

The slope of a line

Suppose for $n > 2$, $(x_1, y_1), \dots, (x_n, y_n)$ are distinct points on the line $y = mx + c$. The slope can be expressed in terms of the x 's and y 's in many ways, including

$$m = \frac{y_j - y_i}{x_j - x_i}, \quad 1 \leq i \neq j \leq n$$

Define the means

$$\bar{x} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n x_i, \quad \bar{y} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n y_i$$

It can be checked that (\bar{x}, \bar{y}) is on the line. Hence for any i with $x_i \neq \bar{x}$,

$$m = \frac{y_i - \bar{y}}{x_i - \bar{x}}$$

Notice that the means are invariant to any reordering of the points. For instance, if we swap (x_1, y_1) with (x_n, y_n) , the formulae for \bar{x} and \bar{y} remain the same, but the above formulae for m do not.

Question: Is there an invariant formula for m ?

If for every i , $x_i \neq \bar{x}$, it seems feasible to try

$$m = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})}{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})}$$

Can you see why this does not work?