

Five Tips for Stata Beginners

1. **Never ever ever overwrite your original dataset!** Even if you think you are absolutely certain that you will not need a variable, you cannot retrieve it after you have dropped it and saved it over your original data. You either let your .do file do the job (which I personally recommend), or you save your amended data as a different file.
2. **Always always use a .do file.** You might think .do files are redundant, but when you have to run many many commands, which you will do in eventually, the .do file will be the best invention ever. In the real world, a .do file also allows you to conduct exactly the same statistical analysis on a different dataset with just the click of a button. Moreover, you might want to return to a dataset you worked on two years ago, but have forgotten how you did the analysis; having a .do file will make everything easier. Lastly, people will think you are a Stata pro.
3. **Always have a .log file.** Instead of copying and pasting from Stata's output window, you should use a .log file to record all your output. As long as you are updating your .do file, it makes sense to overwrite your previous .log file. Do not save your .log file in .smcl format, because it can only be read in Stata, while .log files are just text files. To transfer your output from the .log file to Excel, you can go to Data -> Get External Data -> Import Text Files... To transfer it to Word, you can change the font to Courier New and font size 10 to maintain Stata's formatting.
4. **Always code your variables in a way that is comprehensible to other people.** Dummy variables (which take on values of 0 and 1) are the convention; binary variables (which take on any two values, such as 1 and 2) are not. Moreover, the mean of the former is more meaningful than that of the latter. For categorical variables, label the values to prevent confusion.
5. **When you have a query, consult Stata's online help.** Typing "help 'command'" will give you details on the command. If you do not know what the command is, you can type "search 'keyword'", though that takes more time. Alternatively, you can always ask one of the TFs/CAs or post your question on the discussion board.