

Statistical Thinking for the 21st Century

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.2 Dealing with statistics anxiety

Many people come to their first statistics class with a lot of trepidation and anxiety, especially once they hear that they will also have to learn to code in order to analyze data. In my class I give students a survey prior to the first session in order to measure their attitude towards statistics, asking them to rate a number of statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). One of the items on the survey is “The thought of being enrolled in a statistics course makes me nervous”. In the most recent class, almost two-thirds of the class responded with a five or higher, and about one-fourth of the students said that they strongly agreed with the statement. So if you feel nervous about starting to learn statistics, you are not alone.

Anxiety feels uncomfortable, but psychology tells us that this kind of emotional arousal can actually help us perform *better* on many tasks, by focusing our attention. So if you start to feel anxious about the material in this course, remind yourself that many others in the class are feeling similarly, and that the arousal could actually help you perform better (even if it doesn’t seem like it!).