



SPSS Tip 4.3 Naming variables

'Surely it's a waste of my time to type in long names for my variables when I've already given them a short one?' I hear you ask. I can understand why it would seem so, but as you go through university or your career accumulating data files, you will be grateful that you did. Imagine you had a variable called 'number of times I wanted to bang the desk with my face during Andy Field's statistics lecture'; then you might have named the column in SPSS 'nob' (short for number of bangs). You thought you were smart coming up with such a succinct label. If you don't add a more detailed label, SPSS uses this variable name in all the output from an analysis. Fast forward a few months when you need to look at your data and output again. You look at the 300 columns all labelled things like 'nob', 'pom', 'p', 'lad', 'sit' and 'ssoass' and think to yourself, 'What does "nob" stand for? Which of these variables relates to face-butting a desk? Imagine the chaos you could get into if you always used acronyms for the variable and had an outcome of 'wait at news kiosk' for a study about queuing. I deal with many data sets with variables called things like 'sftg45c', and if they don't have proper variable labels, then I'm in all sorts of trouble. Get into a good habit and label your variables.