25 Common errors

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APPENDIX · COMMON ERRORS

A field guide to the R, Quarto, and `renv` errors that will bite you first.

Each entry lists the error message, the usual cause, and the fix that works most of the time.

25.1 R

Error: `there is no package called 'xyz'`

Cause: the package is not installed in the library R is looking in.

Fix: `install.packages("xyz")`. If you are using `renv`, run `renv::restore()` instead to keep the lock file authoritative.

Error: `could not find function "ggplot"`

Cause: package is installed but not loaded.

Fix: `library(ggplot2)` (or `library(tidyverse)`).

Error: `non-finite value supplied by optim`

Cause: the model failed to converge, often because of extreme starting values, perfect separation (logistic regression), or a misspecified formula.

Fix: rescale predictors, use sensible starting values, or for logistic regression check for zero cells in the outcome-by-predictor table.

Error: `contrasts can be applied only to factors with 2 or more levels`

Cause: a factor predictor has been filtered down to a single level.

Fix: check `table(your_data$predictor)` and restore levels, or drop that predictor from the model.

Error: `Error in UseMethod("predict") : no applicable method for 'predict' applied to an object of class "c('list')"`

Cause: you passed the wrong object to `predict()`. Usually a list instead of the fitted model.

Fix: check the object with `class()` and pass the model object itself, e.g. `predict(fit, newdata = nd)`.

Error: `Loading required package: foo — there is no package called 'foo'`

Cause: an installed package has a dependency that is missing.

Fix: `install.packages("foo", dependencies = TRUE)`.

25.2 Quarto

Error: `quarto: command not found`

Cause: Quarto is not on your PATH.

Fix: install from https://quarto.org and restart your terminal. On macOS, check that `/usr/local/bin` (or the Homebrew prefix) is in your PATH.

Error: `Failed to render: your system is missing pandoc`

Cause: older versions of R Quarto missed the bundled pandoc.

Fix: upgrade Quarto to the latest release.

Error: `Error running filter shortcodes`

Cause: a Quarto extension is missing after cloning.

Fix: run `quarto add` for the extension, or ignore if the extension is optional.

Error: `output file: docs/index.html does not exist`

Cause: `quarto render` was interrupted or `output-dir` changed.

Fix: re-run `quarto render` from a clean state; if the interruption wedged `.quarto/`, delete that cache directory and try again.

Error: `GitHub Pages deployment failed: 404`

Cause: Pages is pointing at the wrong branch or path.

Fix: in the repo Settings → Pages, select the `gh-pages` branch and the `/ (root)` folder. Our workflow deploys to `gh-pages` by default.

25.3 `renv`

Error: `renv::restore() failed with: cannot install package 'xyz' from source`

Cause: a system library is missing. The error above this line usually names the header file.

Fix: install the matching `-dev` package on Linux, the corresponding Homebrew package on macOS, or Rtools on Windows. Common culprits:

- `libcurl4-openssl-dev` for `curl`

- `libxml2-dev` for `XML` / `xml2`
- `libssl-dev` for `openssl`
- `libfontconfig1-dev`, `libfreetype6-dev`, `libharfbuzz-dev`, `libfribidi-dev` for `systemfonts`, `ragg`, `textshaping`
- `libgit2-dev` for `gert`

Error: `renv is out of sync with the lockfile`

Cause: the project library differs from `renv.lock`.

Fix: `renv::status()` to see what, then `renv::restore()` to synchronise.

25.4 knitr / rmarkdown

Error: `pandoc document conversion failed with error 2`

Cause: YAML front matter is malformed — often an unquoted colon in a title.

Fix: quote the offending string. `title: "Two:peas in a pod"`.

Error: `Error in chunkname: object 'xyz' not found`

Cause: an earlier chunk was skipped or cached stale.

Fix: clear the knitr cache (`knitr::clean_cache()`) and re-render; check chunk evaluation with `eval = TRUE`.

25.5 Git

Error: `fatal: refusing to merge unrelated histories`

Cause: you cloned one repo and then tried to pull from a different initialisation.

Fix: only run `git pull --allow-unrelated-histories` if you are sure you want to merge.

Error: `Permission denied (publickey)`

Cause: your SSH key is not registered with GitHub.

Fix: add your key via Settings → SSH and GPG keys, or switch the remote to HTTPS: `git remote set-url origin https://github.com/...`.