

Reading in Stata Format (.dta) Data Files

This set of notes describes how to make use of data files within the computer program Stata. It assumes that you have already installed Stata on your computer, following the “Getting Started with Stata” handout. It also assumes that you have started Stata up on your computer and are looking at its main screen, on which there is a Stata *Results* window and a Stata *Command* box.

This handout uses the 2016 General Social Survey to illustrate Stata commands and output in all handouts in this series. You can download the 2016 data file, GSS2016.DTA, two different ways. You can download it from the GSS’ website: go to <http://gss.norc.org/get-the-data/stata>, scroll to the “Download Individual Year Data Sets” text box and click “2016” to begin an automatic download of the dataset. Alternatively, you can download it here: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/53958>.

Stata data files have .dta extensions. See the “How to Import an Excel or Text Data File into Stata” handout for information on how to import other types of data files into Stata.

You can read a data file on your computer into Stata by typing

```
use <filename>
```

in the Stata *Command* box. You do not have to type the .dta extension, which is assumed. So to read in the 2016 GSS data file (GSS2016.DTA), one would type:

```
use GSS2016
```

If the file is not in the default directory assumed by Stata, you have to add information about the search path to be used to find the data.

On a PC:

For example, if `GSS2016` was not in the default directory, one would have to type

```
use "S:\Data\Data sets\GSS2016.DTA"
```

to indicate that the data are to be found on drive S:, in the folder: `Data\Data sets`. You would type whatever directory information is appropriate for your own computer, of course.

On a Mac:

For example, if `GSS2016` was not in the default directory, one would have to type

```
use "/Users/user1/Data/GSS2016.DTA"
```

to indicate that the data are to be found on the hard drive, in the folder
`/Users/user1/Data` .

Note: PC file paths use a backslash whereas Mac file paths use a forward slash.

Alternately (and probably easier, since typing long path names is tiresome and even annoying), you can use the Stata menus to open a data set: click on File, then on Open; the default directory will open as a window, and you can navigate from there to the folder where the data file you want to use is stored, and then click on that filename.

After you have read in your data by one of these methods, you will be ready to issue Stata commands to compute statistics, draw graphs, and so on, for that set of data.

Closing Stata

When you've done all the statistics work you want to do for a while, you can close Stata in one of two ways:

You can type

`exit,clear`

in the Stata *Command* window.

Or, using the menus, click on File, Exit.