Learning to Calculate a Five-Number Summary Using a TI-84 Calculator

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November 4, 2025

In the critical field of descriptive statistics, the ability to summarize extensive raw data into actionable insights is fundamental. The **five-number summary** stands out as a powerful, concise tool designed specifically for this purpose. It provides an immediate and comprehensive snapshot of the distribution, spread, and central tendency of a given dataset. This summary consists of five crucial values that collectively help analysts understand the structure of the observations.

These five fundamental values, which define the distribution boundaries and central points, are:

The **Minimum** value
The **First Quartile** (Q1)
The **Median** (Q2)
The **Third Quartile** (Q3)
The **Maximum** value

By determining these five figures, we gain robust insight into how data points are spread, enabling the identification of potential skewness or extreme values. This detailed guide walks through the precise, step-by-step methodology for efficiently calculating this vital five-number summary using the widely adopted TI-84 calculator.

For consistency and clarity throughout this tutorial, we will utilize the following specific example dataset:

Example Dataset: 4, 6, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 17, 20, 21, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28

The Statistical Significance of the Five-Number Summary

The core function of the five-number summary is to offer a standardized, distribution-free method for describing and comparing datasets. This set of metrics forms the cornerstone for constructing box plots (box-and-whisker plots), which are invaluable visualizations in exploratory data analysis. Crucially, the five-number summary relies on positional measures rather than algebraic means, meaning it is highly robust against the distorting influence of outliers, unlike the mean and standard deviation.

Each element within the summary plays a distinct role in characterizing the data spread. The **minimum** and **maximum** values establish the outer boundaries, defining the entire span or range of the observations. The **median** (Q2) identifies the exact center of the distribution, ensuring that precisely 50% of the data falls below this point and 50% lies above it. This measure of central tendency provides a more accurate representation of the typical value when the data is heavily skewed.

Furthermore, the first quartile (Q1) marks the 25th percentile, capturing the point where one-quarter of the data distribution concludes. Conversely, the third quartile (Q3) denotes the 75th

percentile. The distance between Q1 and Q3 is known as the Interquartile Range (IQR), which serves as a highly reliable measure of the spread of the middle 50% of the data. Comprehensive understanding of these components is essential before initiating the calculation process on the graphing calculator.

Pre-Calculation Setup: Preparing the TI-84

Before we can calculate the summary statistics, it is imperative to ensure that your TI-84 calculator's memory lists are clear. If residual data remains in lists such as L1 from previous calculations, it could lead to erroneous results when calculating the new one-variable statistics. Clearing these lists is a necessary data integrity step.

To clear any existing data, follow this sequence: Press the STAT key to access the statistics menu. Scroll down and select option 4: ClrList (Clear List). Next, you must specify the list you intend to clear, which is typically L1 for basic calculations. To access L1, press 2nd followed by the number 1. Finally, press ENTER to execute the clear command.

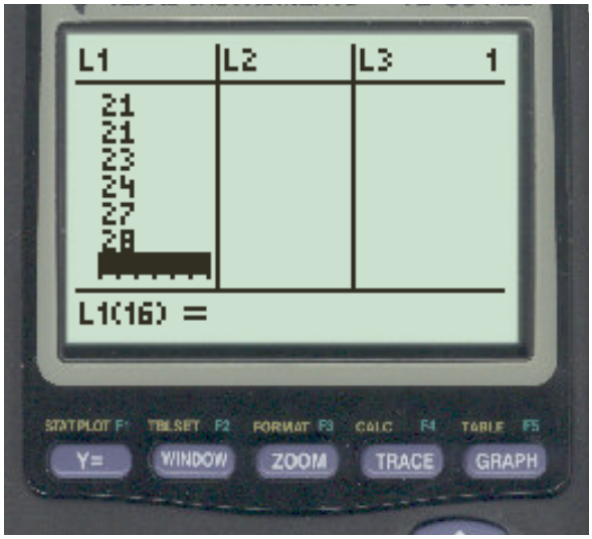
The calculator screen will briefly display the message "Done" upon successful completion of the command. This confirmation indicates that the designated memory space (L1) is completely empty and prepared to accept the new dataset. This preparation guarantees that the subsequent calculation of the five-number summary will be based exclusively on the new values we are about to enter.

Step 1: Inputting the Dataset into List L1

The initial operational phase involves accurately transcribing the values of our example dataset into the TI-84's primary memory list, L1. This requires accessing the dedicated statistics editor interface.

Begin by pressing the STAT key, which opens the main statistics menu. Ensure that the default selection, option 1: EDIT, is highlighted. Press ENTER to open the list editor screen, where you will see columns labeled L1, L2, and so forth. Carefully input each numerical value from our dataset sequentially into the L1 column, pressing ENTER after every entry. Maintaining absolute accuracy during this data transcription step is crucial, as even a minor error will invalidate the resulting five-number summary.

Once all 15 observations (4, 6, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 17, 20, 21, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28) have been entered, your calculator screen should mirror the visual representation provided below. This visual check ensures that the total number of entries (n=15) aligns correctly with the list index count.



It is a standard best practice to double-check the input against the original source data, ensuring no values were skipped or mistyped. Once the integrity of the data input is confirmed, you may proceed confidently to the calculation phase.

Step 2: Generating the One-Variable Statistics

With the dataset securely stored in L1, the TI-84 calculator is ready to compute all necessary descriptive statistics, including the five components of the summary. This process is executed using the calculator's powerful "1-Var Stats" function.

To begin, press the STAT key once more. This time, use the right arrow key to navigate away from the EDIT menu and highlight the CALC menu. Within the CALC options, select option 1: 1-Var Stats. This dedicated function is designed specifically for computing statistics based on a single variable list, which in our case is L1.

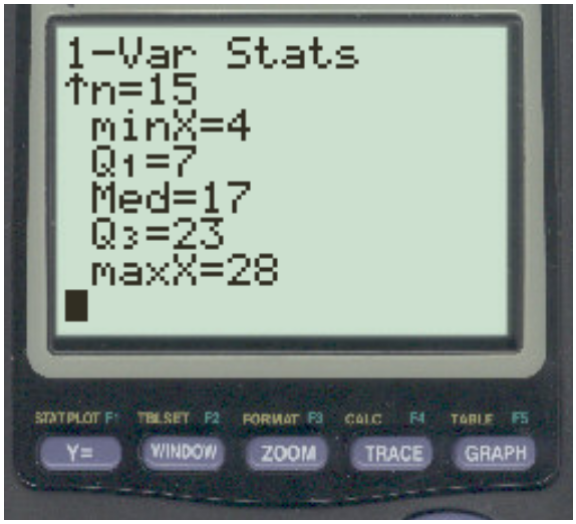
If you are utilizing a modern TI-84 Plus CE model, a detailed menu screen will prompt you for configuration. Ensure the "List" parameter is set to L1 (accessed by pressing 2nd and 1) and confirm that "FreqList" is either blank or set to 1. Once verified, scroll down to the Calculate option and press ENTER to initiate the statistical computation.

For users with older TI-84 models, the command 1-Var Stats will appear directly on the home screen. You simply need to append the list location by typing 1-Var Stats L1, followed by ENTER. The successful execution of this command generates a comprehensive listing of descriptive statistics, including essential metrics like the mean ($\bar{x}$), standard deviation (σx), and the sample size (n).

Interpreting the Five-Number Summary Output

After the TI-84 completes the calculation, the results screen displays a long list of statistical outputs. While the top portion provides crucial information regarding central tendency and variability (such as the mean and standard deviation), the specific components of the five-number summary are strategically placed toward the bottom of this output list. It is necessary to use the down arrow key to scroll past the initial statistics to reveal the required values.

Scroll down beyond the standard deviation and the sample size (n) until the final section of the output is fully visible. This section is clearly labeled and contains the five key figures needed for our summary: minX, Q1, Med, Q3, and maxX. These labels correspond directly to the formal definitions of the summary statistics.



By meticulously observing the output screen, we can extract and record the complete five-number summary for our specific dataset:

The **Minimum** (minX): **4**
The **First Quartile** (Q1): **7**
The **Median** (Med): **17**
The **Third Quartile** (Q3): **23**
The **Maximum** (maxX): **28**

These five definitive values now fully characterize the distribution: the lowest observation is 4, the highest is 28, the central score is 17, and the middle 50% of the data ranges between 7 and 23. This summary is now ready for presentation or further advanced statistical analysis.

Calculating Derived Metrics: Range and Interquartile Range (IQR)

Although the TI-84 automatically calculates the five core numbers, two secondary yet vital measures of variability--the Range and the Interquartile Range (IQR)--must be calculated manually utilizing the results generated by the calculator. These metrics offer quantitative evidence of the data's dispersion.

The **Range** represents the total spread of the data, calculated simply by subtracting the minimum value from the maximum value. This metric quickly communicates the overall extent of the observations. Using our calculated values (Maximum = 28, Minimum = 4), the calculation is as follows:

Range Calculation: Maximum - Minimum = 28 - 4 = **24**

A range of 24 signifies that the difference between the lowest and highest observations spans 24

units. It is important to note that the range is highly susceptible to skewness and outliers, as a single extreme value can disproportionately affect this measure.

In contrast, the **Interquartile Range (IQR)** provides a far more robust measure of spread because it focuses exclusively on the central 50% of the data, effectively neutralizing the impact of extreme outliers. The IQR is calculated by subtracting the first quartile (Q1) from the third quartile (Q3). This metric is essential for constructing box plots and is the foundational element used in formal outlier detection tests (the 1.5 * IQR rule).

Interquartile Range (IQR) Calculation: Q3 - Q1 = 23 - 7 = **16**

These two derived metrics provide a comprehensive understanding of data dispersion. The IQR of 16 specifically tells us that the middle half of our data points are spread across 16 units, providing a trustworthy measure of the typical variability within the core distribution of the dataset.

Next Steps: Visualization and Advanced Considerations

Successfully mastering the calculation of the five-number summary on the TI-84 calculator is a gateway to deeper statistical investigation. The logical extension of this summary is the construction of a box plot, which transforms these five numbers into a clear, visual representation of the data's shape, center, and overall spread.

The TI-84 simplifies the creation of box plots through its statistical plotting feature. By navigating to the STAT PLOT menu (accessed via 2nd, Y=) and selecting the box plot icon, you can instruct the calculator to automatically generate the visualization. The calculator uses the exact minimum, Q1, median, Q3, and maximum values calculated from the L1 data, eliminating the need for manual graphing.

It is beneficial for advanced students to remember that the TI-84 calculator employs a specific methodology (the median method) for determining quartiles, which may result in slight discrepancies when compared to results from other statistical software packages, particularly when working with smaller samples. However, the calculator offers a consistent, rapid, and reliable method for generating these critical descriptive statistics.