Discreet choice models and discrete-choice models: the hyphen is a short dash to clarity

[Edward Morey](#)

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For an extra-marital affair (as compared to an extra marital affair), one might want to consider a discreet choice model; since choice, they must be either beautiful or handsome, there is the cachet of sex with a model, and they won't tell your spouse.

In contrast, if you prefer to spend your time modeling discrete choices, your best bet is a discrete-choice model; what is discrete is the number of the elements in the choice set, not the model, so non-prurient economists should never write discrete choice model, which must mean something like a choice model with a limited number of something. Confused yet?

Discreet choice models, while fun, probably would not be helpful if your aim is to model choice of fishing site, beach, or transportation mode. They probably don't fish.

A pickled herring merchant would likely choose a discreet choice model, but maybe not a sober pickled-herring merchant. It might depend on whether he is a happily-married man, or just a happy married man. Would the outcome be a short-term pregnancy or a short term pregnancy?

Returning to economics, what sort of discrete-choice model would the environmental economist choose: one that assumes random utility? In that case, you want a random-utility model, not a random utility model. We assume utility is a random variable. I am not quite sure what a random model is, maybe one that randomly combines a bunch of assumptions.

So how to say all this: A discrete-choice random-utility model?

Then there is the logit versus probit stuff. So, what do we call our model: A discrete-choice, random-utility logit model? More informative might be in the phrase a discrete-choice, logistically-distributed random-utility model. I don't know.

The hyphen challenged, that is, a hyphen-challenged person, would argue that hyphens are going extinct and that this is a good thing, allowing most of us to continue avoiding them.

Hyphens should be banned if everyone knows which adjective applies to what in phrases such as a strictly quasi concave utility function and a discrete choice random utility logit model. Those who know, know, those who don't, don't and, among the people I know, the latter set is not empty for either of these phrases.

The same hyphen difficulties arise in the second half of our papers when we start talking about consumer's surplus (or is it consumers surplus? or is it consumers' surplus?). In most situations, I would vote for the first.

Researchers who are interested in consumer's surplus want to estimate consumer's-surplus measures or do they want to estimate consumer's surplus measures? The first definitely looks awkward, but, in its defense, consumer's is describing whose surplus it is, not whose measure it is. If I had a punctuation guru, I suspect she would say it depends on whether the words consumer's and surplus cohabitate in the minds of most readers: if so, no need for the hyphen, if not, one can go for either clear, but terribly awkward looking, or just conclude that consumer's-surplus looks so goofy that it should not be written down.

And, what about a conditional indirect utility function? I would argue that one provides more information to the reader if one writes instead, a conditional indirect-utility function. I have often written conditional-indirect utility function, but now think it incorrect: it's the utility function that is conditioned; I currently have no idea what a conditional indirect is.

Or maybe we should all by follow in the footsteps of Joyce and remove both the hyphen and the space it left, writing a discretechoice randomutility function, or, better yet, CONSUMER'SSURPLUS measures

Signed

Edward - an economist with a little-used brain, or is it a little used brain – I am, after all, quite old. That said, I am a slow-thinking person – but move fast, so maybe my brain is not all that used.

Comments from non-punctuation -challenged economists are welcome and can be sent to Edward.Morey@colorado.edu . You just might get quoted.