

4 Getting help

System help

Stata's help system provides a wealth of information to help you learn and use Stata. To find out which Stata command will perform the statistical or data management task you would like to do, you should generally follow these steps:

1. Select **Help > Search...**, choose *Search all*, and enter the topic or keywords. This search will open a new Viewer window containing information about Stata commands, references to articles in the *Stata Journal*, links to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Stata's website, links to videos on Stata's YouTube channel, links to selected external websites, and links to user-written commands.
2. Read through the results. If you find a useful command, click on the link to the appropriate command name to open its help file.
3. Read the help file for the command you chose.
4. If you want more in-depth help, click on the link from the name of the command to the PDF documentation, read it, then come back to Stata.
5. If the first help file you went to is not what you wanted, either click on the **Also See** button and choose a link to related help files or click on the **Back** button to go back to the previous document and go from there to other help files.
6. With the help file open, click on the Command window and enter the command, or click on the **Dialog** button and choose a link to open a dialog for the command.
7. If, at any time, you want to begin again with a new search, enter the new search terms in the search box of the Viewer window.
8. If you select *Search documentation and FAQs*, Stata searches its keyword database for official Stata commands, *Stata Journal* and STB articles and software, FAQs, and videos. If you select *Search net resources*, Stata searches for user-written commands, whether they are from the *Stata Journal*, the STB, or elsewhere; see [\[GSM\] 19 Updating and extending Stata—Internet functionality](#) for more information.

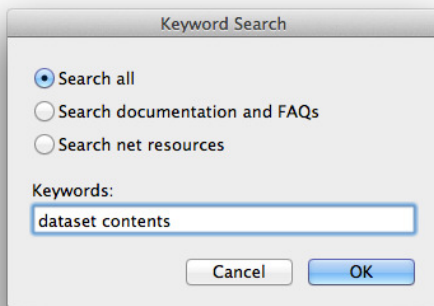
Let's illustrate the help system with an example. You will get the most benefit from the example if you work along at your computer.

Suppose that we have been given a dataset about antique cars and that we need to know what it contains. Though we still have a vague notion of having seen something like this while working through the example session in [\[GSM\] 1 Introducing Stata—sample session](#), we do not remember the proper command.

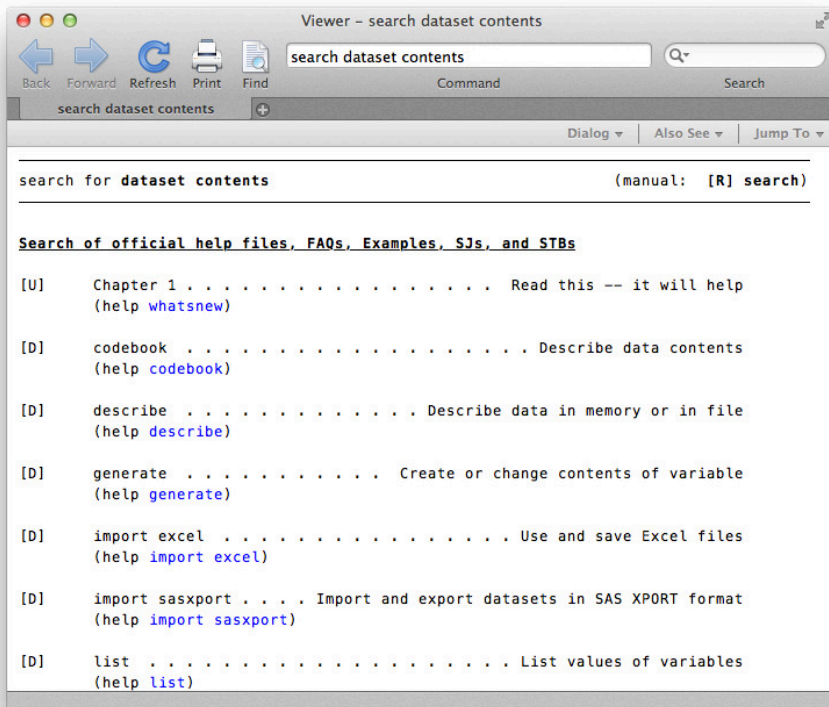
Start by typing `sysuse auto, clear` in the Command window to bring the dataset into memory. (See [\[GSM\] 5 Opening and saving Stata datasets](#) for information on the `clear` option.)

Following the above approach,

1. select **Help > Search...**
2. check that the *Search all* radio button is selected.
3. type `dataset contents` into the search box and click on **OK** or press *Return*. Before we press *Return*, the window should look like



4. Stata will now search for “dataset contents” among the Stata commands, the reference manuals, the *Stata Journal*, the FAQs on Stata’s website, and user-written commands. Here is the result:



5. upon seeing the results of the search, we see two commands that look promising: `codebook` and `describe`. Because we are interested in the contents of the dataset, we decide to check out the `codebook` command. The [D] means that we could look up the `codebook` command in the *Data Management Reference Manual*. The blue `codebook` link in (help `codebook`) means

that there is a system help file for the `codebook` command. This is what we are interested in right now.

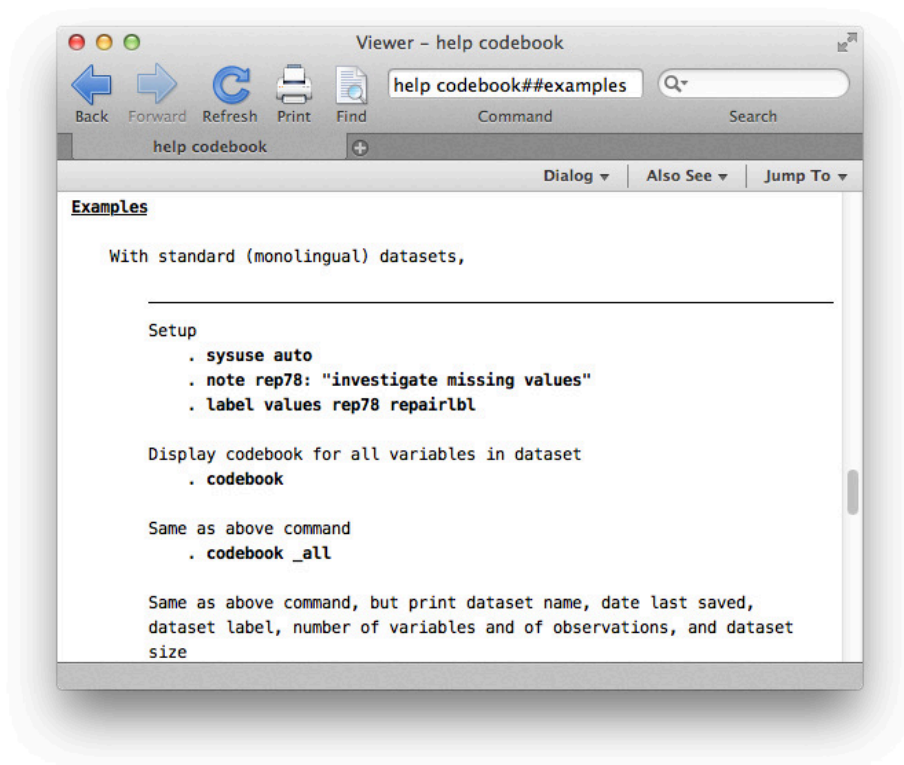
6. click on the blue `codebook` link. Links can take you to a variety of resources, such as help for Stata commands, dialogs, and even webpages. Here the link goes to the help file for the `codebook` command.



7. what is displayed is typical for help for a Stata command. Help files for Stata commands contain, from top to bottom, these features:
 - a. The quick access toolbar with three buttons:
 - i. The **Dialog** button shows links to any dialogs associated with the command.
 - ii. The **Also See** button shows links to related PDF documentation and help files.
 - iii. The **Jump To** button shows links to other sections within the current help file.
 - b. The very first link in the Title section is a link to the manual entry for the command in the PDF documentation. Clicking on the link will open your PDF viewer and show you the complete documentation for the command—in this case, `codebook`.
 - c. The command's syntax, that is, rules for constructing a command that Stata will correctly interpret. The square brackets here indicate that all the arguments to `codebook` are optional but that if we wanted to specify them, we could use a *varlist*, an *if* qualifier, or an *in* qualifier, along with some options. (Options vary greatly from command to command.) The options are listed directly under the command and are explained in some detail later in the help file. You will learn more about command syntax in [\[GSM\] 10 Listing data and basic command syntax](#).

- d. A description of the command. Because “codebook” is the name for big binders containing hard copy describing each of the elements of a dataset, the description for the codebook command is justifiably terse.
- e. The options that can be used with this command. These are explained in much greater detail than in the listing of the possible options after the syntax. Here, for example, we can see that the mv option can look to see if there is a pattern in the missing values—something important for data cleaning and imputation.
- f. Examples of command usage. The codebook examples are real examples that step through using the command on a dataset either shipped with Stata or loadable within Stata from the Internet.
- g. The information the command stores in the returned results. These results are used primarily by programmers.

For now, either click on **Jump To** and choose **Examples** from the drop-down menu or scroll down to the examples. It is worth going through the examples as given in the help file. Here is a screenshot of the top of the examples:



Searching help

Search is designed to help you find information about statistics, graphics, data management, and programming features in Stata, either as part of the official release or as user-written commands. When entering topics for the search, use appropriate terms from statistics, etc. For example, you could enter *Mann-Whitney*. Multiple topic words are allowed, for example, *regression residuals*.

When you are using **Search**, use proper English and proper statistical terminology. If you already know the name of the Stata command and want to go directly to its help file, select **Help > Stata Command...** and type the command name. You can also type the command name in the *Search* field at the top of the Viewer and press *Return*.

Help distinguishes between topics and Stata commands because some names of Stata commands are also general topic names. For example, *logistic* is a Stata command. If you choose **Stata Command...** and type *logistic*, you will go right to the help file for the command. But if you choose **Search...** and type *logistic*, you will get search results listing the many Stata commands that relate to logistic regression.

Remember that you can search for help from within a Viewer window by typing a command in the command box of the Viewer or by clicking the magnifying glass button to the left of the search box, selecting the scope of your search, typing the search criteria in the search box, and pressing *Return*.

Help and search commands

As you might expect, the help system is accessible from the Command window. This feature is especially convenient when you need help on a particular Stata command. Here is a short listing of the various commands you can use:

- Typing `help commandname` is equivalent to selecting **Help > Stata Command...** and typing *commandname*. The help file for the command appears in a new Viewer tab.
- Typing `search topic` in the Command window produces the same output as selecting **Help > Search...**, choosing *Search all*, and typing *topic*. The output appears in a new Viewer tab.
- Typing `search topic, local` in the Command window produces the same output as selecting **Help > Search...**, choosing *Search documentation and FAQs*, and typing *topic*. The output appears in the Results window instead of a Viewer.
- Typing `search topic, net` in the Command window produces the same output as selecting **Help > Search...**, choosing *Search net resources*, and typing *topic*. The output appears in the Results window instead of a Viewer.

See [U] 4 [Stata's help and search facilities](#) and [U] 4.8 [search: All the details](#) in the *User's Guide* for more information about these command-language versions of the help system. The `search` command, in particular, has a few capabilities (such as author searches) that we have not demonstrated here.

The Stata reference manuals and User's Guide

All the Stata reference manuals come as PDF files and are included with the software. The manuals themselves have many cross-references in the form of clickable links, so you can easily read the documentation in a nonlinear way.

Many of the links in the help files point to the PDF manuals that came with Stata. It is worth clicking on these links to read the extensive information found in the manuals. The Stata help system, though extensive, contains only a fraction of the information found in the manuals.

The Stata reference manuals are each arranged like an encyclopedia, alphabetically, and each has its own index. The *User's Guide* also has an index. The *Glossary and Index* contains a combined index for the *User's Guide* and all the reference manuals. This combined index is a good place to start when you are looking for information about a command.

Entries have names like **collapse**, **egen**, and **summarize**, which are generally themselves Stata commands.

Notations such as [R] **ci**, [R] **regress**, and [R] **ttest** in the **Search** results and help files are references to the *Base Reference Manual*. You may also see things like [P] **#delimit**, which is a reference to the *Programming Reference Manual*, and [U] **9 The Break key**, which is a reference to the *User's Guide*. For a complete list of manuals and their shorthand notations, see *Cross-referencing the documentation*, which immediately follows the table of contents in this manual.

For advice on how to use the reference manuals, see [GSM] **18 Learning more about Stata**, or see [U] **1.2 The User's Guide and the Reference manuals**.

The Stata Journal and the Stata Technical Bulletin

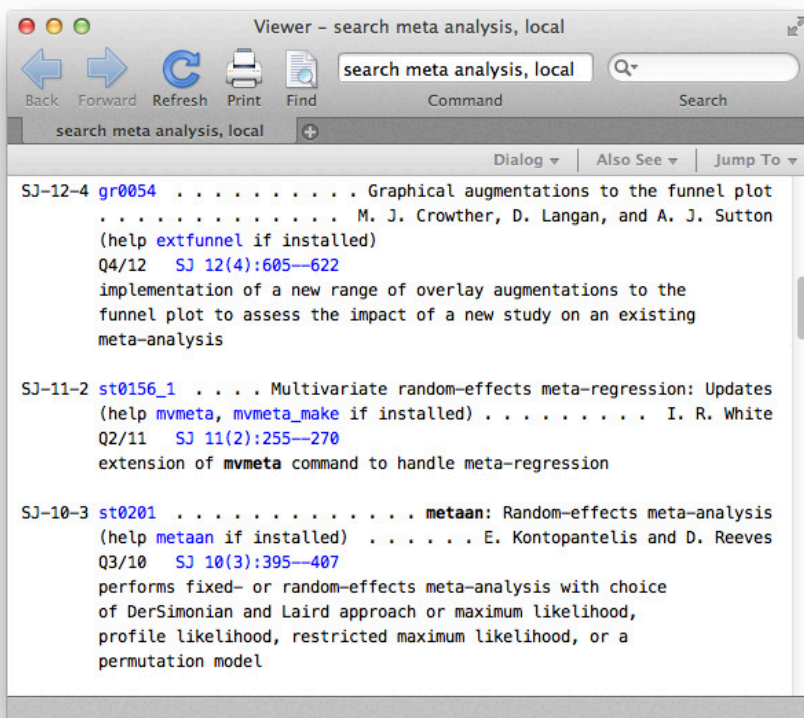
When searching in Stata, you will often see links to the *Stata Journal*.

The *Stata Journal* is a printed and electronic journal, published quarterly, containing articles about statistics, data analysis, teaching methods, and effective use of Stata's language. The *Journal* publishes peer-reviewed papers together with shorter notes and comments, regular columns, tips, book reviews, and other material of interest to researchers applying statistics in a variety of disciplines. The *Journal* is a publication for all Stata users, both novice and experienced, with different levels of expertise in statistics, research design, data management, graphics, reporting of results, and Stata, in particular. See <http://www.stata-journal.com> for more information. There you may browse the archive, subscribe, order PDF copies of individual articles, and view at no charge copies of articles older than three years.

The predecessor to the *Stata Journal* was the STB. Even though the STB is no longer published, past issues contain articles and programs that may interest you. See <http://www.stata.com/bookstore/stbj.html> for the table of contents of past issues, and see the STB FAQs at <http://www.stata.com/support/faqs/res/stb.html> for detailed information on the STB.

Associated with each issue of both the *Stata Journal* and the STB are the programs and datasets described therein. These programs and datasets are made available for download and installation over the Internet, not only to subscribers but to all Stata users. See [R] **net** and [R] **sj** for more information.

Because the *Stata Journal* and the STB have had several articles about meta-analysis, if you select **Help > Search...**, choose *Search documentation and FAQs*, type *meta analysis*, and scroll down a bit, you will see some of these references:



SJ-12-4 refers to volume 12, number 4 of the *Stata Journal*. This is an example of a *Stata Journal* article that describes a new user-written command. The command can be downloaded and installed to extend the abilities of Stata. See [Downloading user-written programs](#) in [GSM] 19 **Updating and extending Stata—Internet functionality** for more information.

SJ-11-2 refers to volume 11, number 2 of the *Stata Journal*. This is an example of a *Stata Journal* article that updates the `mvmeta` user-written command.

Clicking on an SJ link, such as SJ 12(4):605--622, will open a browser and take you to the *Stata Journal* website, where you can download abstracts and articles. The *Stata Journal* website allows all articles older than three years to be downloaded for free.

Links to other sites where you can freely download programs and datasets for Stata can be found on the Stata website; see <http://www.stata.com/links/>. See [Downloading user-written programs](#) in [GSM] 19 **Updating and extending Stata—Internet functionality** for more details on how to install this software. Also see [R] `ssc` for information on a convenient interface to resources available from the Statistical Software Components (SSC) archive.

We recommend that all users subscribe to the *Stata Journal*. See [U] 3.5 **The Stata Journal** for more information.

Stata videos

Stata has a YouTube channel where you can watch short videos explaining specific topics in Stata, such as running t tests or fitting regression models. The easiest way to see a list of available videos is to type `help videos` in the Command window.