histogram — Histograms for continuous and categorical variables

Description

histogram draws histograms of varname, which is assumed to be the name of a continuous variable unless the discrete option is specified.

hist is a synonym for histogram.

Quick start

Histogram of v1

histogram v1

Add a normal density curve to the graph

histogram v1, normal

Add a kernel density estimate to the graph

histogram v1, normal kdensity

Add “My Title” as the title of the graph

histogram v1, normal kdensity title("My Title")

Specify the number of bins as 10

histogram v1, bin(10)

Specify the width of the bins as 2

histogram v1, width(2)

Specify that v2 should be treated as discrete

histogram v2, discrete

As above, but with narrower bars and space between the bars

histogram v2, discrete barwidth(.8)

Add labels to the bars on the x axis

histogram v2, discrete barwidth(.8) xlabel(1 "Category 1" /// 2 "Category 2" 3 "Category 3" 4 "Category 4")

Show frequencies on the y axis

histogram v1, frequency

Show percentages on the y axis

histogram v1, percent

Produce histograms for each value of categorical variable catvar

histogram v1, by(catvar)

As above, but with histograms arranged in a single column

histogram v1, by(cvar, cols(1))
Menu

Graphics > Histogram

Syntax

```
histogram varname [if] [in] [weight] [, [continuous_opts | discrete_opts] options ]
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>continuous_opts</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>bin(#)</code></td>
<td>set number of bins to #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>width(#)</code></td>
<td>set width of bins to #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>start(#)</code></td>
<td>set lower limit of first bin to #</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>discrete_opts</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>discrete</code></td>
<td>specify that data are discrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>width(#)</code></td>
<td>set width of bins to #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>start(#)</code></td>
<td>set theoretical minimum value to #</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>options</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td><code>density</code></td>
<td>draw as density; the default</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>fraction</code></td>
<td>draw as fractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>frequency</code></td>
<td>draw as frequencies</td>
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<td><code>percent</code></td>
<td>draw as percentages</td>
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<td><code>bar_options</code></td>
<td>rendition of bars</td>
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<tr>
<td><code>binrescale</code></td>
<td>recalculate bin sizes when by() is specified</td>
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<tr>
<td><code>addlabels</code></td>
<td>add height labels to bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>addlabopts(marker_label_options)</code></td>
<td>affect rendition of labels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Density plots

- `normal` to add a normal density to the graph
- `normopts(line_options)` to affect rendition of normal density
- `kdensity` to add a kernel density estimate to the graph
- `kdenopts(kdensity_options)` to affect rendition of kernel density

Add plots

- `addplot(plot)` to add other plots to the histogram

Y axis, X axis, Titles, Legend, Overall, By

- `twoway_options` any options documented in [G-3] `twoway_options`

`fweights` are allowed; see [U] 11.1.6 `weight`.
Options

Options are presented under the following headings:

- Options for use in the continuous case
- Options for use in the discrete case
- Options for use in the continuous and discrete cases

Options for use in the continuous case

\[ \text{Main} \]

\( \text{bin(#)} \) and \( \text{width(#)} \) are alternatives. They specify how the data are to be aggregated into bins: \( \text{bin()} \) by specifying the number of bins (from which the width can be derived) and \( \text{width()} \) by specifying the bin width (from which the number of bins can be derived).

If neither option is specified, results are the same as if \( \text{bin(k)} \) had been specified, where

\[ k = \min\{\sqrt{N}, \frac{10\ln(N)}{\ln(10)}\} \]

and where \( N \) is the (weighted) number of observations.

\( \text{start(#)} \) specifies the theoretical minimum of \( \text{varname} \). The default is \( \text{start(m)} \), where \( m \) is the observed minimum value of \( \text{varname} \).

Specify \( \text{start()} \) when you are concerned about sparse data, for instance, if you know that \( \text{varname} \) can have a value of 0, but you are concerned that 0 may not be observed.

\( \text{start(#)} \), if specified, must be less than or equal to \( m \), or else an error will be issued.

Options for use in the discrete case

\[ \text{Main} \]

discrete specifies that \( \text{varname} \) is discrete and that you want each unique value of \( \text{varname} \) to have its own bin (bar of histogram).

\( \text{width(#)} \) is rarely specified in the discrete case; it specifies the width of the bins. The default is \( \text{width(d)} \), where \( d \) is the observed minimum difference between the unique values of \( \text{varname} \).

Specify \( \text{width()} \) if you are concerned that your data are sparse. For example, in theory \( \text{varname} \) could take on the values, say, 1, 2, 3, ..., 9, but because of the sparseness, perhaps only the values 2, 4, 7, and 8 are observed. Here the default width calculation would produce \( \text{width(2)} \), and you would want to specify \( \text{width(1)} \).

\( \text{start(#)} \) is also rarely specified in the discrete case; it specifies the theoretical minimum value of \( \text{varname} \). The default is \( \text{start(m)} \), where \( m \) is the observed minimum value.

As with \( \text{width()} \), specify \( \text{start(#)} \) if you are concerned that your data are sparse. In the previous example, you might also want to specify \( \text{start(1)} \). \( \text{start()} \) does nothing more than add white space to the left side of the graph.

The value of \# in \( \text{start()} \) must be less than or equal to \( m \), or an error will be issued.
Histograms for continuous and categorical variables

Options for use in the continuous and discrete cases

Options for use in the continuous and discrete cases

Main

density, fraction, frequency, and percent specify whether you want the histogram scaled to density units, fractional units, frequencies, or percentages. density is the default.

density scales the height of the bars so that the sum of their areas equals 1.

fraction scales the height of the bars so that the sum of their heights equals 1.

frequency scales the height of the bars so that each bar’s height is equal to the number of observations in the category. Thus the sum of the heights is equal to the total number of observations.

percent scales the height of the bars so that the sum of their heights equals 100.

bar_options are any of the options allowed by graph twoway bar; see [G-2] graph twoway bar.

One of the most useful bar_options is barwidth(#), which specifies the width of the bars in varname units. By default, histogram draws the bars so that adjacent bars just touch. If you want gaps between the bars, do not specify histogram’s width() option—which would change how the histogram is calculated—but specify the bar_option barwidth() or the histogram option gap, both of which affect only how the bar is rendered.

The bar_option horizontal cannot be used with the addlabels option.

binrescale specifies that bin size and plot range be recalculated for each group when by() is specified. If normal is specified, the mean and standard deviation of each overlaid normal density plot are recalculated in each group. Similarly, if kdensity is specified, the scaling of the overlaid kernel density plot is recalculated in each group.

addlabels specifies that the top of each bar be labeled with the density, fraction, or frequency, as determined by the density, fraction, and frequency options.

addlabopts(marker_label_options) specifies how to render the labels atop the bars. See [G-3] marker_label_options. Do not specify the marker_label_option mlabel(varname), which specifies the variable to be used; this is specified for you by histogram.

addlabopts() will accept more options than those documented in [G-3] marker_label_options. All options allowed by twoway scatter are also allowed by addlabopts(); see [G-2] graph twoway scatter. One particularly useful option is yvarformat(); see [G-3] advanced_options.

Density plots

normal specifies that the histogram be overlaid with an appropriately scaled normal density. The normal will have the same mean and standard deviation as the data.

normopts(line_options) specifies details about the rendition of the normal curve, such as the color and style of line used. See [G-2] graph twoway line.

kdensity specifies that the histogram be overlaid with an appropriately scaled kernel density estimate of the density. By default, the estimate will be produced using the Epanechnikov kernel with an “optimal” half-width. This default corresponds to the default of kdensity; see [R] kdensity. How the estimate is produced can be controlled using the kdenopts() option described below.

kdenopts(kdensity_options) specifies details about how the kernel density estimate is to be produced along with details about the rendition of the resulting curve, such as the color and style of line used. The kernel density estimate is described in [G-2] graph twoway kdensity. As an example, if you wanted to produce kernel density estimates by using the Gaussian kernel with optimal
half-width, you would specify `kdenopts(gauss)` and if you also wanted a half-width of 5, you would specify `kdenopts(gauss width(5))`.

Add plots

`addplot(plot)` allows adding more `twoway` plots to the graph; see `[G-3] addplot_option`.

Y axis, X axis, Titles, Legend, Overall, By

`tikway_options` are any of the options documented in `[G-3] twoway_options`. This includes, most importantly, options for titling the graph (see `[G-3] title_options`), options for saving the graph to disk (see `[G-3] saving_option`), and the `by()` option, which will allow you to simultaneously graph histograms for different subsets of the data (see `[G-3] by_option`).

Remarks and examples

Remarks are presented under the following headings:

- Histograms of continuous variables
- Overlaying normal and kernel density estimates
- Histograms of discrete variables
- Use with by()
- Video example

For an example of editing a histogram with the Graph Editor, see Pollock (2011, 29–31).

Histograms of continuous variables

`histogram` assumes that the variable is continuous, so you need type only `histogram` followed by the variable name:

```
. use https://www.stata-press.com/data/r17/sp500
  (S&P 500)
. histogram volume
  (bin=15, start=4103, width=1280.3533)
```

The small values reported for density on the y axis are correct; if you added up the area of the bars, you would get 1. Nevertheless, many people are used to seeing histograms scaled so that the bar heights sum to 1,
and others are used to seeing histograms so that the bar height reflects the number of observations,

```
. histogram volume, frequency
(bin=15, start=4103, width=1280.3533)
```

Regardless of the scale you prefer, you can specify other options to make the graph look more impressive:
For an explanation of the `xaxis()` option—it created the upper and lower $x$ axis—see [G-3] `axis_choice_options`. For an explanation of the `ylabel()` and `xlabel()` options, see [G-3] `axis_label_options`. For an explanation of the `subtitle()` and `note()` options, see [G-3] `title_options`.

### Overlaying normal and kernel density estimates

Specifying `normal` will overlay a normal density over the histogram. It would be enough to type

```
    . histogram volume, normal
```

but we will add the option to our more impressive rendition:

```
    . summarize volume
    Variable |    Obs |   Mean  |  Std. dev. |   Min |     Max
    --------|-------|--------|------------|------|-------
    volume  | 248   | 12320.68 |     2585.929 | 4103 |  23308.3
```

Overlaying normal and kernel density estimates
. histogram volume, freq normal
> xaxis(1 2)
> ylabel(0(10)60, grid)
> xlabel(12321 "mean"
> 9735 "-1 s.d."
> 14907 "+1 s.d."
> 7149 "-2 s.d."
> 17493 "+2 s.d."
> 20078 "+3 s.d."
> 22664 "+4 s.d."
> , axis(2) grid gmax)
> xtitle("", axis(2))
> subtitle("S&P 500, January 2001 - December 2001")
> note("Source: Yahoo! Finance and Commodity Systems, Inc.")

If we instead wanted to overlay a kernel density estimate, we could specify \texttt{kdensity} in place of \texttt{normal}.

**Histogrames of discrete variables**

Specify \texttt{histogram}'s discrete option when you wish to treat the data as discrete—when you wish each unique value of the variable to be assigned its own bin. For instance, in the automobile data, \texttt{mpg} is a continuous variable, but the mileage ratings have been measured to integer precision. If we were to type

. use https://www.stata-press.com/data/r17/auto
(1978 automobile data)
. histogram mpg
(bin=8, start=12, width=3.625)

\texttt{mpg} would be treated as continuous and categorized into eight bins by the default number-of-bins calculation, which is based on the number of observations, 74.
Adding the `discrete` option makes a histogram with a bin for each of the 21 unique values.

```stata
.histogram mpg, discrete
(start=12, width=1)
```

Just as in the continuous case, the $y$ axis was reported in density, and we could specify the `frequency` or `fraction` options if we wanted it to be reported differently. Below, we specify `frequency`, we specify `addlabels` to add a report of frequencies printed above the bars, we specify `ylabel(,grid)` to add horizontal grid lines, and we specify `xlabel(12(2)42)` to label the values 12, 14, ..., 42 on the $x$ axis:

```stata
.histogram mpg, discrete freq addlabels ylabel(,grid) xlabel(12(2)42)
(start=12, width=1)
```
**Use with by()**

*histogram* may be used with *graph twoway’s* by(); for example,

```
. use https://www.stata-press.com/data/r17/auto  
(1978 automobile data)
. histogram mpg, discrete by(foreign)
```

Here results would be easier to compare if the graphs were presented in one column:

```
. histogram mpg, discrete by(foreign, col(1))
```

`col(1)` is a by() suboption—see [G-3] *by_option*—and there are other useful suboptions, such as total, which will add an overall total histogram. **total** is a suboption of by(), not an option of histogram, so you would type

```
. histogram mpg, discrete by(foreign, total)
```

and not `histogram mpg, discrete by(foreign) total`. 

```
. use https://www.stata-press.com/data/r17/voter
(1992 U.S. presidential voters)
. histogram candi [fweight=pop], discrete fraction by(inc, total)
   > gap(40) xlabel(2 3 4, valuelabel)
```

We specified `gap(40)` to reduce the width of the bars by 40%. We also used `xlabel()`’s `valuelabel` suboption, which caused our bars to be labeled “Clinton”, “Bush”, and “Perot”, rather than 2, 3, and 4; see [G-3] `axis_label_options`.

**Video example**

Histograms in Stata

**References**


**Also see**

[R] `kdensity` — Univariate kernel density estimation

[R] `spikeplot` — Spike plots and rootograms

[G-2] `graph twoway histogram` — Histogram plots