Lesson 12: Describing the Center of a Distribution Using the Median

How do we summarize a data distribution? What provides us with a good description of the data? The following exercises help us to understand how a numerical summary answers these questions.

Classwork

Example 1: The Median—A Typical Number

Suppose a chain restaurant (Restaurant A) advertises that a typical number of french fries in a large bag is . The graph shows the number of french fries in selected samples of large bags from Restaurant A.

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**Number of French Fries in a Large Bag (Restaurant A)**

Exercises 1–3

1. You just bought a large bag of fries from the restaurant. Do you think you have french fries? Why or why not?
2. How many bags were in the sample?
3. Which of the following statements would seem to be true given the data? Explain your reasoning.
   1. Half of the bags had more than fries in them.
   2. Half of the bags had fewer than fries in them.
   3. More than half of the bags had more than fries in them.
   4. More than half of the bags had fewer than fries in them.
   5. If you got a random bag of fries, you could get as many as fries.

**Example 2: The Median**

Sometimes it is useful to know what point separates a data distribution into two equal parts, where one part represents the larger “half” of the data values and the other part represents the smaller “half” of the data values. This point is called the **median**. When the data are arranged in order from smallest to largest, the same number of values will be above the median as are below the median.

Exercises 4–7

1. Suppose you were trying to convince your family that you needed a new pair of tennis shoes. After checking with your friends, you argued that half of them had more than four pairs of tennis shoes, and you only had two pairs. Give another example of when you might want to know that a data value is a half-way point? Explain your thinking.
2. Use the information from the dot plot in Example 1. The median number of fries was .
   1. What percent of the bags have more fries than the median? Less than the median?
   2. Suppose the bag with fries was miscounted and there were only fries. Would the median change? Why or why not?
   3. Suppose the bag with fries really only had fries. Would the median change? Why or why not?
3. The owner of the chain decided to check the number of french fries at another restaurant in the chain. Here is the data for Restaurant B: .
   1. How many bags of fries were counted?
   2. Sallee claims the median is as she sees that is the middle number in the data set listed above. She thinks half of the bags had fewer than fries. Do you think she would change her mind if the data were plotted in a dot plot? Why or why not?
   3. Jake said the median was . What would you say to Jake?
   4. Betse argued that the median was halfway between and or . Do you think she is right? Why or why not?
   5. Chris thought the median was . Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Calculate the mean and compare it to the median. What do you observe about the two values? If the mean and median are both measures of center, why do you think one of them is lower than the other?

Exercises 8–10: Finding Medians from Frequency Tables

1. A third restaurant (Restaurant C) tallied a sample of bags of french fries and found the results below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of fries | Frequency |
|  | || |
|  | | |
|  | || |
|  | ||| |
|  | ||||| |
|  | |||| |
|  | | |
|  | | |
|  |  |
|  | ||| |
|  | ||| |
|  | | |

* 1. How many bags of fries did they count?
  2. What is the median number of fries for the sample of bags from this restaurant? Describe how you found your answer.

1. Robere decided to divide the data into four parts. He found the median of the whole set.
   1. List the values of the bottom half. Find the median of these values.
   2. List the values of the top half. Find the median of these values.
2. Which of the three restaurants seems most likely to really have fries in a typical bag? Explain your thinking.

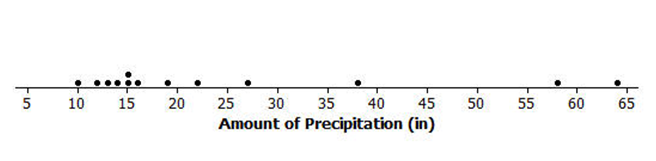
Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned about a summary measure for a set of data called the median. To find a median you first have to order the data. The **median** is the midpoint of a set of ordered data; it separates the data into two parts with the same number of values below as above that point. For an even number of data values, you find the average of the two middle numbers; for an odd number of data values, you use the middle value. It is important to note that the median might not be a data value and that the median has nothing to do with a measure of distance. Medians are sometimes called a measure of the center of a frequency distribution but do not have to be the middle of the spread or range (maximum-minimum) of the data.

Problem Set

1. The amount of precipitation in the western states in the U.S. is given in the table as well as the graph.

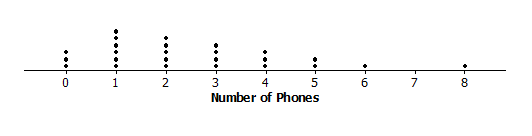
|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| State | Amount of Precipitation (in.) |
| WA |  |
| OR |  |
| CA |  |
| MT |  |
| ID |  |
| WY |  |
| NV |  |
| UT |  |
| CO |  |
| AZ |  |
| NM |  |
| AK |  |
| HI |  |

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Data Source: <http://www.currentresults.com/Weather/US/average-annual-state-precipitation.php>

* 1. How do the amounts vary across the states?
  2. Find the median. What does the median tell you about the amount of precipitation?
  3. Use the median and the range to describe the average monthly precipitation in western states in the U.S.
  4. Do you think the mean or median would be a better description of the typical amount of precipitation? Explain your thinking.

1. Identify the following as true or false. If a statement is false, give an example showing why.
   1. The median is always equal to one of the values in the data set.
   2. The median is the midpoint between the smallest and largest values in the data set.
   3. At most, half of the values in a data set have values less than the median.
   4. In a data set with different values, if you change the two smallest values of a data set to smaller values, the median will not be changed.
   5. If you add to every element of a data set, the median will not change.
2. Make up a data set such that the following is true:
   1. The set has different values and the median is .
   2. The set has values and the median is .
   3. The set has values and the median is the same as the smallest value.
3. The dot plot shows the number of landline phones that a sample of people have in their homes.



* 1. How many people were in the sample?
  2. Why do you think three people have no landline phones in their homes?
  3. Find the median number of phones for the people in the sample.
  4. Use the median and the range (maximum-minimum) to describe the distribution of the number of phones.

1. The salaries of the Los Angeles Lakers for the 2012–2013 basketball season are given below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Player | Salary () |
| Kobe Bryant |  |
| Dwight Howard |  |
| Pau Gasol |  |
| Steve Nash |  |
| Metta World Peace |  |
| Steve Blake |  |
| Jordan Hill |  |
| Chris Duhon |  |
| Jodie Meeks |  |
| Earl Clark |  |
| Devin Ebanks |  |
| Darius Morris |  |
| Antawn Jamison |  |
| Robert Sacre |  |
| Darius Johnson-Odom |  |

Data Source: [www.basketball-reference.com/contracts/LAL.html](http://www.basketball-reference.com/contracts/LAL.html)

* 1. Just looking at the data, what do you notice about the salaries?
  2. Find the median salary, and explain what it tells you about the salaries.
  3. Find the median of the lower half of the salaries and the median of the upper half of the salaries.
  4. Find the width of each of the following intervals. What do you notice about the size of the interval widths, and what does that tell you about the salaries?
     1. minimum salary to median of the lower half:
     2. median of the lower half to the median of the whole set:
     3. median of the whole set to the median of the upper half:
     4. median of the upper half to the highest salary:

1. Use the salary table from above to answer the following.
   1. If you were to find the mean salary, how do you think it would compare to the median? Explain your reasoning.
   2. Which measure do you think would give a better picture of a typical salary for the Lakers, the mean or the median? Explain your thinking.