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. The advice file provides you with steps to search Stata to find information on topics and commands that interest you.

4.3 help: Stata's help system

When you

- 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:

- 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

```
Viewer - help ttest
                                                                               Х
File
     Edit
           History Help
\leftarrow \rightarrow
                      help ttest
                                                                 Q.-
         С
             ت ا
 help ttest
            ×
+
                                                               Dialog *
                                                                       Also see *
                                                                                  Jump to *
[R] ttest — t tests (mean-comparison tests)
               (View complete PDF manual entry)
Syntax
     One-sample t test
         ttest varname == # [if] [in] [, level(#)]
     Two-sample t test using groups
         ttest varname [if] [in] , by(groupvar) [options1]
     Two-sample t test using variables
         ttest varname1 == varname2 [if] [in], unpaired [unequal welch
               level(#)]
     Paired t test
         ttest varname1 == varname2 [if] [in] [, level(#)]
                                                                          CAP NUM INS
```

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 (View complete PDF manual entry) below the title to go directly to the [R] **ttest** manual entry.

We provide some tips for viewing Stata's PDF documentation at https://www.stata.com/support/faqs/ resources/pdf-documentation-tips/.

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 community-contributed 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 community-contributed 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 regress 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 community-contributed 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
```

```
<u>h</u>istorical or <u>man</u>ual sj
```

where <u>under</u>lining 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 the FAQs posted on the Stata and other select websites.

historical adds to the search entries that are of historical interest only. By default, such entries are not listed.

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.

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 community-contributed FAQs and examples, and the articles in the *Stata Journal*. 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* articles, Stata Press books, StataCorp's official blog, and FAQs. For instance, in the *Acknowledgments* of [R] **kdensity**, you will discover the name Isaías H. Salgado-Ugarte. You want to know if he has written any articles in the *Stata Journal*. 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.

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" is the entry ID. In

"GS" is the entry ID. In

```
SJ-14-4 gr0059 . . . . Plotting regression coefficients and other estimates
(help coefplot if installed) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B. Jann
Q4/14 SJ 14(4):708--737
alternative to marginsplot that plots results from any
estimation command and combines results from several models
into one graph
```

"SJ-14-4 gr0059" 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)

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

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 community-contributed programs on the internet, including community-contributed additions published in the *Stata Journal*. 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.

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