

About lies and other statistics

How to use the normal distribution?

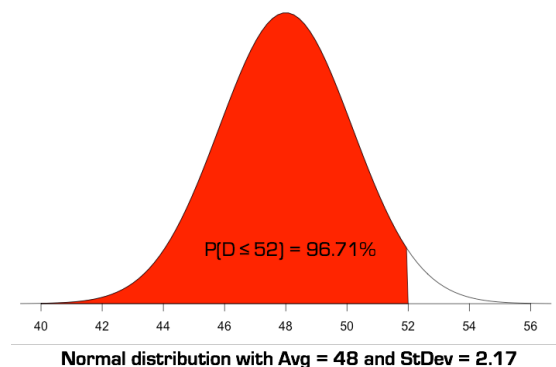


“There are three types of lies - lies, damn lies, and statistics.” (Benjamin Disraeli)

A PERT ANALYSIS

In a PERT analysis, you must calculate average durations and standard deviations (remember that you should calculate the standard deviations only for the activities on the critical path) and then you end up with a total expected project duration (further referred to as “Avg”) and its standard deviation (further referred to as “StDev”) that follows a normal distribution.

Example. Assume a project with Avg = 48 weeks and a StDev = 2.17 weeks (just like the Suriname project). These values have been calculated using a PERT analysis and won't be explained here. The normal distribution for this example project then looks as follows:



The question is now: what do you do with these Avg and StDev values? In other words, how do you calculate deadlines and service levels (or anything else if you wish) using the dark secrets of the normal distribution? Let me show how!

THE NORMAL DISTRIBUTION

Below you find how you should use the normal distribution:

Example question 1. What is the probability that the duration for the project is lower than 52 weeks?

This question boils down to the calculation of the probability that the duration (call it D) is smaller than 52:

Calculate $P[D \leq 52] = ?$ knowing that D follows a normal distribution (with Avg = 48 and StDev = 2.17).

Going back to your knowledge about statistics, you should know that you have to transform this normal distribution with an Avg = 48 and StDev = 2.17 into a standardised normal distribution (which has an average of 0 and standard deviation of 1) using the following formula (this is called the z-value of a standardised normal distribution):

$$z = (D - \text{Avg}) / \text{StDev}$$

In our example, $z = (D - 48) / 2.17 = 1.84$.

If you look in the normal table (first column 1.8 and first row 0.04), then you find that this is equal to 96.71% (the probabilities are given in the body of the table).

So the probability that our example project finishes before week 52 is equal to 96.71%.

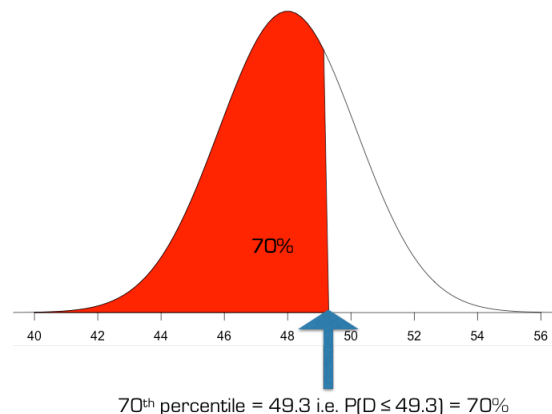
That's easy! Isn't it?

Example question 2. Which project deadline should you promise to the client such that you deliver a service level of 70%?

This question now starts with a probability (70%), so now you should look into the body of the table (since they contain probabilities) and search for the z value that corresponds to a probability of 70%. This z is equal to 0.53.

We know that the formula for the z value is $z = (D - \text{Avg}) / \text{StDev}$, so then you have $0.53 = (D - 48) / 2.17$ which gives you after some basic calculations $D = 0.53 * 2.17 + 48 = 49.3$ weeks.

So the deadline that you should promise to your client to guarantee a service level of 70% is equal to 49.3 weeks. I should promise 50 weeks to be sure!



Technical note. If you want to use the normal distribution to compare projects, than you should understand how to calculate averages and standard deviations of two normal distributions.

Example. Assume that you have a project 1 that follows a normal distribution with Avg_1 and StDev_1 and a second project 2 that follows a normal distribution with Avg_2 and StDev_2

Suppose that you have to calculate the difference of the two normal distributions for the two projects, than this difference also follows a normal distribution with an average AvgDiff and a standard deviation StDevDiff , with the following properties:

Property 1. The expected value of the difference is equal to the difference of the expected values, or $\text{AvgDiff} = \text{Avg}_1 - \text{Avg}_2$ (that's easy and intuitive).

Property 2. The standard deviation of a difference is equal to the square root of the sum of the squared standard deviations, or $\text{StDevDiff} = \text{SQRT}(\text{StDev}_1^2 + \text{StDev}_2^2)$. I know that this is not intuitive, but yes, you should sum them, not subtract them to find the difference! These are the dark secrets of statistics. But it's important to know these secrets in our data-driven world!

More information on how to use the normal distribution can be found at www.or-as.be/downloads (go to statistical background).

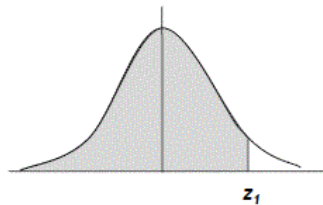
That's all folks!



APPENDIX. TABLE FOR THE STANDARDISED NORMAL DISTRIBUTION

A table for the standardised normal distribution can be found anywhere [Google it!] but below you find one that is easy to use.

Standard Normal Distribution



$$p(z \leq z_1) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} \int_{-\infty}^{z_1} e^{-\frac{1}{2}z^2} dz$$

| z_1 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.09 |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 0.0 | 0.5000 | 0.5040 | 0.5080 | 0.5120 | 0.5160 | 0.5199 | 0.5239 | 0.5279 | 0.5319 | 0.5359 |
| 0.1 | 0.5398 | 0.5438 | 0.5478 | 0.5517 | 0.5557 | 0.5596 | 0.5636 | 0.5675 | 0.5714 | 0.5753 |
| 0.2 | 0.5793 | 0.5832 | 0.5871 | 0.5910 | 0.5948 | 0.5987 | 0.6026 | 0.6064 | 0.6103 | 0.6141 |
| 0.3 | 0.6179 | 0.6217 | 0.6255 | 0.6293 | 0.6331 | 0.6368 | 0.6406 | 0.6443 | 0.6480 | 0.6517 |
| 0.4 | 0.6554 | 0.6591 | 0.6628 | 0.6664 | 0.6700 | 0.6736 | 0.6772 | 0.6808 | 0.6844 | 0.6879 |
| 0.5 | 0.6915 | 0.6950 | 0.6985 | 0.7019 | 0.7054 | 0.7088 | 0.7123 | 0.7157 | 0.7190 | 0.7224 |
| 0.6 | 0.7257 | 0.7291 | 0.7324 | 0.7357 | 0.7389 | 0.7422 | 0.7454 | 0.7486 | 0.7517 | 0.7549 |
| 0.7 | 0.7580 | 0.7611 | 0.7642 | 0.7673 | 0.7704 | 0.7734 | 0.7764 | 0.7794 | 0.7823 | 0.7852 |
| 0.8 | 0.7881 | 0.7910 | 0.7939 | 0.7967 | 0.7995 | 0.8023 | 0.8051 | 0.8078 | 0.8106 | 0.8133 |
| 0.9 | 0.8159 | 0.8186 | 0.8212 | 0.8238 | 0.8264 | 0.8289 | 0.8315 | 0.8340 | 0.8365 | 0.8389 |
| 1.0 | 0.8413 | 0.8438 | 0.8461 | 0.8485 | 0.8508 | 0.8531 | 0.8554 | 0.8577 | 0.8599 | 0.8621 |
| 1.1 | 0.8643 | 0.8665 | 0.8686 | 0.8708 | 0.8729 | 0.8749 | 0.8770 | 0.8790 | 0.8810 | 0.8830 |
| 1.2 | 0.8849 | 0.8869 | 0.8888 | 0.8907 | 0.8925 | 0.8944 | 0.8962 | 0.8980 | 0.8997 | 0.9015 |
| 1.3 | 0.9032 | 0.9049 | 0.9066 | 0.9082 | 0.9099 | 0.9115 | 0.9131 | 0.9147 | 0.9162 | 0.9177 |
| 1.4 | 0.9192 | 0.9207 | 0.9222 | 0.9236 | 0.9251 | 0.9265 | 0.9279 | 0.9292 | 0.9306 | 0.9319 |
| 1.5 | 0.9332 | 0.9345 | 0.9357 | 0.9370 | 0.9382 | 0.9394 | 0.9406 | 0.9418 | 0.9429 | 0.9441 |
| 1.6 | 0.9452 | 0.9463 | 0.9474 | 0.9484 | 0.9495 | 0.9505 | 0.9515 | 0.9525 | 0.9535 | 0.9545 |
| 1.7 | 0.9554 | 0.9564 | 0.9573 | 0.9582 | 0.9591 | 0.9599 | 0.9608 | 0.9616 | 0.9625 | 0.9633 |
| 1.8 | 0.9641 | 0.9649 | 0.9656 | 0.9664 | 0.9671 | 0.9678 | 0.9686 | 0.9693 | 0.9699 | 0.9706 |
| 1.9 | 0.9713 | 0.9719 | 0.9726 | 0.9732 | 0.9738 | 0.9744 | 0.9750 | 0.9756 | 0.9761 | 0.9767 |
| 2.0 | 0.9772 | 0.9778 | 0.9783 | 0.9788 | 0.9793 | 0.9798 | 0.9803 | 0.9808 | 0.9812 | 0.9817 |
| 2.1 | 0.9821 | 0.9826 | 0.9830 | 0.9834 | 0.9838 | 0.9842 | 0.9846 | 0.9850 | 0.9854 | 0.9857 |
| 2.2 | 0.9861 | 0.9864 | 0.9868 | 0.9871 | 0.9875 | 0.9878 | 0.9881 | 0.9884 | 0.9887 | 0.9890 |
| 2.3 | 0.9893 | 0.9896 | 0.9898 | 0.9901 | 0.9904 | 0.9906 | 0.9909 | 0.9911 | 0.9913 | 0.9916 |
| 2.4 | 0.9918 | 0.9920 | 0.9922 | 0.9925 | 0.9927 | 0.9929 | 0.9931 | 0.9932 | 0.9934 | 0.9936 |
| 2.5 | 0.9938 | 0.9940 | 0.9941 | 0.9943 | 0.9945 | 0.9946 | 0.9948 | 0.9949 | 0.9951 | 0.9952 |
| 2.6 | 0.9953 | 0.9955 | 0.9956 | 0.9957 | 0.9959 | 0.9960 | 0.9961 | 0.9962 | 0.9963 | 0.9964 |
| 2.7 | 0.9965 | 0.9966 | 0.9967 | 0.9968 | 0.9969 | 0.9970 | 0.9971 | 0.9972 | 0.9973 | 0.9974 |
| 2.8 | 0.9974 | 0.9975 | 0.9976 | 0.9977 | 0.9977 | 0.9978 | 0.9979 | 0.9979 | 0.9980 | 0.9981 |
| 2.9 | 0.9981 | 0.9982 | 0.9982 | 0.9983 | 0.9984 | 0.9984 | 0.9985 | 0.9985 | 0.9986 | 0.9986 |
| 3.0 | 0.9987 | 0.9987 | 0.9987 | 0.9988 | 0.9988 | 0.9989 | 0.9989 | 0.9989 | 0.9990 | 0.9990 |
| 3.1 | 0.9990 | 0.9991 | 0.9991 | 0.9991 | 0.9992 | 0.9992 | 0.9992 | 0.9992 | 0.9993 | 0.9993 |
| 3.2 | 0.9993 | 0.9993 | 0.9994 | 0.9994 | 0.9994 | 0.9994 | 0.9994 | 0.9995 | 0.9995 | 0.9995 |
| 3.3 | 0.9995 | 0.9995 | 0.9995 | 0.9996 | 0.9996 | 0.9996 | 0.9996 | 0.9996 | 0.9996 | 0.9997 |
| 3.4 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9997 | 0.9998 |
| 3.5 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 |
| 3.6 | 0.9998 | 0.9998 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 |
| 3.7 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 |
| 3.8 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 | 0.9999 |
| 3.9 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 |