Dynamic Documents in Stata

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The Good and Bad of Creating Documents

- Think of documents you've made in the past, good and bad
- Good:
  - Reused ideas from one project for another
  - Reused and polished lessons for teaching
- Bad:
  - Questions on methods for reaching particular numerical results
  - Updating analyses because of new or improved data
  - Producing repetitive reports

General Idea

- What gets done once often gets done twice
  - Similar projects
  - Updated datasets
  - Datasets arriving over time or from various sources
  - Teaching
  - Production work, such as dreaded monthly reports
- The second and later repetitions should not start from scratch

Dynamic Documents

- Needed: reproducible, reusable, and maintainable documents, aka dynamic documents
  - Documents should be reproducible at the push of a button
    - No manual intervention!
  - Documents should be reusable
  - Documents should be easily maintained and improved
    - This is especially necessary for teaching
- Both of these are easy for pure narratives
- Including computational results is trickier
- Making this nice for all collaborative parties is even trickier

Best Possible Process

- One underlying file for producing a final document, including both narrative and computation
  - If not a single document, a single folder with easily-related files
- The final document can be reliably reproduced from scratch
- Drafts of the final document can be passed around to all collaborators
  - Topic experts as well as statistical experts as well as writers
  - Those comfortable with programmerish work and those who are not
- The final document could be in a variety of forms

What We'll See Here

- Several tools for producing dynamic documents
- Some way of deciding between complexity, completeness, and comprehension

Bare Necessities for Teaching

- Commands
- Results
- Graphs

Bare Necessities for Reports

- Results without commands
- Inline results
  - Results often show up within the narrative
- Invisible commands

Dream World

- Extremely readable documents
- Flexible formatting

Included Software

- We will look at three and one half pieces of software
- Germán Rodríguez' `markstat` command
- Stata's official `dyndoc` command
- Stata's official `putdocx` command
- A wrapper to (possibly) make `putdocx` simpler, called `putwrap`

Excluded Software

- The software below was covered in a similar talk in 2016:
  - `texdoc` for making documents which are like Stata Journal articles
    - Still relevant
  - Markdoc for creating general-purpose documents in many formats
  - StatWeave for making general-purpose documents
  - A suite for producing lessons with handouts

Terminology

- It will help to have some defined jargon here to refer to files
  - A *base* file gets processed by the software
  - The result of the processing is an *interim* file, if that file needs more processing
  - The document as it would be viewed will be called a *final* file
    - This is not final as in "final draft"

Working Through the Examples

- Much as something fully interactive would be nice, typing is dull
- We'll look at examples of files for each of the methods and then see if we can get them to turn into documents
- Most of the talk will be spent looking at these files
- When this talk is posted, all the example files will be in the file `repdoc.zip`

A Sketch of What to Do

- Here is a basic outline of a small evaluation we'd like to do
  - This is in the `data/shared/pseudo.txt` file
- It has a few items of interest
  - Stata commands and output
  - Graphics
  - A table from `tabout`
  - An unnumbered list
  - Boldface, italics and fixed-width fonts
- We would like to realize this report (or something close to it) in different ways

markstat Basics

- markstat was written and is maintained by Germán Rodríguez
- markstat is based on the **markdown** language
- markstat can produce most any document type you would like
- markstat can be used in either simple markdown mode or in a strict mode
- Narrative and code are in the same file

markstat Process

- markstat processes a markdown file to produce the end document
- markstat produces many small files containing code and output
  - By default these get deleted, but they can be kept
- It is possible to regenerate the document without running the Stata commands
  - While dangerous in general, this is useful when fixing typos in the narrative
  - Germán credits taking this idea from Ben Jann's texdoc

markstat Advantages

- Can be quite simple
  - Simplicity can lose some important features
- Can be made more complex
  - The added complexity reduces the readability of the base file
- Has the ability to include external files as the markdown gets processed
  - This is not possible in vanilla markdown

markstat Disadvantages

- Markdown has some limitations
- Unfortunately, markdown doesn't have some hidden rarely-used constructions which allow extra complexity

`markstat` Installation & Dependencies

- Getting `markstat` itself is simple

  ```
  . ssc install markstat
  ```

- It does require another piece of Stata software

  ```
  . ssc install whereis
  ```

- It also requires Pandoc (http://pandoc.org)
- If you want to use LaTeX, you need to install the package for your OS
  - You also need to get Stata's style file
  - Instructions for this are at the site (http://data.princeton.edu/stata/markdown)

dyndoc Basics

- dyndoc is an official Stata command
- dyndoc uses markdown for its formatting language
- dyndoc makes web pages (HTML)
- Narrative and code are in the same file
- Rather than indentation or code fences, dyndoc use its own dyndoc tags

dyndoc Process

- dyndoc takes a markdown + Stata file and turns it into an html file
- There are no interim files

dyndoc Advantages

- There are extra dyndoc tags which allow for conditional processing
  - This can be useful in dreadful monthly reports for calling out rare evants
- Has the ability to include external files as the markdown gets processed
- It's built in to Stata

dyndoc Disadvantages

- The tags can look a bit cluttered
  - The clutter is not as bad when the file is viewed as a Stata do-file in your text editor

dyndoc Dependencies

- None, of course

putdocx Basics

- putdocx is an official Stata command
- putdocx makes docx documents
  - The documents are based on the open standard for docx
  - So... putdocx works best with Open Office and its relatives
  - putdocx also works well with Microsoft Office

putdocx Process

- putdocx allows writing text, tables and graphs
- It does not write Stata commands or their output directly
  - It is made more for reports than for reporting on Stata
- It is always in Stata mode

putdocx Advantages

- Easy to push out estimation tables
- Very flexible table generation
  - Can write line by line to update a table rather than needing to write one single massive command
- Has a lot of user interest, so there are a slew of community-contributed aids

putdocx Disadvantages

- putdocx documents look like pure code
  - Tough on collaborators
- Changing small pieces can take some effort.

putdocx Dependencies

- None, of course

putwrap Basics

- putwrap attempts to allow putdocx to have a narrative mode and a Stata mode
- Otherwise it is putdocx

putwrap Process

- By default, it is assumed that the do-file is in narrative mode (i.e. writing the document)
- To go into Stata mode, use `putdocx pause`
- To go back to narrative mode, use `putdocx resume`
  - Adding two subcommands to an official Stata command breaks all the rules for community-contributed software
  - Be forewarned!
- `putwrap` takes a file using these commands, and created a do-file which has all the requisite paragraph and text commands

putwrap Advantages

- It should make documents with long narrative sections easier to read

putwrap Disadvantages

- If there are a lot of font changes, it is still necessary to break up the narrative
- It is not a clever program, so it can get fooled if lines start with special contructions (like inline macro expansions)

putwrap Dependencies

- Needs putdocx

Conclusion

- There are plenty of packages out there for making dynamic documents
- The quality of the packages has greatly increased in the past couple of years
- You should really give this a try