

Returned args — Function arguments used to return results
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Description

Most Mata functions leave their arguments unchanged and return a result:

```
: y = f(x, ...)
```

Some Mata functions, however, return nothing and instead return results in one or more arguments:

```
: g(x, ..., y)
```

If you use such functions interactively and the arguments that are to receive results are not already defined (y in the above example), you will get a variable-not-found error. The solution is to define the arguments to contain something—anything—before calling the function:

```
: y = .
: g(x, ..., y)
```

You can combine this into one statement:

```
: g(x, ..., y=.)
```

Syntax

```
y = f(x, ...)    (function returns result the usual way)
```

```
g(x, ..., y)    (function returns result in argument y)
```

Remarks and examples

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`sqrt(a)`—see [M-5] [sqrt\(\)](#)—calculates the (element-by-element) square root of a and returns the result:

```
: x = 4
: y = sqrt(x)
: y           // y now contains 2
  2
: x           // x is unchanged
  4
```

Most functions work like `sqrt()`, although many take more than one argument.

On the other hand, `polydiv(c_a , c_b , c_q , c_r)`—see [M-5] [polyeval\(\)](#)—takes the polynomial stored in c_a and the polynomial stored in c_b and divides them. It returns the quotient in the third argument (c_q) and the remainder in the fourth (c_r). c_a and c_b are left unchanged. The function itself returns nothing:

```
: A = (1,2,3)
: B = (0,1)
: polydiv(A, B, Q, R)
```

```
: Q                                // Q has been redefined
      1   2
1   

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 2 | 3 |
|---|---|



: R                                // as has R
      1

: A                                // while A and B are unchanged
      1   2   3
1   

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|



: B
      1   2
1   

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 0 | 1 |
|---|---|


```

As another example, `st_view(V, i, j)`—see [M-5] `st_view()`—creates a view onto the Stata dataset. Views are like matrices but consume less memory. Arguments *i* and *j* specify the observations and variables to be selected. Rather than returning the matrix, however, the result is returned in the first argument (*V*).

```
: st_view(V, (1\5), ("mpg", "weight"))
: V
      1   2
1   

|    |      |
|----|------|
| 22 | 2930 |
| 15 | 4080 |


2
```

If you try to use these functions interactively, you will probably get an error:

```
: polydiv(A, B, Q, R)
      <istmt>: 3499 Q not found
r(3499);
: st_view(V, (1\5), ("mpg", "weight"))
      <istmt>: 3499 V not found
r(3499);
```

Arguments must be defined before they are used, even if their only purpose is to receive a newly calculated result. In such cases, it does not matter how the argument is defined because its contents will be replaced. Easiest is to fill in a missing value:

```
: Q = .
: R = .
: polydiv(A, B, Q, R)
: V = .
: st_view(V, (1\5), ("mpg", "weight"))
```

You can also define the argument inside the function:

```
: polydiv(A, B, Q=., R=.)
: st_view(V=., (1\5), ("mpg", "weight"))
```

When you use functions like these inside a program, however, you need not worry about defining the arguments, because they are defined by virtue of appearing in your program:

```
function foo()
{
    ...
    polydiv(A, B, Q, R)
    st_view(V, (1\5), ("mpg", "weight"))
    ...
}
```

When Mata compiles your program, however, you may see warning messages:

```
: function foo()
> {
>     ...
>     polydiv(A, B, Q, R)
>     st_view(V, (1\5), ("mpg", "weight"))
>     ...
> }
note: variable Q may be used before set
note: variable R may be used before set
note: variable V may be used before set
```

If the warning messages bother you, either define the variables before they are used just as you would interactively or use `pragma` to suppress the warning messages; see [\[M-2\] pragma](#).

Also see

[\[M-1\] Intro](#) — Introduction and advice