Wald's Identity

Implications for psychometric function, chronometric function, and Weber's law

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Introduction and road map

This tutorial is an attempt to supply the background for understanding a class of models known as diffusion – or random walk – to barrier. The model has been applied to a variety of decision problems that arise in quality control and psychology. Wald contributed the sequential probability ratio test, in which noisy evidence accumulates (or meanders) toward one of a pair of criteria. Stone and Laming were the first to apply this idea to perceptual decisions, and Roger Ratcliff is probably the most active modern champion. I was motivated to write this tutorial after reading Stephen Link's papers and book. Link championed the idea that such a model can account for a wide variety of observations in sensory psychology: speed-accuracy tradeoff, Weber's law, most of what we already know under the theory of signal detection, Fechner's and Stevens' laws concerning magnitude estimation, and so on. Link's ideas have much going for them. The object of this tutorial is not to reiterate what is in his book. Rather it is to provide a firm background in the mathematical foundations. Late in the tutorial, I spend some time deriving Weber's law and elaborating Link's argument. But the main thrust of the tutorial is on Wald's identity and especially the background in stochastic processes that is required. My real motivation in writing this tutorial is to bring my colleagues and students up to speed so that we can all work on the problem that fascinates me most right now: decisions among N>2 alternatives and the incorporation of prior probability and reward expectation in the decision process.

The organization of the tutorial is under revision. The main goal is to understand the derivation of Wald's identity and to recognize it as a martingale. To make sense of this, we must acquaint ourselves with the definition of martingales. To make sense of Wald's identity and use it, we must be comfortable with the moment generating function. Both of these topics fall outside the background of many neuroscientists. So we walk through this very slowly, building intuitions along the way. I take a long time to accomplish what Karlin & Taylor do in about two pages. I am also taking a more direct assault on Wald's identity. K and T get to Wald's identity by developing a general "trick" for making martingales using the eigenvectors (or eigenfunctions) of markov transition matrices (or functions). I only develop these concepts in the particular setting of the random walk. My approach is extremely intuitive, but it is a bit repetitious. If you don't want the long ride, see pp. 242-243 of K and T. I mention this to preempt any concern that this seems like a hard way to go about proving Wald's identity. Not only is this simple (once you get the hang of it), but it provides some deep understanding that lets you march right through response times!

In parts 2 and 3, we use Wald's identity to derive the psychometric function (accuracy) and the chronometric function (decision time), respectively. This turns out to be a piece of cake after part 1. In the final sections, we explore some
related topics. I plan to incorporate new sections on the PMF under asymmetric barriers and the CMF for each type of choice.

1. Wald's Identity

Notation and preliminaries
The outline goes as follows. First we state Wald’s identity as a martingale. It turns out that proving Wald’s identity can boil down to proving that a special sequence of random numbers is a martingale. The proof comes in two parts. The first part is the more difficult and also the more general. It is to see that eigenfunctions of the transition probability functions of a Markov chain can be used to create martingales. The second part requires showing that $e^{\lambda t}$ is just such an eigenfunction for the Markov process of partial sums, $x = Y_1 + \ldots + Y_n$.

I have adopted the usual convention of writing a moment generating function (mgf) as $M[\theta] = E[e^{\theta X}]$, where $E$ is expectation, $X$ is a random variable whose distribution possesses the mgf. Link puts a negative sign in the exponent. This leads to a nicer set of functions, but it is not the standard way to write the mgf. I will try to be clear in comparing the derived expressions to Link’s. It is usually a matter of a sign change on $\theta$.

1.1 What is a martingale?

A martingale is a stochastic process, meaning a sequence of random numbers, that defines a fair game. Suppose you have a process that gives the random sequence, $Y_0, Y_1, \ldots, Y_n$.

Apply some function to these values to obtain a new sequence, $X_0, X_1, \ldots, X_n$.

In principle, you can use the whole history of $Y_0, Y_n$ to make each $X_n$, but for our purposes, we will only work with functions that ignore history (i.e., Markov processes):

$$X_0 = f[Y_0], X_1 = f[Y_1], \ldots, X_n = f[Y_n]$$

We say that $X$ is a martingale with respect to the stochastic process that gave rise to $Y$ if and only if

$$\text{for all } n, \quad |E[X_n]| < \infty$$

$$E[X_{n+1} \mid Y_0, Y_1, \ldots, Y_n] = X_n$$

In words, whatever value the sequence of $X$'s has yielded up to the $n$th term, the expectation of the next term is just what has been attained to that point.
- Example

For example, if the $Y$ are iid random vars with mean 0, then if the new process describing $X_n$ is the sum of the $Y_0 \ldots Y_n$, then $X$ is a martingale. The sum meanders about in the form of a random walk or diffusion, but whatever the sum has become on the nth addition is the expectation of the process on the next step. This would not be the case if $E[Y] \neq 0$.

But we could make our function be

$$X_n = \sum_{i=1}^{n} Y_i - n E[Y]$$

(2)

to discount the affect of adding the mean of $Y$ at every step. We'll exploit this "undoing the effect of the incrementing operation" in a moment to construct Wald's martingale.

There is a convenient property of martingales that we will exploit. Since the expectations do not change, it turns out that if you stop the process based on some test, including an evaluation of the $Y$ or the sum of $Y_i$, the expectation of $X_n$ does not change.

- 1.2 What is a moment generating function?

Write this. Basic properties. Intuitions about products. Convexity. Introduce $\theta_1$ and show that it will be negative for positive means. Show an example using the gaussian or difference of poisons.

- Show $\theta_1$ for the normal distribution

$$npdf[x_-, \mu_-, \sigma_-] := \frac{e^{-(x-\mu)^2 / 2\sigma^2}}{\sqrt{2 \pi} \sigma}$$

Ensure that the pdf has area 1

```
Integrate[npdf[x, m, s], {x, -Infinity, Infinity}, Assumptions -> s > 0]
1
```

Moment generating function is expectation of $e^{\theta x}$

```
Integrate[Exp[\theta x] npdf[x, m, s], {x, -Infinity, Infinity}, Assumptions -> s > 0]
e^m \theta + \frac{e^{\theta^2 / 2}}{2}
```

Set this equal to 1 or take log and set equal to 0. The nonzero root is $\theta_1$
1.3 Wald's identity and Wald's martingale

Suppose $Y_0 = 0$ and $Y_1, Y_2, \ldots$ are independent identically distributed (iid) random variables with associated PDF, $g[Y]$, and moment generating function, $M[\theta]$

$$M[\theta] = E[e^{\theta Y}]$$
$$= \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} e^{\theta Y} g[Y] \, dY \quad (3)$$

I dropped the subscript on the $Y$ because the $Y$ are identically distributed. Generate a new list of random variables as follows.

$$W_0 = 1$$
$$W_n = M[\theta]^{-n} \, e^{\theta \sum_{i=0}^{n} Y_i} \quad (4)$$

We can also write the sum of the random variables as $S_n$.

$$W_n = M[\theta]^{-n} \, e^{\theta S_n} \quad (5)$$

Remember that $S_n$ is also a sequence of random numbers. It is a random walk, and we refer to it as a markov process of partial sums. It’s a markov process because $E[S_{n+1}]$ depends only on the values of $S_n$ and we say “partial sums” to remind ourselves that it is the sum up to $n$ terms. In the next section, we will show that the sequence, $W_0, W_1, \ldots, W_n$ is a martingale and that the expectation of $W_n$ is 1 for all $n$. Both statements are expressed in the following equation.

$$E[W_{n+1} \mid S_0, S_1, \ldots, S_n] = W_n = 1 \quad (6)$$

Wald's identity is usually written in terms of Equation 5.

$$E\left[\frac{e^{\theta S_n}}{M[\theta]^n}\right] = 1 \quad (7)$$
### 1.4 Derivation part 1

The process we wish to study is the random walk formed by accumulating random numbers. We will refer to the sum after each step n by $S_n$.

\[
S_0 = 0
\]
\[
S_1 = Y_1
\]
\[
S_2 = Y_1 + Y_2
\]
\[
S_n = Y_1 + Y_2 + ... + Y_n
\]

Notice that the $S_n$ form a sequence of random numbers. As mentioned above, it is a Markov process. We assume that the $Y_i$ are independent and that each is described by a probability density function, $g[Y]$, and moment generating function $M_Y[θ]$. Throughout this tutorial, we will write $M[θ]$ without a subscript to designate the MGF of the random variable, $Y$. It's important to keep track in your mind that the $Y$ are the increments in the steps that comprise the random walk.

Now generate a new stochastic process based on the $S_i$.

\[
X_n = f[S_n] = e^{θS_n}
\]

where $θ$ is any constant. We'll think about $θ$ as a variable later on. But for now, we can imagine that $θ$ is a particular value. So really, what we're generating is not a sequence of random numbers but a family of such sequences depending on what we fill in for $θ$. Don’t get hung up on this. It it bothers you, just assume $θ = 1$, but don’t drop it from the expressions. Let’s look at our new stochastic process

\[
X_0 = 1 \text{ because } S_0 = 0
\]
\[
X_1 = e^{θY_1} \text{ because } S_1 = Y_1
\]
\[
X_2 = e^{θ(Y_1+Y_2)} \text{ because } S_2 = Y_1 + Y_2
\]
\[
X_n = e^{θ(Y_1+Y_2+...+Y_n)} \text{ because } S_n = Y_1 + Y_2 + ... + Y_n
\]

In short, the $X_i$ comprise another stochastic process that we have spawned using the function, $f$. Suppose we have observed such a process to the $n^{th}$ step. That means that $X_n$ is known but $X_{n+1}$ is yet to be determined. What is the expectation of $X_{n+1}$, conditional on knowledge of $X_n$?
E \{X_{n+1} \mid X_n\} = E \{f[S_{n+1}] \mid S_n\} \quad (11)

Using the exponential function, f, this is

E \{X_{n+1} \mid X_n\} = E \{e^{S_{n+1}} \mid S_n\} \quad (12)

The conditional here reminds us that $S_n$ is known. The random variable $S_{n+1}$ can be decomposed into the part that is known and a random increment

$= E \{e^{S_n + Y_{n+1}}\} \quad (13)$

Take the nonrandom part out of the expectation.

$= e^{S_n} E \{e^Y\} \quad (14)$

I dropped the subscript on $Y$ because the random increments are always drawn from the same kind of distribution. They are iid. Notice that the expectation in this expression is the moment generating function, $M[\theta]$, associated with the random variable, $Y$.

E \{f[S_{n+1}] \mid S_n\} = M[\theta] f[S_n] \quad (15)

Remember, for any given value of $\theta$, the moment generating function, $M[\theta]$ is just a number. To make this more transparent, I’m going to substitute the constant $\lambda$ for $M[\theta]. This is just to make a point. It allows us to see something special about the function, $f$, that we are using to generate our random sequence.

E \{f[S_{n+1}]\} = \lambda f[S_n] \quad (16)

When we write things this way, we can understand why $f$ is called an eigenfunction and $\lambda$ (i.e., $M[\theta]$) an eigenvalue for the stochastic process (markov process of partial sums). Remember, we know $S_n$. The function, $f$, has this cool property that if you feed it the state of the stochastic process at step $n$, it spits out a number that, upon multiplication by $\lambda$, is the expectation of the stochastic process at the next step. It’s probably obvious where we’re heading with all this. With our eigenfunction $f[S_n] = e^{\theta S_n}$ in hand, we can create a martingale by undoing the multiplication by $\lambda$ that occurs with each step.

Let’s break this down by looking at the expectations for a few steps ($n$). Start before we take the first step. What’s the expectation of $f[S_0]$?

E \{e^{\theta S_0}\} = 1 \quad \text{because} \quad S_0 = 0 \quad (17)

That was easy. Let’s look at step $n=1$

E \{e^{\theta S_1}\} = M[\theta] \quad \text{because} \quad S_1 = Y_1. \quad \text{We might want to write this as} \quad (18)

E \{e^{\theta S_1}\} = \lambda

On to step $n=2$. What is $E \{e^{\theta S_2}\}$?

Recall that $E \{f[S_2] \mid S_1\} = \lambda f[S_1]$

That’s fine, but it assumes we know $S_1$. To get the expectation of $f[S_2]$, we need to average over all possible values for $S_1$. Let’s write this by taking a second expectation over all the possible $S_1$. I’ll indicate this by writing a subscript on the $E$ for expectation.
\[ E \{ e^{\theta S_1} \} = E_{S_1} \{ E \{ f[S_2] \mid S_1 \} \} \]
\[ = E_{S_1} \{ \lambda f[S_1] \} \]
\[ = \lambda E \{ f[S_1] \} \]
\[ = \lambda^2 \]  

That last step works because the expectation is just equation (18). Not to beat it to death, but before we get general, let's do one more step (n=3).

\[ E \{ e^{\theta S_2} \} = E_{S_2} \{ E \{ f[S_3] \mid S_2 \} \} \]
\[ = E_{S_2} \{ \lambda f[S_2] \} \]
\[ = \lambda E \{ f[S_2] \} \]
\[ = \lambda^3 \]  

Notice how we are exploiting the markov property. The random variable at step n depends only on the value it attained at step n - 1. Obviously, our eigenfunction, \( f \), is playing a key role here. And remember, \( \lambda \) is really the moment generating function evaluated at some value, \( \theta \). We may as well write things out for the \( n \)th step.

\[ E \{ e^{\theta S_n} \} = E_{S_{n-1}} \{ E \{ f[S_n] \mid S_{n-1} \} \} \]
\[ = E_{S_{n-1}} \{ \lambda f[S_{n-1}] \} \]
\[ = \lambda E \{ f[S_{n-1}] \} \]
\[ = \lambda^n \]  

That gives us Wald's identity.

\[ \lambda^{-n} E \{ e^{\theta S_n} \} = 1 \]  

although it is typically written with the constant inside the expectation

\[ E \left\{ \frac{e^{\theta S_n}}{M[\theta]^n} \right\} = 1 \]  

I substituted the mgf for \( \lambda \). I want to emphasize that (23) holds for any value of \( \theta \). We're going to pick a particular value in section 2.

- **A stochastic process resembling \( X_n \) is a martingale**

  I want to make a minor adjustment to our stochastic process from above. Recall that the stochastic process \( X_i \) was generated by taking the random sums (i.e., our random walk) and exponentiating. All I want to do now is divide by the eigenvalues we've been referring to as \( \lambda \) for convenience but which we know are really \( M[\theta] \). To be cute, I'll call this new stochastic process \( W_0, W_1, \ldots, W_n \)

\[ W_n = \lambda^{-n} f[S_n] = \frac{e^{\theta S_n}}{M[\theta]^n} \]
I wrote this two ways. The first expression makes it obvious that this stochastic process is generated using the eigenfunction and eigenvalue associated with the markov process of partial sums. The second version makes the connection to Wald’s identity. In fact, we already know that the \( E \{ W_n \} = 1 \) for all \( n \). But just for the heck of it, let’s prove that the stochastic process, \( W_0, W_1, \ldots, W_n \) is a martingale.

To prove this, we need to show that

\[
E \{ W_{n+1} \mid Y_0, Y_1, \ldots, Y_n \} = W_n
\]

Our \( W \) depends on the sums of the \( Y_i \). In other words, the \( S_t \) we’ve been talking about. Moreover, because the process is markov, we don’t need to write down the whole history. The most recent state covers everything we need to know about the process. So we need only convince ourselves that

\[
E \{ W_{n+1} \mid S_n \} = W_n
\]

From the definition of \( W \), we have

\[
E \{ W_{n+1} \mid S_n \} = E \{ \lambda^{-n} \mid e^{S_n} Y_{n+1} \mid S_n \}
\]

Using the same strategy as before, we will break \( S_{n+1} \) into the part we know (i.e., \( S_n \)) and the new random bit that got added on in the \( n+1 \) step.

\[
= E \{ \lambda^{-n} \mid e^{S_n + Y_{n+1}} \}
\]

\[
= (\lambda^{-n} e^{S_n}) \lambda^{-1} E \{ e^{Y_{n+1}} \}
\]

\[
= (\lambda^{-n} e^{S_n}) \lambda^{-1} \lambda
\]

\[
= W_n
\]

Let me walk you through those four lines. The first is just expressing \( S_{n+1} \) as the sum through the \( n \)th step plus the increment. The next step pulls all the non-random stuff out of the expectation. Remember, we’re assuming we know \( S_n \). I also grouped together in the parenthetical a term that you should recognize as equivalent to \( W_n \). That left a \( \lambda^{-1} \) straggling. To get to third line we just simplified the expectation. Like before, we recognize that there’s nothing special about the \((n+1)\)th increment. So we forget subscript from \( Y \). In fact, that expectation is just \( M[\theta] \). We’re using \( \lambda \) to represent \( M[\theta] \). So to be consistent, we write it that way. Now we can see that the \( \lambda \)’s outside the parentheses annihilate each another. That leaves \( W_n \), which completes the proof. It is worth pointing out that this annihilation of \( \lambda \)’s obscures the important fact that the constant, \( \theta \), in the exponential is the same constant that we use in argument to the moment generating function, \( M[\theta] \).
Summary

The cumulative sum of iid random variables, \( S_n = Y_1 + Y_2 + \ldots + Y_n \),
is a stochastic process that describes a random walk in discrete time steps, \( n \). We constructed a new stochastic process by transforming the \( S_n \). The transformation involves exponentiating \( S_n \) (times a constant) and dividing by another constant raised to the \( n^{th} \) power. The latter constant is the MGF associated with the \( Y \) variable that increments \( S_n \) at each step of the random walk. Actually it is the MGF evaluated at some value, \( \theta \). This \( \theta \) is the constant that multiplies \( S_n \) in the term \( e^{\theta S_n} \). The new stochastic process, \( W_t \), is a martingale whose expectation is 1. Because \( \{W_t\} \) is a martingale, we can stop it using any rule we want to apply without affecting the expectation. In other words, Wald's identity will hold for the sum even when we stop it using decision criteria.

2. From Wald's identity to the logistic response function

Consider the same random walk, \( S_n = Y_1 + Y_2 + \ldots + Y_n \) as above. But add the following decision rule. If \( S_n \) is between than some upper barrier value, \(+A\), and some lower barrier \(-B\), take another sample. Otherwise stop the process. Note that \( A \) and \( B \) are positive numbers. The idea is that if the path stops at the \(+A\) barrier, the process makes a decision in favor of proposition \'A'. If it stops by hitting the lower barrier, it makes a decision in favor of proposition \'B'.

Let's take it as given that the process will eventually stop. Perhaps I'll fill in the proof one day. Here, we need to recognize that the random walk is stochastic. Any particular instantiation of the stochastic process (random walk) is a path that could end at \(+A\) or \(-B\). In fact, we assume that when the process stops, the sum does not overshoot \(+A\) or \(-B\), but hits these values exactly. That's an important (and often questionable) assumption, but it certainly holds when the the values for the \( Y \) are tiny compared to the barrier heights. The stopping time or number of steps, \( n \), is a random value, which we will explore in the next section. In this section, let's focus on which barrier the path hits first, that is, the probability of making an \'A' versus a \'B' decision. Of course this depends on the random variables used for the increments and also on the values we choose for \( A \) and \( B \).

The stopped random walk, \( \hat{S}_n \), which I will denote with a hat, is either \(+A\) or \(-B\). It is a random number, but it's an easy one to work with. What is the mean (expectation) of \( \hat{S}_n \)? Let \( P_A \) be the probability that the process stops by hitting the upper barrier first. It's just a weighted sum of \(+A\) and \(-B\):

\[
E(\hat{S}_n) = P_A + (1 - P_A)(-B)
\]

This somewhat trivial random variable, \( \hat{S}_n \), also has a moment generating function. It's just a weighted sum also:

\[
M_{\hat{S}_n}[\theta] = E[e^{\theta \hat{S}_n}] = P_A e^{\theta A} + (1 - P_A) e^{\theta(-B)}
\]

Let's relate this expression to Wald's identity.

\[
E\left[\frac{e^{\theta S_n}}{M[\theta]^n}\right] = 1
\]

Because the term inside the expectation is a martingale, we know that this expectation is the same even if the process is stopped according to some rule, even a rule that is based on the observations of the stochastic process itself. This is the main virtue of martingales. We are exploiting the optional stopping theorem to add a hat to Wald's identity.
The expression holds for any particular choice of $\theta$.
But it would be nice to lose the denominator. So let's exploit the intuition we developed about the moment generating function. For a large class of distributions, $Y_i$, there exists a value for $\theta$ such that $M[\theta_1]=1$, where $\theta_1 \neq 0$. (Link uses $\theta^*$ to refer to this special value, $\theta_1$. The notation is problematic for mathematica; so I’m sticking with the subscript.) Note that when $\theta = \theta_1$, the denominator in Wald's identity disappears, leaving behind an expectation that looks something like the mgf for the stopped sum, $S_n$. In fact, it is not the moment generating function, but moment generating function evaluated at a particular value of its argument $\theta = \theta_1$.

\[
M_{S_n}[\theta_1] = E[e^{\theta_1 S_n}] = 1
\]  

(33)

We can now relate the two expressions for moment generating functions

\[
P_A e^{\theta_1 A} + (1 - P_A)e^{\theta_1 (-B)} = E[e^{\theta_1 S_n}] = 1
\]  

(34)

This leads to a simple expression of the probability of hitting the $A$ barrier first, i.e., the probability of a decision in favor of 'A'.

- **Use mathematica to simplify the algebra**

```math
Solve[{P_A e^{\theta_1 A} + (1 - P_A)e^{\theta_1 (-B)} == 1, P_A}]
```

\[
\begin{cases}
P_A \rightarrow -1 + e^{B \theta_1} \\
-1 + e^{A \theta_1 + B \theta_1}
\end{cases}
\]

Notice that when there is no drift, the probability of absorption is determined solely by geometry, as seen by taking the limit

\[
\text{Limit}
\left[
\frac{1 - e^{-B \theta_1}}{e^{A \theta_1} - e^{-B \theta_1}}, \theta_1 \to 0
\right]
\]

\[
\frac{B}{A + B}
\]

When $A=B$, we have symmetric diffusion.
Solve\[P_A e^{\theta_1 A} + (1 - P_A) e^{\theta_1 (-A)} = 1, P_A]\]
\[
\{\{P_A \rightarrow \frac{1}{1 + e^{A \theta_1}}\}\}
\]

which is recognized as a logistic function of the argument, \(-A \theta_1\)

FullSimplify\[
\frac{1 - e^{-A \theta_1}}{-e^{-A \theta_1} + e^{A \theta_1}}\]
\[
\frac{1}{1 + e^{A \theta_1}}
\]
The algebra is transparent once you see that the denominator can be factored into

\[
\text{Factor}[ -e^{-A \theta_1} + e^{A \theta_1}]
\]
\[
e^{-A \theta_1} (-1 + e^{A \theta_1}) (1 + e^{A \theta_1})
\]

We recognize that this is the same equation that arises in Brownian motion to symmetric barrier at A when the drift rate is \(\mu\) and variance is 1, because \(\theta_1 = -2 \mu / \sigma^2\) for the normal distribution. See RewardEquations_fromRoss (and below). Remember also that Link defines the mgf as \(E[e^{-\theta X}]\). That leads to a more standard looking logistic because of the negative exponent.

3. From Wald's identity to the response time function

To get the response time function, we need to solve for the number of steps for the accumulation, \(S_n = Y_1 + \ldots + Y_n\), to reach \(\pm A\). I know of three ways to show that the stopped process has an expectation,

\[E[S_n] = E[n] E[Y].\] (35)

One that does not use martingales can be found on p. 105 of Ross (2nd Edition). Another uses martingale based on the sum:

\[X_n = S_n - n E[Y], \quad E[X_n] = E[X_1] = 0\]

which gives the desired result in 1 step. I will use Wald's martingale because it is a little less obvious and because it's nice to see that the moment generating functions can really serve the purpose of generating moments. The key to the use of the martingales is that one can exploit the "optional stopping theorem," which states essentially, that if \(\{X_n\}\) is a martingale, then stopping the process at \(n=T\) does not change \(E[X_n]\). This seems pretty intuitive because \(E[X_n] = E[X_{n-1}] = X_0\). So start with Wald's martingale

\[E[M[\theta]^{-n} e^{\theta S_n}] = 1\]
and differentiate with respect to $\theta$.

- **Here's a little reminder about derivatives of products and the use of the chain rule:**

- **Returning to the derivation, the derivative with respect to $\theta$ is**

\[
E[e^{S \theta} S M[\theta]^{-n} - e^{S \theta} n M[\theta]^{-1-n} M'[\theta]] = 0
\]

Suppose we set $\theta = 0$. We know that $M[\theta] = 1$ (because $M[\theta]$ is the expectation of $e^{\theta Y}$) and most importantly, we know that the derivative of the mgf evaluated at 0 is the 1st moment, that is $E[Y]$.

\[
\begin{align*}
E[S - n E[Y]] &= 0 \\
E[S] - E[n] E[Y] &= 0 \\
E[S] &= E[n] E[Y]
\end{align*}
\]

which is what we obtained using the other methods. Rearranging, we see that expectation of the number of steps, $n$, for the sum of $Y$ to reach $\pm A$ is

\[
E[n] = \frac{E[S]}{E[Y]}
\]

(37)

The numerator, $E[S]$, is just the average stopping position. Since this is either $A$ or $-A$,

\[
E[S] = P_A A + (1 - P_A) (-A) \\
= (2 P_A - 1) A
\]

\[
E[n] = \frac{(2 P_A - 1) A}{\mu}
\]

(38)

Substitute the logistic function for $P_A = \frac{1}{1+e^{\theta A}}$. 

\[ E[n] = \frac{\left(\frac{2}{1 + e^{\theta_1 A}} - 1\right) A}{\mu} \]

\[ = \frac{1 - e^{\theta_1 A}}{1 + e^{\theta_1 A}} \left(\frac{A}{\mu}\right) \]

\[ = \left(\frac{e^{-\frac{\theta_1 A}{2}}}{e^{-\frac{\theta_1 A}{2}} + e^{\theta_1 A}}\right) \left(1 - e^{\theta_1 A}\right) \left(\frac{A}{\mu}\right) \]

\[ = -\text{Tanh} \left[ \frac{\theta_1 A}{2} \right] \left(\frac{A}{\mu}\right) \]

Note that for Brownian motion, we assume the \( Y \) are distributed as normal with mean, \( \mu \), and variance \( \sigma^2 \). In that case, \( \theta_1 = -\frac{2}{\sigma^2} \), using the standard definition of the mgf (i.e., the one we've been using here, not Link's). Therefore

\[ E[n] = \text{Tanh} \left[ \frac{\mu A}{\sigma^2} \right] \left(\frac{A}{\mu}\right) \]

- Some mathematica expressions to check the algebra above...

4. Weber's law from a Poisson difference

Link's ideas on this are mainly in Link Ch. 12, pp. 192ff. I think it would be helpful to step more carefully through the logic and the math. The logic behind the theory is similar to the approach one would take using the theory of signal detection. It may be helpful to expose the common set of ideas. That way we can see where Link's theory departs from SDT and appreciate its advantages. In both theories, we compare a base stimulus and a test stimulus. We assign internal representation of base and test using random variables and we consider the discriminability of the two signals or the detectability of the difference.
The formulation from Signal Detect Theory

Overview

Suppose the base stimulus, $S_{1L}$, gives rise to (a neural) signal whose mean intensity is $\mu_{1L} = L_1 \alpha$, where $\alpha$ is some kind of unit intensity value which scaled by $L_1$. To this base, we compare a second stimulus, $S_{1M}$. It gives rise to a signal whose mean intensity $\mu_{1M} = M_1 \alpha$. We can think of the first stimulus as a pedestal value and the second a pedestal plus an increment. The stimulus difference associated with the increment, $\Delta S_1$, gives rise to a difference in signals, $\Delta \mu_1 = \alpha (M_1 - L_1)$. To theorize about Weber’s law, we consider the size of this increment that is required to produce some criterion level of discriminability. We then do the same thing for a scaled version of the base stimulus. In that case we are comparing signals, $S_{2L}$ and $S_{2M}$, with mean intensities, $\mu_{2L} = L_2 \alpha$ and $\mu_{2M} = M_2 \alpha$. Weber’s law states that the criterion performance is achieved for increments in stimulus that scale with the baseline stimulus intensity. That is,

$$\frac{\alpha (M_1 - L_1)}{L_1 \alpha} = \frac{\alpha (M_2 - L_2)}{L_2 \alpha}$$

which implies that discriminability depends only on the ratio of the signal intensities

$$\frac{M_1}{L_1} = \frac{M_2}{L_2}.$$  

Our job is to explain why this would be true. In order to make statements about the discriminability of two signals, we have to specify (assume) something about the variability of the random signals.

Constant variance assumption

If we assume that all the signals are Normally distributed with means specified by the $\mu_{ij}$ and identical variance, we would require the same difference in mean intensity to produce equal discriminability. we cannot explain Weber’s law, $\Delta \mu_1 = \Delta \mu_2$. Under our scaling assumption, this implies

$$(M_1 - L_1) = (M_2 - L_2)$$

which cannot be true if (2) holds.

Clearly, the problem is the scaling assumption that the stimulus gives rise to an internal representation that is proportional to its intensity. One solution is to assume that the (neural) signals scale by the log of stimulus intensity. If $\mu_{ij} = \log S_{ij}$, then

$$\log (k S_{ij}) = \log (k) + \log (S_{ij})$$

So, one way SDT can give us Weber’s law is to assume a log transformation of the stimulus intensity into its neural signal and constant noise. What is worth noting is that SDT is not really achieving Weber’s law in this case, except by fiat. It gives us Weber’s law only by enforcing a log transformation at the level of stimulus encoding. In general, we think that the variance of neural signals is not constant but instead varies with mean intensity, and it is often the case that larger stimuli lead to proportionately larger neural responses. In that case, SDT simply fails to ex
- **Poisson assumption**

A more realistic formulation is that the variance of internal signals scales in some way with the mean value. Clearly, if that is the case, then the log transformation would not achieve Weber's law. In fact, we would need a larger increment than the one predicted by Weber's law because there would be more noise associated with the larger signals, hence the need for a larger separation of $\mu_{2M}$ from $\mu_{2L}$. Let's see how this plays out.

{I'm copying some of what I wrote above. I might move it here.}

Suppose the base stimulus, $S_{1L}$, gives rise to a (neural) signal whose mean intensity is $\mu_{1L} = L_1 \alpha$, where $\alpha$ is some kind of unit intensity value which scaled by $L_1$. To this base, we compare a second stimulus, $S_{1M}$. It gives rise to a signal whose mean intensity $\mu_{1M} = M_1 \alpha$. We can think of the first stimulus as a pedestal value and the second a pedestal plus an increment. The stimulus difference associated with the increment, $\Delta S_1$, gives rise to a difference in signals, $\Delta \mu_1 = \alpha (M_1 - L_1)$. To theorize about Weber’s law, we consider the size of this increment that is required to produce some criterion level of discriminability. We then do the same thing for a scaled version of the base stimulus. In that case we are comparing signals, $S_{2L}$ and $S_{2M}$, with mean intensities, $\mu_{2L} = L_2 \alpha$ and $\mu_{2M} = M_2 \alpha$.

If the $\mu_a$ are Poisson means, then SDT tells us that the discriminability of $S_{1M}$ from $S_{1L}$ is governed by the difference of the mean neural signals, $\alpha (M_1 - L_1)$, in relation to the mean uncertainty, $\sqrt{\alpha (M_1 + L_1)}$.

If $M_1 = w L_1$, the probability that a random draw $x_M$ is larger than $x_L$ is given by the function $pYgtX$, below. Notice that this function does not give us Weber’s law. We can also see this by deriving $D'$ as a function of the two Poisson rates. Clearly, $D'$ is not the same when the rates scale.

```plaintext
<< Statistics`DiscreteDistributions`

Begin by defining a joint Poisson surface

```plaintext
p1[x_, y_, r1_, r2_] :=
  (PDF[PoissonDistribution[r1], x])  (PDF[PoissonDistribution[r2], y])
```

The probability that the 2nd rv is greater than the 1st is given by

```plaintext
pYgtX[a_, b_, r1_, r2_] :=
  Sum[ p1[a, b, r1, r2], {a, 0, r1*10}, {b, a + 1, r2*10}] +
  0.5 (Sum[ p1[a, b, r1, r2], {a, 0, r1*10}, {b, a, a}])
```

where ties are equally likely to be classified as $a<b$ or $b<a$.

Verify that $pY gt X$ is 0.5 when the Poisson rates are identical.
When the 2nd rate is larger, the probability reflect this

\[
pYgtX[x, y, 5, 5] = 0.5
\]

But, when the rates are doubled, the probability changes, contrary to Weber's law.

\[
pYgtX[x, y, 6, 10] = 0.841312
\]

Examine Dprime for a pair of Poisson distributed RVs

\[
diffMean[r1_, r2_] := \text{Sum}[(x - y) p1[x, y, r1, r2], \{x, 0, 10 \text{ r1}\}, \{y, 0, 10 \text{ r2}\}]
\]
\[
diffVar[r1_, r2_] := \text{Sum}[(x - y)^2 p1[x, y, r1, r2], \{x, 0, 10 \text{ r1}\}, \{y, 0, 10 \text{ r2}\}] - (\text{diffMean}[r1, r2])^2
\]
\[
diffDprime[r1_, r2_] := \frac{\text{diffMean}[r1, r2]}{\sqrt{\text{diffVar}[r1, r2]}}
\]

\[
N[\text{diffDprime}[4, 3]] = 0.377964
\]

\[
N[\text{diffDprime}[8, 6]] = 0.534522
\]
The formulation from Wave Difference theory

Short digression: the moment generating function for the Poisson Distribution
Here is the development of Weber's law using Link's wave difference theory.

Suppose that signal 1 is the sum of L Poisson intensities, each parameterized by \( \alpha \). We know that this is just a Poisson rv with rate parameter \( L \alpha \)

\[
M_{1,L}[\theta] := e^{(e^\theta - 1)L \alpha}
\]

Suppose that signal 2 is the sum of M Poisson intensities, each parameterized by \( \alpha \). We know that this is just a Poisson rv with rate parameter \( M \alpha \)

\[
M_{1,M}[\theta] := e^{(e^\theta - 1)M \alpha}
\]

What is the mgf for the sum? It is the product

\[
M_{1,M}[\theta] M_{1,L}[\theta] = e^{(-1+e^\theta)L \alpha + (-1+e^\theta)M \alpha}
\]

We recognize that the mgf of the sum is the mgf of a Poisson distribution with parameter \((L+M)\alpha\)

\[
\text{Re}[L] > 0; \text{Re}[M] > 0; \alpha > 0; \\
\text{Simplify}\left[ \frac{(-1 + e^{-\theta}) L \alpha + (-1 + e^{-\theta}) M \alpha}{(-1 + e^{-\theta})(L + M) \alpha} \right] = 1
\]

What is the mgf for the difference variable? It is the product

\[
mgf_{\text{Diff}}[\theta] := M_{1,M}[\theta] M_{1,L}[-\theta] \\
\text{FullSimplify}[mgf_{\text{Diff}}[\theta]] = e^{(-1+e^\theta)L \alpha + (-1+e^\theta)M \alpha}
\]

\[
\text{Off[Solve::"ifun"]}; \text{Off[InverseFunction::"ifun"]}; \\
\text{Solve}[(-1 + e^\theta) L \alpha + (-1 + e^{-\theta}) M \alpha = 0, \theta]
\]

\[
\{[\theta \rightarrow 0], \{\theta \rightarrow \text{Log}\left[ \frac{M}{L} \right]\}\}
\]

Of course, the interesting solution here is the second one, the all important \( \theta_1 \)
The probability of a particular choice is governed by the logistic function with parameter, $A_{\theta_1}$.

\[
p = \frac{1}{1 + e^{A_{\theta_1}}}
\]

And this demonstrates that we will get the same proportion of choices for the same ratio, $\frac{M}{L}$, independent of $\alpha$.

## 5. Background appendices

### Transition functions for Markov Processes

**Using an eigenfunction of a Markov process to create a martingale?**

- **Start with an eigenvector of a transition matrix**

  If $P$ is a transition matrix with states in the rows, then $\vec{v}$ is a right eigenvector of $P$ if

  \[ \lambda \vec{v} = P \vec{v} \]

  where $\lambda$ is a constant (eigenvalue).

  Karlin writes this so that we can recognize $f$ as a function

  \[ \lambda f[i] = \sum_j P_{ij} f[j] \tag{40} \]

  Notice that the right side is just $P \vec{f}$

  The claim is that if $Y_0, Y_1, ..., Y_n$ is a Markov chain with transition probability matrix, $P$, then

  \[ X_n = \lambda^{-n} f[Y_n] \]

  is a martingale. The proof is pretty simple:

  \[
  E[X_{n+1} \mid Y_0, ..., Y_n] = E[\lambda^{-n+1} f[Y_{n+1}] \mid Y_0, ..., Y_n] = \lambda^{-n} \lambda^{-1} E[f[Y_{n+1}] \mid Y_n]
  \]

  simply by substituting the definition of $X_n$ and applying the

  Markov property. The next step contains funny terminology (the $P_{\tau_{x,i}}$ term),
\[ = \lambda^{n} \lambda^{-1} \sum_{j} P_{Y_{n}, \mathcal{J}[j]} \]

and is worthy of a little thought. The conditional \( Y_{n}, \mathcal{J}[j] \) tells us that we are in the \( Y_{n} \) state. That tells us which row to look at in \( P \). The values in this row add up to 1. They are a probability function. So, to find the expectation of \( f \) after the transition, we simply weigh the elements of \( f \) by the probabilities of going to each of the states. This gives us \( E[f[Y_{n+1}]] \).

With this expression in hand, we make the obvious substitution using the fact the definition of \( f \):

\[ = \lambda^{n} f[Y_{n}] = X_{n} \]

which completes the proof.

**Moment generating functions that possess \( \theta_{1} \) (Link's \( \theta' \))**

I plan on adding to this section. As of July 4, 2003, I show that the mgf for a Poisson RV does not possess \( \theta_{1} \), but the difference of two Poisson RVs does. See matlab tutorial momentGeneratingFuncTutorial.m

The mgf for a Poisson RV. The argument \( \alpha \) is the rate function or mean, which we see from the derivative at 0

```math
\text{Unset}\{\alpha\}
\text{g}[x_, \alpha_] := \text{Exp}[\alpha (\text{Exp}[x] - 1)]
\text{g}[\theta]
\text{g}'[0]
\exp(-1+\theta) \alpha
```

Notice that it does not possess a nonzero root at \( \theta=1 \)
The mgf for a difference of 2 Poisson rvs. The rate is $\alpha-\beta$. You can play around to appreciate that the slope at 0 reflects the difference. Notice that the $\theta_1$ term is more negative, the larger the expected difference. For Link, the opposite sign convention leads to more positive $\theta_1$ and a logistic psychometric function with $1/(1+\exp(-\theta_1 A))$.

```math
Unset[h]; Unset[\alpha]; Unset[\beta]; Unset[a]; Unset[b];
h[x_, \alpha_, \beta_] := \exp[\alpha (\exp[x] - 1) + \beta (\exp[-x] - 1)]
h[\theta, a, b]
h'[0, 2, 1]
```

```math
\exp(\beta - (1 + e^{-\theta}) + a (1 + e^\theta))
```

```math
h'[0, 2, 1]
```

```math
\exp(\beta - (1 + e^{-\theta}) + a (1 + e^\theta))
```
Plot[{h[5, 5, 5], h[4, 3], h[10, 8], h[3, 1]},
     {x, -1, 2}, PlotStyle -> {RGBColor[1, 0, 0], RGBColor[0, 1, 0],
     RGBColor[0, 0, 1], RGBColor[.5, .3, .1]}, PlotRange -> {0, 4}]