

Session 4: Data Visualization

R for Data Analysis

DIME Analytics

The World Bank | [WB Github](#)

April 2025



Introduction

Introduction

Initial Setup

If You Attended Session 2

If You Did Not Attend Session 2

-
1. Go to the `dime-r-training-main` folder that you created yesterday, and open the `dime-r-training-main` R project that you created there.

Today's session

Exploratory Analysis v. Publication/Reporting

Data, aesthetics, & the grammar of graphics

Aesthetics in extra dimensions, themes, and saving plots

For this session, you'll use the `ggplot2` package from the `tidyverse` meta-package.

Similarly to previous sessions, you can find some references at the end of this presentation that include a more comprehensive discussion on data visualization.

Introduction

Before we start

- Make sure the packages `ggplot2` are installed and loaded. You can load it directly using `library(tidyverse)` or `library(ggplot2)`
- Load the `whr_panel` data set we created last week. (Remember to use the `here` package)

```
# Packages
library(tidyverse)
library(here)

whr_panel <- read_csv(
  here(
    "DataWork", "DataSets", "Final", "whr_panel.csv"
  )
)
```

```
## Rows: 470 Columns: 8
```

```
## — Column specification
```

```
## Delimiter: ","
```

```
## chr (2): country, region
```

```
## dbl (6): year, happiness_rank, happiness_score, economy_gdp_per_capita, heal...
```

Introduction

In our workflow there are usually two distinct uses for plots:

1. **Exploratory analysis:** Quickly visualize your data in an insightful way.
 - Base R can be used to quickly create basic figures
 - We will also use `ggplot2` to quickly create basic figures as well.
2. **Publication/Reporting:** Make pretty graphs for a presentation, a project report, or papers:
 - We'll do this using `ggplot2` with more customization. The idea is to create beautiful graphs.

Exploratory Analysis

ggplot2:
exploratory
data visualization



Plot with Base R

First, we're going to use base plot, i.e., using Base R default libraries. It is easy to use and can produce useful graphs with very few lines of code.

Exercise 1: Exploratory Analysis.

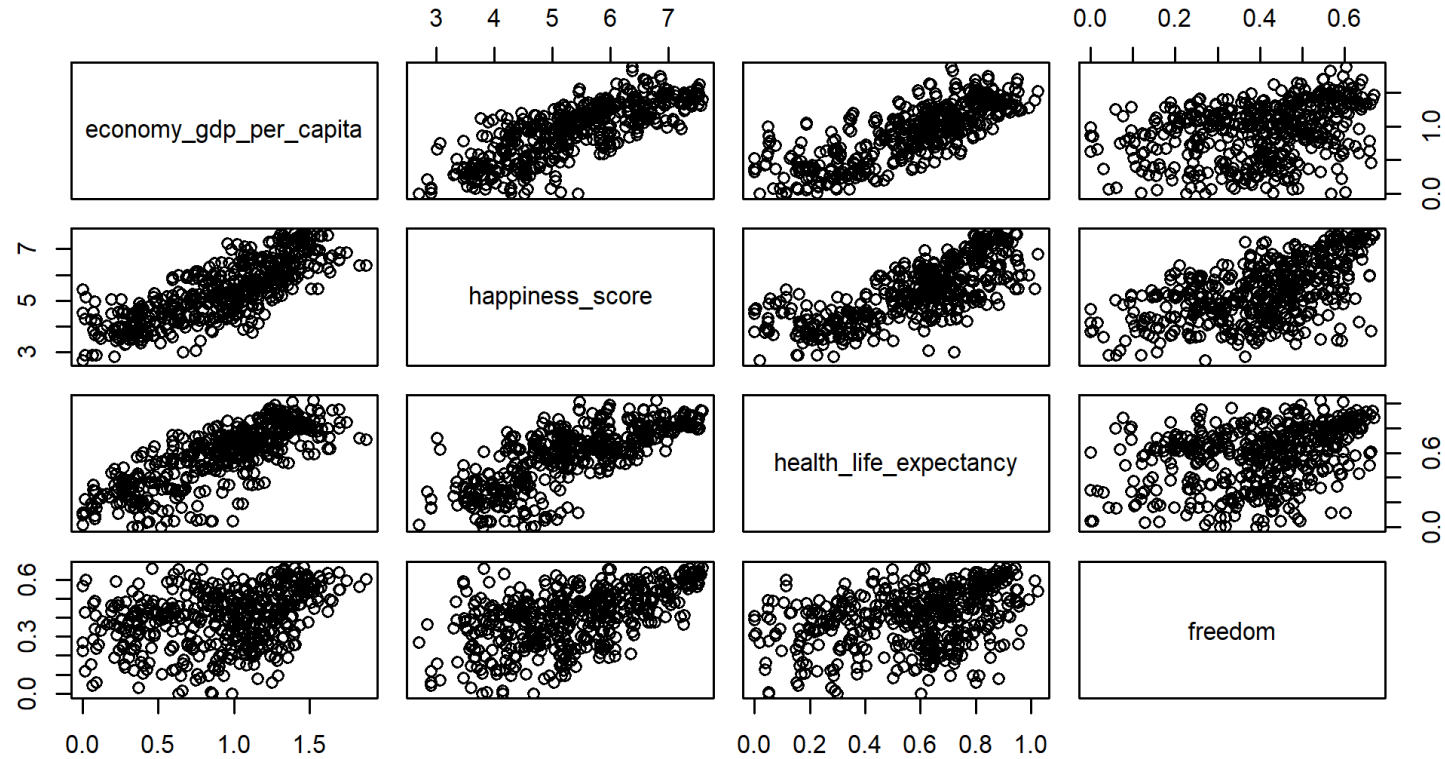
- (1) Create a vector called `vars` with the strings: `"economy_gdp_per_capita"`, `"happiness_score"`, `"health_life_expectancy"`, and `"freedom"`.
- (2) Select all the variables from the vector `vars` in the `whr_panel` dataset and assign to the object `whr_plot`. Hint: use `select(all_of(vars))` for this.
- (3) Use the `plot()` function: `plot(whr_plot)`

```
# Vector of variables
vars <- c("economy_gdp_per_capita", "happiness_score", "health_life_expectancy", "freedom")
# Create a subset with only those variables, let's call this subset whr_plot
whr_plot <- whr_panel %>%
  select(all_of(vars))
```

01:00

Base Plot

```
plot(whr_plot)
```



The beauty of ggplot2

1. Consistency with the **Grammar of Graphics**

- This book is the foundation of several data viz applications: `ggplot2`, `polaris-tableau`, `vega-lite`

2. Flexibility

3. Layering and theme customization

4. Community

It is a powerful and easy to use tool (once you understand its logic) that produces complex and multifaceted plots.

The grammar of graphics

The Structure of ggplot2

Creating a plot with ggplot2 requires **three basic components**:

1. **Data**: The dataset you want to visualize.
2. **Aesthetics (aes)**: How you map your data to visual elements (e.g., x-axis, y-axis, color).
3. **Geometry (geom)**: The type of plot you want (e.g., bar graph, scatter plot).

(and many more, we will see some examples at the end of the presentation)



ggplot2: Basic Structure (Template)

The basic ggplot structure is:

```
ggplot(data = DATA)  
  GEOM_FUNCTION(mapping = aes(AESTHETIC MAPPINGS))
```

Mapping data to aesthetics

Think about colors, sizes, x and y references

We are going to learn how we connect our data to the components of a ggplot

ggplot2: Full Structure

The full structure of a `ggplot2` visualization follows a logical sequence.

```
ggplot(data = <DATA>) +  
  <GEOM_FUNCTION>(  
    mapping = aes(<MAPPINGS>),  
    stat = <STAT>,  
    position = <POSITION>  
  ) +  
  <COORDINATE_FUNCTION>() + # Adjust coordinate system  
  <FACET_FUNCTION>() +      # Create small multiples  
  <SCALE_FUNCTION>() +      # Adjust scales (colors, sizes, etc.)  
  <THEME_FUNCTION>()        # Customize overall appearance
```

Key Components

- 1 Data** (`data = <DATA>`) → The dataset you want to visualize
- 2 Layers** (`geom_`, `stat_`) → Shapes and statistical summaries
- 3 Aesthetics** (`aes()`) → Maps data to visual properties
- 4 Scales** (`scale_`) → Defines color, size, axes, etc.
- 5 Coordinate System** (`coord_`) → Maps data to a 2D plane
- 6 Facets** (`facet_`) → Splits data into small multiples
- 7 Themes** (`theme()`, `theme_`) → Customizes visual appearance

ggplot2: decomposition

There are multiple ways to structure plots with ggplot

For this presentation, I will stick to Thomas Lin Pedersen's decomposition who is one of most prominent developers of the ggplot and gganimate package.

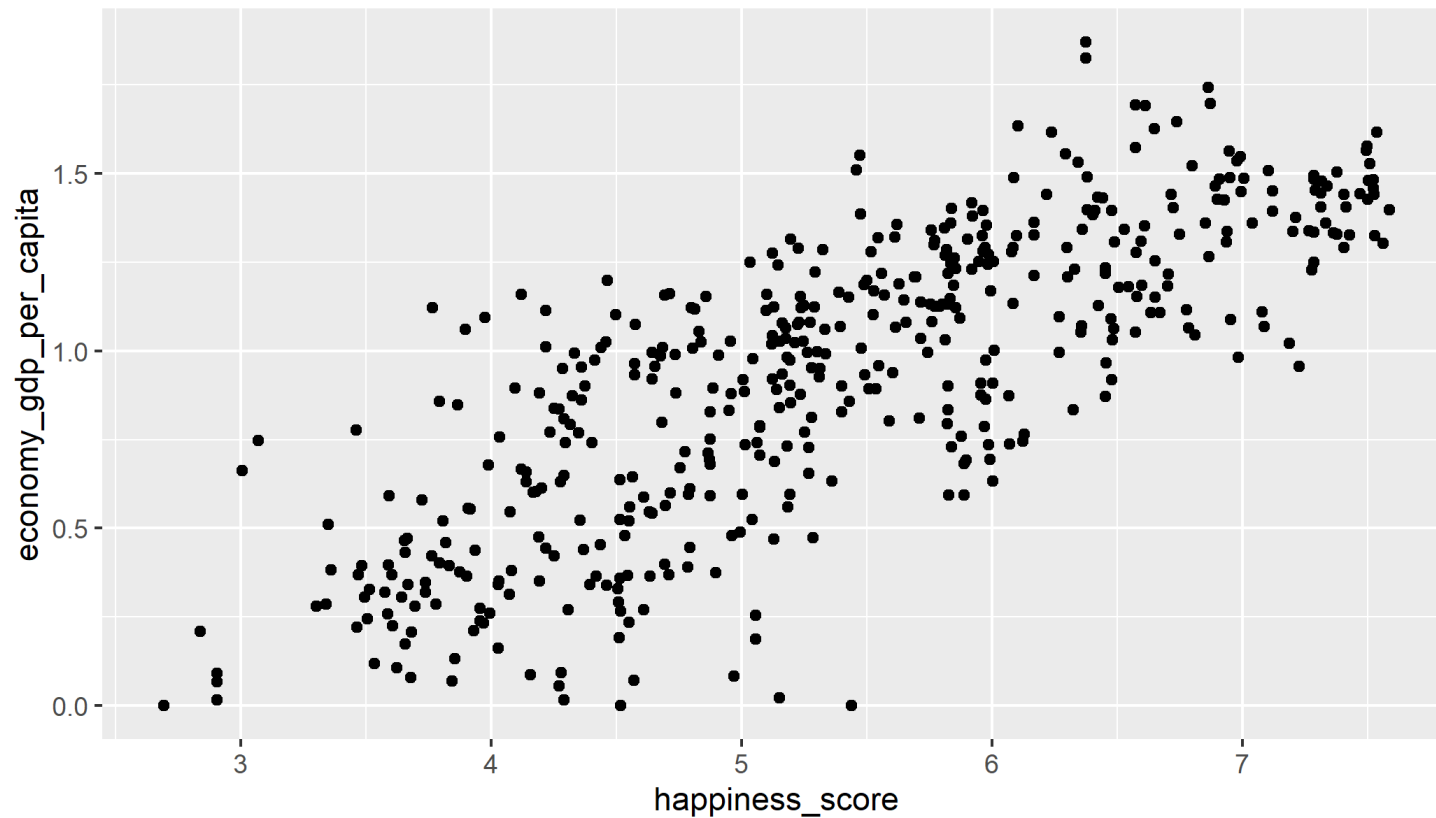
These components can be seen as layers, this is why we use the `+` sign in our ggplot syntax.



Exploratory Analysis

Let's start making some plots.

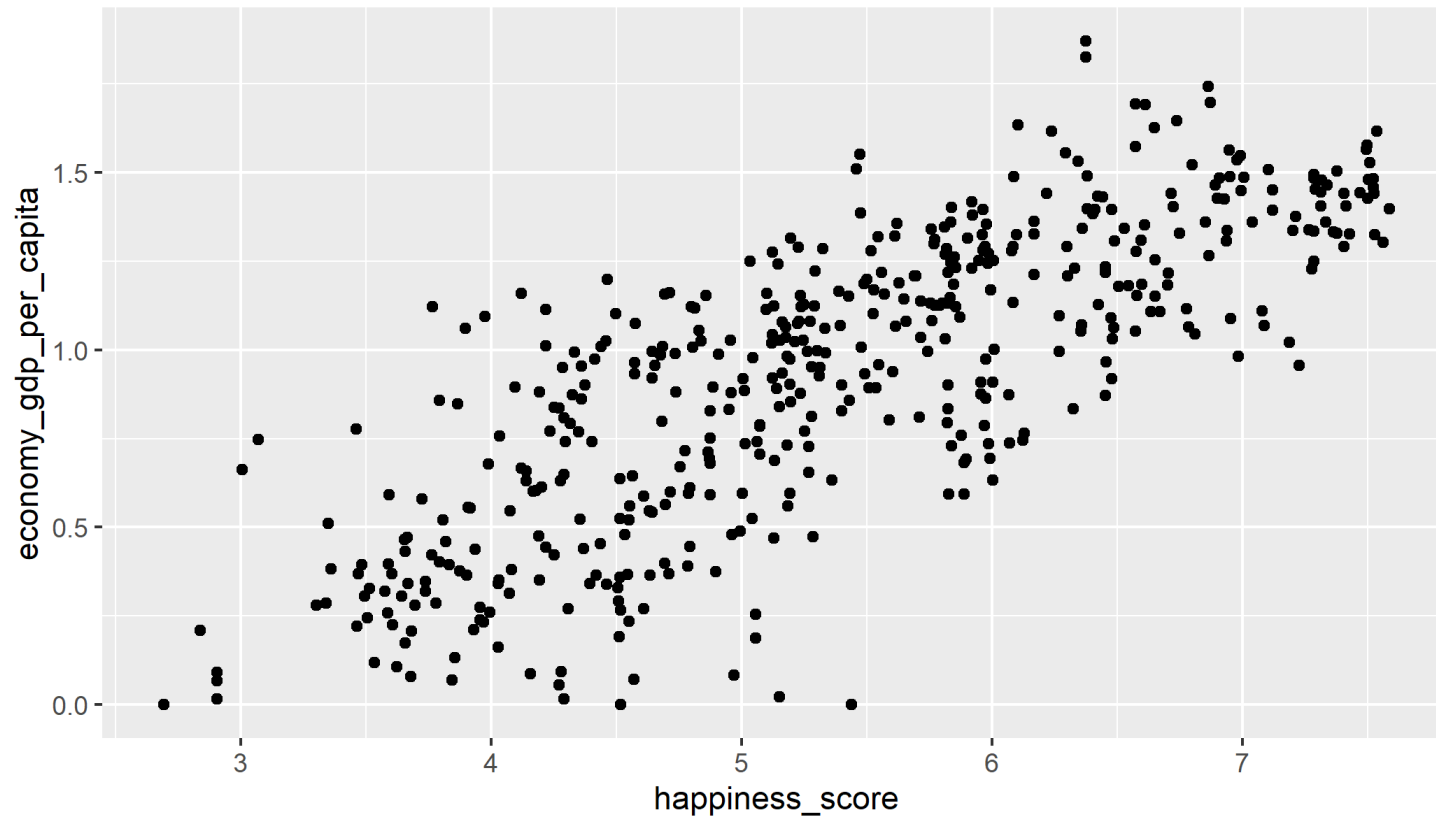
```
ggplot(data = whr_panel) + #data  
  geom_point(mapping = aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita))
```



Exploratory Analysis

We can also set up our mapping in the `ggplot()` function.

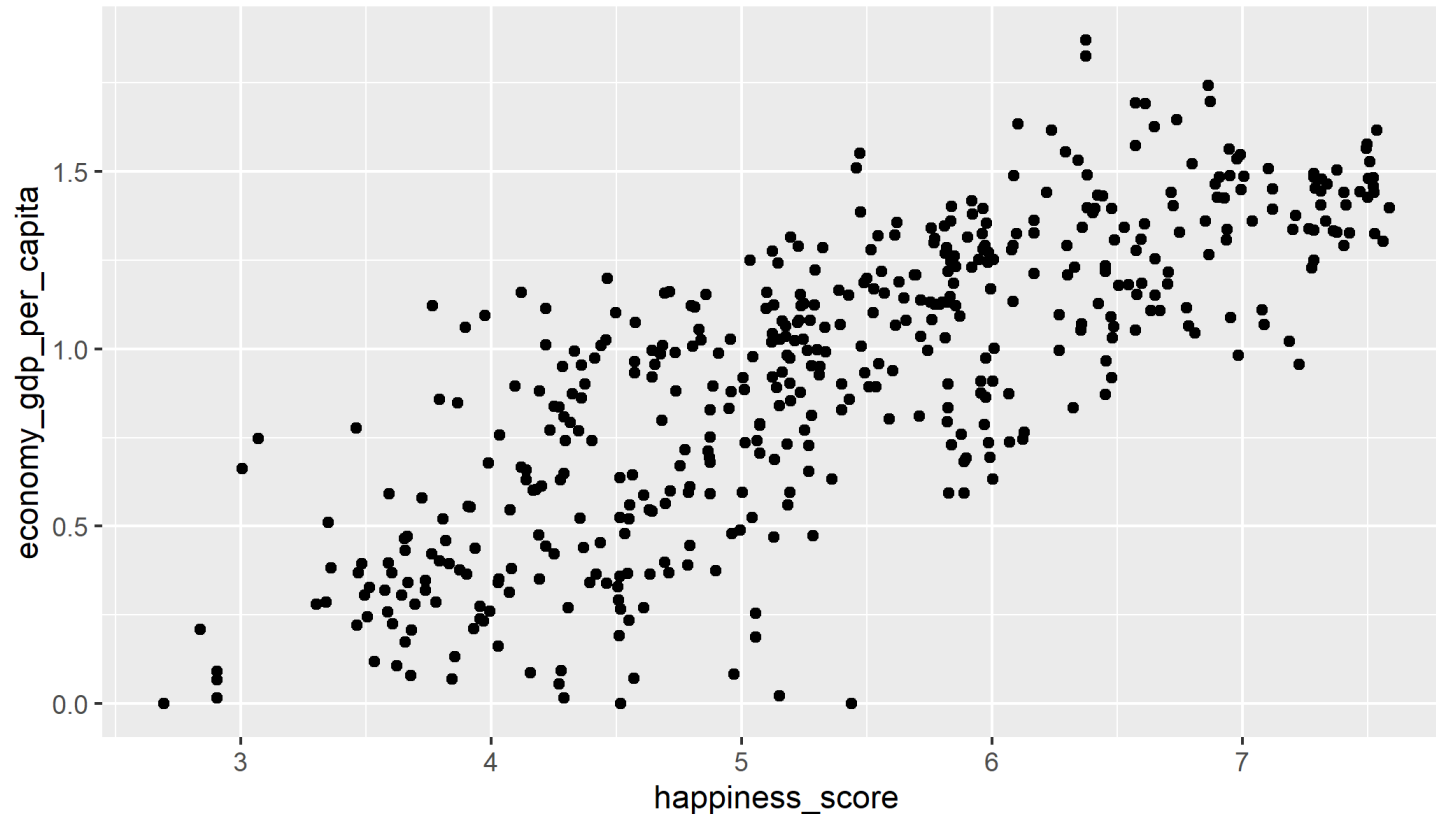
```
ggplot(data = whr_panel, aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point()
```



Exploratory Analysis

We can also set up the data outside the `ggplot()` function as follows:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point()
```



Exploratory Analysis

I prefer to use the last way of structuring our ggplot.

1. First, setting our data;
2. pipe it;
3. then aesthetics;
4. and finally the geometries.

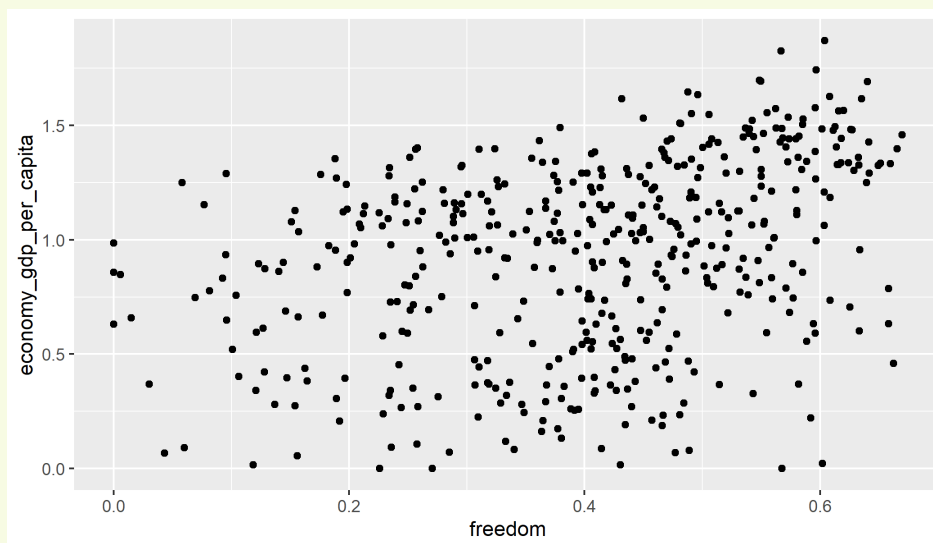
Both structures will work but this will make a difference if you want to load more datasets at the same time, and whether you would like to combine more geoms in the same ggplot. More on this in the following slides.

Exploratory Analysis

Exercise 2: Create a scatter plot with `x = freedom` and `y = economy_gdp_per_capita`.

Solution:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot() +  
  geom_point(aes(x = freedom, y = economy_gdp_per_capita))
```



01:00

Exploratory Analysis

The most common `geoms` are:

- `geom_bar()`, `geom_col()`: bar charts.
- `geom_boxplot()`: box and whiskers plots.
- `geom_density()`: density estimates.
- `geom_jitter()`: jittered points.
- `geom_line()`: line plots.
- `geom_point()`: scatter plots.

If you want to know more about layers, you can refer to [this](#).

Exploratory Analysis

In summary, our basic plots should have the following:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```

The data we want to plot.

Exploratory Analysis

In summary, our basic plots should have the following:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```

Columns (variables) to use for **x** and **y**

Exploratory Analysis

In summary, our basic plots should have the following:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```

How the plot is going to be drawn.

Exploratory Analysis

We can also **map** colors.

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = region  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```

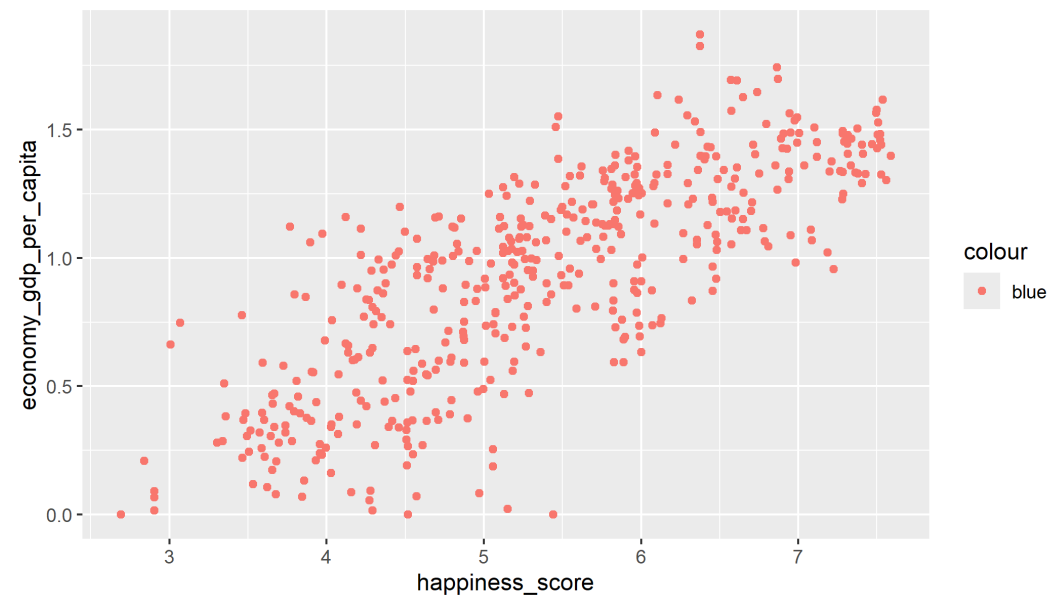


Exploratory Analysis

Let's try to do something different, try, instead of `region`, adding `color = "blue"` inside `aes()`.

- What do you think is the problem with this code?

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = "blue"  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```



Exploratory Analysis

In `ggplot2`, these settings are called **aesthetics**.

"Aesthetics of the geometric and statistical objects".

We can set up:

- `position`: x, y, xmin, xmax, ymin, ymax, etc.
- `colors`: color and fill.
- `transparency`: alpha.
- `sizes`: size and width.
- `shapes`: shape and linetype.

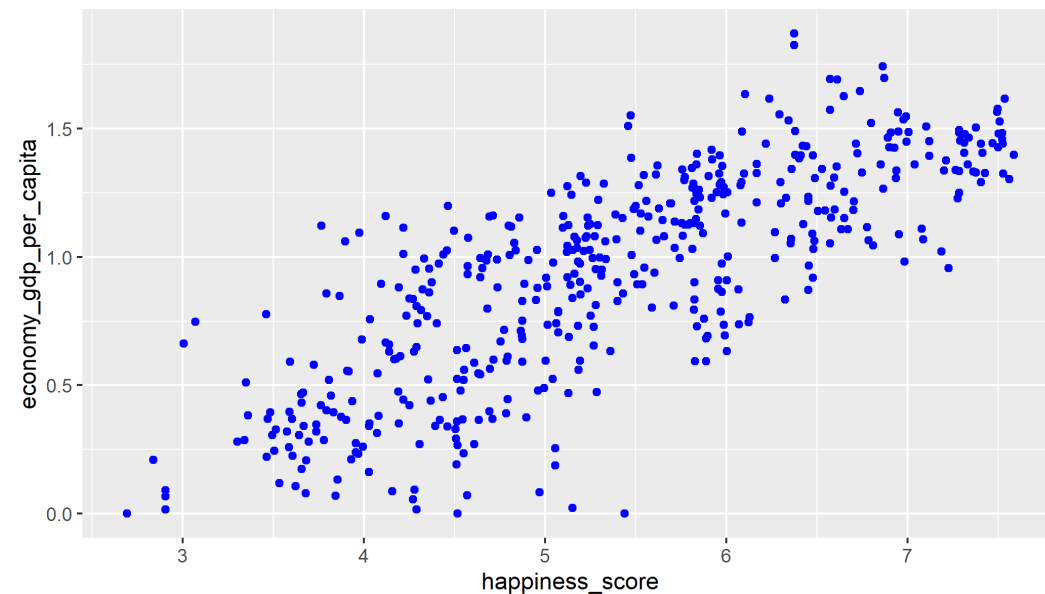
Notice that it is important to know where we are setting our aesthetics. For example:

- `geom_point(aes(color = region))` to color points based on the variable `region`
- `geom_point(color = "red")` to color all points in the same color.

Exploratory Analysis

Let's modify our last plot. Let's add `color = "blue"` inside `geom_point()`.

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point(color = "blue")
```

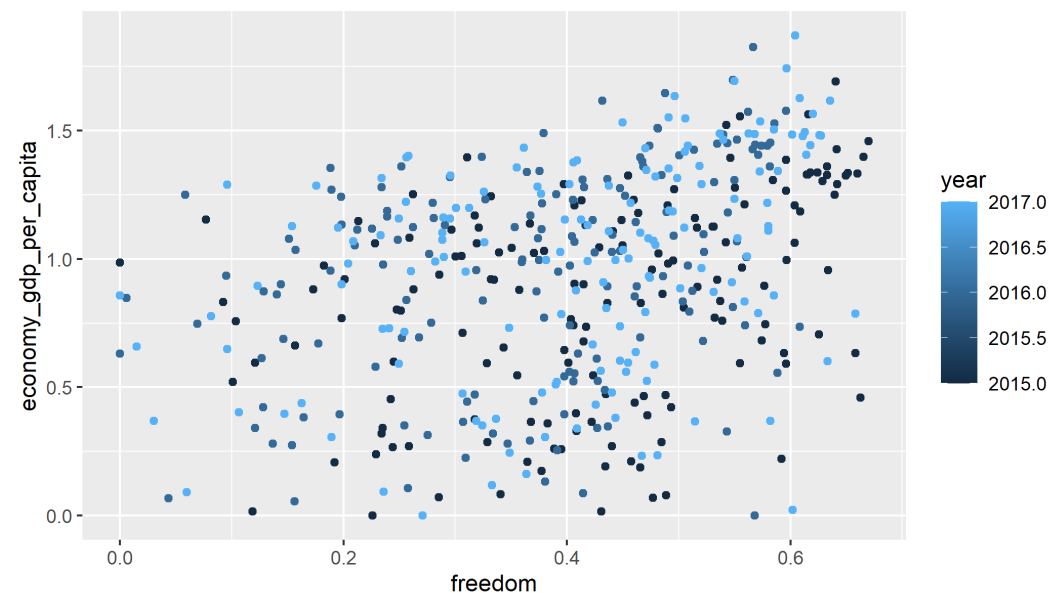


Exploratory Analysis

Exercise 3: Map colors per year for the freedom and gdp plot we did before. Keep in mind the type of the variable `year`.

Solution:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = freedom,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = year  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```



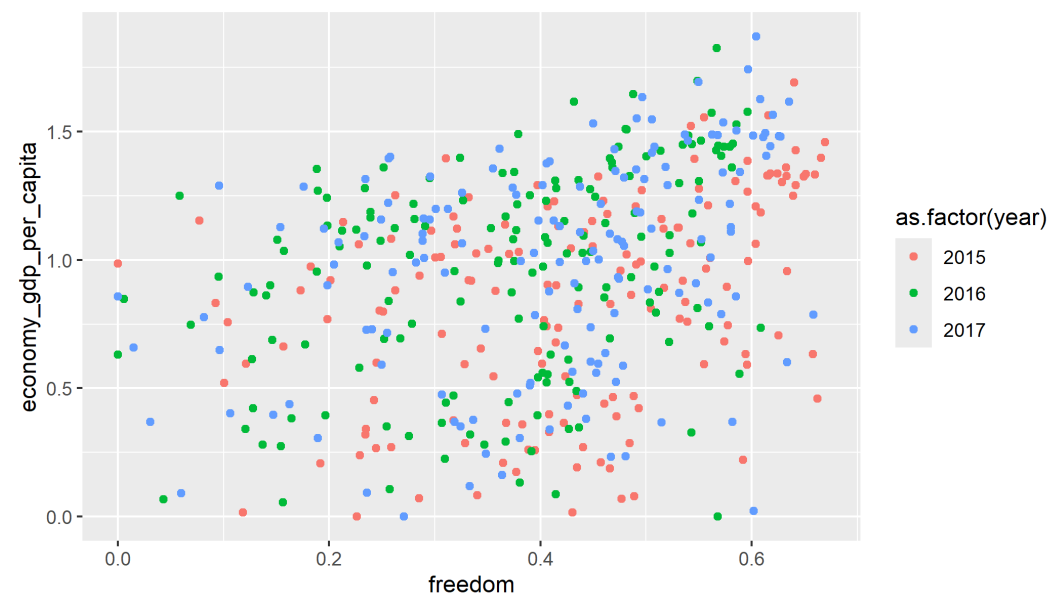
01:00

Exploratory Analysis

How do you think we could solve it?

- Change the variable `year` as: `as.factor(year)`.

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = freedom,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = as.factor(year)  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point()
```



ggplot2: settings



ggplot2: settings

Now, let's try to modify our plots. In the following slides, we are going to:

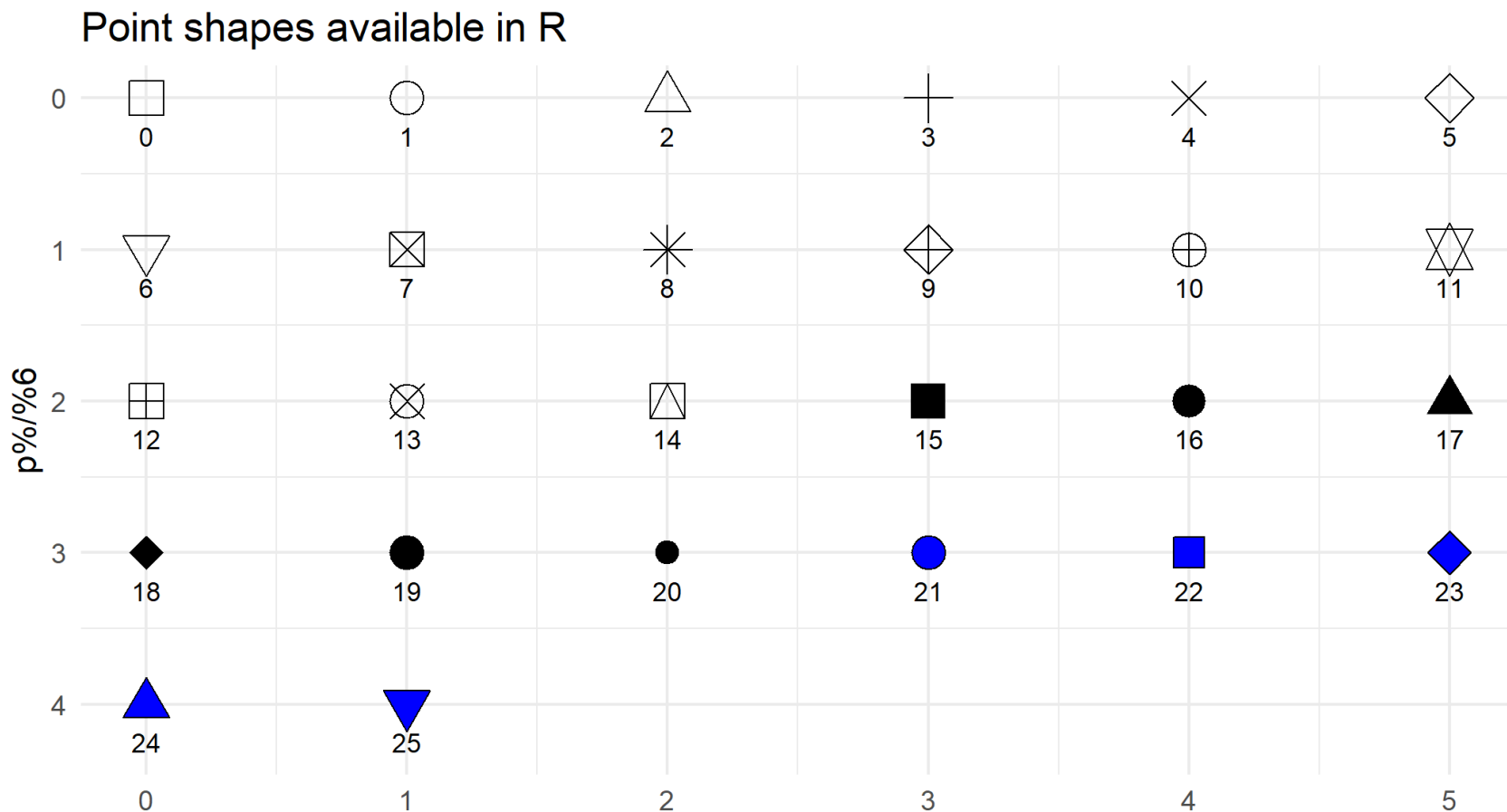
1. Change shapes.
2. Include more geoms.
3. Separate by regions.
4. Pipe and mutate before plotting.
5. Change scales.
6. Modify our theme.

ggplot2: shapes

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point(shape = 5)
```



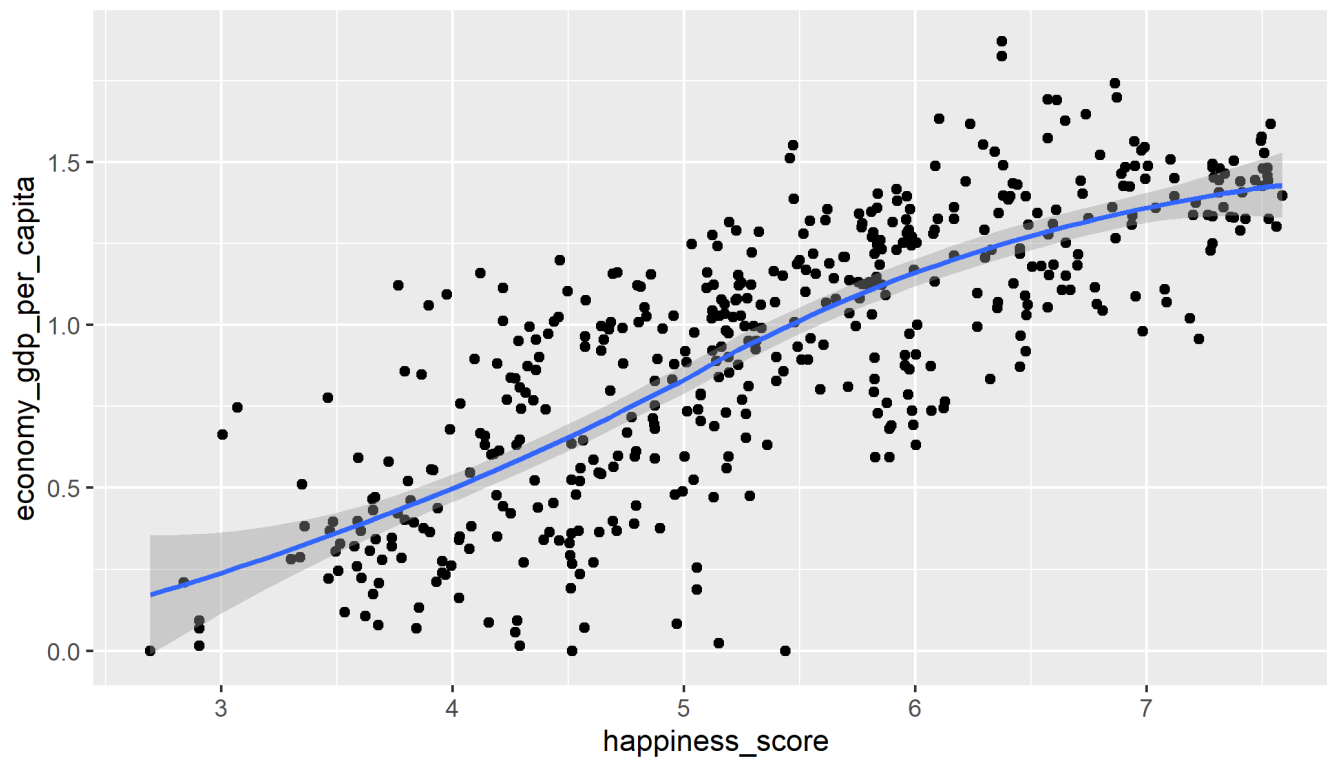
ggplot2: shapes



ggplot2: including more geoms

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  geom_smooth()
```

```
## `geom_smooth()` using method = 'loess' and formula = 'y ~ x'
```



ggplot2: Facets

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  facet_wrap(~ region)
```

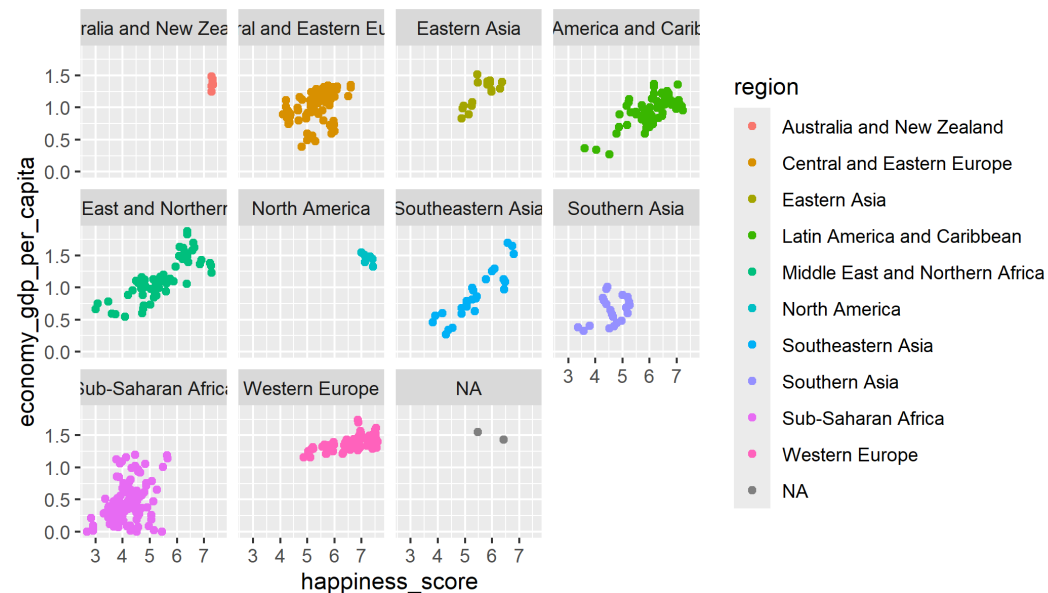


ggplot2: Colors and facets

Exercise 4: Use the last plot and add a color aesthetic per region.

Solution:

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = region  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point() +  
  facet_wrap(~ region)
```



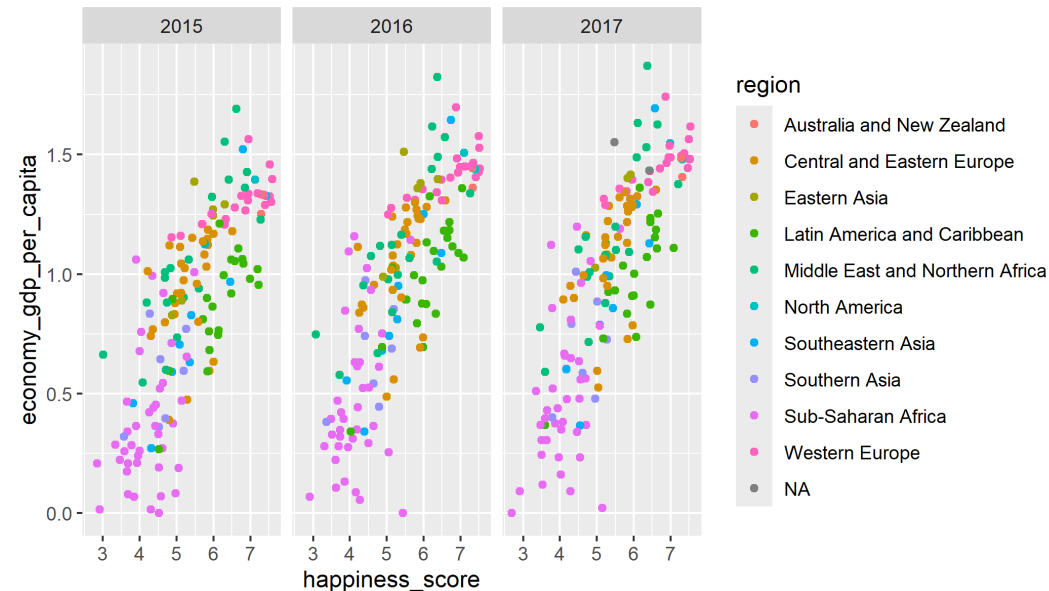
01:00

ggplot2: Colors and facets

Another type of facet is `facet_grid()`, which arranges plots by one or more variables while keeping a consistent y-axis across all panels. This is useful when comparing trends over time or across categories.

Here we facet the plot by `year`, so we can visually compare patterns in happiness and GDP over different years.

```
whr_panel %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score,  
      y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = region  
    )  
  ) +  
  geom_point() +  
  facet_grid(~year)
```



ggplot2: Pipe and mutate before plotting

Let's imagine now, that we would like to transform a variable before plotting.

R Code

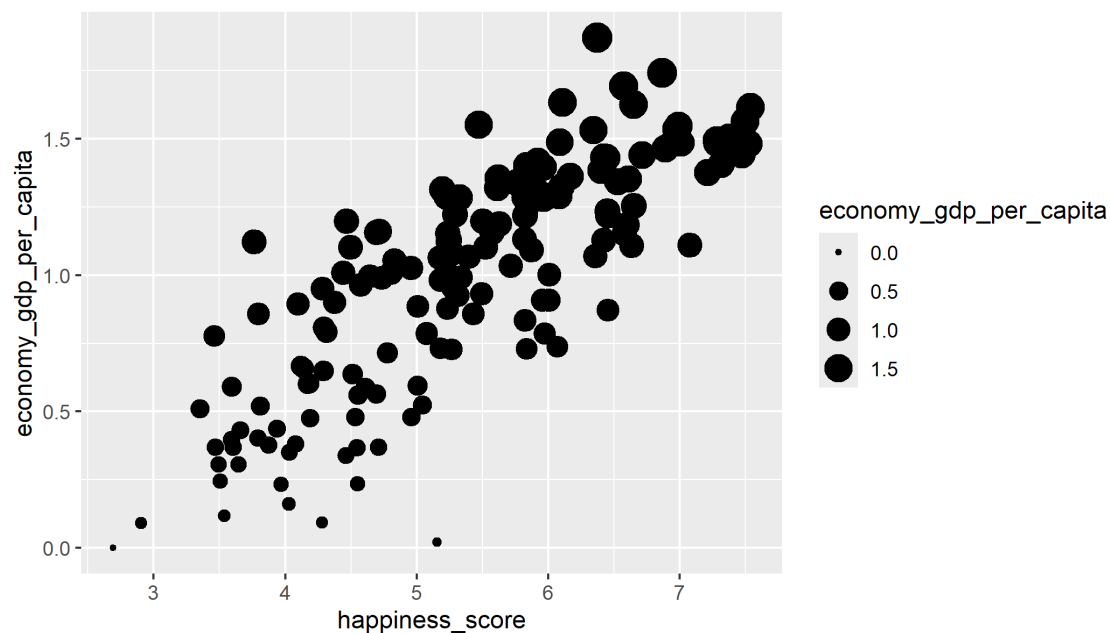
Plot

```
whr_panel <- whr_panel %>%  
  mutate(  
    latam = region == "Latin America and Caribbean"  
  )  
  
whr_panel %>%  
  filter(  
    !is.na(latam) # Make sure that we don't include missing values in our graph  
  ) %>%  
  ggplot(  
    aes(  
      x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
      color = latam)  
    ) +  
  geom_point()
```

ggplot2: geom's sizes

We can also specify the size of a geom, either by a variable or just a number.

```
whr_panel %>%  
  filter(year == 2017) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point(aes(size = economy_gdp_per_capita))
```

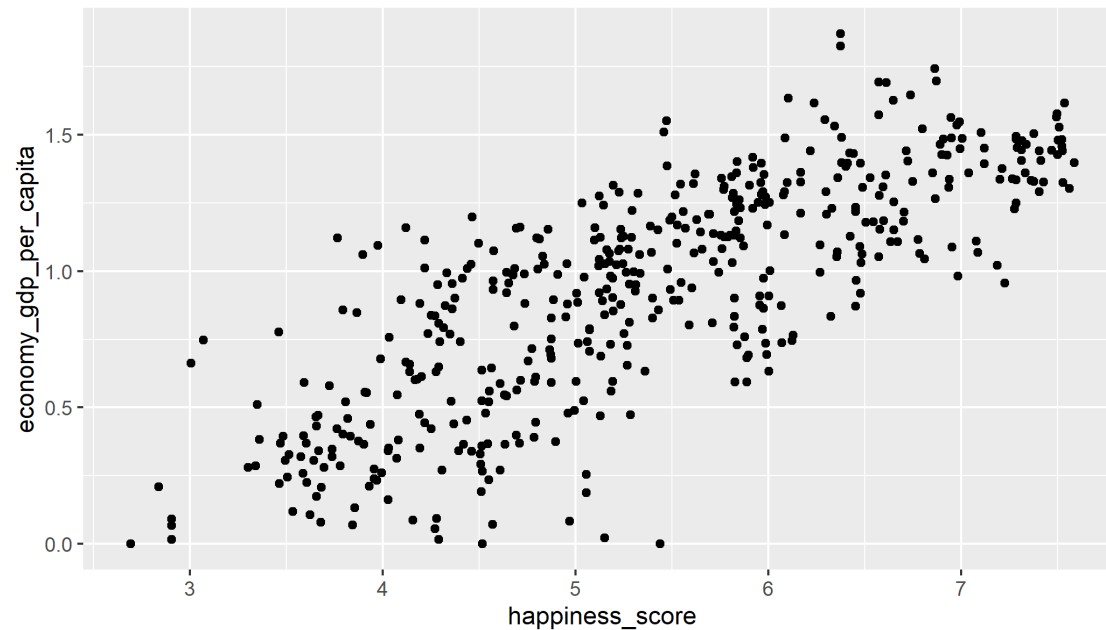


ggplot2: Changing scales

Unscaled

Scaled

```
ggplot(data = whr_panel,  
       aes(x = happiness_score,  
           y = economy_gdp_per_capita)) +  
  geom_point()
```



ggplot2: Themes

Let's go back to our plot with the `latam` dummy.

We are going to do the following to this plot:

1. Filter only for the year 2015.
2. Change our theme.
3. Add correct labels.
4. Add some annotations.
5. Modify our legends.

ggplot2: Labels

R Code

Plot

```
whr_panel %>%  
  filter(  
    !is.na(latam) # Make sure that we don't include missing values in our graph  
  ) %>%  
  filter(year == 2015) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
            color = latam)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  labs(  
    x = "Happiness Score",  
    y = "GDP per Capita",  
    title = "Happiness Score vs GDP per Capita, 2015"  
  )
```

ggplot2: Legends

R Code

Plot

```
whr_panel %>%  
  filter(  
    !is.na(latam) # Make sure that we don't include missing values in our graph  
  ) %>%  
  filter(year == 2015) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
            color = latam)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  scale_color_discrete(labels = c("No", "Yes")) +  
  labs(  
    x = "Happiness Score",  
    y = "GDP per Capita",  
    color = "Country in Latin America\and the Caribbean",  
    title = "Happiness Score vs GDP per Capita, 2015"  
  )
```

ggplot2: Themes

R Code

Plot

```
whr_panel %>%  
  filter(  
    !is.na(latam) # Make sure that we don't include missing values in our graph  
  ) %>%  
  filter(year == 2015) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
             color = latam)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  scale_color_discrete(labels = c("No", "Yes")) +  
  labs(  
    x = "Happiness Score",  
    y = "GDP per Capita",  
    color = "Country in Latin America\and the Caribbean",  
    title = "Happiness Score vs GDP per Capita, 2015"  
  ) +  
  theme_minimal()
```

ggplot2: Themes

The `theme()` function allows you to modify each aspect of your plot. Some arguments are:

```
theme(  
  # Title and text labels  
  plot.title = element_text(color, size, face),  
  # Title font color size and face  
  legend.title = element_text(color, size, face),  
  # Title alignment. Number from 0 (left) to 1 (right)  
  legend.title.align = NULL,  
  # Text label font color size and face  
  legend.text = element_text(color, size, face),  
  # Text label alignment. Number from 0 (left) to 1 (right)  
  legend.text.align = NULL,  
)
```

More about these modification can be found [here](#)

ggplot2: Color palettes

We can also add color palettes using other packages such as: `RColorBrewer`, `viridis` or funny ones like the `wesanderson` package. So, let's add new colors.

- First, install the `RColorBrewer` package.

```
# install.packages("RColorBrewer")  
library(RColorBrewer)
```

- Let's add `scale_color_brewer(palette = "Dark2")` to our ggplot.

ggplot2: Color palettes

R Code

Plot

```
whr_panel %>%
  filter(
    !is.na(latam) # Make sure that we don't include missing values in our graph
  ) %>%
  filter(year == 2015) %>%
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita,
             color = latam)) +
  geom_point() +
  scale_color_brewer(palette = "Dark2", labels = c("No", "Yes")) +
  labs(
    x = "Happiness Score",
    y = "GDP per Capita",
    color = "Country in Latin America\and the Caribbean",
    title = "Happiness Score vs GDP per Capita, 2015"
  ) +
  theme_minimal()
```

ggplot2: Color palettes

My favorite color palettes packages:

1. `ghibli`
2. `LaCroixColor`
3. `NineteenEightyR`
4. `nord`
5. `palettetown`
6. `quickpalette`
7. `wesanderson`

Saving a plot

Saving a plot

Remember that in R we can always assign our functions to an object. In this case, we can assign our `ggplot2` code to an object called `fig` as follows.

```
fig <- whr_panel %>%  
  filter(  
    !is.na(latam) # Make sure that we don't include missing values in our graph  
  ) %>%  
  filter(year == 2015) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(x = happiness_score, y = economy_gdp_per_capita,  
            color = latam)) +  
  geom_point() +  
  scale_color_discrete(labels = c("No", "Yes")) +  
  labs(  
    x = "Happiness Score",  
    y = "GDP per Capita",  
    color = "Country in Latin America\and the Caribbean",  
    title = "Happiness Score vs GDP per Capita, 2015"  
  ) +  
  theme_minimal()
```

Therefore, if you want to plot it again, you can just type `fig` in the console.

Saving a plot

Exercise 5: Save a ggplot under the name `fig_*YOUR INITIALS*`. Use the `ggsave()` function. You can either include the function after your plot or, save the ggplot first as an object and then save the plot.

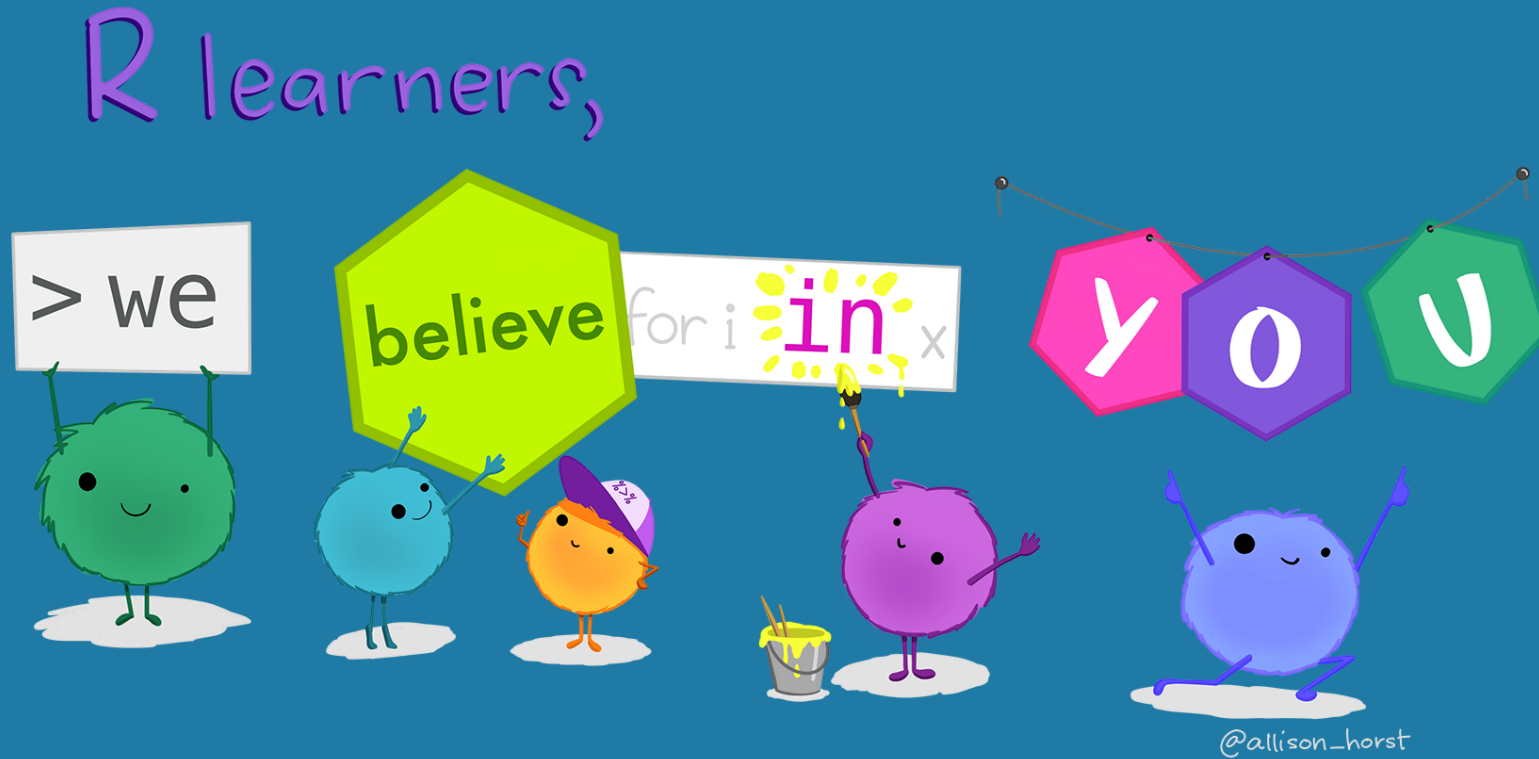
The syntax is `ggsave(OBJECT, filename = FILEPATH, height = ..., width = ..., dpi = ...)`.

Solution:

```
ggsave(  
  fig,  
  filename = here("DataWork", "Output", "Raw", "fig_MA.png"),  
  dpi = 750,  
  scale = 0.8,  
  height = 8,  
  width = 12  
)
```

01:00

And that's it for this session. Join us tomorrow for data analysis. Remember to submit your feedback!



References and recommendations

References and recommendations

- **ggplot tricks:**

- Tricks and Secrets for Beautiful Plots in R by Cédric Scherer: <https://github.com/z3tt/outlierconf2021>

- **Websites:**

- Interactive stuff : <http://www.htmlwidgets.org/>
- The R Graph Gallery: <https://www.r-graph-gallery.com/>
- Ggplot official site: <http://ggplot2.tidyverse.org/>

- **Online courses:**

- Johns Hopkins Exploratory Data Analysis at Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/exploratory-data-analysis>

- **Books:**

- The grammar of graphics by Leland Wilkinson.
- Beautiful Evidence by Edward Tufte.
- R Graphics cook book by Winston Chang
- R for Data Science by Hadley Wickham and Garrett Grolemund

Appendix: interactive graphs

Interactive graphs

There are several packages to create interactive or dynamic data visualizations with R. Here are a few:

- `leaflet` - R integration to one of the most popular open-source libraries for interactive maps.
- `highcharter` - cool interactive graphs.
- `plotly` - interactive graphs with integration to ggplot.
- `gganimate` - ggplot GIFs.
- `DT` - Interactive table

These are generally, html widgets that can be incorporated in to an html document and websites.

Interactive graphs

Now we'll use the `ggplotly()` function from the `plotly` package to create an interactive graph!

Extra exercise: Interactive graphs.

- Load the `plotly` package
- Pass that object with the last plot you created to the `ggplotly()` function

Interactive graphs

R Code

Plot

```
# Load package  
library(plotly)  
  
# Use ggplotly to create an interactive plot  
ggplotly(fig) %>%  
  layout(legend = list(orientation = "h", x = 0.4, y = -0.2))
```

