4 Stata's help and search facilities

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4.1 Introduction

To access Stata's help, you will either

1. select **Help** from the menus, or
2. use the `help` and `search` commands.

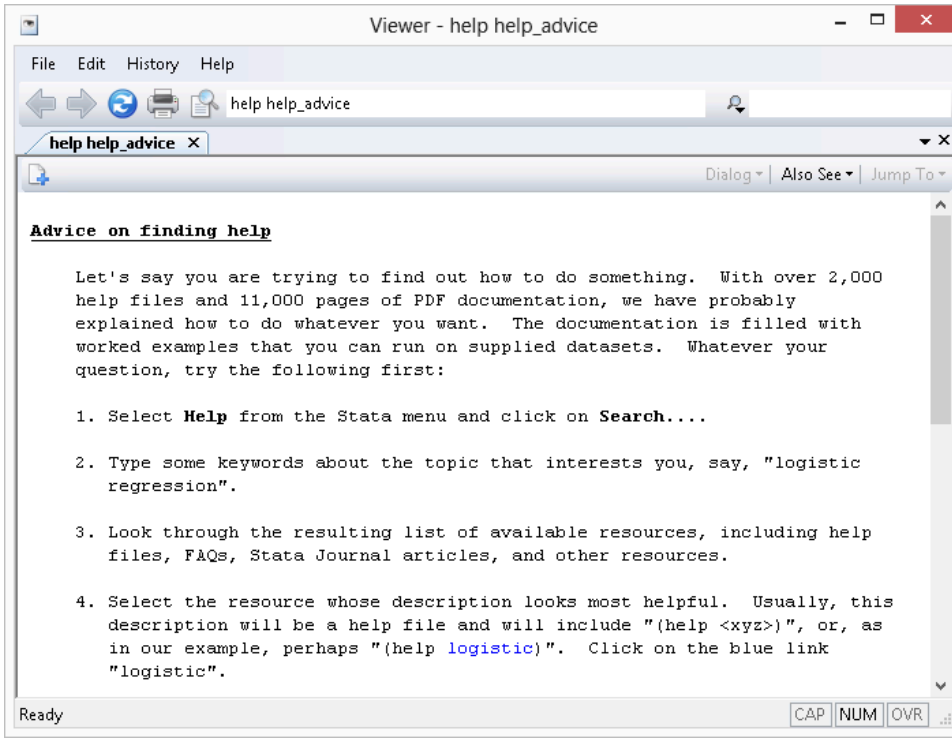
Regardless of the method you use, results will be shown in the Viewer or Results windows. Blue text indicates a hypertext link, so you can click to go to related entries.

4.2 Getting started

The first time you use help, try one of the following:

1. select **Help > Advice** from the menu bar, or
2. type `help advice`.

Either step will open the `help_advice` help file within a Viewer window; it will be similar to the following:



The advice file provides you with steps to search Stata to find information on topics and commands that interest you. The steps show an example of finding all there is to know about "logistic regression" within Stata.

4.3 help: Stata's help system

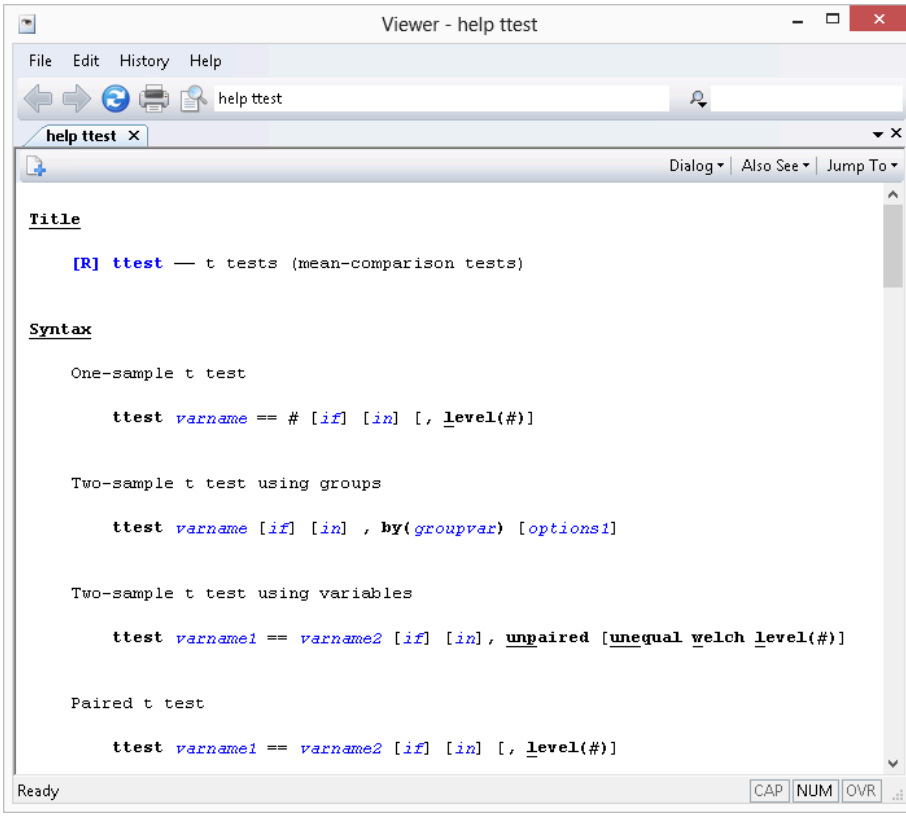
When you

1. Select **Help > Stata Command...**
   Type a command name in the Command edit field
   Click on OK, or
2. Type `help` followed by a command name

you access Stata's help files. These files provide shortened versions of what is in the printed manuals. Let's access the help file for Stata's `ttest` command. Do one of the following:

1. Select **Help > Stata Command...**
   Type `ttest` in the Command edit field
   Click on OK, or
2. Type `help ttest`

Regardless of which you do, the result will be



The trick is in already knowing that Stata's command for testing equality of means is `ttest` and not, say, `meanstest`. The solution to that problem is searching.

4.4 Accessing PDF manuals from help entries

Every help file in Stata links to the equivalent manual entry. If you are reading `help ttest`, simply click on `[R] ttest` in the **Title** section of the help file to go directly to the [R] **ttest** manual entry.

We provide recommended settings for your PDF viewer to optimize it for Stata's documentation at http://www.stata.com/support/faqs/res/documentation.html.

4.5 Searching

If you do not know the name of the Stata command you are looking for, you can search for it by keyword,

1. Select **Help > Search...**
   Type keywords in the edit field
   Click on OK
2. Type `search` followed by the keywords

search matches the keywords you specify to a database and returns matches found in Stata commands, FAQs at www.stata.com, official blogs, and articles that have appeared in the *Stata Journal*. It can also find user-written additions to Stata available over the web.

search does a better job when what you want is based on terms commonly used or when what you are looking for might not already be installed on your computer.

4.6 More on search

However you access search—command or menu—it does the same thing. You tell search what you want information about, and it searches for relevant entries. By default, search looks for the topic across all sources, including the system help, the FAQs at the Stata website, the *Stata Journal*, and all Stata-related Internet sources including user-written additions.

search can be used broadly or narrowly. For instance, if you want to perform the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for equality of distributions, you could type

```
. search Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of equality of distributions
[R]     ksmirnov . . . . . Kolmogorov-Smirnov equality of distributions test
        (help ksmirnov)
```

In fact, we did not have to be nearly so complete—typing search Kolmogorov-Smirnov would have been adequate. Had we specified our request more broadly—looking up equality of distributions—we would have obtained a longer list that included ksmirnov.

Here are guidelines for using search.

- Capitalization does not matter. Look up Kolmogorov-Smirnov or kolmogorov-smirnov.
- Punctuation does not matter. Look up kolmogorov smirnov.
- Order of words does not matter. Look up smirnov kolmogorov.
- You may abbreviate, but how much depends. Break at syllables. Look up kol smir. search tends to tolerate a lot of abbreviation; it is better to abbreviate than to misspell.
- The words a, an, and, are, for, into, of, on, to, the, and with are ignored. Use them—look up equality of distributions—or omit them—look up equality distributions—it makes no difference.
- search tolerates plurals, especially when they can be formed by adding an *s*. Even so, it is better to look up the singular. Look up normal distribution, not normal distributions.
- Specify the search criterion in English, not in computer jargon.
- Use American spellings. Look up color, not colour.
- Use nouns. Do not use -ing words or other verbs. Look up median tests, not testing medians.
- Use few words. Every word specified further restricts the search. Look up distribution, and you get one list; look up normal distribution, and the list is a sublist of that.
- Sometimes words have more than one context. The following words can be used to restrict the context:
    a. data, meaning in the context of data management. Order could refer to the order of data or to order statistics. Look up order data to restrict order to its data management sense.
    b. statistics (abbreviation stat), meaning in the context of statistics. Look up order statistics to restrict order to the statistical sense.

c. `graph` or `graphs`, meaning in the context of statistical graphics. Look up `median graphs` to restrict the list to commands for graphing medians.

d. `utility` (abbreviation `util`), meaning in the context of utility commands. The `search` command itself is not data management, not statistics, and not graphics; it is a utility.

e. `programs` or `programming` (abbreviation `prog`), to mean in the context of programming. Look up `programming scalar` to obtain a sublist of scalars in programming.

`search` has other features, as well; see [U] **4.8 search: All the details**.

4.7 More on help

Both `help` and `search` are understanding of some mistakes. For instance, you may abbreviate some command names. If you type either `help regres` or `help regress`, you will bring up the help file for `regress`.

When `help` cannot find the command you are looking for among Stata's official help files or any user-written additions you have installed, Stata automatically performs a search. For instance, typing `help ranktest` causes Stata to reply with "help for ranktest not found", and then Stata performs `search ranktest`. The search tells you that `ranktest` is available in the *Enhanced routines for IV/GMM estimation and testing* article in Stata Journal, Volume 7, Number 4.

Stata can run into some problems with abbreviations. For instance, Stata has a command with the inelegant name `ksmirnov`. You forget and think the command is called `ksmir`:

```
. help ksmir
No entries found for search on "ksmir"
```

A help file for `ksmir` was not found, so Stata automatically performed a search on the word. The message indicates that a search of `ksmir` also produced no results. You should type `search` followed by what you are really looking for: `search kolmogorov smirnov`.

4.8 search: All the details

The `search` command actually provides a few features that are not available from the **Help** menu. The full syntax of the `search` command is

`search` *word* [*word* ...] [`,` [`all`|`local`|`net`] `author` `entry` `exact` `faq` `historical` `or` `manual` `sj`]

where underlining indicates the minimum allowable abbreviation and [`brackets`] indicate optional.

`all`, the default, specifies that the search be performed across both the local keyword database and the net materials.

`local` specifies that the search be performed using only Stata's keyword database.

`net` specifies that the search be performed across the materials available via Stata's `net` command. Using `search word` [*word* ...]`,` `net` is equivalent to typing `net search word` [*word* ...] (without options); see [R] **net**.

`author` specifies that the search be performed on the basis of author's name rather than keywords.

`entry` specifies that the search be performed on the basis of entry IDs rather than keywords.

`exact` prevents matching on abbreviations.

`faq` limits the search to entries found in the FAQs at http://www.stata.com.

`historical` adds to the search entries that are of historical interest only. By default, such entries are not listed. Past entries are classified as historical if they discuss a feature that later became an official part of Stata. Updates to historical entries will always be found, even if `historical` is not specified.

`or` specifies that an entry be listed if any of the words typed after `search` are associated with the entry. The default is to list the entry only if all the words specified are associated with the entry.

`manual` limits the search to entries in the *User's Guide* and all the *Reference* manuals.

`sj` limits the search to entries in the *Stata Journal* and the *Stata Technical Bulletin*.

4.8.1 How search works

`search` has a database—files—containing the titles, etc., of every entry in the *User's Guide*, *Reference* manuals, undocumented help files, NetCourses, Stata Press books, FAQs posted on the Stata website, videos on StataCorp's YouTube channel, selected articles on StataCorp's official blog, selected user-written FAQs and examples, and the articles in the *Stata Journal* and in the *Stata Technical Bulletin*. In this file is a list of words associated with each entry, called keywords.

When you type `search` *xyz*, `search` reads this file and compares the list of keywords with *xyz*. If it finds *xyz* in the list or a keyword that allows an abbreviation of *xyz*, it displays the entry.

When you type `search` *xyz abc*, `search` does the same thing but displays an entry only if it contains both keywords. The order does not matter, so you can `search linear regression` or `search regression linear`.

How many entries `search` finds depends on how the search database was constructed. We have included a plethora of keywords under the theory that, for a given request, it is better to list too much rather than risk listing nothing at all. Still, you are in the position of guessing the keywords. Do you look up normality test, normality tests, or tests of normality? Normality test would be best, but all would work. In general, use the singular, and strike the unnecessary words. We provide guidelines for specifying keywords in [U] **4.6 More on search** above.

4.8.2 Author searches

`search` ordinarily compares the words following `search` with the keywords for the entry. If you specify the `author` option, however, it compares the words with the author's name. In the search database, we have filled in author names for *Stata Journal* and STB articles, Stata Press books, StataCorp's official blog, and FAQs.

For instance, in [R] **kdensity**, you will discover that Isaías H. Salgado-Ugarte wrote the first version of Stata's `kdensity` command and published it in the STB. Assume that you have read his original and find the discussion useful. You might now wonder what else he has written in the STB. To find out, type

```
. search Salgado-Ugarte, author
(output omitted)
```

Names like Salgado-Ugarte are confusing to some people. `search` does not require you specify the entire name; what you type is compared with each "word" of the name, and, if any part matches, the entry is listed. The hyphen is a special character, and you can omit it. Thus you can obtain the same list by looking up Salgado, Ugarte, or Salgado Ugarte without the hyphen.

Actually, to find all entries written by Salgado-Ugarte, you need to type

```
. search Salgado-Ugarte, author historical
  (output omitted)
```

Prior inserts in the STB that provide a feature that later was superseded by a built-in feature of Stata are marked as historical in the search database and, by default, are not listed. The `historical` option ensures that all entries are listed.

4.8.3 Entry ID searches

If you specify the `entry` option, `search` compares what you have typed with the entry ID. The entry ID is not the title—it is the reference listed to the left of the title that tells you where to look. For instance, in

```
[R]     regress  . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Linear regression
        (help regress)
```

"[R] regress" is the entry ID. In

```
GS      . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Getting Started manual
```

"GS" is the entry ID. In

```
SJ-6-4   st0113  . Testing for cross-sectional dependence in panel-data models
        (help  xtcsd if installed) . . . . . . R. E. De Hoyos and V. Sarafidis
        Q4/06   SJ 6(4): 482--496
        tests for the presence of cross-sectional dependence in
        panels with many cross-sectional units and few time-series
        observations
```

"SJ-6-4 st0113" is the entry ID.

`search` with the `entry` option searches these entry IDs.

Thus you could generate a table of contents for the *Reference* manuals by typing

```
. search [R], entry
  (output omitted)
```

You could generate a table of contents for the 16th issue of the STB by typing

```
. search STB-16, entry historical
  (output omitted)
```

The `historical` option here is possibly important. STB-16 was published in November 1993, and perhaps some of its inserts have been marked as historical.

You could obtain a list of all inserts associated with *dm36* by typing

```
. search dm36, entry historical
  (output omitted)
```

Again, we include the `historical` option if any of the relevant inserts have been marked historical.

4.8.4 FAQ searches

To search across the FAQs, specify the `faq` option:

```
. search logistic regression, faq
  (output omitted)
```

4.8.5 Return codes

In addition to indexing the entries in the *User's Guide* and all the *Stata Reference* manuals, `search` also can be used to look up return codes.

To see information about return code 131, type

```
. search rc 131
[R]     error messages  . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  Return code 131
        not possible with test;
        You requested a test of a hypothesis that is nonlinear in the
        variables.  test tests only linear hypotheses.  Use testnl.
```

To get a list of all Stata return codes, type

```
. search rc
  (output omitted)
```

4.9 net search: Searching net resources

When you select **Help > Search...**, there are two types of searches to choose. The first, which has been discussed in the previous sections, is to **Search documentation and FAQs**. The second is to **Search net resources**. This feature of Stata searches resources over the Internet.

When you choose **Search net resources** in the search dialog box and enter *keywords* in the field, Stata searches all user-written programs on the Internet, including user-written additions published in the *Stata Journal* and the STB. The results are displayed in the Viewer, and you can click to go to any of the matches found.

Equivalently, you can type `net search` *keywords* on the Stata command line to display the results in the Results window. For the full syntax for using the `net search` command, see [R] **net search**.