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Probability Distributions > Uniform Distribution Contents: What is a Uniform Distribution? Expected Value/Mean and Variance. 1. What is a Uniform Distribution? A uniform distribution, also called a rectangular distribution, is a probability distribution that has constant probability. This distribution is defined by two parameters, a and b: a is the minimum, b is the maximum. The distribution is written as  $U(a, b)$ . The following graph shows the distribution with  $a = 1$  and  $b = 3$ : Like all probability distributions for continuous random variables, the area under the graph of a random variable is always equal to 1. In the above graph, the area is:  $A = 1 \times h = 2 \times 0.5 = 1$ . Watch the video for an overview and a few worked examples: Uniform Probability Distribution Examples Watch this video on YouTube. Can't see the video? Click here. Note: In actuarial science, the uniform distribution is called the de Moivre distribution. Types This distribution has two types. The most common type you'll find in elementary statistics is the continuous uniform distribution (in the shape of a rectangle). However, there is a second type: the discrete uniform distribution. It still resembles a rectangle but instead of a line, a series of dots represent a known, finite number of outcomes. The following graph shows 5 possible outcomes: Image: ikanusumeFan/Wikimedia Commons Rolling a single die is one example of a discrete uniform distribution; a die roll has four possible outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. There is a  $1/6$  probability for each number being rolled. General Formula The general formula for the probability density function (pdf) for the uniform distribution is:  $f(x) = 1/(B-A)$  for  $A \leq x \leq B$ . "A" is the location parameter. The location parameter tells you where the center of the graph is. "B" is the scale parameter: The scale parameter stretches the graph out on the horizontal axis. Note: The A and B here aren't to be confused with lowercase (a,b), which is an open interval. Uniform CDF The uniform distribution doesn't always look like a rectangle. A special case, the uniform cumulative distribution function, adds up all of the probabilities (in the same way a cumulative frequency distribution adds probabilities) and plots the result, which is a linear graph and not a rectangle: Variables The variables in a uniform distribution are called uniform random variables. 2. Expected Value and Variance. The expected value (i.e. the mean) of a uniform random variable X is:  $E(X) = (1/2)(a + b)$  This is also written equivalently as:  $E(X) = (b + a) / 2$ . "a" in the formula is the minimum value in the distribution, and "b" is the maximum value. The variance of a uniform random variable is:  $Var(x) = (1/12)(b-a)^2$  For the above image, the variance is  $(1/12)(3 - 1)^2 = 1/12 \times 4 = 1/3$ . 3. Finding Probabilities for a Continuous Uniform Distribution Need help with a homework question? Check out our tutoring page! Example question #1: The average amount of weight gained by a person over the winter months is uniformly distributed from 0 to 30lbs. Find the probability a person will gain between 10 and 15lbs during the winter months. Step 1: Find the height of the distribution. The area under a probability distribution is always 1. As there are 30 units (from zero to 30), then the height is  $1/30$ . Step 2: Find the width of the "slice" of the distribution mentioned in the question. Do this by subtracting the biggest number (b) from the smallest (a), to get  $b - a = 15 - 10 = 5$ . Step 3: Multiply the width (Step 2) by the height (Step 1) to get: Probability =  $5 \times 1/30 = 5/30 = 1/6$ . Example Question 2: Find  $P(X \leq 10)$  for the above question. This is asking you to find the probability that the random variable X is less than 10. In other words, you want to know the probability a person will gain up to ten pounds. Step 1: Find the width of the "box":  $b - a = 10 - 0 = 10$ . Step 2: Multiply the width (Step 1) by the height. We already know the height is  $1/30$  (from example question 1), so:  $10 \times 1/30 = 10/30 = 1/3$ . Example Question 3: Find  $P(20 \leq X \leq 25)$  for the above question. This is asking the probability of a weight gain between 20 and 25 pounds. Step 1: Find the width of the "box":  $b - a = 25 - 20 = 5$ . Step 2: Multiply the width (Step 1) by the height. We already know the height is  $1/30$  (from example question 1), so:  $5 \times 1/30 = 5/30 = 1/6$ . The More Formal Formula You can solve these types of problems using the steps above, or you can use the formula for finding the probability for a continuous uniform distribution:  $P(X) = d - c / b - a$ . This is also sometimes written as:  $P(X) = x_2 - x_1 / b - a$ . "d" and "c" ( $x_2 - x_1$ ) are the upper and lower bounds of the area you are trying to find. You get exactly the same answer as if you'd followed the steps above. If formulas work for you &hellip;great. Personally, I find it easier to visualize these problems as trying to find an area inside a rectangle. Otherwise, I've just got another formula to memorize. References Agresti A. (1990) Categorical Data Analysis. John Wiley and Sons, New York. Dodge, Y. (2008). The Concise Encyclopedia of Statistics. Springer. Everitt, B. S.; Skrondal, A. (2010), The Cambridge Dictionary of Statistics, Cambridge University Press. Gonick, L. (1993). The Cartoon Guide to Statistics. HarperPerennial. Kotz, S.; et al., eds. (2006). Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences, Wiley. Lindstrom, D. (2010). Schaum's Easy Outline of Statistics, Second Edition (Schaum's Easy Outlines) 2nd Edition. McGraw-Hill Education Levine, D. (2014). Even You Can Learn Statistics and Analytics: An Easy to Understand Guide to Statistics and Analytics 3rd Edition. Pearson FT Press Vogt, W.P. (2005). Dictionary of Statistics & Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences. SAGE. ----- Need help with a homework or test question? With Chegg Study, you can get step-by-step solutions to your questions from an expert in the field. Your first 30 minutes with a Chegg tutor is free! Comments? Need to post a correction? Please Contact Us. Home Science Mathematics In statistics, uniform distribution refers to a type of probability distribution in which all outcomes are equally likely. A deck of cards has within it uniform distributions because the likelihood of drawing a heart, a club, a diamond or a spade is equally likely. A coin also has a uniform distribution because the probability of getting either heads or tails in a coin toss is the same. The uniform distribution can be visualized as a straight horizontal line, so for a coin flip returning a head or tail, both have a probability  $p = 0.50$  and would be depicted by a line from the y-axis at 0.50. Uniform distributions are probability distributions with equally likely outcomes. In a discrete uniform distribution, outcomes are discrete and have the same probability. In a continuous uniform distribution, outcomes are continuous and infinite. In a normal distribution, data around the mean occur more frequently. The frequency of occurrence decreases the farther you are from the mean in a normal distribution. There are two types of uniform distributions: discrete and continuous. The possible results of rolling a die provide an example of a discrete uniform distribution: it is possible to roll a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6, but it is not possible to roll a 2.3, 4.7, or 5.5. Therefore, the roll of a die generates a discrete distribution with  $p = 1/6$  for each outcome. There are only 6 possible values to return and nothing in between. The plotted results from rolling a single die will be discretely uniform, whereas the plotted results (averages) from rolling two or more dice will be normally distributed. Some uniform distributions are continuous rather than discrete. An idealized random number generator would be considered a continuous uniform distribution. With this type of distribution, every point in the continuous range between 0.0 and 1.0 has an equal opportunity of appearing, yet there is an infinite number of points between 0.0 and 1.0. There are several other important continuous distributions, such as the normal distribution, chi-square, and Student's t-distribution. There are also several data generating or data analyzing functions associated with distributions to help understand the variables and their variance within a data set. These functions include probability density function, cumulative density, and moment generating functions. A distribution is a simple way to visualize a set of data. It can be shown either as a graph or in a list, revealing which values of a random variable have lower or higher chances of happening. There are many different types of probability distributions, and the uniform distribution is perhaps the simplest of them all. Under a uniform distribution, each value in the set of possible values has the same possibility of happening. When displayed as a bar or line graph, this distribution has the same height for each potential outcome. In this way, it can look like a rectangle and therefore is sometimes described as the rectangular distribution. If you think about the possibility of drawing a particular suit from a deck of playing cards, there is a random yet equal chance of pulling a heart as there is for pulling a spade—that is,  $1/4$  or 25%. The roll of a single dice yields one of six numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Because there are only 6 possible outcomes, the probability of you landing on any one of them is  $16.67\%$  ( $1/6$ ). When plotted on a graph, the distribution is represented as a horizontal line, with each possible outcome captured on the x-axis, at the fixed point of probability along the y-axis. Uniform Distribution of one six-sided die. Image by Julie Bang © Investopedia 2020 Probability distributions help you decide the probability of a future event. Some of the most common probability distributions are discrete uniform, binomial, continuous uniform, normal, and exponential. Perhaps one of the most familiar and widely used is the normal distribution, often depicted as a bell curve. Normal distributions show how continuous data is distributed and assert that most of the data is concentrated on the mean or average. In a normal distribution, the area under the curve equals 1 and 68.27% of all data falls within 1 standard deviation—how dispersed the numbers are—from the mean; 95.45% of all data falls within 2 standard deviations from the mean, and approximately 99.73% of all data falls within 3 standard deviations from the mean. As the data moves away from the mean, the frequency of data occurring decreases. Discrete uniform distribution shows that variables in a range have the same probability of occurring. There are no variations in probable outcomes and the data is discrete, rather than continuous. Its shape resembles a rectangle, rather than the normal distribution's bell. Like a normal distribution, however, the area under the graph is equal to 1. There are 52 cards in a traditional deck of cards. In it are four suits: hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades. Each suit contains an A, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, J, Q, K, and 2 jokers. However, we'll do away with the jokers and face cards for this example, focusing only on number cards replicated in each suit. As a result, we are left with 40 cards, a set of discrete data. Suppose you want to know the probability of pulling a 2 of hearts from the modified deck. The probability of pulling a 2 of hearts is  $1/40$  or 2.5%. Each card is unique; therefore, the likelihood that you will pull any one of the cards in the deck is the same. Now, let's consider the likelihood of pulling a heart from the deck. The probability is significantly higher. Why? We are now only concerned with the suits in the deck. Since there are only four suits, pulling a heart yields a probability of  $1/4$  or 25%. Uniform distribution is a probability distribution that asserts that the outcomes for a discrete set of data have the same probability. The formula for a discrete uniform distribution is  $P_x = 1/n$  where:  $P_x$  = Probability of a discrete value  $n$  = Number of values in the range  $\begin{aligned} P_x &= \frac{1}{n} \end{aligned}$  &P\_x = \text{Probability of a discrete value} \&n = \text{Number of values in the range}  $\begin{aligned} P_x &= 1/n \end{aligned}$  where:  $P_x$  = Probability of a discrete value  $n$  = Number of values in the range As with the example of the die, each side contains a unique whole number. The probability of rolling the die and getting any one number is  $1/6$ , or 16.67%. Normal indicates the way data is distributed about the mean. Normal data shows that the probability of a variable occurring around the mean, or the center, is higher. Fewer data points are observed the farther you move away from this average, meaning the probability of a variable occurring far away from the mean is lower. The probability is not uniform with normal data, whereas it is constant with a uniform distribution. Therefore, a uniform distribution is not normal. It is expected that a uniform distribution will result in all possible outcomes having the same probability. The probability for one variable is the same for another.







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