Getting Started Creating Data Dictionaries: How to Create a Shareable Dataset

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A data dictionary is a supplementary document that details the information provided in a dataset, often the meaning of included variables, creation, format, and usage of the data (McDaniel & International Business Machines Corporation, 1994). This information is usually denoted as metadata. This tutorial will demonstrate three simple options for creating data dictionaries to describe research data in psychology (see psych-DS for current efforts; Kline, 2018). These applications allow the researcher to enter their metadata with the goal of sharing the files on a platform for others to read. In general, metadata should describe the information provided in the dataset, and websites like schema.org provide structure for what can and should be included in a data dictionary.

Open datasets are beneficial for both individual researchers and the scientific community as a whole: articles with open datasets reach more researchers, allowing them to convey their findings to a wider audience, as evident by their rate of citations (McKiernan et al., 2016). Open data allows scientists to develop new hypotheses (e.g., Vadillo, Gold, & Osman, 2018), investigate multiple analysis perspectives on different datasets (e.g., Simonsohn, Simmons, & Nelson, 2015), and, importantly, identify and correct errors that would otherwise create noise in the literature (Piwowar & Vision, 2013). FAIR guidelines indicate that data should be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable (Wilkinson et al., 2016). One of the most common researcher concerns for sharing data is not having set standards for making data public (Hardwicke et al., 2018; Houtkoop et al., 2018). For those wishing to use the open data, one concern is that the shared data are unusable without a data dictionary to translate the data.

Further, open data may not be findable without a corresponding, machine-readable, data dictionary containing the searchable metadata.

This tutorial aims to help researchers by demonstrating how to create metadata for their datasets. Table 1 indicates the practical benefits to each of the applications described below. We have also included video tutorials as supplementary material, and the links are provided in Table 1 (also online at <a href="https://osf.io/3y2ex/">https://osf.io/3y2ex/</a>). The allowed inputs into the applications cover a wide range of data formats including SPSS/SAS data files, comma separated files (CSV), text files, and Excel. The output from these applications is HTML (i.e., webpage), CSV, and JavaScript Object Notation (JSON). JSON files are machine readable formats, and thus searchable, which are encouraged for sharing, especially by the new Google Dataset Search (Noy, 2018). Once the data dictionary is created, these files can be shared alongside the dataset on a web repository in the same folder (see Rouder, 2016 for a tutorial)¹. In the case of multiple datasets and dictionaries, separate subfolders or naming cues should be included to ensure that researchers can map the dataset to the appropriate dictionary.

Table 1.

Information about the Benefits for each Application

	Codebook	DataSchema	DD Creator
Citation	Arslan (2018)	Inspired by Data Spice (Boettiger et al., 2018)	DeBruine, Buchanan, & Mohr (2018)
Input	CSV, SPSS, Stata, RDS	CSV, Text, Excel, SPSS, SAS	CSV, Text, Excel, SPSS, SAS
Output	HTML report from Markdown	CSV files of metadata, JSON, and HTML report	CSV files of metadata, JSON, Rdata
Benefits	Easiest to use	Follows schema.org for	Follows schema.org

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> We do not specify where to share the data and metadata as there are many options that are appropriate. However, a tutorial for the Open Science Framework can be found here: <a href="https://youtu.be/Uyw42vpXCPk">https://youtu.be/Uyw42vpXCPk</a>.

	Quick metadata generation Generates a summary for each variable in a readable format	output Metadata entry is medium	Specifies a separate section for category labels Rdata output More detailed descriptions, depending on the data
Video	youtu.be/GF-mPLnPD1g	youtu.be/GRdMjrDurOY	youtu.be/7gZIz1tvQ_Y

### **Data Files**

In this tutorial, we demonstrate examples of how to process a dataset and create different types of metadata output. The supplementary video tutorials describe each input space and provide examples of possible descriptions. The mtcars data example is from R's datasets package and contains data from car road tests for n = 32 cars on ten variables (Henderson & Velleman, 1981). The requirements for data in these tutorials is that they: 1) be in a file format that is readable by one of the demonstrated apps as shown in Table 1, 2) include participants<sup>2</sup>, and 3) include variables. Data may be arranged according to tidy data principles; however, these apps do not specify the layout of the data, only that it may be labeled and described as shown (Wickham, 2014).

## **Codebook Tutorial**

Codebook (Arslan, 2018) is an *R* package with a corresponding website that allows researchers to create reports of their data, including reliabilities and summaries of items (histograms, descriptive statistics). The embedded metadata (such as item labels) is automatically combined into that report. Of the three available options, codebook is the quickest and easiest to implement; however, users who are accustomed to Graphical User Interfaces in their statistical software (e.g., SPSS users) might have trouble editing the automatically produced output if they

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Participants are defined as a person/animal from a study or other types of studied data, such as stimuli, words, etc.

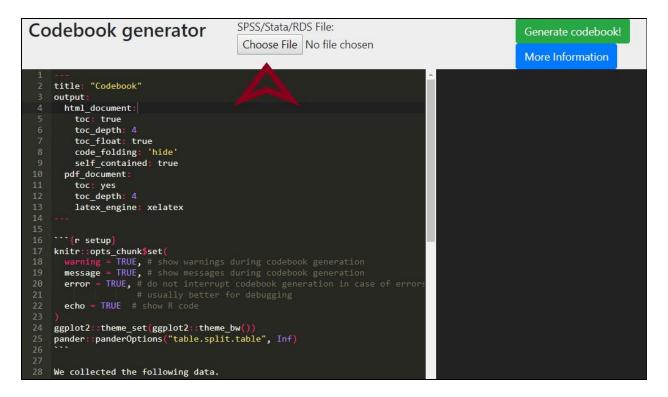
wish to add more information. The tutorial below covers the web app version of codebook, and Arslan (2018) provides more information about using codebook in R.

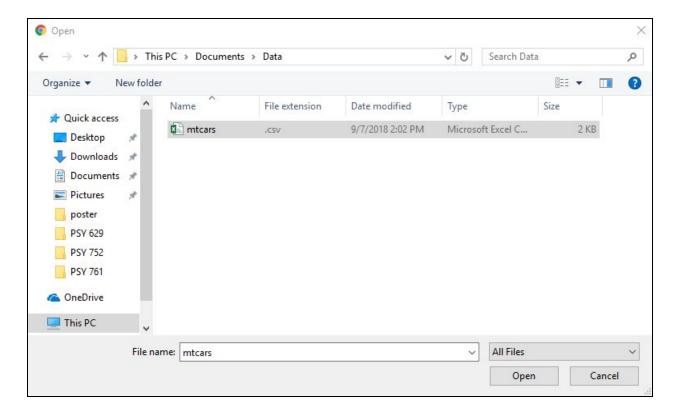
7

Step 1: Go to the codebook website: <a href="https://opencpu.formr.org/ocpu/library/codebook/www/">https://opencpu.formr.org/ocpu/library/codebook/www/</a>.

```
Codebook generator
                                                   SPSS/Stata/RDS File:
                                                                                                                          Generate codebook!
                                                     Choose File No file chosen
                                                                                                                           More Information
      title; "Codebook"
     output
       html_document:
          toc: true
          toc_depth: 4
toc_float: true
         code_folding: 'hide'
           self_contained: true
       pdf_document:
          toc: yes
toc_depth: 4
          latex_engine: xelatex
     ···{r setup}
     knitr::opts_chunk$set(
        warning = TRUE, # show warnings during codebook generation
message = TRUE, # show messages during codebook generation
error = TRUE, # do not interrupt codebook generation in case of error
# usually better for debugging
        echo = TRUE # show R code
     ggplot2::theme_set(ggplot2::theme_bw())
     pander::panderOptions("table.split.table", Inf)
28 We collected the following data.
```

Step 2: Click the **Browse...** button at the top of the page. Select the data file you wish to upload, then click **Open**. You may upload CSV, SAV (SPSS), DTA (Stata), or RDS files.





Step 3: Click Generate codebook!

```
SPSS/Stata/RDS File:
Codebook generator
                                                                                     Generate codebook!
                                    Choose File No file chosen
                                                                                     More Ir
                                                                                              mation
    title; "Codebook"
    output
     html_document:
       toc: true
toc_depth: 4
       toc_float: true
code_folding: 'hide'
       self_contained: true
      pdf_document:
       toc: yes
       toc_depth: 4
       latex_engine: xelatex
    ···{r setup}
    knitr::opts_chunk$set(
     ggplot2::theme_set(ggplot2::theme_bw())
    pander::panderOptions("table.split.table", Inf)
28 We collected the following data.
```

Step 4: Make changes to the created document by editing the code on the left side of the screen. You can safely edit the title, the text that says, "We collected the following data.", or "My Awesome Dataset" for the name of the dataset. Those more familiar with R Markdown may edit elsewhere. To save changes, click **Generate codebook!** again.

```
title: "Codebook"
    output:
      html_doc' it t:
        toc
        toc_depth: 4
       toc float: true
       code_folding: 'hide'
        self_contained: true
      pdf document:
11
       toc: yes
12
        toc depth: 4
        latex engine: xelatex
15
    ```{r setup}
17
    knitr::opts chunk$set(
      warning = TRUE, # show warnings during codebook generation
      message = TRUE, # show messages during codebook generation
      error = TRUE, # do not interrupt codebook generation in case of errors
      echo = TRUE # show R code
    ggplot2::theme_set(ggplot2::theme_bw())
                   is ("table.split.table", Inf)
    pander pande
    We collected the following data.
```

```
codebook_data = detect_scales(codebook_data)

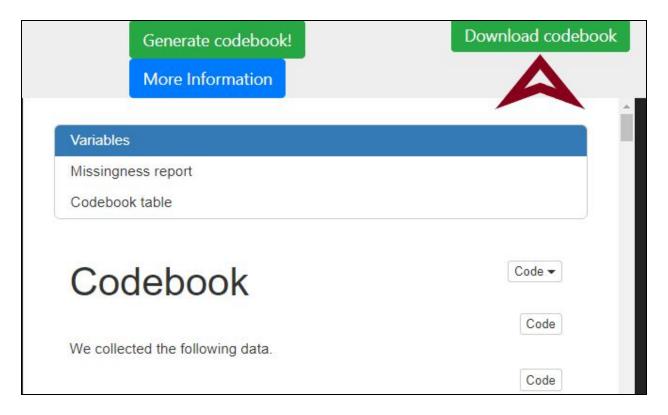
do de detect_scales(codebook_data)

# Does your dataset have a name that is not reflected in the file name?
metadata(codebook_data)$name <- "My Awesome Dataset"

codebook(codebook_data)

codebook(codebook_data)</pre>
```

Step 5: When ready, click **Download codebook** to save the file to your computer.

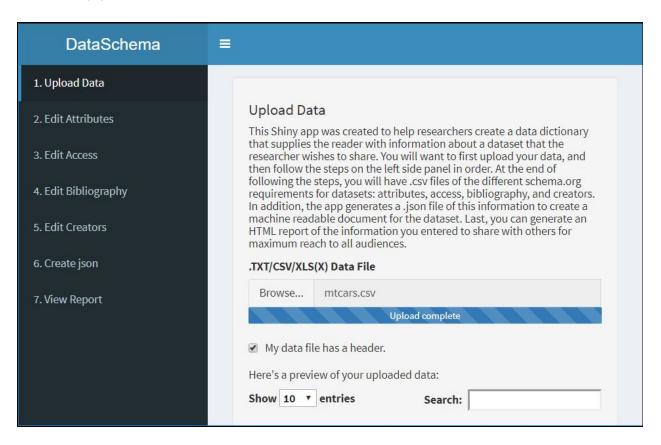


#### DataSchema Tutorial<sup>3</sup>

This application allows users to create an HTML report, a JSON file formatted following guidelines for datasets from schema.org, and .csv files of their metadata. In this application, descriptions of the dataset properties (e.g., authors, collection dates) and column information should be entered to complete the metadata files.

Step 1: Go to https://doomlab.shinyapps.io/dataschema/ to access DataSchema.

Step 2: Click **Browse...** and select the data file you wish to upload. You may upload a TXT, CSV, XLS(X), SAV, or SAS data file.

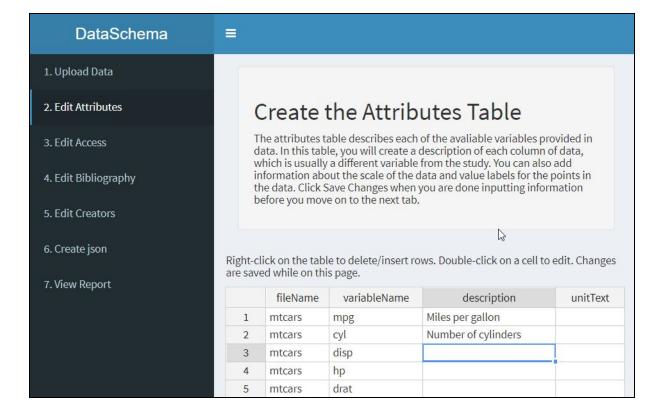


<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> DataSchema was created by forking (copying) from the GitHub repository for Data Spice (Boettiger et al., 2018). The original *R* code was then rewritten completely as a single Shiny application (Chang, Cheng, Allaire, Xie, & McPherson, 2018).

The table will automatically display your uploaded data.

mpg 🏺	cyl 🌲	disp 🏺	hp 🏺	drat 🏺	wt 🏺	qsec 🏺	VS
21	6	160	110	3.9	2.62	16.46	0
21	6	160	110	3.9	2.875	17.02	0
22.8	4	108	93	3.85	2.32	18.61	1
21.4	6	258	110	3.08	3.215	19.44	1
18.7	8	360	175	3.15	3.44	17.02	0
18.1	6	225	105	2.76	3.46	20.22	1
14.3	8	360	245	3.21	3.57	15.84	0
24.4	4	146.7	62	3.69	3.19	20	1
22.8	4	140.8	95	3.92	3.15	22.9	1
19.2	6	167.6	123	3.92	3.44	18.3	1

Step 3: Click the **Edit Attributes** page on the left to navigate to a page where you can add descriptions to the variables provided from the data file. The data uploaded will be populated into the information table on this page.



Edit the table by selecting a cell and typing directly into it. Make sure to click **Save Changes** to save the table before moving onto the next step.

	fileName	variableName	description	unitText
1	mtcars	mpg		
2	mtcars	cyl		
3	mtcars	disp		
4	mtcars	hp		
5	mtcars	drat		
6	mtcars	wt		
7	mtcars	qsec		
8	mtcars	vs		
9	mtcars	am		
.0	mtcars	gear		
.1	mtcars	carb		
П	lit the Save Changes h	outton to save this file.		Save Changes

Below the table is a box with descriptions of what to enter for each column. Each table entry page of the app contains a similar box of descriptions.

Hit the Save Changes button to save this file.

# Attributes Metadata:

fileName = The name of the input data file(s). Do Not Change.

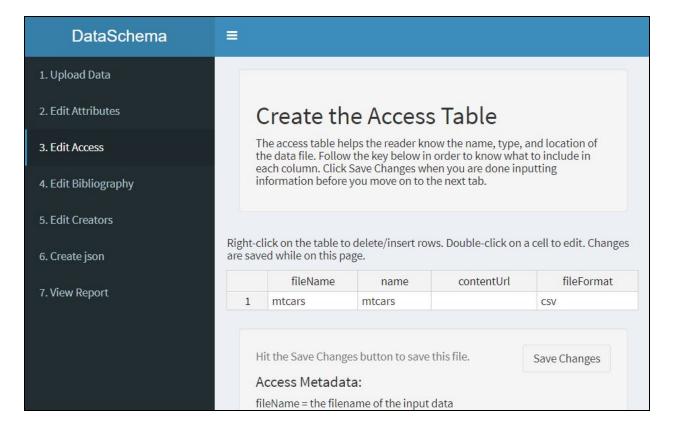
variableName = The name of the measured variable. Do Not Change.

description = A written description of what that measured variable is.

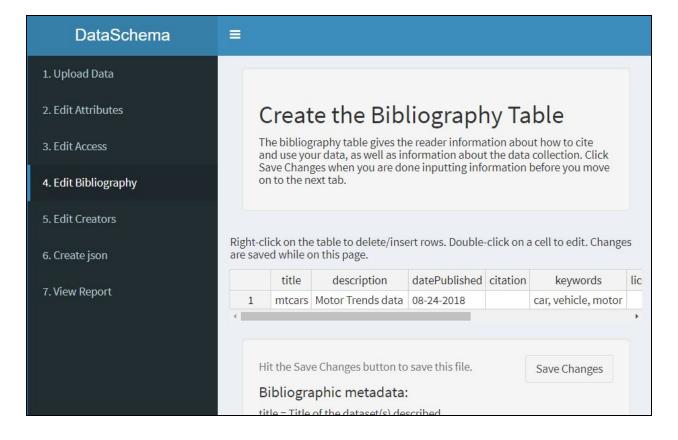
unitText = The units the variable was measured in, as well as any variable labels for data to help the reader understand the measurement of the data. For example, you might include the label values for a Likert-type scale that participants used to rate the data.



Step 4: Click the **Edit Access** page on the left to navigate to a page where you can include the name, type, and location of the data file. Edit the table by directly typing in the desired box, and then click **Save Changes** before moving on to the next step.

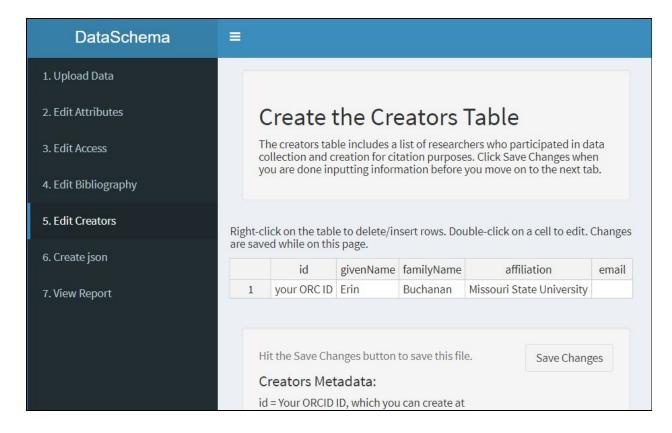


Step 5: Click the **Edit Bibliography** page on the left to navigate to a page where you can add information about the data collection and data citation. Edit the table by clicking directly on the box, and make sure to click **Save Changes** before moving on to the next step.

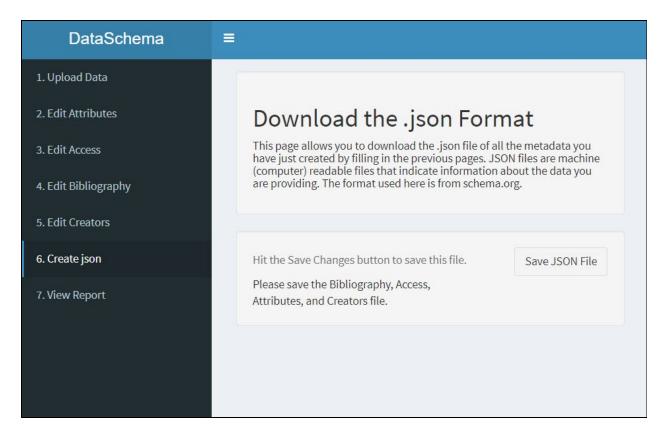


Step 6: Click the **Edit Creators** page on the left to navigate to a page where you can include citation information about the researchers who were involved in data collection and creation.

Edit the table by typing directly in it, and click **Save Changes** before moving on to the next step.



Step 7: Click the **Create json** page on the left to navigate to a page where you can download the .json file of the metadata created by editing the tables from previous pages. Click **Save JSON File** to save the metadata as a .json file.



Step 8: Click the **View Report** page on the left to view the metadata as an HTML report. Click **Save Report HTML** to save the report as a .html file. Open the file to view the HTML report of the metadata.

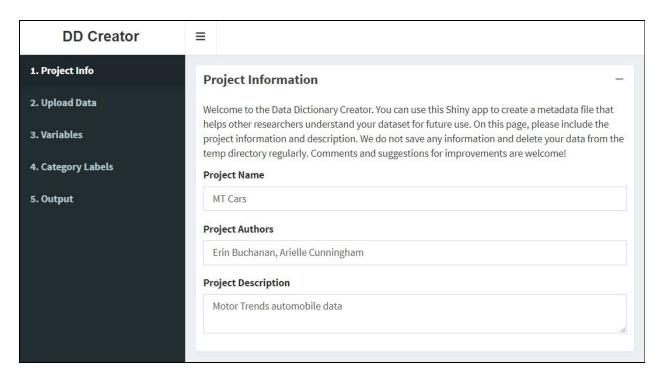
Dataset	Inform	nation							
Title	Descri		ate ublished	Citation	Keywords	License	Funder	Geographic Information	Start Date
mtcars	Motor Trends	W	3-24- )18	NA	car, vehicle, motor	NA	Missouri State University	Springfield, MO	03/27/2018
Accessi	ng the	Data							
File Nan	ne Na	me of Dat	a URL		File	Format			
mtcars	mt	cars	http://	/mydata.co	m/data csv				
Authors	;								
	First Name	Last Name	Afflia	tion En	nail				
12345	Erin	Buchana	n Misso State Unive		nail@missouri	state.edu			
Data At	tribute	es							
Variable					Units	of			

# **Data Dictionary Creator**

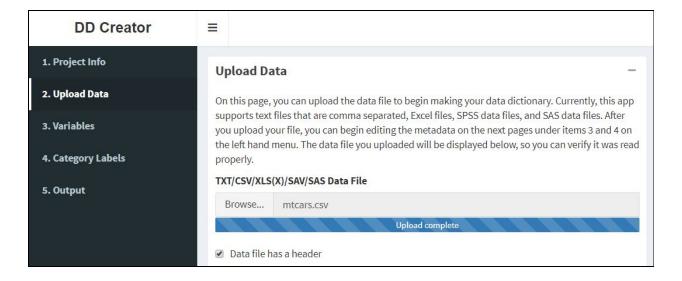
DD Creator allows a user to enter metadata for each column provided in the dataset, while automatically providing a starting point for the number of unique values, missing values, variable type (i.e., character, numeric), and minimum/maximum values. A description of each column can be added, along with information about the levels/groups in the data and synonyms for the variables. On a separate page, category labels can be provided for both character and numeric data (i.e., Likert-type scales that include labeled numbers). Users can then download CSV files of the metadata, a JSON formatted metadata file, and an Rdata file that includes the dataset and descriptive information integrated together.

Step 1: Go to <a href="https://doomlab.shinyapps.io/ddcreator/">https://doomlab.shinyapps.io/ddcreator/</a> to access DD Creator.

Step 2: On the first page (**Project Info**), type in the appropriate information under the **Project**Name, **Project Authors**, and **Project Description** fields.



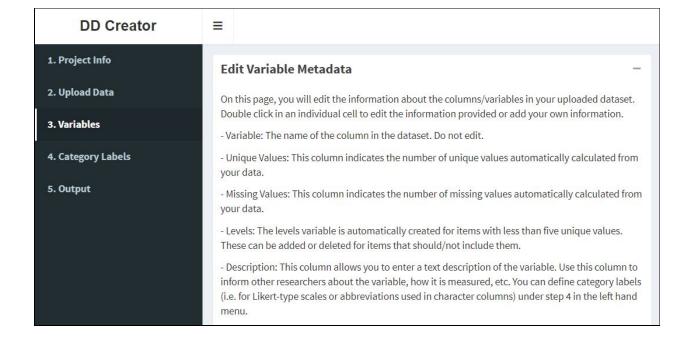
Step 3. Click the **Upload Data** tab on the left side of the page. Click **Browse** and select the data file you would like to upload. If your data file has a header, check the **Data file has a header** box.



A table of your data will display below. You can change the number of entries you see on the screen as well as search for specific information in the dataset.

how 10	▼ entrie	ries			Search:				
mpg 🌲	cyl 🌲	disp 🛊	hp 🌲	drat 🛊	wt 🌲	qsec 🌲	vs 🌲	am \$	gear 🛊
21	6	160	110	3.9	2.62	16.46	0	1	4
21	6	160	110	3.9	2.875	17.02	0	1	4
22.8	4	108	93	3.85	2.32	18.61	1	1	4
21.4	6	258	110	3.08	3.215	19.44	1	0	3
18.7	8	360	175	3.15	3.44	17.02	0	0	3
18.1	6	225	105	2.76	3.46	20.22	1	0	3
14.3	8	360	245	3.21	3.57	15.84	0	0	3
24.4	4	146.7	62	3.69	3.19	20	1	0	4
22.8	4	140.8	95	3.92	3.15	22.9	1	0	4
19.2	6	167.6	123	3.92	3.44	18.3	1	0	4
									•

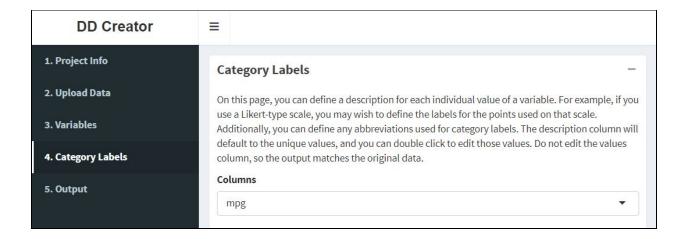
Step 4: Click the **Variables** tab on the left to navigate to a page where you can enter metadata about your variables. See the instructions on the page for details about the information you can add.



Step 5: Below the instructions, the metadata table will be populated with information from the dataset you uploaded in the previous step. Double-click inside a cell to edit or add information about your variables. The page will save automatically.

Show 10 ▼ e	ntries			Search:			
Variable	# Unique <b>\$</b> Values	# Missing   Values	Levels 🛊	Description (required)	Type \$	Minimum Allowable	
mpg	25	0		Miles per Gallon	numeric	10	
cyl	3	0	4, 6, 8	Cylinders	integer		
disp	27	0		Displacement (cu. in.)	numeric	71	
hp	22	0		Horsepower	integer	5	
drat	22	0			numeric	2.7	
wt	29	0			numeric	1.51	
qsec	30	0			numeric	14	
VS	2	0	0, 1		integer		

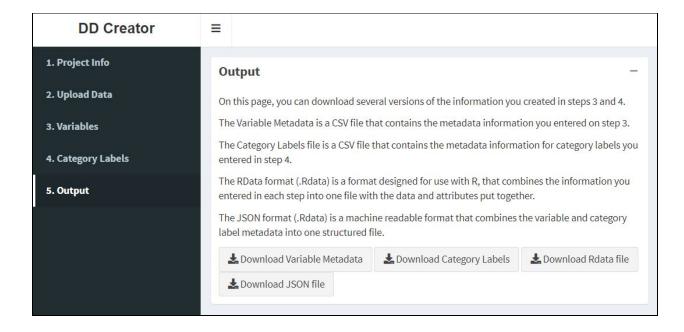
Step 6: Click the **Category Labels** tab on the left to navigate to a page where you can edit category labels for your variables. The **Columns** drop-down list will populate based on your dataset.



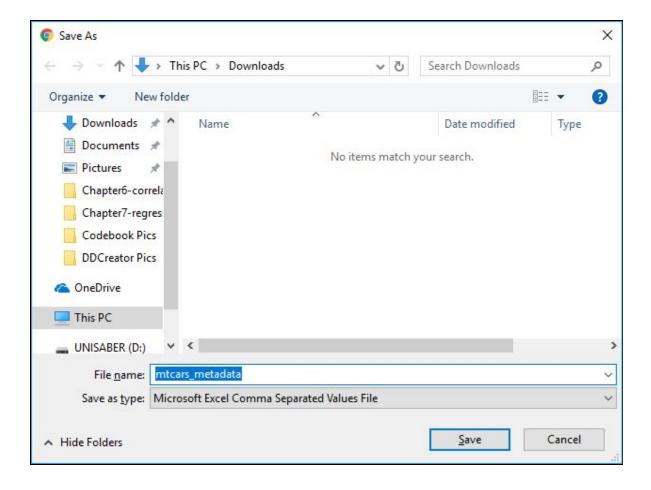
Step 7: Use the **Columns** drop-down box to select which variable description to change. The table below will populate based on your selection. Double-click inside a cell to make changes. The page will save automatically.



Step 8: Click the **Output** tab on the left side of the page. Select the file you would like to download. Variable Metadata and Category Labels will download as CSV files. You may also download an Rdata or JSON file.



Enter a file name and click Save.



# Summary

In this tutorial, we provide three accessible options for researchers to create data dictionaries: shareable metadata information that allows others to read and understand the data provided. This type of tutorial is especially critical as transparency practices become more commonplace and as journals and researchers implement guidelines for sharing information and open data. For example, the availability of large, open neuroimaging datasets led to the development of Brain Imaging Data Structure, which defines standards for neurological data (BIDS; Gorgolewski et al., 2016), and a similar movement is occurring in psychology with the psych-DS project (Kline, 2018). This tutorial provides a manageable first step toward generating understandable and reusable metadata for sharing. The applications showcased here will continue to evolve as cohesive standards are formed through group discussion.

## **Additional Resources**

- Boulton, G., Rawlins, M., Vallance, P., & Walport, M. (2011). Science as a public enterprise: the case for open data. *The Lancet*, 377(9778), 1633-1635.
   <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60647-8">https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60647-8</a>
- 2) Codebook's website with examples from many data types:

  <a href="https://rubenarslan.github.io/codebook/index.html">https://rubenarslan.github.io/codebook/index.html</a>
- 3) Google Data Explorer: <a href="https://www.google.com/publicdata/directory">https://www.google.com/publicdata/directory</a>

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Wickham, H. (2014). Tidy Data. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 59(10), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v059.i10

Wilkinson, M. D., Dumontier, M., Aalbersberg, I. J. J., Appleton, G., Axton, M., Baak, A., ...

Mons, B. (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and
stewardship. *Scientific Data*, *3*, 160018. https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18