

Free Waves

Free waves are waves that are not part of any data folder hierarchy. They are used mainly for temporary storage in a user function. They are somewhat faster to create than global waves, and when used as temporary storage in a user function, they are automatically killed at the end of the function.

Free waves are recommended for advanced programmers only.

A wave that is stored in no data folder is called a “free” wave to distinguish it from a “global” wave which is stored in the root data folder or its descendants and from a “local” wave which is stored in a free data folder or its descendants.

Note: Free waves are saved only in packed experiment files. They are not saved in unpacked experiments and are not saved by the SaveData operation or the Data Browser’s Save Copy button. In general, they are intended for temporary computation purposes only. The only way to save a free wave in an experiment file is by storing a wave reference in a wave reference wave.

You most commonly create free waves using the **NewFreeWave** function, or the **Make/FREE** and **Duplicate/FREE** operations. There are some other operations that can optionally make their output waves free waves. By default free waves are given the name `'_free_'` but **NewFreeWave** and **Make/FREE** allow you to specify other names - see **Free Wave Names** (see page IV-95) for details.

Here is an example:

```
Function ReverseWave (w)
    Wave w

    Variable lastPoint = numpts(w) - 1
    if (lastPoint > 0)
        // This creates a free wave named _free_ and an automatic
        // wave reference named wTemp which refers to the free wave
        Duplicate /FREE w, wTemp

        w = wTemp[lastPoint-p]
    endif
End
```

In this example, `wTemp` is a free wave. As such, it is not contained in any data folder and therefore can not conflict with any other wave.

As explained below under **Free Wave Lifetime** on page IV-92, a free wave is automatically killed when there are no more references to it. In this example that happens when the function ends and the local wave reference variable `wTemp` goes out of scope.

You can access a free wave only using the wave reference returned by **NewFreeWave**, **Make/FREE** or **Duplicate/FREE**.

Free waves can not be used in situations where global persistence is required such as in graphs, tables and controls. In other words, you should use free waves for computation purposes only.

For a discussion of multithreaded assignment statements, see **Automatic Parallel Processing with Multi-Thread** on page IV-323. For an example using free waves, see **Wave Reference MultiThread Example** on page IV-327.

Free Wave Created When Free Data Folder Is Deleted

A wave stored in a free data folder or one of its descendants is called a local wave. This is in contrast to free waves which are stored in no data folder and to global waves which are stored in the main data folder hierarchy (in the root data folder or one of its descendants).

Local waves, like free waves, can not be used in situations where global persistence is required such as in graphs, tables and controls.