Unconstrained optimization

Minimizing a loss function

Usual setup in machine learning: choose a model w by minimizing a loss function $L(w)$ that depends on the data.

- Linear regression: $L(w) = \sum_i (y^{(i)} - (w \cdot x^{(i)}))^2$
- Logistic regression: $L(w) = \sum_i \ln(1 + e^{-y^{(i)}(w \cdot x^{(i)})})$

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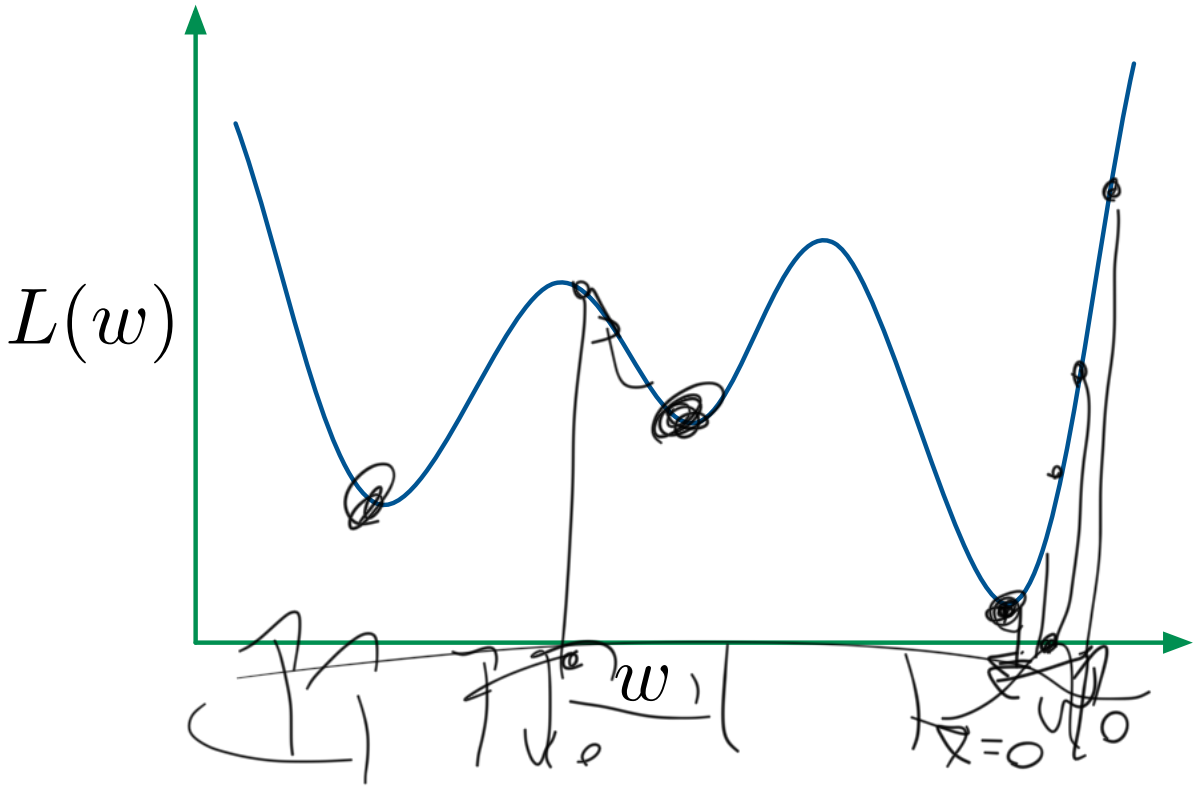
Default way to solve this minimization: **local search**.

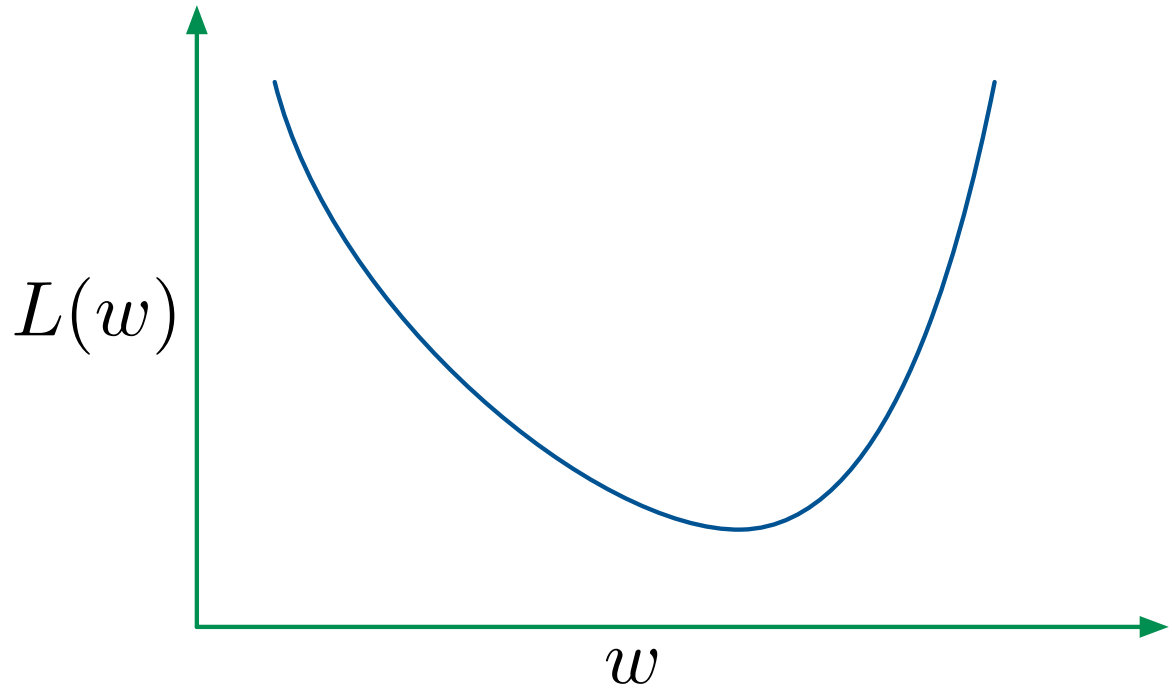
Local search



- Initialize w arbitrarily
- Repeat until w converges:
  - Find some w' close to w with $L(w') < L(w)$.
  - Move w to w'.

A good situation for local search

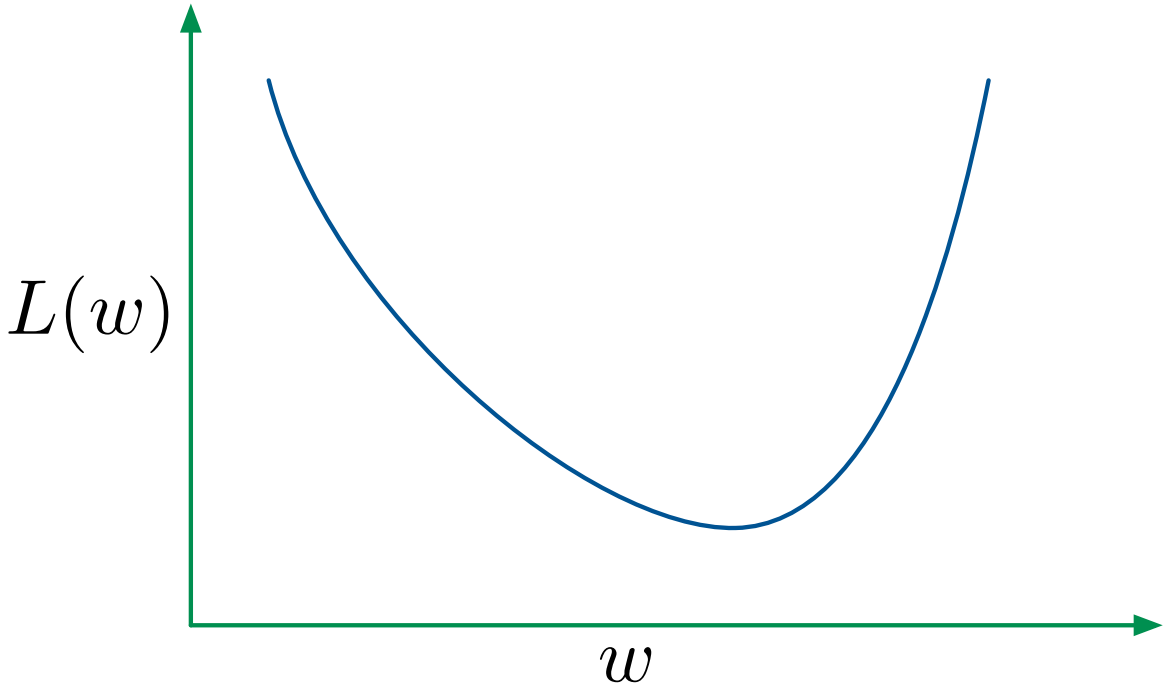
When the loss function is **convex**:



E.g. least-squares regression and logistic regression.

Choosing a search direction

One idea: look at the **derivative** of $L(w)$ at the current point w.



Multivariate differentiation

Example: $w \in \mathbb{R}^3$ and $F(w) = 3w_1w_2 + w_3$.

Example: $w \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and $F(w) = w \cdot x$.

Example: $w \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and $F(w) = \|w\|^2$.

Example: $w \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and $F(w) = w^T M w$.

Gradient descent

For minimizing a function $L(w)$:

- $w_o = 0, t = 0$
- while $\nabla L(w_t) \not\approx 0$:
  - $w_{t+1} = w_t - \eta_t \nabla L(w_t)$
  - $t = t + 1$

Here η_t is the *step size* at time t.

Gradient descent: rationale

"Differentiable" $\Longrightarrow$ "locally linear".

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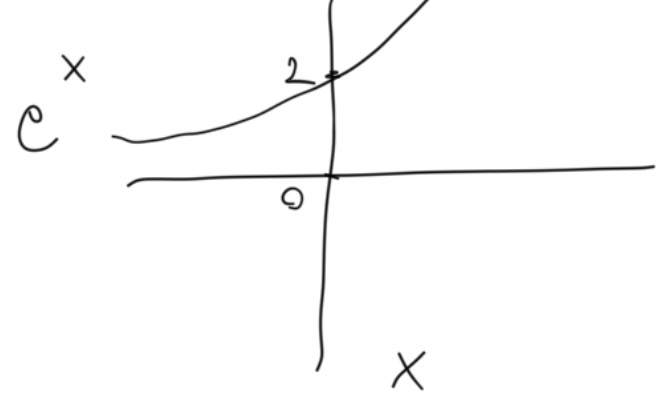
$$\exp(x) = e^x$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x} e^x = e^x$$

$$\ln e^x = x$$



$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x} f(g(x)) = f'(g(x))\, g'(x)$$

Gradient descent: rationale

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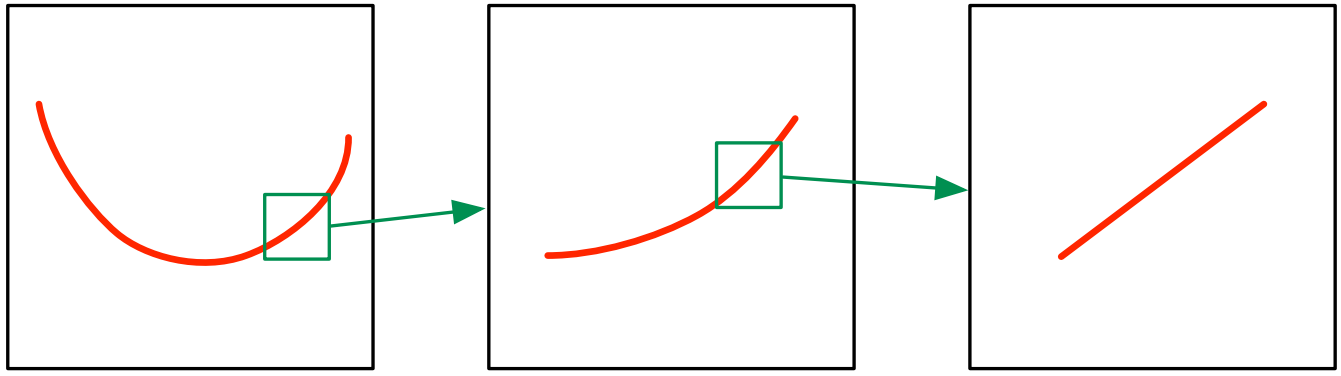

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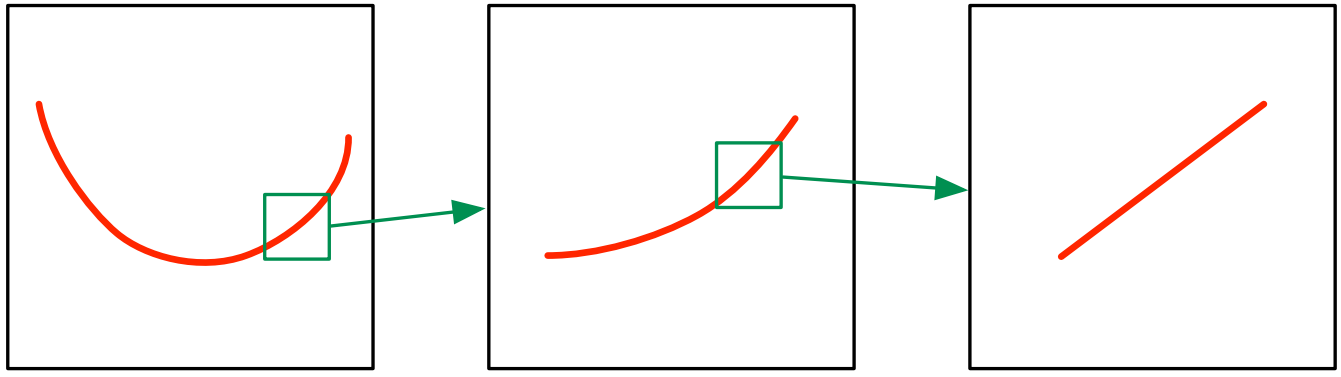


For *small* displacements $u \in \mathbb{R}^d$,

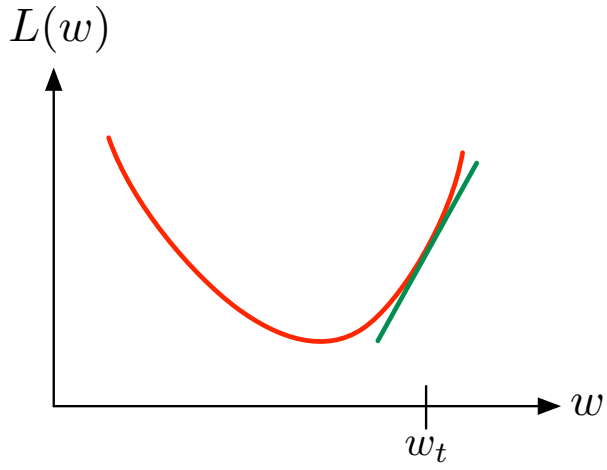
$$L(w+u) \approx L(w) + u \cdot \nabla L(w) \quad .$$

Therefore, if $u = -\eta \nabla L(w)$ is small,

$$L(w+u) \approx L(w) - \eta \|\nabla L(w)\|^2 < L(w)$$

The step size matters

Gradient descent update: $w_{t+1} = w_t - \eta_t \nabla L(w_t)$.



- Step size η_t too small: not much progress
- Too large: overshoot the mark

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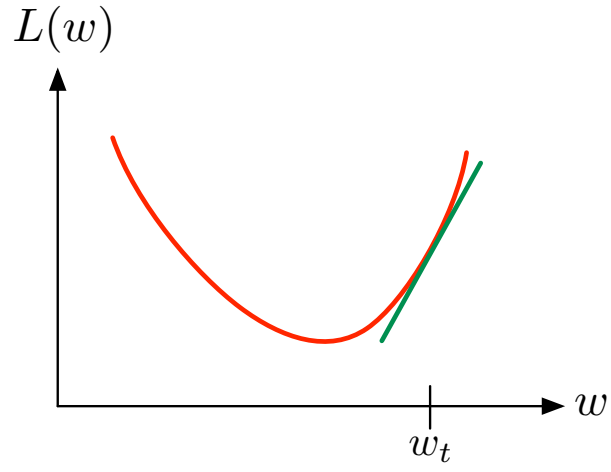

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One option: pick η_t using a line search

$$\eta_t = \arg\min_{\alpha>0} L(w_t - \alpha \nabla L(w_t))$$

Example: logistic regression

For $(x^{(1)}, y^{(1)}), \ldots, (x^{(n)}, y^{(n)}) \in \mathbb{R}^d \times \{-1, +1\}$, loss function

$$L(w) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \ln(1 + e^{-y^{(i)}(w \cdot x^{(i)})})$$

What is the derivative?

Gradient descent for logistic regression

- Set $w_0 = 0$
- For $t = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$, until convergence:

$$w_{t+1} = w_t + \eta_t \sum_{i=1}^{n} y^{(i)} x^{(i)} \underbrace{\Pr_{w_t}(-y^{(i)}|x^{(i)})}_{\text{doubt}_t(x^{(i)}, y^{(i)})}$$

Many choices for step size η_t:

- Choose by line search to minimize $L(w_{t+1})$
- Fix it beforehand
- Fix it to a value, and halve upon convergence

Variant: stochastic gradient descent

Gradient descent update for logistic regression: at time t

$$w_{t+1} = w_t + \eta_t \sum_{i=1}^{n} y^{(i)} x^{(i)} \underbrace{\Pr_{w_t}(-y^{(i)}|x^{(i)})}_{\text{doubt}_t(x^{(i)},y^{(i)})}$$

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Stochastic gradient descent: update based on just one point:

- Get next data point (x, y), e.g., cycling through data set
- $w_{t+1} \;=\; w_t \;+\; \eta_t \, y \, x \Pr_{w_t}(-y|x)$

Convenient for very large data sets.

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Or: make updates based on **mini-batches** of data points.