

Helpful Hints on Record Keeping for People Working on Projects¹

A challenge in working on long-term projects is keeping track of programs, data files, variables, etc. Even in small projects, such as a single paper, many files can be produced. In this document, I make suggestions that may make it easier for you and others to find your work. It takes a little extra time to document your work, but in the long run, it is worth it.

1. Decide on a short name (one word) for the project or paper, and use this in the naming scheme of files and directories. For example, if the paper is going to be about immigrant women, you might choose the handle of “immw”. If you work on two platforms (for example, you do your analysis on a UNIX, but create your tables on a PC) create directories on both platforms using the handle you decided on. Store all of the files pertaining to that paper in those directories and subdirectories. You may want to create subdirectories for systems files, for revisions, or for different aspects of the paper.
2. Create a file in the directories (PC and UNIX) called “anote” that has information about the work that will be found in the directories. (You can do it once, and FTP an ASCII file between locations.) Briefly describe the goals of the project and the data that will be used. Update the note when necessary, putting the most recent information at the top, with dates. When analysis is finished for specific tables, put that information in the file called “anote”. For example, “Output for table 1 was created by /full/path/immwt1.sas. Output for table 2 was created by /full/path/immwt2.sas., etc”. Include full information about where files are stored on PC and UNIX directories.
3. **VERY IMPORTANT.** It is very important to be able to determine how systems files and the variables in them were created. I believe that the best way to assure that you (and those that follow you) will be able to do this is by using the following strategy. Every systems file should be created by a program file that has the same first name. For example, if you create a SAS systems file called “immw90.ssd01”, it should be created by a program named “immw90.sas”. Similarly, an SPSS systems file called “immw90.sav” should be created by “immw90.spss”. It is also a good idea put information in the file “anote” (described above) about systems files you create, the dates, etc.
4. To help you and others easily identify a file type, always name SAS programs with the extension of “.sas” and SPSS program files with the extension of “.spss” (or choose some other naming convention – just be consistent). Always name SPSS systems files with the extension of “.sav”. With SAS systems files, there is not a choice. The extension is determined by the version of SAS, and the platform used (examples are .sd2, sas7bdat, or .ssd01).
5. Document your program with comments, titles, variable labels (SPSS) and formats (SAS). The first line of the program should always be a comment line that tells the name of the program. For example, the first line of the program file “immw1.sas” would be “* immw1.sas, your initials or name, the date”. The second line should be a title that includes the full path name of the program (for example “/disk1/immw/y90/immw1.sas”. If the program reads data, document the sources of the data carefully. Be generous with documentation throughout the program, especially with programming that may otherwise be confusing.
6. When printing tables and figures, include information that will make it easy to revise the table when necessary – the full path name of the file (for example, c:\immw\table1.doc, from program /disk1/immw/table1.sas, and the date. Keep a copy of the tables with this documentation with the paper.
7. Create an index of your directories and projects. For example, you would have an entry for the project on immigrant women. You would include information about the subject and purpose of the paper/project, the data being used, the directories where files are stored (PC and UNIX), the title of the paper, status of the project (for example, paper under review at AJS, or revised and resubmitted for ASR in 4/99), and any other information that is important.

C:\all\help\helpnew\record.wpd

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