SPSS Syntax

There are three reasons for learning how to work with SPSS syntax. Firstly, if you use SPSS for your research, you may find that you spend a considerable amount of time carrying out similar analyses. Syntax can help reduce the time needed to repeat the analysis. Secondly, if you want to produce accurate results (which you should want to do), that are replicable you should learn how to use Syntax in SPSS. Lastly, some types of analysis (such as conjoint analysis) are only provided through syntax, and not through menus.

Every time you select and execute commands from the SPSS menu system, SPSS generates syntax to perform the procedures you selected. This is done in the background, but you can capture the syntax via the menu system by directly pasting it into a syntax file. To see how this works, make a pie chart using the file *Retailer. sav* (⌕ Chapter 5). Pie charts can be made by clicking on ▸Graphs ▸Legacy Dialogs ▸Pie. SPSS will then request you to make one of three choices. The first option (*Summaries for groups of cases*) is best for a standard pie chart. In the subsequent dialog box, all you need to do is to enter the variable for which you want to make a pie chart. This is done in the box titled *Define Slices by*. If we enter gender to *Define Slices by*, and click on *Paste*, SPSS will then open a dialog box similar to the one in Figure A5.1.

Note that you have to click on *Paste* and not on *OK*. If a syntax file is already open (open a syntax file by clicking File▸New▸Syntax), the new syntax will be pasted into it. If not, SPSS will create a new syntax file and paste the syntax into it. The SPSS syntax is simple because it is aimed at non-programmers.

Figure A5.2 shows the syntax needed to sort and split a file. The first command sorts the data on gender, then splitting the data file according to gender. If you execute this syntax, any subsequent analyses will be conducted on the basis of the variable gender. Thus, each analysis would be repeated for females and males.

If you want to run the analysis based on this syntax, you simply go to the Run menu where you can choose to run the entire syntax or only parts of it. For our example, just click on Run▸All, which will start the analysis.
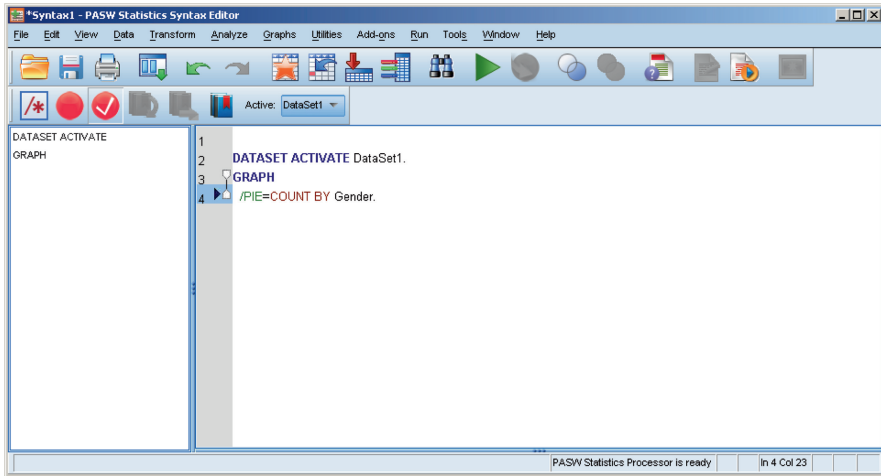
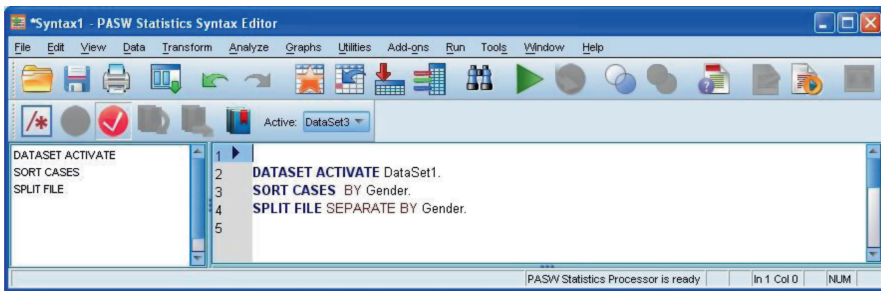**Figure A5.1** Syntax for creating a pie chart.

Figure A5.2 Syntax to split a file.

A syntax file can be saved by clicking on *File* and then *Save As*. Syntax files can thus serve as a repository of the analyses already carried out, which will be useful if you have to re-do the analysis. An existing syntax file can be opened by clicking File ▸ Open ▸ Syntax in the syntax or main menu.

Describing the functioning of the syntax in detail is beyond the scope of this book, but if you want to know more, Collier (2010) and Sarstedt et al. (2010) provide an excellent introduction to the SPSS syntax.

References

Collier, Jacqueline (2010). *Using SPSS Syntax: A Beginner's Guide*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Sarstedt, Marko, Tobias schütz, and Sascha Raithel (2010). *IBM SPSS Syntax. Eine anwendung-sorientierte Einführung*, 2nd edition, Munich: Vahlen (*in German*).