

Library data literacy workshop

This workshop is a general-audience introduction to reading and questioning a real dataset, designed for a public or academic library setting rather than a credit-bearing course. Participants need no background in finance, statistics, or computers beyond comfort using a web browser.

What today looks like

- Length: 60 minutes. A 45 minute and a 75 minute variant are noted under Teaching notes.
- Level: general audience. Public library patrons, community members, or lifelong learners with no background in finance, statistics, or computers beyond comfort using a web browser.
- Access: the no-code sandbox at sandbox.altfndata.com only. No API key or coding tool is needed. A personal email is acceptable for registration for this general-audience session, though a work or school email speeds automatic approval.
- Goal: participants leave able to open the sandbox on their own, use the data dictionary and coverage browser to understand a field before trusting it, filter to a question they generated themselves, and name at least one reason to be cautious about a data-driven conclusion.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of class students can

- Navigate a real, professionally maintained dataset using a point-and-click browser tool, with no coding required.
- Explain what a data dictionary is and use one to understand what a field in a dataset actually measures.
- Filter a dataset to answer a simple, self-generated question (for example, what has a particular brand sold for recently).
- Read a chart built from filtered data and describe, in plain language, what it does and does not show.
- Identify at least one reason to be cautious about a data-driven conclusion, such as an incomplete category or an unstable recent period.

AGENDA

How the session runs

- 0 to 10 min: Welcome and framing. What is a dataset, and why would anyone want to look at auction records for watches or handbags.
- 10 to 20 min: Sandbox orientation. Everyone registers and opens the sandbox together; facilitator walks through the homepage, coverage browser, and data dictionary.
- 20 to 40 min: Guided demo. Facilitator walks the group through filtering one brand's sold items and building a chart.
- 40 to 50 min: Participant exploration. Each person picks a brand or category they are curious about and filters to it themselves, with facilitator circulating to help.
- 50 to 60 min: Group share-out and discussion questions.

The in-class walkthrough

- Open sandbox.altfndata.com and register with an email address. Approval happens automatically, so everyone should be in within a minute or two.
- Click the coverage browser tab. Type a familiar brand name, such as a well-known watch or handbag maker, into the search box and note how many records and vendors appear.
- Click the data dictionary tab and find the entries for `sale_date`, `usd_price_decimal`, and `status`. Read the plain-language description of each aloud, so participants understand exactly what they are about to see.
- Return to the coverage browser or filter panel and narrow the dataset to that same brand, restricting to sold items only.
- Look at the resulting list of items: note the item title, the sale date, and the realized price in US dollars for a handful of entries.
- Open the pre-built charts tab and select a chart that shows realized price over time for the filtered brand.

The core query

- Run this in the sandbox SQL editor:
 - `SELECT designer, item_title, sale_date, usd_price_decimal`
 - `FROM all_handbags_data`
 - `WHERE designer LIKE '%Hermès%'`
 - `AND status = 'sold'`
 - `ORDER BY sale_date DESC`
 - `LIMIT 25;`

DISCUSS

Questions for the room

- What surprised you about what this dataset actually contains, compared to what you expected before we opened it?
- Why does it matter whether a listed price was what an item actually sold for, versus what a seller merely asked for it?
- What questions would you want to ask about how this data was collected before trusting a conclusion drawn from it?
- If you saw a chart showing prices rising for a brand over the last few months, what would make you trust that trend, and what would make you doubt it?
- How is looking at real auction records different from reading a news article that summarizes a market trend?

This week's assignment

- This module does not carry a graded homework assignment, since it is designed for a general-audience library setting.
- Facilitators who want an optional take-home activity can ask participants to return to the sandbox on their own, pick a category they did not explore in the session (for example, fine art or wine and whisky if the session covered handbags), and bring one observation and one question about the data to a follow-up session or a brief written note left with library staff.
- There is no formal deliverable, and the activity is intended to reinforce independent, unsupervised comfort with the sandbox rather than to produce a graded product.

NEXT

Wrapping up

- Restate the one-sentence takeaway before students leave.
- Point to the facilitator guide for discussion guidance and teaching notes.
- Questions or a class API key: info@altfndata.com