

Addendum to “Statistical Software from a Blind Person’s Perspective”

by A. Jonathan R. Godfrey and Robert Erhardt

Abstract This short note explains a solution to a problem for blind users when using the R terminal under Windows Vista or Windows 7, as identified in Godfrey (2013). We note the way the solution was discovered and subsequent confirmatory experiments.

As part of his preparations for teaching a blind student in a statistics course, the second author read Godfrey (2013). He also attempted to use the R terminal in conjunction with the screen reading software his student would be using. More important though was his use of the keyboard gestures that a blind person uses in place of mouse clicks; the solution was found quite by accident by not completing the Alt+Tab key combination for switching applications.

Godfrey (2013) stated:

“... use of R in the terminal window of Windows Vista and Windows 7 has proved problematic for the screen reading software which can ‘lose focus’. This means the cursor is no longer able to be controlled by the blind user and the session must be curtailed. This problem is not specific to a particular screen reader, and can be replicated in other terminal windows such as the command prompt of these operating systems. At the time of writing, this problem remains and the author can only recommend using base R in batch mode to compensate.”

The loss of focus problem still exists, but the blind user can return to having a normal functioning terminal window by a single press of the Alt key alone. The first author has ensured that this solution works for a range of screen reader software, and for both Windows Vista and Windows 7. The R session does not need to be curtailed, meaning that in terms of the options for running an R job, blind users of R under Windows are back on par with their sighted colleagues.

Acknowledgement

The first author wishes to thank the editor for accepting this addendum. It is crucial that blind students and their lecturers are kept up to date with any developments that affect the way blind people can use R. This update may seem trivial to some readers, but is hugely important to blind users of R.

Bibliography

A. J. R. Godfrey. Statistical software from a blind person’s perspective: R is the best, but we can make it better. *The R Journal*, 5(1):73–80, 2013. URL <http://journal.R-project.org/archive/2013-1/godfrey.pdf>. [p182]

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