A Gentle Tutorial on
Information Theory and Learning

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Outline

- First part based very loosely on [Abramson 63].
- Information theory usually formulated in terms of information channels and coding — will not discuss those here.

1. Information
2. Entropy
3. Mutual Information
4. Cross Entropy and Learning

Information

- information $\neq$ knowledge
  Concerned with abstract possibilities, not their meaning
- information: reduction in uncertainty

Imagine:

#1 you're about to observe the outcome of a coin flip

#2 you're about to observe the outcome of a die roll

There is more uncertainty in #2

Next:

1. You observed outcome of #1 $\rightarrow$ uncertainty reduced to zero.
2. You observed outcome of #2 $\rightarrow$ uncertainty reduced to zero.

$\Longrightarrow$ more information was provided by the outcome in #2

Definition of Information

(After [Abramson 63])

> Let E be some event which occurs with probability $P(E)$. If we are told that E has occurred, then we say that we have received
>
> $$I(E) = \log_2 \frac{1}{P(E)}$$
>
> bits of information.

- Base of log is unimportant — will only change the units
  We'll stick with bits, and always assume base 2
- Can also think of information as amount of "surprise" in E (e.g. $P(E) = 1, P(E) = 0$)
- Example: result of a fair coin flip ($\log_2 2 = 1$ bit)
- Example: result of a fair die roll ($\log_2 6 \approx 2.585$ bits)

Information is Additive

- $I(k$ fair coin tosses$) = \log \frac{1}{1/2^k} = k$ bits
- So:
  - random word from a 100,000 word vocabulary:
    I(word) $= \log 100,000 = 16.61$ bits
  - A 1000 word document from same source:
    I(document) = 16,610 bits
  - A 480x640 pixel, 16-greyscale video picture:
    I(picture) $= 307,200 \cdot \log 16 = 1,228,800$ bits
- $\Longrightarrow$ A (VGA) picture is worth (a lot more than) a 1000 words!
- (In reality, both are gross overestimates.)

Entropy

A *Zero-memory information source* S is a source that emits symbols from an alphabet $\{s_1, s_2, \ldots, s_k\}$ with probabilities $\{p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_k\}$, respectively, where the symbols emitted are statistically independent.

What is the average amount of information in observing the output of the source S?

Call this **Entropy**:

$$H(S) \;=\; \sum_i p_i \cdot I(s_i) \;=\; \sum_i p_i \cdot \log \frac{1}{p_i} \;=\; E_P \left[\, \log \frac{1}{p(s)} \,\right]$$

Alternative Explanations of Entropy

$$H(S) \;=\; \sum_i p_i \cdot \log \frac{1}{p_i}$$

1. avg amt of info provided per symbol
2. avg amount of surprise when observing a symbol
3. uncertainty an observer has before seeing the symbol
4. avg # of bits needed to communicate each symbol (Shannon: there are codes that will communicate these symbols with efficiency arbitrarily close to $H(S)$ bits/symbol; there are no codes that will do it with efficiency $< H(S)$ bits/symbol)

Entropy as a Function of a Probability Distribution

Since the source S is fully characterized by$P = \{p_1, \ldots p_k\}$ (we don't care what the symbols s_i actually are, or what they stand for), entropy can also be thought of as a property of a probability distribution function P: the avg uncertainty in the distribution. So we may also write:

$$H(S) \;=\; H(P) \;=\; H(p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_k) \;=\; \sum_i p_i \log \frac{1}{p_i}$$

(Can be generalized to continuous distributions.)

Properties of Entropy

$$H(P) \;=\; \sum_i p_i \cdot \log \frac{1}{p_i}$$

1. Non-negative: $H(P) \geq 0$
2. Invariant wrt permutation of its inputs:
   $H(p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_k) = H(p_{\tau(1)}, p_{\tau(2)}, \ldots, p_{\tau(k)})$
3. For any *other* probability distribution $\{q_1, q_2, \ldots, q_k\}$:

$$H(P) \;=\; \sum_i p_i \cdot \log \frac{1}{p_i} \;<\; \sum_i p_i \cdot \log \frac{1}{q_i}$$

4. $H(P) \leq \log k$, with equality iff $\;p_i = 1/k \;\; \forall i$
5. The further P is from uniform, the lower the entropy.

Special Case: $k = 2$

Flipping a coin with P("head")=p, P("tail")=1-p

$$H(p) = p \cdot \log \frac{1}{p} + (1-p) \cdot \log \frac{1}{1-p}$$

Notice:

- zero uncertainty/information/surprise at edges
- maximum info at 0.5 (1 bit)
- drops off quickly

Special Case: $k = 2$ (cont.)

Relates to: "20 questions" game strategy (halving the space).

So a sequence of (independent) 0's-and-1's can provide up to 1 bit of information per digit, provided the 0's and 1's are equally likely at any point. If they are not equally likely, the sequence provides less information *and can be compressed*.

The Entropy of English

27 characters (A-Z, space).

100,000 words (avg 5.5 characters each)

- Assuming independence between successive characters:
  - uniform character distribution: $\log 27 = 4.75$ bits/character
  - true character distribution: 4.03 bits/character
- Assuming independence between successive *words*:
  - unifrom word distribution: $\log 100,000/6.5 \approx 2.55$ bits/character
  - true word distribution: $9.45/6.5 \approx 1.45$ bits/character
- True Entropy of English is much lower!

Two Sources

Temperature T: a random variable taking on values t

P(T=hot)=0.3

P(T=mild)=0.5

P(T=cold)=0.2

$\Longrightarrow$ H(T)=H(0.3, 0.5, 0.2) = 1.48548

huMidity M: a random variable, taking on values m

P(M=low)=0.6

P(M=high)=0.4

$\Longrightarrow H(M) = H(0.6, 0.4) = 0.970951$

T, M not independent: $P(T = t, M = m) \neq P(T = t) \cdot P(M = m)$

Joint Probability, Joint Entropy

	cold	mild	hot	
low	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.6
high	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4
	0.3	0.5	0.2	1.0

- $H(T) = H(0.3, 0.5, 0.2) = 1.48548$
- $H(M) = H(0.6, 0.4) = 0.970951$
- $H(T) + H(M) = 2.456431$
- **Joint Entropy**: consider the space of (t, m) events $H(T, M) = \sum_{t,m} P(T = t, M = m) \cdot \log \frac{1}{P(T=t,M=m)}$
  $H(0.1, 0.4, 0.1, 0.2, 0.1, 0.1) = 2.32193$

Notice that $H(T, M) < H(T) + H(M)$!!!

Conditional Probability, Conditional Entropy

$$P(T = t|M = m)$$

	cold	mild	hot	
low	1/6	4/6	1/6	1.0
high	2/4	1/4	1/4	1.0

Conditional Entropy:

- $H(T|M = low) = H(1/6, 4/6, 1/6) = 1.25163$
- $H(T|M = high) = H(2/4, 1/4, 1/4) = 1.5$
- **Average Conditional Entropy** (aka equivocation):
  $H(T/M) = \sum_m P(M = m) \cdot H(T|M = m) =$
  $0.6 \cdot H(T|M = low) + 0.4 \cdot H(T|M = high) = 1.350978$

How much is M telling us on average about T?

$H(T) - H(T|M) = 1.48548 - 1.350978 \approx 0.1345$ bits

Conditional Probability, Conditional Entropy

$$P(M = m|T = t)$$

	cold	mild	hot
low	1/3	4/5	1/2
high	2/3	1/5	1/2
	1.0	1.0	1.0

Conditional Entropy:

- $H(M|T = cold) = H(1/3, 2/3) = 0.918296$
- $H(M|T = mild) = H(4/5, 1/5) = 0.721928$
- $H(M|T = hot) = H(1/2, 1/2) = 1.0$
- Average Conditional Entropy (aka Equivocation):
  $H(M/T) = \sum_t P(T = t) \cdot H(M|T = t) =$
  $0.3 \cdot H(M|T = cold) + 0.5 \cdot H(M|T = mild) + 0.2 \cdot H(M|T = hot) = 0.8364528$

How much is T telling us on average about M?

$H(M) - H(M|T) = 0.970951 - 0.8364528 \approx 0.1345$ bits

Average Mutual Information

$$
\begin{aligned}
I(X;Y) &= H(X) - H(X/Y) \\
&= \sum_x P(x) \cdot \log \frac{1}{P(x)} - \sum_{x,y} P(x,y) \cdot \log \frac{1}{P(x|y)} \\
&= \sum_{x,y} P(x,y) \cdot \log \frac{P(x|y)}{P(x)} \\
&= \sum_{x,y} P(x,y) \cdot \log \frac{P(x,y)}{P(x)P(y)}
\end{aligned}
$$

Properties of Average Mutual Information:

- Symmetric (but $H(X) \neq H(Y)$ and $H(X/Y) \neq H(Y/X)$)
- Non-negative (but $H(X) - H(X/y)$ may be negative!)
- Zero iff X, Y independent
- Additive (see next slide)

Mutual Information Visualized

$$H(X, Y) = H(X) + H(Y) - I(X; Y)$$

Three Sources

From Blachman:

(" /" means "given". ";" means "between". "," means "and".)

- $H(X,Y/Z) = H(\{X,Y\} \;/\; Z)$
- $H(X/Y,Z) = H(X \;/\; \{Y,Z\})$
- $I(X;Y/Z) = H(X/Z) - H(X/Y,Z)$
-

$$\begin{aligned} I(X;Y;Z) &= I(X;Y) - I(X;Y/Z) \\ &= H(X,Y,Z) - H(X,Y) - H(X,Z) - H(Y,Z) + H(X) + H(Y \end{aligned}$$

$\Longrightarrow$ Can be negative!

- $I(X;Y,Z) = I(X;Y) + I(X;Z/Y)$ (additivity)
- But: $I(X;Y) = 0$,$I(X;Z) = 0$ doesn't mean $I(X;Y,Z) = 0$!!!

A Markov Source

Order-k Markov Source: A source that "remembers" the last k symbols emitted.

Ie, the probability of emitting any symbol depends on the last k emitted symbols: $P(s_{T=t}|s_{T=t-1}, s_{T=t-2}, \ldots, s_{T=t-k})$

So the last k emitted symbols define a *state*, and there are q^k states.

First-order markov source: defined by qXq matrix: $P(s_i|s_j)$

Example: $S_{T=t}$ is position after t random steps

Approximating with a Markov Source

A non-Markovian source can still be approximated by one.

Examples: English characters: $C = \{c_1, c_2, \ldots\}$

1. Uniform: $H(C) = \log 27 = 4.75$ bits/char
2. Assuming 0 memory: $H(C) = H(0.186, 0.064, 0.0127, \ldots) =$ 4.03 bits/char
3. Assuming 1st order: $H(C) = H(c_i/c_{i-1}) = 3.32$ bits/char
4. Assuming 2nd order: $H(C) = H(c_i/c_{i-1}, c_{i-2}) = 3.1$ bits/char
5. Assuming large order: Shannon got down to ≈ 1 bit/char

Modeling an Arbitrary Source

Source $\mathcal{D}(Y)$ with unknown distribution $P_{\mathsf{D}}(Y)$

(recall $H(P_{\mathsf{D}}) = E_{P_{\mathsf{D}}}[\log \frac{1}{P_{\mathsf{D}}(Y)}]$)

Goal: Model (approximate) with learned distribution $P_M(Y)$

What's a good model $P_M(Y)$?

1. *RMS error* over D's parameters $\Rightarrow$ but D is unknown!
2. *Predictive Probability:* Maximize the expected log-likelihood the model assigns to future data from $\mathcal{D}$

Cross Entropy

$$
\begin{aligned}
M^* &= \arg\max_M E_{\mathsf{D}}[\log P_M(Y)] \\
&= \arg\min_M E_{\mathsf{D}}[\log \frac{1}{P_M(Y)}] \\
&= CH(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M) \Longleftarrow \text{Cross Entropy}
\end{aligned}
$$

The following are equivalent:

1. Maximize Predictive Probability of P_M
2. Minimize Cross Entropy $CH(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M)$
3. Minimize the difference between P_{D} and P_M (in what sense?)

A Distance Measure Between Distributions

Kullback-Liebler distance:

$$
\begin{aligned}
KL(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M) &= CH(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M) - H(P_{\mathsf{D}}) \\
&= E_{P_{\mathsf{D}}}[\log \frac{P_{\mathsf{D}}(Y)}{P_M(Y)}]
\end{aligned}
$$

Properties of KL distance:

1. Non-negative. $KL(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M) = 0 \iff P_{\mathsf{D}} = P_M$
2. Generally non-symmetric

The following are equivalent:

1. Maximize Predictive Probability of P_M for distribution D
2. Minimize Cross Entropy $CH(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M)$
3. Minimize the distance $KL(P_{\mathsf{D}}; P_M)$