the axis. The first quartile marks one end of the box and the third quartile marks the other end of the box. Approximately *the middle 50 percent of the data fall inside the box*. The "whiskers" extend from the ends of the box to the smallest and largest data values. The median or second quartile can be between the first and third quartiles, or it can be one, or the other, or both. The box plot gives a good, quick picture of the data.

You may encounter box-and-whisker plots that have dots marking outlier values. In those cases, the whiskers are not extending to the minimum and maximum values.

Consider, again, this dataset.

1; 1; 2; 2; 4; 6; 6; 8; 7.2; 8; 8.3; 9; 10; 10; 11.5

The first quartile is two, the median is seven, and the third quartile is nine. The smallest value is one, and the largest value is 11.5. The following image shows the constructed box plot.

See the calculator instructions on the TI web site or in the appendix.

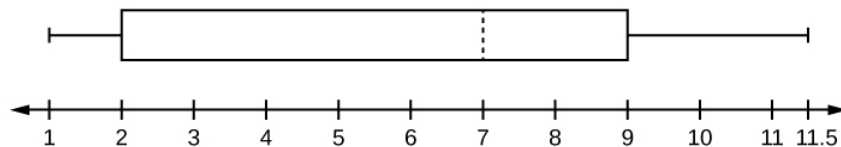
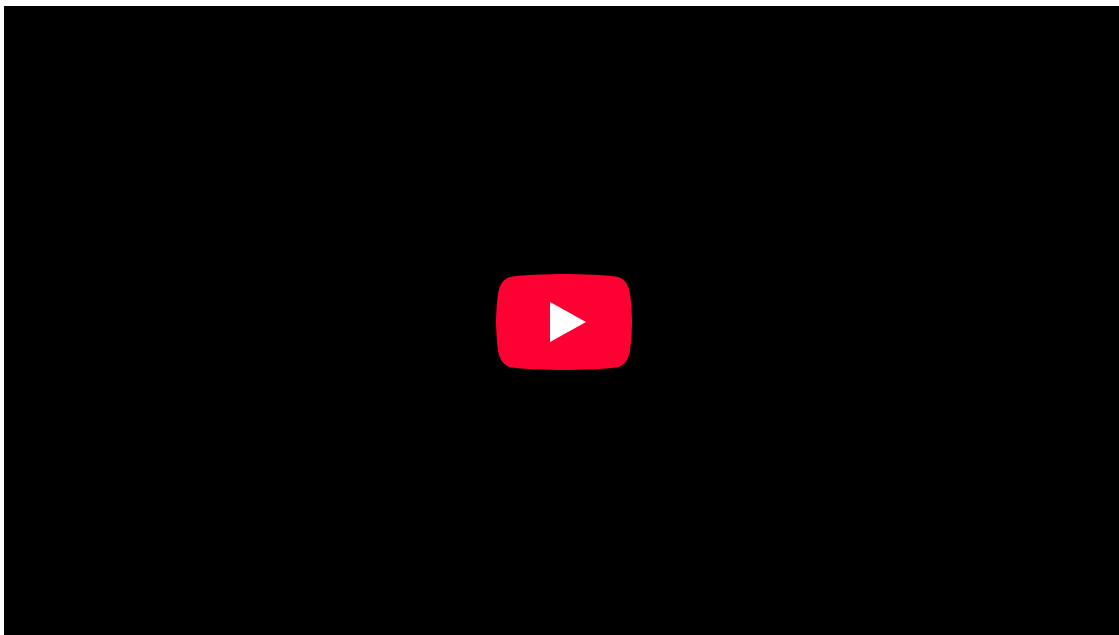


Figure 2.5.1

The two whiskers extend from the first quartile to the smallest value and from the third quartile to the largest value. The median is shown with a dashed line.

It is important to start a box plot with a **scaled number line**. Otherwise the box plot may not be useful.



The data shows the weight in grams of newborn mice. Construct a box plot for this data.

Min = 1.1
Max = 4.5
Median = 2.3
Q1 = 1.6
Q3 = 3.3

1.1	1.8	2.9
1.1	2.0	3.1
1.2	2.0	3.3
1.3	2.2	3.3
1.3	2.2	3.6
1.3	2.4	3.7
1.4	2.5	3.7
1.6	2.5	3.8
1.7	2.6	4.1
1.7	2.8	4.5

Play the Draw the box plot game and see if you can get a perfect score of 70.

This is a game that will guide you through the process of drawing a box plot.

Score 0

Min: 6 σ : 5 Q1: 14 Mean: 21

Median: 24 Q3: 29 Max: 40

Click on each of the values that are part of the five point summary for the box plot.

Example 2.5.1

The following data are the heights of 40 students in a statistics class.

59; 60; 61; 62; 62; 63; 63; 64; 64; 64; 65; 65; 65; 65; 65; 65; 65; 65; 65; 66; 66; 67; 67; 68; 68; 69; 70; 70; 70; 70; 70; 71; 71; 72; 72; 73; 74; 74; 75; 77

Construct a box plot with the following properties; the calculator instructions for the minimum and maximum values as well as the quartiles follow the example.

- Minimum value = 59
- Maximum value = 77
- Q1: First quartile = 64.5
- Q2: Second quartile or median = 66
- Q3: Third quartile = 70

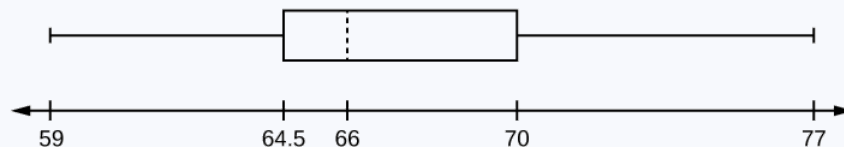


Figure 2.5.2

- Each quarter has approximately 25% of the data.
- The spreads of the four quarters are $64.5 - 59 = 5.5$ (first quarter), $66 - 64.5 = 1.5$ (second quarter), $70 - 66 = 4$ (third quarter), and $77 - 70 = 7$ (fourth quarter). So, the second quarter has the smallest spread and the fourth quarter has the largest spread.
- Range = maximum value – the minimum value = $77 - 59 = 18$
- Interquartile Range: $IQR = Q_3 - Q_1 = 70 - 64.5 = 5.5$.
- The interval 59–65 has more than 25% of the data so it has more data in it than the interval 66 through 70 which has 25% of the data.
- The middle 50% (middle half) of the data has a range of 5.5 inches.

Calculator

To find the minimum, maximum, and quartiles:

Enter data into the list editor (Press STAT 1:EDIT). If you need to clear the list, arrow up to the name L1, press CLEAR, and then arrow down.

Put the data values into the list L1.

Press STAT and arrow to CALC. Press 1:1-VarStats. Enter L1.

Press ENTER.

Use the down and up arrow keys to scroll.

Smallest value = 59.

Largest value = 77.

Q1: First quartile = 64.5.

Q2: Second quartile or median = 66.

Q3: Third quartile = 70.

To construct the box plot:

Press 4: Plotoff. Press ENTER.

Arrow down and then use the right arrow key to go to the fifth picture, which is the box plot. Press ENTER.

Arrow down to Xlist: Press 2nd 1 for L1

Arrow down to Freq: Press ALPHA. Press 1.

Press Zoom. Press 9: ZoomStat.

Press TRACE, and use the arrow keys to examine the box plot.

Exercise 2.5.1

The following data are the number of pages in 40 books on a shelf. Construct a box plot using a graphing calculator, and state the interquartile range.

136; 140; 178; 190; 205; 215; 217; 218; 232; 234; 240; 255; 270; 275; 290; 301; 303; 315; 317; 318; 326; 333; 343; 349; 360; 369; 377; 388; 391; 392; 398; 400; 402; 405; 408; 422; 429; 450; 475; 512

Answer

Figure 2.5.3

$$IQR = 158$$

For some sets of data, some of the largest value, smallest value, first quartile, median, and third quartile may be the same. For instance, you might have a data set in which the median and the third quartile are the same. In this case, the diagram would not have a dotted line inside the box displaying the median. The right side of the box would display both the third quartile and the median. For example, if the smallest value and the first quartile were both one, the median and the third quartile were both five, and the largest value was seven, the box plot would look like:

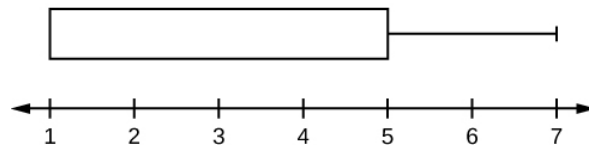


Figure 2.5.4

In this case, at least 25% of the values are equal to one. Twenty-five percent of the values are between one and five, inclusive. At least 25% of the values are equal to five. The top 25% of the values fall between five and seven, inclusive.

Example 2.5.2

Test scores for a college statistics class held during the day are:

99; 56; 78; 55.5; 32; 90; 80; 81; 56; 59; 45; 77; 84.5; 84; 70; 72; 68; 32; 79; 90

Test scores for a college statistics class held during the evening are:

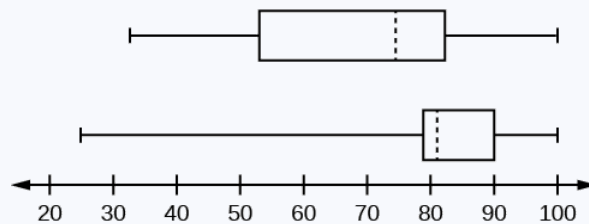
98; 78; 68; 83; 81; 89; 88; 76; 65; 45; 98; 90; 80; 84.5; 85; 79; 78; 98; 90; 79; 81; 25.5

- Find the smallest and largest values, the median, and the first and third quartile for the day class.
- Find the smallest and largest values, the median, and the first and third quartile for the night class.
- For each data set, what percentage of the data is between the smallest value and the first quartile? the first quartile and the median? the median and the third quartile? the third quartile and the largest value? What percentage of the data is between the first quartile and the largest value?
- Create a box plot for each set of data. Use one number line for both box plots.
- Which box plot has the widest spread for the middle 50% of the data (the data between the first and third quartiles)? What does this mean for that set of data in comparison to the other set of data?

Answer

- Min = 32
 - $Q_1 = 56$
 - $M = 74.5$

- $Q_3 = 82.5$
- $\text{Max} = 99$
- b. ◦ $\text{Min} = 25.5$
- $Q_1 = 78$
- $M = 81$
- $Q_3 = 89$
- $\text{Max} = 98$
- c. Day class: There are six data values ranging from 32 to 56: 30%. There are six data values ranging from 56 to 74.5: 30%. There are five data values ranging from 74.5 to 82.5: 25%. There are five data values ranging from 82.5 to 99: 25%. There are 16 data values between the first quartile, 56, and the largest value, 99: 75%. Night class:



d.

Figure 2.5.5

- e. The first data set has the wider spread for the middle 50% of the data. The *IQR* for the first data set is greater than the *IQR* for the second set. This means that there is more variability in the middle 50% of the first data set.

Exercise 2.5.2

The following data set shows the heights in inches for the boys in a class of 40 students.

66; 66; 67; 67; 68; 68; 68; 68; 69; 69; 69; 70; 71; 72; 72; 72; 73; 73; 74

The following data set shows the heights in inches for the girls in a class of 40 students.

61; 61; 62; 62; 63; 63; 63; 65; 65; 65; 66; 66; 66; 67; 68; 68; 68; 69; 69; 69

Construct a box plot using a graphing calculator for each data set, and state which box plot has the wider spread for the middle 50% of the data.

Answer

Figure 2.5.6

IQR for the boys = 4

IQR for the girls = 5

The box plot for the heights of the girls has the wider spread for the middle 50% of the data.

Example 2.5.3

Graph a box-and-whisker plot for the data values shown.

10; 10; 10; 15; 35; 75; 90; 95; 100; 175; 420; 490; 515; 515; 790

The five numbers used to create a box-and-whisker plot are:

- Min: 10
- Q_1 : 15
- Med: 95
- Q_3 : 490
- Max: 790

The following graph shows the box-and-whisker plot.

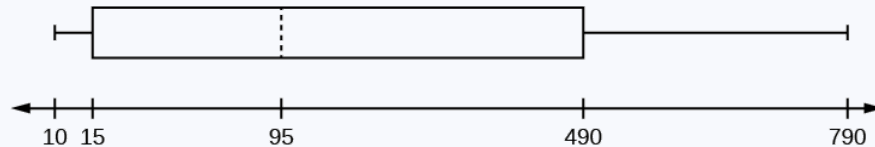


Figure 2.5.7

Exercise 2.5.3

Follow the steps you used to graph a box-and-whisker plot for the data values shown.

0; 5; 5; 15; 30; 30; 45; 50; 50; 60; 75; 110; 140; 240; 330

Answer

The data are in order from least to greatest. There are 15 values, so the eighth number in order is the median: 50. There are seven data values written to the left of the median and 7 values to the right. The five values that are used to create the boxplot are:

- Min: 0
- Q_1 : 15
- Med: 50
- Q_3 : 110
- Max: 330

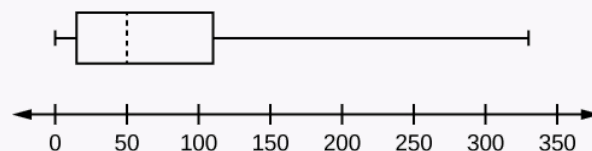


Figure 2.5.8

References

1. Data from *West Magazine*.

Chapter Review

Box plots are a type of graph that can help visually organize data. To graph a box plot the following data points must be calculated: the minimum value, the first quartile, the median, the third quartile, and the maximum value. Once the box plot is graphed, you can display and compare distributions of data.

Sixty-five randomly selected car salespersons were asked the number of cars they generally sell in one week. Fourteen people answered that they generally sell three cars; nineteen generally sell four cars; twelve generally sell five cars; nine generally sell six cars; eleven generally sell seven cars.

Exercise 2.5.4

Construct a box plot below. Use a ruler to measure and scale accurately.

Exercise 2.5.5

Looking at your box plot, does it appear that the data are concentrated together, spread out evenly, or concentrated in some areas, but not in others? How can you tell?

Answer

More than 25% of salespersons sell four cars in a typical week. You can see this concentration in the box plot because the first quartile is equal to the median. The top 25% and the bottom 25% are spread out evenly; the whiskers have the same length.

Exercise 2.5.6

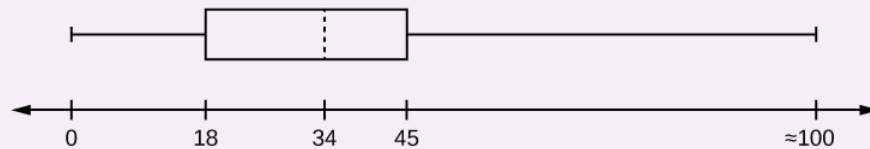
Santa Clara County, CA, has approximately 27,873 Japanese-Americans. Their ages are as follows:

Age Group	Percent of Community
0–17	18.9
18–24	8.0
25–34	22.8
35–44	15.0
45–54	13.1
55–64	11.9
65+	10.3

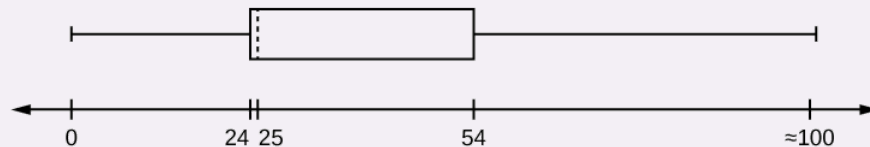
- Construct a histogram of the Japanese-American community in Santa Clara County, CA. The bars will **not** be the same width for this example. Why not? What impact does this have on the reliability of the graph?
- What percentage of the community is under age 35?
- Which box plot most resembles the information above?



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 2.5.9.

Answer

- For graph, check student's solution.
- 49.7% of the community is under the age of 35.
- Based on the information in the table, graph (a) most closely represents the data.

Glossary

Box plot

a graph that gives a quick picture of the middle 50% of the data

First Quartile

the value that is the median of the of the lower half of the ordered data set

Frequency Polygon

looks like a line graph but uses intervals to display ranges of large amounts of data

Interval

also called a class interval; an interval represents a range of data and is used when displaying large data sets

Paired Data Set

two data sets that have a one to one relationship so that:

- both data sets are the same size, and
- each data point in one data set is matched with exactly one point from the other set.

Skewed

used to describe data that is not symmetrical; when the right side of a graph looks “chopped off” compared the left side, we say it is “skewed to the left.” When the left side of the graph looks “chopped off” compared to the right side, we say the data is “skewed to the right.” Alternatively: when the lower values of the data are more spread out, we say the data are skewed to the left. When the greater values are more spread out, the data are skewed to the right.

Contributors

- Barbara Illowsky and Susan Dean (De Anza College) with many other contributing authors. Content produced by OpenStax College is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license. Download for free at <http://cnx.org/contents/30189442-699...b91b9de@18.114>.

This page titled [2.5: Box Plots](#) is shared under a [CC BY 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [OpenStax](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.