



StatNews #26: User-Friendly Statistical Software

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With the introduction of Windows, most statistical software companies quickly adapted and took advantage of the menu driven interface. SPSS and Minitab, for example, now have effectively made use of menus. This past semester, the high-end statistical package, S-Plus, came out with its new version 4, also extensively menu-driven.

Even SAS is trying to improve its user-friendliness. The SAS Assist module was the first such attempt, and is still included in the package. Unfortunately it is not really straightforward to use. Another attempt in the latest version of SAS is the addition of a separate program, the SAS System Viewer. This program enables us to view SAS files without opening SAS. It even allows us, in a still clumsy way, to subset SAS data files.

A third approach to user-friendliness implemented by SAS, and in my opinion the most successful, is the SAS Insight module. If you have not yet done so, I would like to tempt you to experiment with it. This module will not only allow you to view your data, but also to enter data in a spreadsheet and access a choice of different statistical analyses to be performed. Besides basic analysis, ANOVA and multiple regression, you will have access through the menus, amongst other analyses, to logistic regression, Poisson regression, various curve fitting options and high-quality graphs. Some of the output is interactive, allowing you, for example, to adjust some of the parameters or to obtain some information on specific data points in requested graphs.

If using menus for the analysis of your data does not tempt you, you can still benefit from the use of SAS Insight to cut short some steps that are cumbersome to implement with commands, for example changing a variable from character to numeric or editing a typo in the data.

SAS is currently developing a fourth tool, SAS Analyst, to make its software even more user-friendly. This application will provide easy access to basic statistical analyses in Windows 3.1, Windows 95, and Windows NT environments. The menu-driven interface follows the standard for Windows applications and will seem familiar to most users. We are evaluating a beta release of this application and will keep you posted on its availability in future versions of SAS.

If you have SAS for Windows and would like to have a head start with using SAS Insight, please contact Francoise Vermeylen for additional information.

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