Is R right for you? If yes …

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Repository Citation
Lei, Pei-Pei, "Is R right for you? If yes..." (2017). Center for Health Policy and Research (CHPR) Publications. 208.
http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/healthpolicy_pp/208

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Pei-Pei Lei on Is R right for you? If yes...

Greetings AEA community, I’m Pei-Pei Lei, a biostatistician in the Office of Survey Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Have you been looking to expand your skill set in statistical programming? Have you wondered if R is the appropriate statistical software package for your needs? The purpose of this post is to help you decide whether R is right for you and, if so, how you can get started using it.

R may be the right tool if you:

- Need to manage and/or analyze quantitative data
- Are looking for a free alternative to commercial software packages, such as SAS, SPSS, and STATA
- Don’t mind writing computer code – does print (“Hello, world!”) look easy enough to you?
- Want to create nice-looking and informative figures and graphics (see this website for example)

If you’re not sure, here are some places for you to get a feel for R language:

- **TryR**: This website provides online interactive step-by-step practice on the webpage
- **DataCamp**: This website provides online interactive step-by-step practice (more material than TryR)

**Hot tips:**
The following is a list of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that can help you learn R for free (or pay a fee for a verified certificate):

- **R programming on Coursera**: It’s a 4-week course to go through basic R programming knowledge. It provides a weekly quiz and a final project for you to test your skills. Good for beginning to intermediate users.

- **Introduction to R for Data Science on edX**: It’s a self-paced 4-week course to go through basic R programming knowledge. This course is using DataCamp for class materials and exercises. Good for beginners.

- **R Basics – R Programming Language Introduction on Udemy**: This is a self-paced course that goes through basic set up such as downloading the software and coding. Good for beginners.

- **Data Analysis with R on Udacity**: This course takes about 2 months to finish (it’s also part of the Data Analyst nanodegree program). Its tutorial videos show coding processes in RStudio. Good for beginning to intermediate users.

You can also install the Swirl R package to learn R in R. It gives you interactive instructions for different topics. This is good for intermediate users.

**Rad resources:**
- **R-bloggers**: This is a repository of R-related articles, including tutorials. You can subscribe to the mailing list to receive the latest articles.
Stack overflow: This is a forum where you can post your question and get answers, or even better, provide answer to others’ questions!

Lessons Learned:
Don’t be intimidated by the many choices you have in learning R. They are the means to reach your goal. So pick one that you like and get started!