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Standard Practice for Calculating and Using Basic Statistics¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E2586; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers methods and ~~formulas~~equations for computing and presenting basic descriptive statistics using a set of sample data containing a single variable. This practice includes simple descriptive statistics for variable data, tabular and graphical methods for variable data, and methods for summarizing simple attribute data. Some interpretation and guidance for use is also included.

1.2 The system of units for this practice is not specified. Dimensional quantities in the practice are presented only as illustrations of calculation methods. The examples are not binding on products or test methods treated.

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

E178 [Practice for Dealing With Outlying Observations](#)

E456 [Terminology Relating to Quality and Statistics](#)

E2282 [Guide for Defining the Test Result of a Test Method](#)

2.2 ISO Standards:³

ISO 3534-1 Statistics—Vocabulary and Symbols, part 1: Probability and General Statistical Terms

ISO 3534-2 Statistics—Vocabulary and Symbols, part 2: Applied Statistics

3. Terminology

3.1 ~~Definitions: Unless~~ Definitions—Unless otherwise noted, terms relating to quality and statistics are as defined in Terminology E456.

3.1.1 *characteristic, n*—a property of items in a sample or population which, when measured, counted, or otherwise observed, helps to distinguish among the items. **E2282**

3.1.2 *coefficient of variation, CV, n*—for a nonnegative characteristic, the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean for a population or sample

3.1.2.1 *Discussion*—The coefficient of variation is often expressed as a percentage.

3.1.2.2 *Discussion*—This statistic is also known as the *relative standard deviation, RSD*.

3.1.3 *estimate, n*—sample statistic used to approximate a population parameter.

3.1.4 *histogram, n*—graphical representation of the frequency distribution of a characteristic consisting of a set of rectangles with area proportional to the frequency. **ISO 3534-1**

3.1.4.1 *Discussion*—While not required, equal bar or class widths are recommended for histograms.

3.1.5 *interquartile range, IQR, n*—the 75th percentile (0.75 quantile) minus the 25th percentile (0.25 quantile), for a data set.

3.1.6 *kurtosis, γ_2 , g_2 , n*—for a population or a sample, a measure of the weight of the tails of a distribution relative to the center, calculated as the ratio of the fourth central moment (empirical if a sample, theoretical if a population applies) to the standard deviation (sample, s , or population, σ) raised to the fourth power, minus 3 (also referred to as excess kurtosis).

3.1.7 *mean, n*—of a population, μ , average or expected value of a characteristic in a population – of a sample, x , sum of the observed values in the sample divided by the sample size.

3.1.8 *median, X , n*—the 50th percentile in a population or sample.

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E11 on Quality and Statistics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E11.10 on Sampling / Statistics. Current edition approved May 15, Sept. 1, 2010. Published August/October 2010. Originally approved in 2007. Last previous edition approved in 2007/2010 as E2586 – 107. DOI: 10.1520/E2586-10A.

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

³ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, http://www.ansi.org.

3.1.8.1 *Discussion*—The sample median is the $[(n + 1)/2]$ order statistic if the sample size n is odd and is the average of the $[n/2]$ and $[n/2 + 1]$ order statistics if n is even.

3.1.9 *midrange, n*—average of the minimum and maximum values in a sample.

3.1.10 *order statistic, $x_{(k)}$, n*—value of the k^{th} observed value in a sample after sorting by order of magnitude.

3.1.10.1 *Discussion*—For a sample of size n , the first order statistic $x_{(1)}$ is the minimum value, $x_{(n)}$ is the maximum value.

3.1.11 *parameter, n*—see *population parameter*.

3.1.12 *percentile, n*—quantile of a sample or a population, for which the fraction less than or equal to the value is expressed as a percentage.

3.1.13 *population, n*—the totality of items or units of material under consideration.

3.1.14 *population parameter, n*—summary measure of the values of some characteristic of a population. **ISO 3534-2**

3.1.15 *statistic, n*—see *sample statistic*.

3.1.16 *quantile, n*—value such that a fraction f of the sample or population is less than or equal to that value.

3.1.17 *range, R, n*—maximum value minus the minimum value in a sample.

3.1.18 *sample, n*—a group of observations or test results, taken from a larger collection of observations or test results, which serves to provide information that may be used as a basis for making a decision concerning the larger collection.

3.1.19 *sample size, n, n*—number of observed values in the sample

3.1.20 *sample statistic, n*—summary measure of the observed values of a sample.

3.1.21 *skewness, γ_1, g_1, n* —for population or sample, a measure of symmetry of a distribution, calculated as the ratio of the third central moment (empirical if a sample, and theoretical if a population applies) to the standard deviation (sample, s , or population, σ) raised to the third power.

3.1.22 *standard error*—standard deviation of the population of values of a sample statistic in repeated sampling, or an estimate of it.

3.1.22.1 *Discussion*—If the standard error of a statistic is estimated, it will itself be a statistic with some variance that depends on the sample size.

3.1.23 *standard deviation—of a population, σ* , the square root of the average or expected value of the squared deviation of a variable from its ~~mean~~—*mean; —of a sample, s* , the square root of the sum of the squared deviations of the observed values in the sample divided by the sample size minus 1.

~~3.1.23~~

3.1.24 *variance, σ^2, s^2, n* —square of the standard deviation of the population or sample.

~~3.1.23.1~~

3.1.24.1 *Discussion*—For a finite population, σ^2 is calculated as the sum of squared deviations of values from the mean, divided by n . For a continuous population, σ^2 is calculated by integrating $(x - \mu)^2$ with respect to the density function. For a sample, s^2 is calculated as the sum of the squared deviations of observed values from their average divided by one less than the sample size.

~~3.1.24~~

3.1.25 *Z-score, n*—observed value minus the sample mean divided by the sample standard deviation. [/astm-e2586-10a](https://standards.iteh.ai/)

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice provides approaches for characterizing a sample of n observations that arrive in the form of a data set. Large data sets from organizations, businesses, and governmental agencies exist in the form of records and other empirical observations. Research institutions and laboratories at universities, government agencies, and the private sector also generate considerable amounts of empirical data.

4.1.1 A data set containing a single variable usually consists of a column of numbers. Each row is a separate observation or instance of measurement of the variable. The numbers themselves are the result of applying the measurement process to the variable being studied or observed. We may refer to each observation of a variable as an item in the data set. In many situations, there may be several variables defined for study.

4.1.2 The sample is selected from a larger set called the population. The population can be a finite set of items, a very large or essentially unlimited set of items, or a process. In a process, the items originate over time and the population is dynamic, continuing to emerge and possibly change over time. Sample data serve as representatives of the population from which the sample originates. It is the population that is of primary interest in any particular study.

4.2 The data (measurements and observations) may be of the variable type or the simple attribute type. In the case of attributes, the data may be either binary trials or a count of a defined event over some interval (time, space, volume, weight, or area). Binary trials consist of a sequence of 0s and 1s in which a “1” indicates that the inspected item exhibited the attribute being studied and a “0” indicates the item did not exhibit the attribute. Each inspection item is assigned either a “0” or a “1.” Such data are often governed by the binomial distribution. For a count of events over some interval, the number of times the event is observed on the inspection interval is recorded for each of n inspection intervals. The Poisson distribution often governs counting events over an interval.

4.3 For sample data to be used to draw conclusions about the population, the process of sampling and data collection must be considered, at least potentially, repeatable. Descriptive statistics are calculated using real sample data that will vary in repeating the sampling process. As such, a statistic is a random variable subject to variation in its own right. The sample statistic usually

has a corresponding parameter in the population that is unknown (see Section 5). The point of using a statistic is to summarize the data set and estimate a corresponding population characteristic or parameter.

4.4 Descriptive statistics consider numerical, tabular, and graphical methods for summarizing a set of data. The methods considered in this practice are used for summarizing the observations from a single variable.

4.5 The descriptive statistics described in this practice are:

4.5.1 Mean, median, min, max, range, mid range, order statistic, quartile, empirical percentile, quantile, interquartile range, variance, standard deviation, Z-score, coefficient of variation, skewness and kurtosis, and standard error.

4.6 Tabular methods described in this practice are:

4.6.1 Frequency distribution, relative frequency distribution, cumulative frequency distribution, and cumulative relative frequency distribution.

4.7 Graphical methods described in this practice are:

4.7.1 Histogram, ogive, boxplot, dotplot, normal probability plot, and q-q plot.

4.8 While the methods described in this practice may be used to summarize any set of observations, the results obtained by using them may be of little value from the standpoint of interpretation unless the data quality is acceptable and satisfies certain requirements. To be useful for inductive generalization, any sample of observations that is treated as a single group for presentation purposes must represent a series of measurements, all made under essentially the same test conditions, on a material or product, all of which have been produced under essentially the same conditions. When these criteria are met, we are minimizing the danger of mixing two or more distinctly different sets of data.

4.8.1 If a given collection of data consists of two or more samples collected under different test conditions or representing material produced under different conditions (that is, different populations), it should be considered as two or more separate subgroups of observations, each to be treated independently in a data analysis program. Merging of such subgroups, representing significantly different conditions, may lead to a presentation that will be of little practical value. Briefly, any sample of observations to which these methods are applied should be homogeneous or, in the case of a process, have originated from a process in a state of statistical control.

4.9 The methods developed in Sections 6, 7, and 8 apply to the sample data. There will be no misunderstanding when, for example, the term “mean” is indicated, that the meaning is sample mean, not population mean, unless indicated otherwise. It is understood that there is a data set containing n observations. The data set may be denoted as:

$$x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots, x_n \quad (1)$$

4.9.1 There is no order of magnitude implied by the subscript notation unless subscripts are contained in parenthesis (see 6.7).

5. Characteristics of Populations

5.1 A population is the totality of a set of items under consideration. Populations may be finite or unlimited in size and may be existing or continuing to emerge as, for example, in a process. For continuous variables, X , representing an essentially unlimited population or a process, the population is mathematically characterized by a probability density function, $f(x)$. The density function visually describes the shape of the distribution as for example in Fig. 1. Mathematically, the only requirements of a density function are that its ordinates be all positive and that the total area under the curve be equal to 1.

5.1.1 Area under the density function curve is equivalent to probability for the variable X . The probability that X shall occur between any two values, say s and t , is given by the area under the curve bounded by the two given values of s and t . This is expressed mathematically as a definite integral over the density function between s and t :

$$P(s < X \leq t) = \int_s^t f(x) dx \quad (2)$$

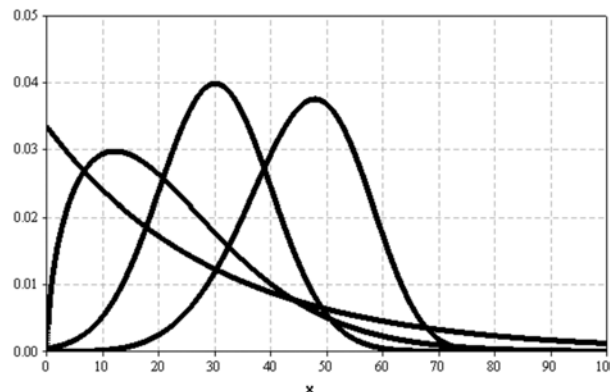


FIG. 1 Probability Density Function—Four Examples of Distribution Shape

5.1.2 A great variety of distribution shapes are theoretically possible. When the curve is symmetric, we say that the distribution is symmetric; otherwise, it is asymmetric. A distribution having a longer tail on the right side is called right skewed; a distribution having a longer tail on the left is called left skewed.

5.1.3 For a given density function, $f(x)$, the relationship to cumulative area under the curve may be graphically shown in the form of a cumulative distribution function, $F(x)$. The function $F(x)$ plots the cumulative area under $f(x)$ as x moves to the right. Fig. 2 shows a symmetric distribution with its density function, $f(x)$, plotted on the left-hand axis and distribution function, $F(x)$, plotted on the right-hand axis.

5.1.4 Referring to the $F(x)$ axis in Fig. 2, observe that $F(30) = 0.5$. The point $x = 30$ divides the distribution into two equal halves with respect to probability (50 % on each side of x). In general, where $F(x) = 0.5$, we call the point x the median or 50th percentile of the distribution. In like manner, we may define any percentile, for example, the 25th or the 90th percentiles. In general, for $0 < p < 1$, a 100p % percentile is a location point, Q_p , that divides the distribution into two parts, with 100p % lying to the left and $(1 - p)100$ % lying to the right.

5.2 A density function is often given as a formula⁴ with one or more parameters, which, when given values, allow the curve to be drawn. For many distributions, two parameters are sufficient (some have one parameter and others have more than two). The parameters may also have meaning with respect to the shape of the curve, the scale used, or some other property of the curve.

5.2.1 The mean or “expected value” of a distribution, denoted by the symbol μ , is a parameter that defines the central location of a distribution. The mean can be thought of as a “center of gravity” for the distribution. When the distribution is symmetric, the mean will coincide with the 50th percentile and occur exactly in the center, splitting the area under the curve into two equal halves of 0.5 each. For right-skewed distributions, the mean will occur to the right of the median; for left-skewed distributions, the mean will occur to the left of the median.

5.2.2 The standard deviation, denoted by the symbol σ , is another important parameter in many distributions. It carries the same units as the variable X , and is also called a scale parameter. Generally, it is a standard measure of variability. The larger the value of σ , the greater will be the variation in the variable X . One of the most important theoretical distributions in statistics is the normal, or Gaussian, distribution. It arises in complex phenomena when many uncontrolled factor effects cause variability and no single effect is of dominating magnitude. The normal distribution is a symmetrical, bell-shaped curve and is completely determined by its mean, μ , and its standard deviation, σ . The parameter μ locates the center, or peak, of the distribution, and the parameter σ determines its spread. The distance from the mean to the inflection point of the curve (maximum slope point) is σ . This is illustrated in Fig. 3.

5.2.3 The probability of obtaining a value in a given interval on the measurement scale is the area under the curve over the interval. This gives some numerical meaning to the parameter σ . Table 1 gives the normal probability for several selected intervals in terms of parameters μ and σ . The first two columns in Table 1 are known as the empirical rule for symmetric and mound-shaped distributions.

5.2.4 The variance of a distribution, σ^2 , is the square of the standard deviation. It is the average value of the quantity $(X - \mu)^2$ in the population. It is the variance that is computed first, and then the standard deviation is the positive square root of the variance. For a population specified by a density function, $f(x)$, the theoretical mean and variance are defined mathematically as:

$$\mu = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} xf(x)dx \tag{3}$$

⁴ In the same way a straight line, $y = mx + b$, has “parameters” referred to as the slope, m , and y-intercept, b . Once these parameters are known, the line is completely known and may be drawn precisely.

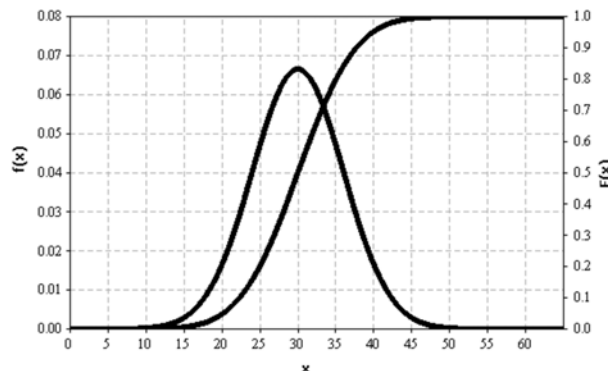


FIG. 2 Cumulative Distribution Function, $F(x)$, and Density Function, $f(x)$ Relationship

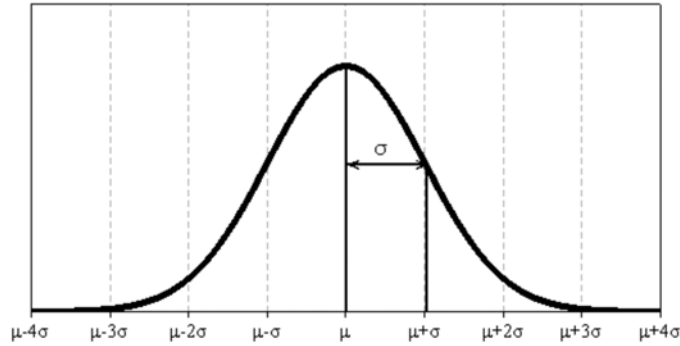


FIG. 3 Normal Distribution and Relationship to Parameters μ and σ

TABLE 1 Areas Under the Curve for the Normal Distribution

| Interval | Area | Interval | Area |
|-------------------|---------|-----------------------|------|
| $\mu \pm 1\sigma$ | 0.68270 | $\mu \pm 0.674\sigma$ | 0.50 |
| $\mu \pm 2\sigma$ | 0.95450 | $\mu \pm 1.645\sigma$ | 0.90 |
| $\mu \pm 3\sigma$ | 0.99730 | $\mu \pm 1.960\sigma$ | 0.95 |
| $\mu \pm 4\sigma$ | 0.99994 | $\mu \pm 2.576\sigma$ | 0.99 |

$$\sigma^2 = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (x - \mu)^2 f(x) dx \tag{4}$$

5.2.5 Here the variable X is assumed to take on all values in the interval $(-\infty, +\infty)$, but this need not be the case.

5.3 In addition to the mean and standard deviation, measures may be theoretically defined that attempt to describe the general shape of a distribution. Two such quantities are skewness and kurtosis. For a continuous variable, X , skewness is defined as the average value of the quantity $(X - \mu)^3/\sigma^3$, and kurtosis as the average value of the quantity $(X - \mu)^4/\sigma^4$, minus 3. Each of these calculations is taken over the population. The symbols used for the theoretical skewness and kurtosis are γ_1 and γ_2 , respectively. For a population specified by a density function, $f(x)$, the theoretical skewness and kurtosis are defined mathematically as:

$$\gamma_1 = \frac{\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (x - \mu)^3 f(x) dx}{\sigma^3} \tag{5}$$

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$$\gamma_2 = \frac{\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (x - \mu)^4 f(x) dx}{\sigma^4} - 3 \tag{6}$$

5.3.1 Here again, the variable X is assumed to take on all values in the interval $(-\infty, +\infty)$.

5.3.2 When a distribution is perfectly symmetric, $\gamma_1 = 0$. This is the case for the normal distribution in Fig. 3. If the distribution has a longer tail on the right, we say that it is right skewed and $\gamma_1 > 0$ as in Fig. 4. If the distribution has a longer tail on the left, we say that it is left skewed and $\gamma_1 < 0$ as in Fig. 5.

5.3.3 For the normal distribution $\gamma_2 = 0$. The large base of applications for the normal distribution is the reason for subtracting 3 in the definition of kurtosis. Subtracting of 3 from (6) makes $\gamma_2 = 0$ for the normal distribution. For any distribution

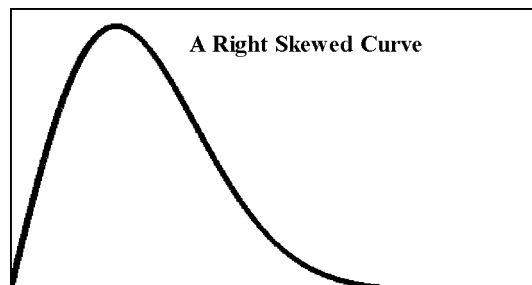


FIG. 4 Curve with Positive Skewness, $\gamma_1 > 0$

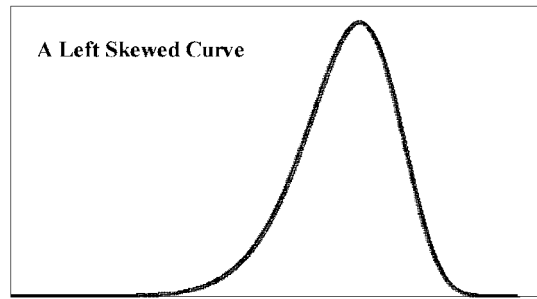


FIG. 5 Curve with Negative Skewness, $\gamma_1 < 0$

the quantity γ_2 cannot be less than -2 (1).⁵ Several examples of skewness and kurtosis as related to specific distributions are given in Table 2.

5.3.4 Table 2 shows that there is great variation in both skewness and kurtosis for several commonly occurring distributions. Also, for some distributions such as the normal, exponential, and uniform, skewness and kurtosis are constant and not dependent on the value of any other parameter; for others, however, skewness and kurtosis are a function of some other parameter. Here we see that for the Poisson distribution, both γ_1 and γ_2 are functions of the mean, λ . For the Weibull distribution, both γ_1 and γ_2 are functions of the Weibull shape parameter β .

5.4 Statistics is the study of the properties, behavior, and treatment of numerical data. A statistic may be defined as any function of the data values that originate from a sample. In many applications in which one has a specific model in mind, the initial goal is to try to estimate the population (model) parameters using the sample data. These estimates are called descriptive statistics. For example, the sample mean and standard deviation are attempting to estimate the parameters μ and σ , sample skewness and kurtosis are attempting to estimate γ_1 and γ_2 , and sample percentiles may be calculated that are attempting to estimate population percentiles. In some cases, there may be more than one statistic that may be used for the same purpose.

5.4.1 In addition to estimation, descriptive statistics serve to organize and give meaning to the raw sample data. By itself a set of numbers in columnar format may yield little useful information. The methods of descriptive statistics include numerical, tabular, and graphical methods that will lead to great insight for the underlying phenomena being studied.

6. Descriptive Statistics

6.1 *Mean or Arithmetic Average*—The mean is a measure of centrality or central tendency of a distribution of observations. It is most appropriate for symmetric distributions and is affected by distribution nonsymmetry (shape) and extreme values. The calculation of the mean is the sum of the n sample values divided by the number of values, n . This formula equation is:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n X_i}{n} \tag{7}$$

6.2 *Median or 50th Percentile* —The median is a measure of centrality or central tendency that is generally not affected by the extremes of the distribution. It is a value that divides the distribution into two equal parts. For continuous distributions, 50 % will lie to the left and 50 % to the right of the median. To obtain the 50th percentile of a sample, arrange the n values of a sample in increasing order of magnitude. The median is the $[(n + 1)/2]$ th value when n is odd. When n is even, the median lies between the $(n/2)$ th and the $[(n/2) + 1]$ th values and is not defined uniquely among the data values. It is then taken to be the arithmetic average of these two values.

⁵ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of this standard.

TABLE 2 Skewness and Kurtosis for Selected Distribution Forms

| Distribution Form | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Normal | 0 | 0 |
| Exponential | 2 | 6 |
| Uniform | 0 | -1.2 |
| Poisson ^A | $1/\sqrt{\lambda}$ | $1/\lambda$ |
| Student's t^B | 0 | $6/(v - 4)$ |
| Weibull ^C , $\beta = 3.6$ | 0 | -0.28 |
| Weibull, $\beta = 0.5$ | 6.62 | 84.72 |
| Weibull, $\beta = 50.0$ | -1 | 1.9 |

^A For the Poisson distribution, λ is the mean.

^B For the Student's t distribution, v is the degrees of freedom. When $v \leq 4$, kurtosis is infinite.

^C For the Weibull distribution, β is the shape parameter.