

When..	Be sure to...	So Do this...	Avoid this...	Why?
Naming variables (aka assigning column headers)	Use meaningful variable names	`AgeAtDiagnosis`	`ADx`	`ADx` is an unclear and uninformative abbreviation
Naming variables	Avoid spacing in column headers	`AgeAtDiagnosis`	`Age At Diagnosis`	Spacing in variable names makes the analyst's life more difficult
Naming variables	Use consistent capitalization	`AgeAtDiagnosis`	Using both `AgeAtDiagnosis` and `ageatdiagnosis`	Using consistent column names across tables/spreadsheets simplifies any merging the statistician may have to do.
Naming variables	Avoid using separators, but if it's necessary, use an underscore (`_`)	`IGF1` (or `IGF_1`)	`IGF.1`, `IGF-1`, `IGF/1`, `IGF,1`	Separators (commas, periods, hyphens, slashes, spaces etc.) often have different meanings in coding languages than they do in text. Avoiding them avoids error.
Coding variables	Avoid unnecessary spaces	`male`	`male `	That extra space after `male ` makes it different from `male` without a space.
Coding variables	Be consistent!	`male`	`Male`,`male`, and `M`,	In the eyes of the statistician, `Male`,`male`, and `M` could be incorrectly perceived as three different values.
Coding variables	Be careful of spelling errors	`male`	`maale`	That extra `a` makes these two different categories.
Coding date and time	Use ISO 8601 coding	`YYYY-MM-DD`	`MM/DD/YY` and `Month Day, Year`	Consistency simplifies the analyst's life, and YYYY-MM-DD will not be misconstrued if opened in Excel.
Coding missing data	Not leave any cells blank and use a consistent value	`NA`	`0`, `-9`, red-highlighted blank cells, `.` , `'-`, ...	Each cell should be filled with a consistent value. Pick a way to denote missingness (ideally `NA`) and stick with it. Avoid using numbers or punctuation to denote missing data.
Entering data	Stick to text and numbers	Convey all information with direct text/numerical entry	Using cell highlighting or font color to convey information	Your analyst may not use the same platform for analysis as you used for data entry, so avoiding font color and cell highlighting will minimize issues.
Generating an Excel file	Save the data in an appropriate format	Use one worksheet per table and save as CSV or text files	Multiple worksheets	Statisticians require this format to import your data onto other platforms.
Entering Data	Avoid entering unnecessary lines of text at the start	Start your first row with variable names	Adding lines of text	This violates the rules of tidy data and makes processing more difficult. Include this information in the "Code book" instead.
Opening files in Excel	Know and avoid its pitfalls	Consistently include one value per cell and be careful of date and time data.	Using macros, splitting cells, and merging cells	These formats are not amenable to data analysis on other platforms.