The Mathematics of Machine Learning 2026

Lecture 5

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Outline

Surrogate Losses for Classification

1. Motivation
2. Surrogate Losses

Log Loss

Logistic Regression

3. Logistic Probability Model
4. Logistic Loss
5. An Extra Reason to Regularize
6. Multiclass Logistic Regression

Surrogate Losses: Motivation

Classification: find $\hat{f}$ with small expected 0/1-loss:

$$\mathrm{EPE}(\hat{f}) = \mathop{\mathbb{E}}_{X,Y}\Big[L\big(Y, \hat{f}(X)\big)\Big],$$

where $L(Y, \hat{Y}) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } \hat{Y} = Y \text{ is correct} \\ 1 & \text{if } \hat{Y} \neq Y \text{ is wrong.} \end{cases}$

Empirical Risk Minimization:

$$\hat{f} = \arg\min_{f \in \mathcal{F}} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} L\big(Y_i, f(X_i)\big)$$

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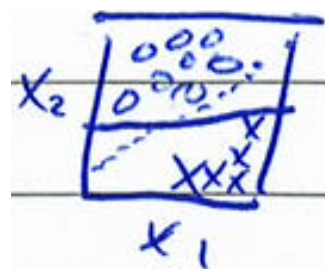
$$\hat{f} = \arg\min_{f \in \mathcal{F}} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} L\big(Y_i, f(X_i)\big)$$

Difficulties:

- ERM solution not unique for linearly separable data
- Impossible to compute efficiently for non-separable data



Surrogate Losses I

Surrogate/Proxy Loss L':

Care about loss L, but train classifier with loss L'

Want:

EPE L' close to its minimum $\Rightarrow$ EPE L close to its minimum

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Two most important surrogates:

logistic loss, ↑ today

hinge loss ↑ used in support vector machines (after midterm)

Surrogate Losses II

For 0/1 loss with $Y \in \{-1, +1\}$, predict correctly if and only if

$$\text{sign}(X^\intercal \hat{\beta}) = Y \quad \Leftrightarrow \quad YX^\intercal \hat{\beta} > 0$$

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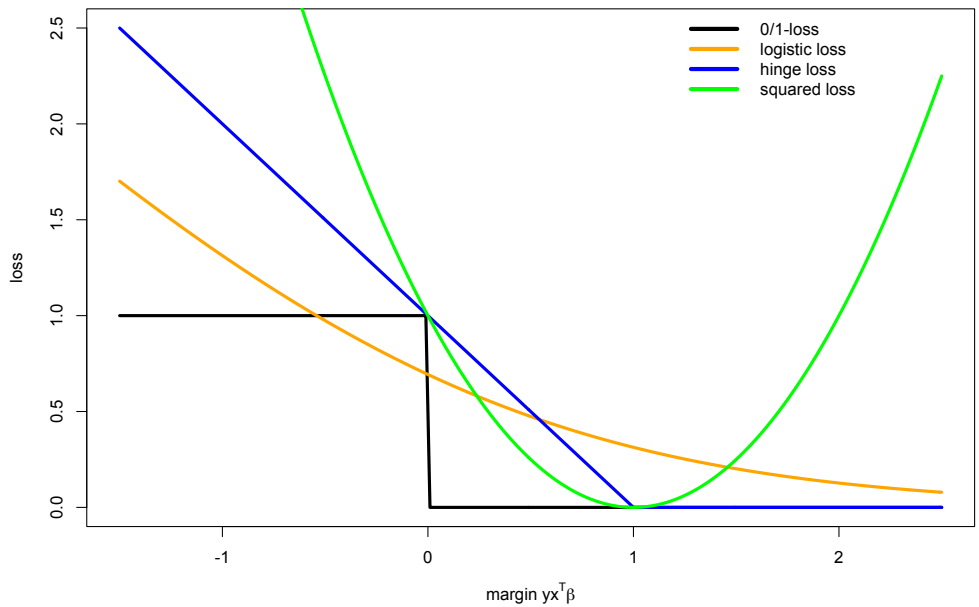
Most surrogate losses are therefore decreasing as a function of the **margin** $YX^\intercal \hat{\beta}$:



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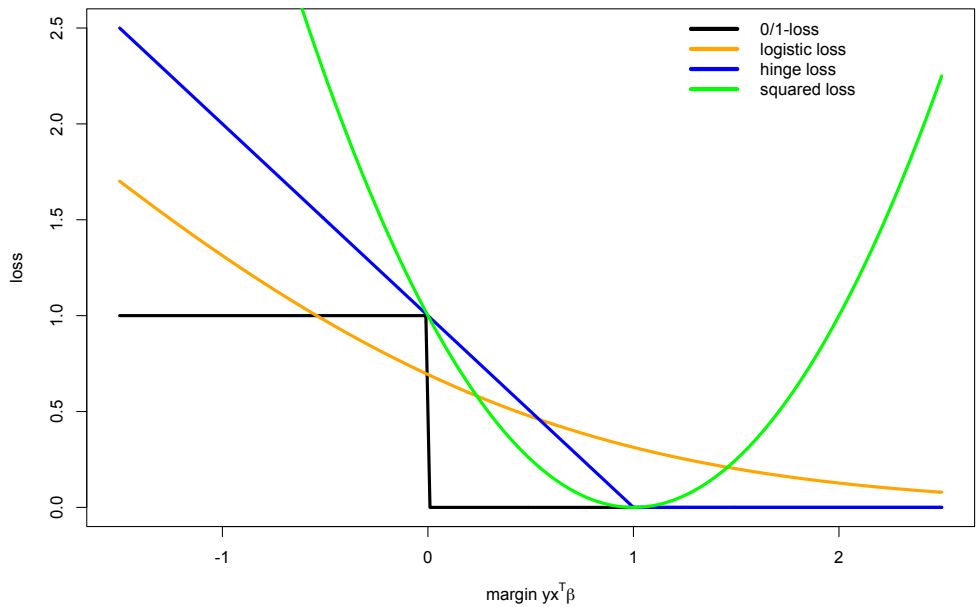

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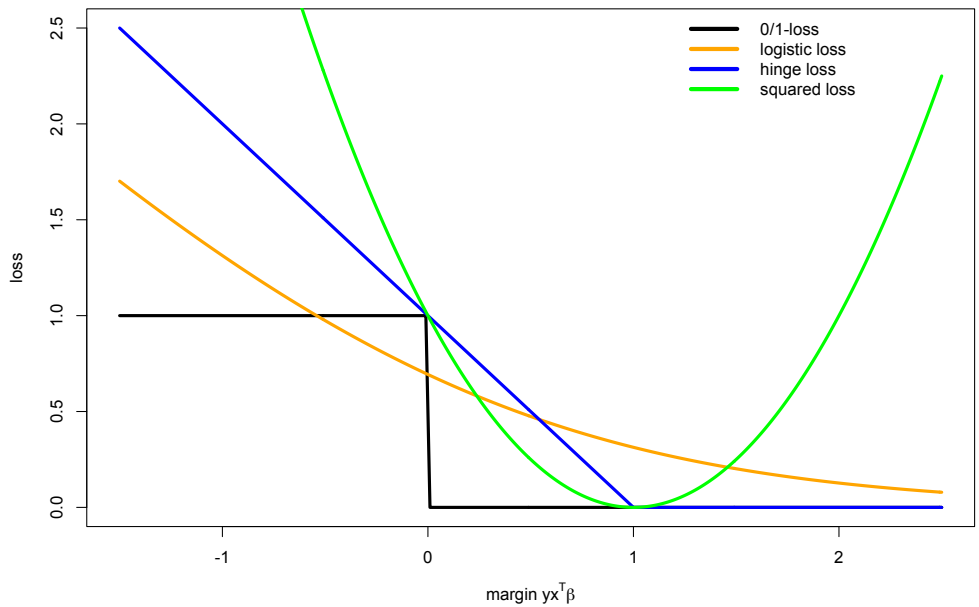

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- Increases for $YX^\intercal \hat{\beta} > 1$.
- This is undesirable, so squared error not a natural choice for classification!

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Maximum likelihood = ERM for log loss:

$$\text{ML:} \qquad \arg\max_{\beta} \prod_{i=1}^{N} p_\beta(Y_i \mid X_i) = \arg\min_{\beta} \sum_{i=1}^{N} -\log p_\beta(Y_i \mid X_i)$$

$$= \arg\min_{\beta} \sum_{i=1}^{N} L\big(Y_i, p_\beta(\cdot \mid X_i)\big)$$

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Bayes-optimal predictor for log loss is true conditional probability:

$$f_{\text{B}}(X) = \arg\min_p \mathbb{E}[L(Y, p) \mid X] = p^*(\cdot \mid X)$$

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Logistic Probability Model (for two classes)

Plug-in estimator for $P^*(Y \mid X)$ directly

- So not using Bayes' rule, like LDA or Naive Bayes
- This is called a **discriminative model** as opposed to a **generative model** when using Bayes' rule

How can we model the **class probabilities** $P^*(Y \mid X)$
with a **linear model** $f_\beta(X) = X^\intercal \beta$?

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Bad Ideas:

1. $P_\beta(Y = +1 \mid X) = f_\beta(X)$
2. $\log P_\beta(Y = +1 \mid X) = f_\beta(X) \quad \Leftrightarrow \quad P_\beta(Y = +1 \mid X) = e^{f_\beta(X)}$

- Probabilities would go outside of range $[0, 1]$

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Logistic Regression: Linear log-odds:

$$\log \frac{P_\beta(Y = +1 \mid X)}{P_\beta(Y = -1 \mid X)} = f_\beta(X)$$

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$$P_\beta(Y \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-Yf_\beta(X)}}$$

$$P_{\hat{\beta}}(Y=+1 \mid X) > \tfrac{1}{2} \Leftrightarrow f_{\hat{\beta}}(X) > 0$$

- Decision boundary: $P_{\hat{\beta}}(Y=+1 \mid X) = \frac{1}{2} \Leftrightarrow f_{\hat{\beta}}(X) = 0$ is linear

Logistic Loss

Logistic loss = log loss for logistic regression

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Training:

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$$\min_\beta \sum_{i=1}^{N} \log\left(1 + e^{-Y_i f_\beta(X_i)}\right)$$

No formula for minimum, but can find it by convex optimization

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Important Extensions:

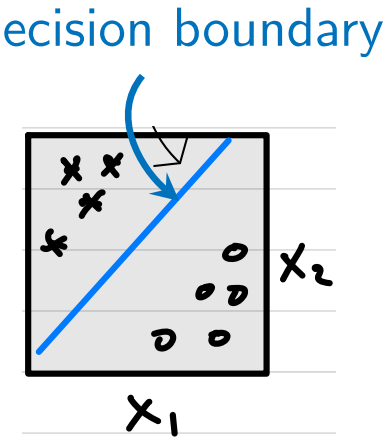
$$\min_{\beta_0,\beta} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \log\left(1 + e^{-Y_i(\beta_0 + X_i^\intercal \beta)}\right) + \lambda\,\mathrm{pen}(\beta)$$

ℓ_2-penalty:	$\mathrm{pen}(\beta) = \|\beta\|_2^2$	(like ridge regression)
ℓ_1-penalty:	$\mathrm{pen}(\beta) = \|\beta\|_1$	(like Lasso)

- Considerations for penalization similar as for squared error

An Extra Reason to Regularize

Consider linearly separable data:



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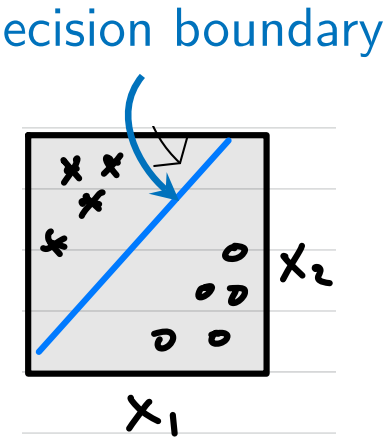

Let $\hat{f}(X) = \hat{\beta}_0 + X^\intercal \hat{\beta}$.
Suppose we **scale** both $\hat{\beta}_0$ and $\hat{\beta}$ by any $\alpha > 0$. Then

- $\hat{f}(X) \to \alpha \hat{f}(X)$ for any X

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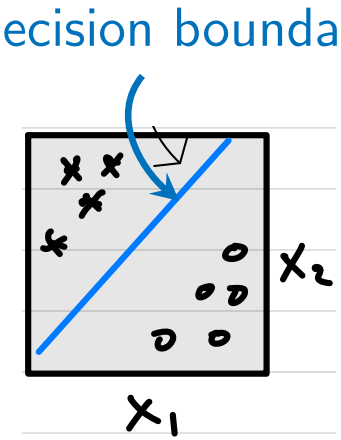

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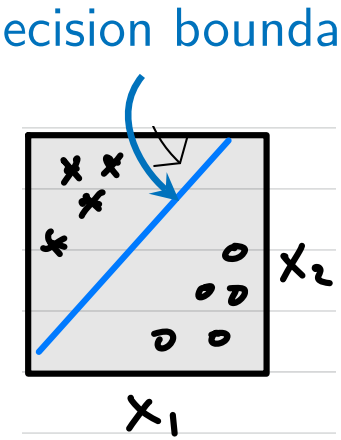

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- But, for linearly separable data, will **increase the margin** $Y_i \hat{f}(X_i)$ for all training data points (X_i, Y_i): $Y_i \hat{f}(X_i) \to \alpha Y_i \hat{f}(X_i)$

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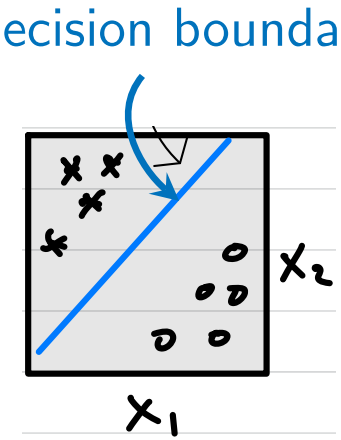

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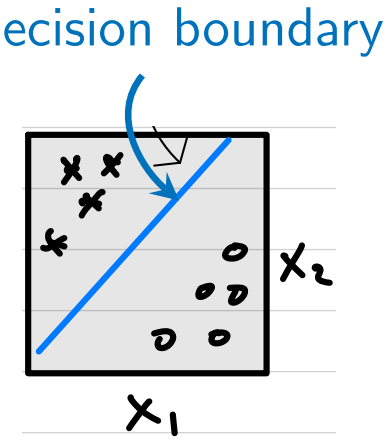

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$$\left\| \alpha \begin{pmatrix} \hat{\beta}_0 \\ \hat{\beta} \end{pmatrix} \right\| \to \infty$$

- Your optimizer: **"Warning, optimization did not converge!"**
- Penalization avoids this problem, because $\text{pen}(\alpha\hat{\beta}) > \text{pen}(\hat{\beta})$, so penalty pushes back against too large α.

Multiclass Logistic Regression: ML Version

(Assume implicit intercept again.)

Machine Learning Version:

Parameter vector for each class: $\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_K \in \mathbb{R}^p$,
$\beta = (\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_K) \in \mathbb{R}^{p \times K}$

$$P_\beta(Y = k \mid X) = \frac{e^{X^\intercal \beta_k}}{\sum_{j=1}^{K} e^{X^\intercal \beta_j}}$$

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- But identifiability does not matter for machine learning, because only cares about predictions P_β, not about β.
- Nice symmetry: treats all classes the same
- Does **not** simplify to binary logistic regression for $K = 2$

Multiclass Logistic Regression: Stats Version

(Assume implicit intercept again.)

Statistical Version:

$\beta = (\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_{K-1}) \in \mathbb{R}^{p \times (K-1)}$

$$P_\beta(Y = k \mid X) = \begin{cases} \frac{e^{X^\intercal \beta_k}}{1+\sum_{j=1}^{K-1} e^{X^\intercal \beta_j}} & \text{for } k \leq K-1 \\ \frac{1}{1+\sum_{j=1}^{K-1} e^{X^\intercal \beta_j}} & \text{for } k = K \end{cases}$$

- Coincides with ML version if we fix $\beta_K = 0$
- Parameters β **identifiable**: one-to-one mapping $P_\beta \leftrightarrow \beta$
  Important because statistics wants to learn **true parameters** β^*!
- Breaks symmetry between classes for $K > 2$: class K treated differently
- Reduces to binary logistic regression for $K = 2$, for which it is therefore still symmetrical