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Mixed Model Analysis of Variance

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The characteristics of the design and the variables in a research study determine the appropriate statistical analysis. A mixed model analysis of variance (or mixed model ANOVA) is the right data analytic approach for a study that contains (a) a continuous dependent variable, (b) two or more categorical independent variables, (c) at least one independent variable that varies between-units, and (d) at least one independent variable that varies within-units. “Units” refer to the unit of analysis, usually subjects. In other words, a mixed model ANOVA is used for studies in which independent units are “crossed with” at least one of the independent variables and are “nested under” at least one of the independent variables.

Mixed model ANOVAs are sometimes called split-plot ANOVAs, mixed factorial ANOVAs, and mixed design ANOVAs. They are often used in studies with repeated measures, hierarchical data, or longitudinal data. This entry begins by describing simple ANOVAs before moving on to mixed model ANOVAs. This entry focuses mostly on the simplest case of a mixed model ANOVA: one dichotomous between-subjects variable and one dichotomous within-subjects variable. Then, it briefly presents more complex mixed model ANOVAs and discusses these analyses in the context of linear mixed effects models.

Simple ANOVAs

Between-units (e.g., between-subjects) ANOVAs are characterized by units that are “nested under” one or more categorical independent variables. Between-subjects ANOVAs examine the differences between two or more independent groups. For example, a simple one-way between-subjects ANOVA may test whether girls or boys have better grades in school. Here, there is one dichotomous independent variable that varies between-subjects (gender). The goal of the ANOVA is to examine whether the mean scores for each group (boys vs. girls) are reliably different from each other. The statistical model can be described as

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X + e,$$

where Y is the dependent variable (scores), X is the dichotomous independent variable (gender), and e refers to the residuals (the errors). If the coefficient b_1 is statistically significant, one would conclude that the data provide evidence for the idea that one of the two genders has better grades than the other. Between-subjects ANOVAs are more flexible than independent samples t tests because they allow for multiple independent variables with two or more levels each.

Within-units (e.g., within-subjects) ANOVAs are characterized by units that are “crossed with” one or more categorical independent variables. They frequently examine differences between one measurement of a particular variable and another measurement of the same variable for a given subject. In such cases, the observations are not independent of each other in that two data points from the same subject are likely to be more similar to each other than two data points from two different subjects. Within-subjects ANOVAs examine the differences between two or more dependent groups. Their goal is often to examine changes in an outcome variable over time. For example, a one-way, within-subjects ANOVA may test whether students have better grades in English or math. Here, there is one dichotomous independent variable that varies within-subjects (discipline: English vs. math). The statistical model can be described as

$$(Y_1 - Y_2) = b_0 + e,$$

where Y_1 is subjects' English grade and Y_2 is subjects' math grade. Like before, the e refers

to the residuals (the errors). If the coefficient b_0 is statistically significant, one would conclude that the data provide evidence for the idea that students' English and math grades differ from each other. Compared to paired samples t tests, within-subjects ANOVAs are more flexible because they allow for multiple independent variables with two or more levels each.

2 × 2 Mixed Model ANOVAs

A mixed model ANOVA is a combination of a between-unit ANOVA and a within-unit ANOVA. It requires a minimum of two categorical independent variables, sometimes called factors, and at least one of these variables has to vary between-units and at least one of them has to vary within-units. The explanations that follow focus on the simplest possible mixed model ANOVA, a so-called 2 × 2 mixed model ANOVA: one dichotomous between-subjects variable and one dichotomous within-subjects variable. To better understand mixed model ANOVAs, consider the following research study.

A group of researchers is interested in comparing boys' and girls' grades in English and math. Let's assume they are predicting a gender difference (girls have better grades than boys) and they expect this gender difference to be greater in English than in math. In this example, there are two independent variables. The first is gender (boy vs. girl), a dichotomous between-subjects variable. The second is discipline (English vs. math), a dichotomous within-subjects variable. For ease of interpretation, let's assume that the data confirm the researchers' hypotheses.

The study just described has a classic 2 × 2 design, and its data can be analyzed with a two-way mixed model ANOVA. This data analytic approach allows researchers to test whether there are main effects for both gender and discipline. A main effect is the effect of a particular independent variable, averaging across all levels of the other independent variable(s). The data analytic approach also allows researchers to test whether there is an interaction between the two independent variables. An interaction is present when the effect of one independent variable is stronger at one level of the other independent variable than at the second level of that same independent variable. A mixed model ANOVA tests whether each of the three effects—the two main effects and the interaction effect—is statistically significant.

These three effects can be obtained with the following statistical models:

$$(Y_1 + Y_2)/2 = b_0 + b_1 X + e,$$

$$(Y_1 - Y_2) = b_0 + b_1 X + e,$$

where Y_1 is subjects' grades in English, Y_2 is subjects' grades in math, X is the dichotomous between-subjects variable (gender), and e refers to the residuals (the error) in the model. The term on the left side of the equations is simply the average (Equation 3) or the difference (Equation 4) of the grades.

The coefficient b_1 in Equation 3 represents the main effect of gender, the between-subjects independent variable. If b_1 in Equation 3 is statistically significant, one would conclude that girls on average have reliably higher or reliably lower grades than boys, regardless of discipline. The coefficient b_0 in Equation 4 estimates the effect of discipline, the within-subjects independent variable, for students with a score of zero on X (gender). If X is coded 1 and 2, then this coefficient is rather meaningless. However, if X is "centered" (i.e., coded -0.5

and +.5, or -1 and +1), then b_0 in Equation 4 represents the main effect of discipline. If it is statistically significant, one would conclude that the students, regardless of their gender, performed better in one of two disciplines. The coefficient b_1 in Equation 4 represents the interaction effect between gender and discipline. If this coefficient is statistically significant, one would conclude that the gender difference is greater for one of the two disciplines. The coefficient b_0 in Equation 3 is the grand mean (the average of all scores) and is usually not interpreted.

Note that many menu-based data analysis programs (like SPSS) will automatically center the dichotomous between-subjects variable (X) for the user when the appropriate module is chosen. When using other, more code-based programs, researchers may have to recode the between-subjects variable by hand to make sure it is centered prior to estimating the model described in Equation 4 if they want to interpret the main effect of the within-subject variable.

Advanced Mixed Model ANOVAs

Mixed model ANOVAs are not limited to dichotomous independent variables. For example, they can contain within-subjects independent variables with more than two levels. Imagine a group of researchers interested in comparing boys' and girls' grades in English, math, and biology. They are predicting a gender difference (girls have better grades than boys) and they expect this gender difference to be greater in English than in the other two disciplines (math and biology). Now, the within-subjects independent variable (discipline) has three levels (English, math, and biology).

In the case of such data, the study has a 2×3 factorial design that can also be analyzed with a mixed model ANOVA. The data analytic approach is the same as before examining two main effects and an interaction effect, but the within-subjects independent variable will most likely be examined with a specific contrast. Given that the researchers predict the gender difference to be greater in English than in the other two disciplines, the appropriate contrast would be 1, -.5, -.5 (which produces the same F and p values as the contrasts 2, -1, -1, and .67, -.33, -.33, respectively).

These main and interaction effects can be obtained with the following models:

$$(Y_1 + Y_2 + Y_3)/3 = b_0 + b_1 X + e,$$

$$(Y_1 - ((Y_2 + Y_3)/2)) = b_0 + b_1 X + e,$$

where Y_1 , Y_2 , X , and e have the same meaning as in Equations 3 and 4. Y_3 is students' grades in biology. The term on the left side of the equation is the average (Equation 5) or the weighted difference (Equation 6) of the grades.

The coefficient b_1 in Equation 5 represents the main effect of gender. It tests whether girls have on average reliably better or reliably worse grades than boys, regardless of discipline. The coefficient b_0 in Equation 6 corresponds to the effect of the within-subjects contrast. If this contrast is statistically significant, one would conclude that the students, regardless of their gender, have higher grades in English than in math and biology. The coefficient b_1 in Equation 6 describes the interaction between the within-subjects contrast and gender. If it is statistically significant, one would conclude that the gender difference is greater in English than in the other two disciplines. Like before, the coefficient b_0 in Equation 5, the grand

mean, is usually not interpreted.

Researchers may also decide to include covariates—sometimes called confounding variables or concomitants—in their analyses. These are variables that are not of primary interest to the study but may affect the outcome variable. For example, students' parental income can provide them with resources that may influence their grades. Thus, the researchers decide to measure parental income and to account for the effects of this variable in the statistical analysis. Here, a mixed model ANOVA with a covariate—called a mixed model analysis of covariance (or mixed model ANCOVA)—can be used to analyze the data. This approach allows researchers to examine the main effects of discipline and gender on grades, as well as the interaction between them, while statistically controlling for parental income.

The relevant effects can be obtained with the following statistical models:

$$(Y_1 + Y_2)/2 = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Z + e,$$

$$(Y_1 - Y_2) = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Z + e,$$

where Y_1 , Y_2 , X , and e have the same meaning as in Equations 3 and 4, and Z is parental income.

The coefficient b_1 in Equation 7 represents the main effect of gender, over and above the effect of parental income. The coefficient b_0 in Equation 8 represents the effect of discipline for students who have a score of 0 on both X and Z . Like before, this coefficient is in most cases rather meaningless if X and Z are uncentered. In order to be able to interpret b_0 , it is usually necessary to center both the dichotomous X (by recoding it into $-.5$ and $+.5$, or into -1 and $+1$) and the continuous Z (by “mean centering” it, i.e., by computing the average value of all scores and then subtracting this value from every participant's score). When both X and Z are centered, the coefficient b_0 in Equation 8 represents the main effect of test discipline for the participant with an average score on the covariate. If this coefficient is statistically significant, one would conclude that the students with an average parental income, regardless of their gender, have better grades in one of the two disciplines. The coefficient b_1 in Equation 8 is the interaction effect between discipline and gender when controlling for the effect of parental income. A significant b_1 in Equation 8 suggests that the gender difference is greater for one of the two disciplines.

Note that none of the data analysis programs, not even the menu-based ones, will automatically mean center the covariate for the user. It is thus important to manually mean center the covariate before including it in the analysis. A failure to do so leads to an incorrect interpretation of the main effect of the within-subjects variable in a mixed model ANCOVA (unless a score of 0 on the covariate is a theoretically meaningful value).

The mixed model ANOVA is a powerful analytic approach for examining data from complex research designs. It is useful to note that one of the most common 2×2 mixed model ANOVAs contains one manipulated within-subjects variable, and the between-subjects variable is the order in which the levels of the within-subjects variable were administered (subjects in one order condition first did Level 1 and then Level 2 of the within-subjects variable, whereas participants in the other order condition started out with Level 2 and then did Level 1). For more information on this model, refer to the entry on *Repeated Measures Designs* in this encyclopedia.

Another important issue to note is that researchers sometimes conduct a 2×2 mixed model ANOVA with pretest and posttest as the within-subjects variable. One should know that this is not always the best test. Statistical power can be increased by including the pretest as a covariate (i.e., by regressing the posttest on both the between-subjects variable and the pretest). However, this data analytic approach can be chosen only if certain conditions are satisfied (see the entry *Repeated Measures Designs* in this encyclopedia for more details).

Model Assumptions for Mixed Model ANOVAs

Mixed model ANOVAs must meet certain assumptions in order to generate unbiased estimates of the main and interaction effects. As with usual ANOVAs, one assumption is that the residuals in both the between-subjects model (Equation 3) and the within-subjects model (Equation 4) must be normally distributed. The second assumption is homogeneity of variances or homoscedasticity. This assumption holds that the two groups defined by the between-subjects variable have approximately the same error variance. Applying transformations to the data may correct violations of these assumptions.

Mixed model ANOVAs also have several assumptions that are specific to them. One of these is “homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices.” This assumption is satisfied when the pattern of intercorrelations among the various levels of the within-subjects independent variable(s) is consistent across groups of subjects defined by the levels of the between-subjects independent variable(s). The homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices assumption is tested using Box’s M statistic. If Box’s M returns a p value that is less than .001, then the variance-covariance assumption is violated. Violations of this assumption can be corrected for with data transformations.

The final model assumption of mixed model ANOVAs is “sphericity” and applies only to models including within-subjects variables with three or more levels. This assumption is satisfied if the variance of the difference scores for any two levels of the within-subjects independent variable is similar to the variance of the difference scores for any other two levels. Mauchly’s test of sphericity can be used to evaluate this assumption, and if it is significant at $p < .05$, the F and p values of the coefficients in the mixed model ANOVA should be adjusted using the Greenhouse-Geisser or the Huynh-Feldt corrections.

Extending Mixed Model ANOVAs to Linear Mixed Effects Models

An increasing number of researchers are analyzing data from studies with both within- and between-subjects independent variables as linear mixed effects models. In this approach, the unit of analysis is the observation rather than the subject. As a result, the data have to be in “long format” (one line per observation) rather than in “wide format” (one line per subject). Data files in the traditional wide format have to be restructured into long format before they can be submitted to a linear mixed effects model analysis.

When specified correctly and with complete data, the linear mixed effects model yields the same results (i.e., the same coefficients, the same F and p values) as the mixed model ANOVA. And yet, linear mixed effects models have numerous advantages. They are more flexible in that they allow researchers to analyze the effects of continuous within- and between-subjects variables. They have the ability to incorporate missing data directly (i.e., there is no need to delete incomplete cases or impute for missing values). They can account for multiple sources of nonindependence (e.g., when subjects react to the same set of items).

Finally, they allow researchers to relax the previously mentioned sphericity assumption under certain circumstances.

See also [Analysis of Covariance](#); [Analysis of Variance](#); [Multivariate Analysis of Variance](#); [Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance](#); [Repeated Measures Designs](#); [Two-Way Analysis of Variance](#)

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Further Readings

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