

Histograms

(Also available in [CODAP](#))

Students are introduced to Histograms by comparing them to bar charts, learning to construct them by hand and in the programming environment.

Lesson Goals	Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• create histograms using the Animals Dataset• create visualizations of frequency using their chosen dataset, and write up their findings
Student-facing Lesson Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let's create histograms for datasets and learn how to interpret them.
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simple Data Types• Introduction to Data Science• Contracts: Making Tables and Displays
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PDF of all Handouts and Page• Animals Starter File• Data Exploration Project Slide Template• Lesson Slides• Printable Lesson Plan (a PDF of this web page)
Supplemental Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Additional Printable Pages for Scaffolding and Practice
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an optional kinesthetic in this lesson that requires a ball of playdough for each group of 3.

Glossary

bar chart :: a display of categorical data that uses bars positioned over category values; each bar's height reflects the count or percentage of data values in that category

bin :: a range that values from a dataset can belong to; there is one bar in a histogram per bin

categorical data :: data whose values are qualities that are not subject to the laws of arithmetic

frequency :: how often a particular value appears in a dataset

histogram :: a display of quantitative data that uses vertical bars positioned over bins (or 'intervals'); each bar's height reflects the count data values in that bin.

outlier :: observations whose values are very different from the other observations in the same dataset, perhaps due to experimental error. Outliers can also be indicative of data belonging to a different population from the rest of the established samples.

quantitative data :: number values for which arithmetic makes sense

sample :: a set of individuals or objects collected or selected from a statistical population by a defined procedure

shape :: The aspect of a dataset - visible in a histogram or box plot - that describes which values are more or less common.

Introducing Histograms

20 minutes

Overview

Students look at a bar chart and a histogram, compare/contrast them, and make observations about what they have in common and how they are different. Then they learn a more formal explanation of histograms.

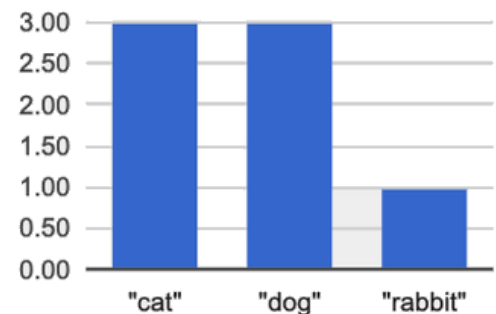
Launch



- Turn to [Summarizing Columns](#), which contains a table of data, two kinds of displays, and some questions.
- Answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

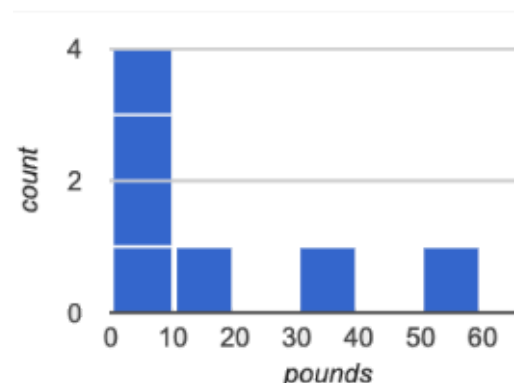
The display on the right side of that page is a **Bar chart**.

- The x-axis lists the values of a **categorical** variable (species).
- The y-axis shows the **frequency** of categorical values in the dataset.
- This chart happens to show the categorical values in alphabetical order from left to right, but it would be fine to re-order them any way we wish. The bar for “dogs” could have been drawn before the one for “cats”, without changing the meaning of the display.



The display on the right side is called a **histogram**.

- Histograms show the distribution of **quantitative** data.
- Since quantitative data must follow a natural order, these bars *cannot* be re-ordered.
- Histograms allow us to see the shape of a dataset.



Investigate

To build a histogram, we start by sorting all of the numbers in our column from smallest to largest, marking our x-axis from the smallest value (or a bit below) to the largest value (or a bit above) and dividing into equally-sized or **bins** (also known as **intervals**). For example, if our values ranged from 3 to 53 we might mark our x-axis from 0 to 60 and divide it into bins of width 10. If they range from 22 to 41 we might mark our x-axis from 20 to 45 and divide it into bins of width 5. Once we have our bins, we put each value in our dataset into the bin where it belongs, and then count how many values fall in each bin. This count determines the height of the bars on our y-axis.

Optional: Kinesthetic Activity

Divide the class into groups of three, and give each group a ball of play-dough. Have the groups roll the dough into a thick cylinder, then divide that cylinder in half. Then, have them take one of the halves and cut that in half *again*, then cut one of the resulting pieces in half once more. This will form **four** chunks of playdough, with a ratio of **1:1:2:4**

The playdough represents a **sample**, with values falling into four intervals. The largest cylinder represents double the number of "data points" (amounts of dough) as the next largest, which in turn has double the data points of the two small ones.

Histograms pile the data points into equally-sized intervals, just as the cylinders of dough are all of the same width. *More dough means longer cylinders*, since the "interval width" (cylinder thickness) stays fixed.

Have students line up the cylinders from smallest-to-largest, laying them on a sheet of graph paper. Have them come up with labels for what the x- and y-axis might represent!



Turn to [Making Histograms](#), and try drawing a histogram from a dataset.

Extreme values - which sit far above or below the others - are called *outliers*

In the histogram we just made, we see that the data is clustered at the right-hand side of the histogram: most people in this sample have close to a full set of teeth, with some people missing a few more than others. But apparently there are five people with almost no teeth at all! These are very unusual, and they show up as a small bar far to the left of the cluster. Extreme data points like this are called *outliers*.

Common Misconceptions

Note that intervals on this display include the left endpoint but not the right. If we included the right endpoint and someone had 0 teeth, we'd have to add on a bar from -5 to 0, which would be awfully strange!



Turn to [Reading Histograms](#) and practice matching descriptions of video ratings to histograms that could fit the data.

Synthesize

Review: How are histograms and bar charts different?

Choosing the Right Bin Size

30 minutes

Overview

Students make histograms from the animals-dataset, and explore different bin sizes.

Launch

The size of the bins matters a lot! Bins that are too small will hide the shape of the data by breaking it into too many short bars. Bins that are too large will hide the shape by squeezing the data into just a few tall bars. In this exercise, the bins were provided for you. But how do you choose a good bin-size?

Investigate

Suppose we want to know how long it takes for animals from the shelter to be adopted.



- Open your saved Animals Starter File, or [make a new copy](#).
- Find the Contract for histogram on the [Contracts Page](#).

Optionally, provide students with [Choosing the Right Bin Size](#), a handout with space to respond to the guided questions below.



Make a histogram for the "weeks" column in the `animals-table`, using a bin size of 10 and the "name" column for your labels.



- How many animals took between 0 and 10 weeks to be adopted? Between 10 and 20?
 - *29 animals took between 0 and 10 weeks to be adopted; just 1 animal took between 10 and 20 weeks.*



Try some other bin sizes (be sure to experiment with bigger and smaller bins!)



- What shapes emerge? What bin size gives you the best picture of the distribution?
- Are there any outliers? Are they high or low?
- Count how many animals took between 0 and 5 weeks to be adopted. How many took between 5 and 10 weeks?
 - *18 animals took between 0 and 5 weeks to be adopted; 11 animals took between 5 and 10 weeks.*

- What else do you Notice? What do you Wonder?
 - We see most of the histogram's area under the two bars between 0 and 10 weeks, so we can say it was most common for an animal to be adopted in 10 weeks or less.
 - We see a small amount of the histogram's area trailing out to unusually high values, so we can say that a couple of animals took an unusually long time to be adopted: one took even more than 30 weeks.
 - More than half of the animals (17 out of 31) took just 5 weeks or less to be adopted. But the few unusually long adoption times pulled the average up to 5.8 weeks.

If someone asked what was a typical adoption time, we could say: "Almost all of the animals were adopted in 10 weeks or less, but a couple of animals took an unusually long time to be adopted – even more than 20 or 30 weeks!" It would have been hard to give this summary by reading through the table, but the histogram makes it easy to see!

WARNING: A Bug in Google Charts!

Pyret uses the [Google Charts library](#) for all of the data displays in this curriculum. Unfortunately, there's a longstanding bug in Google's implementation of histograms! Instead of letting students able to pick any bin size we want, Google Charts pushes "normal" bin sizes like 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 40, and so on.

Synthesize

- What would the histogram look like if most of the animals took more than 20 weeks to be adopted, but a couple of them were adopted in fewer than 5 weeks?
- What would the histogram look like if every animal was adopted in roughly the same length of time?
- What bin sizes worked best for analyzing adoption?

Have students talk about the bin sizes they tried. Encourage open discussion as much as possible here, so that students can make their own meaning about bin sizes before moving on to the next point.

Rule of thumb: a histogram should have between 5–10 bins.

Histograms are a powerful way to display a dataset and assess its *shape*. Choosing the right bin size for a column has a lot to do with how data is distributed between the smallest and largest values in that column! With the right bin size, we can see the *shape* of a quantitative column.

But how do we talk about or describe that shape, and what does the shape actually tell us? Our [Visualizing the "Shape" of Data](#) lesson addresses all of these questions... and our [Measures of Center](#) lesson explores the effect of the shape of a histogram on the average (the mean).

Overview

Students apply what they have learned about histograms to their chosen dataset. They will add two items to their [Data Exploration Project Slide Template](#): (1) at least two histograms and (2) any interesting questions that emerge. To learn more about the sequence and scope of the Dataset Exploration Project, visit [Project: Dataset Exploration](#). For teachers with time and interest, [Project: Create a Research Project](#) is an extension of the Dataset Exploration, where students select a single question to investigate via data analysis.

Launch

Let's review what we have learned about making and interpreting histograms.



- Does a histogram display categorical or quantitative data? How many columns of data does a histogram display?
 - *Histograms display a single column of quantitative data.*
- How is a histogram different from a bar chart?
 - Because a bar chart displays categorical data, we can rearrange the bars in any order we wish. Because the quantitative data of a histogram must follow a natural order, bars cannot be rearranged.
- What do histograms show us about a dataset?
 - Histograms allow us to see the shape of one column of dataset.
- How can you decide an appropriate bin size for your histogram?
 - *A histogram should have 5-10 bins. We want to choose a bin size that lets us see the shape of a quantitative column.*

Investigate

Let's connect what we know about histograms to your chosen dataset.



- Open your chosen dataset starter file in Pyret.
 - *Teachers: Students have the opportunity to choose a dataset that interests them from our [List of Datasets](#) in the [Choosing Your Dataset](#) lesson.*
- Choose one quantitative column from your data set that you will represent with a histogram!

- What question does your display answer?
 - *Possible response: What is the shape of a particular quantitative column of my dataset?*
- Now, write down that question in the top section of [Data Cycle: Shape of My Dataset](#).
- Then, complete the rest of the data cycle, recording how you considered, analyzed and interpreted the question.
- Repeat this process for at least one more quantitative column.

Confirm that all students have created and understand how to interpret their histograms. Once you are confident that all students have made adequate progress, invite them to access their [Data Exploration Project Slide Template](#) from Google Drive.



- It's time to add to your [Data Exploration Project Slide Template](#).
- Copy/paste at least two histograms. Be sure to also add any interesting questions that you developed while making and thinking about histograms.
 - *You may need to help students locate the "Histogram" slide in the "Making Displays" section. They will need to duplicate the slide to add their second display. The "My Questions" section is at the end of the slide deck.*
 - *Note: During the next lesson, [Visualizing the "Shape" of Data](#), students will learn additional vocabulary to help them describe what they see in their histogram. They can add to their histogram interpretations at that point.*

Synthesize

Share your findings with the class!

Did you discover anything surprising or interesting about your dataset?

What questions did the bar and pie charts inspire raise?

Did other students make any discoveries that were surprising or interesting to you? (For instance: Did everyone find outliers? Was there more or less similarity than expected?)