

SPSS Statistics: Configuration Options

There are a number of options to SPSS that you might consider altering according to your work habits and personal preferences in order to make SPSS easier to use.

One of the downsides of complex software is that there are a lot of options for you to consider. Here are the main options that we find useful, working in the SSCC.

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File Locations

If you are working on an SSCC computer (in the labs or on the Winstats) then you are already aware that you should try to save your files to your U:\ drive. Because SPSS typically defaults to saving files someplace in the C:\Users directory, this means you have to put some time and effort into making sure your files end up in the right place. You can make this easier for yourself by changing the SPSS defaults. (We try to reconfigure SPSS for you, but our choice of folders does not always work and may not always be the most convenient for you.)

There are three file locations you might want to change: the location for the **Open** and **Save** dialog boxes, the location for the Journal file, and the default folder for commands run from Syntax.

Open and Save Dialogs

If SPSS always goes someplace in the C:\Users directory first when you try to open or save files, or if you typically work in some folder other than U:\, you can save yourself some time and effort by changing the default location for these dialog boxes.

In any of the SPSS windows, click **Edit, Options ...**, and then click on the **File Locations** tab (see the image, below). In the first section on this tab, change the **Startup Folder for Open and Save Dialogs** to whatever folder (e.g. "U:\", "U:\SPSS", or "X:\") is going to require the least amount of clicking later – anyplace but folders on the C:\ drive!

Journal File

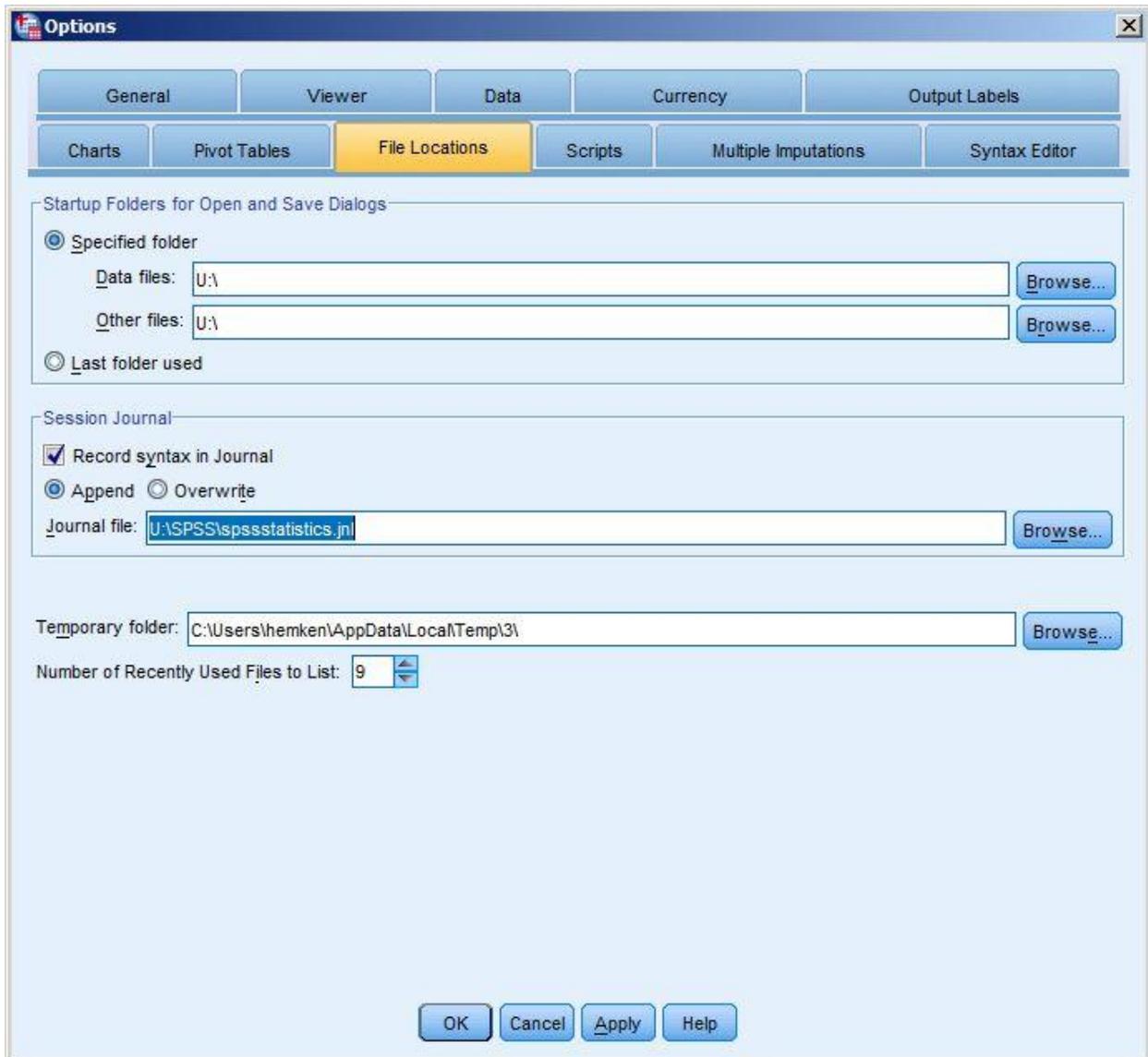
You may or may not be aware that SPSS records the syntax for (just about) every little thing you do in a separate file. This is the Journal file. We normally think of this as a disaster recovery tool, something we can use to recreate your latest session if your computer crashes (rare) or if

you become disconnected from the Winstats and your session becomes hung up. However, it is only useful if you know it exists, and if you can find it after disaster strikes!

On the same **Edit, Options...**, **File Locations** tab that you used to set the Open and Save dialogs, there is a collection of settings for your **Session Journal**. Again, anyplace besides a folder on the C:\ drive is fine with us, but make the location and the name of the file something obvious so that you can find it later. It is customary to give these files a **.jnl** file extension, which also helps us search for them. (The default file name changes from version to version of SPSS.)

Temporary Folder

This is the actual location where SPSS puts your working data sets as you open them. You should leave this setting alone: the C:\ drive will be the fastest place for SPSS to work from, and your user profile in C:\Users ensures that your work is private. We can sometimes (not always) recover these files if disaster strikes your SPSS session.



Syntax Default

Commands written in syntax use a different default directory than the dialog boxes – this is by design. Initially this syntax default directory is “C:\Program Files\IBM\SPSS\Statistics\20” (or something similar). If you run a command like:

```
get file="employee data.sav".
```

SPSS attempts to find this file in the “C:\Program Files\IBM\SPSS\Statistics\20” folder, and issues an error message, because it is not there. You can fix this problem by always full path specifications like:

```
get file="C:\Program Files\IBM\SPSS\Statistics\20\Samples\English\Employee data.sav.sav".
```

If your syntax opens and saves a lot of files, that can turn into a lot of typing (or cutting-and-pasting) and also makes your code a lot harder to read and debug. Then if you move your large collection of files to some new location, your syntax will require extensive revision. A solution that works well where you have a lot of files or where you may move your files from time to time is to change the default directory and then specify pathless file names.

```
cd "Y:\SPSS\data".  
get file="employee data.sav".
```

* Perhaps followed later in your syntax by more file commands .

```
compute raises = salary – salbegin.  
save outfile="raises data.sav".
```

Another handy command to know is:

```
show directory.
```

This will print your current directory in your Output window. It does have the major drawback that it yields short, DOS path names rather than longer, Windows path names.

Finally, if you have syntax (or a macro) where you would like to change the default directory but later return it to its original setting, you should investigate the `preserve` and `restore` commands.

Output Labels

If your data have value labels and variable labels, SPSS uses those when it creates tables of output. This usually makes it easier to interpret and explain your results.

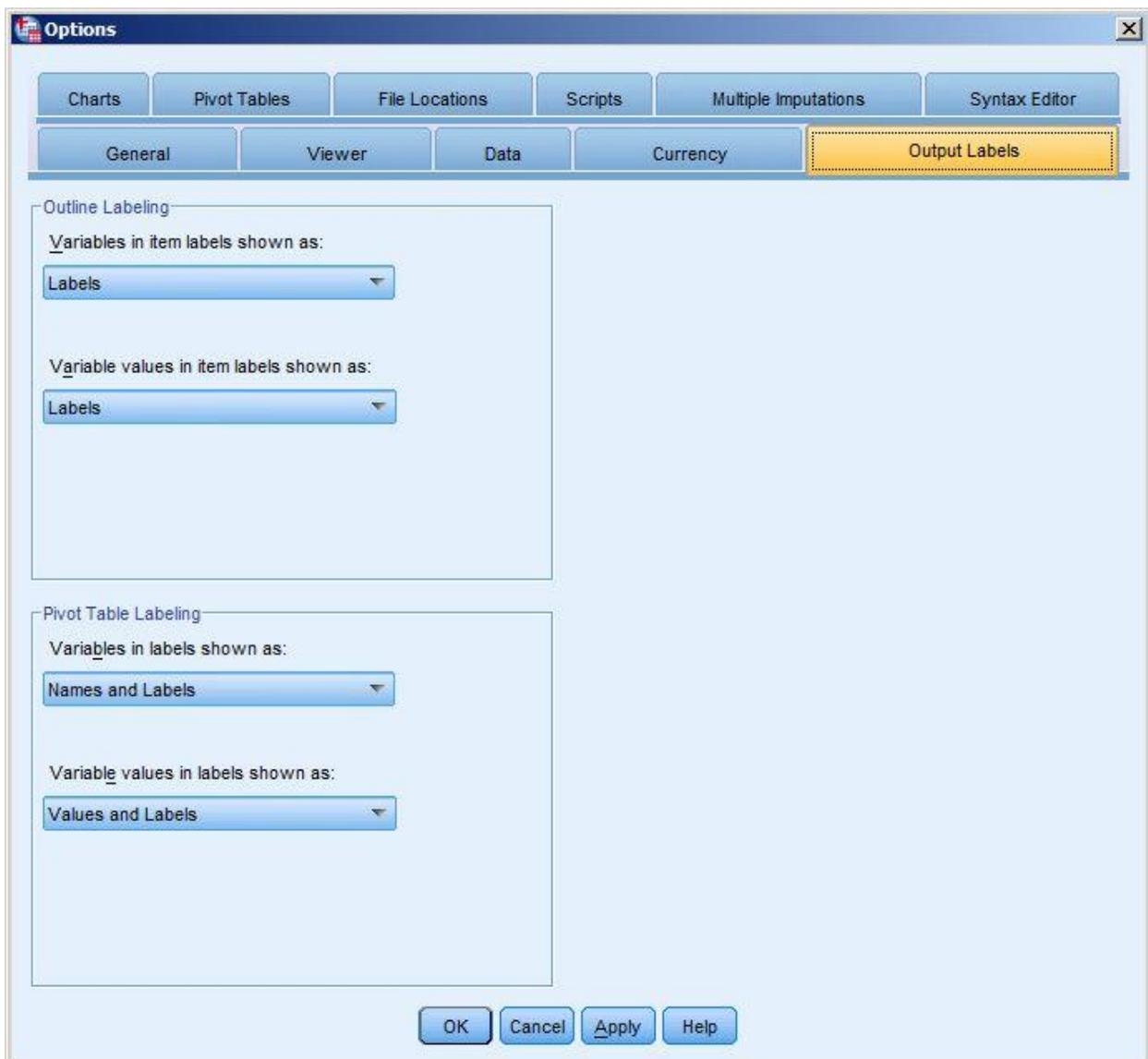
		Respondent's Sex			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	636	41.9	41.9	41.9
	Female	881	58.1	58.1	100.0
Total		1517	100.0	100.0	

However, at times you will look at your tables in order to guide further computations and syntax (or to troubleshoot problem computations), and then it is often handy to be able to see actual data values and variable names in addition to the value and variable labels. For example, you see from a frequency table that you have both males and females in your data set, but in order to carry out your next step you need to know whether those data are coded {0,1} or {1,2}, and which sex is the 1!

sex Respondent's Sex

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Male	636	41.9	41.9	41.9
	2 Female	881	58.1	58.1	100.0
	Total	1517	100.0	100.0	

You can change how SPSS uses labels in your Output either through the **Options...** dialog box, or through syntax. To use the dialog box, click **Edit, Options...**, and then click on the **Output Labels** tab.



In the section on **Pivot Table Labeling**, try changing the options to “Names and Labels” for variables and “Values and Labels” for values.

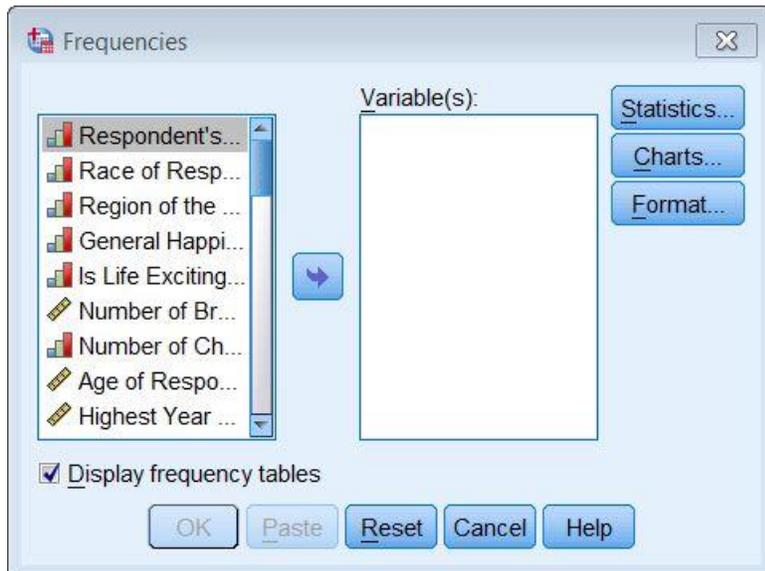
To achieve the same result through syntax, issue the command:

```
set tvars=both tnumbers=both.
```

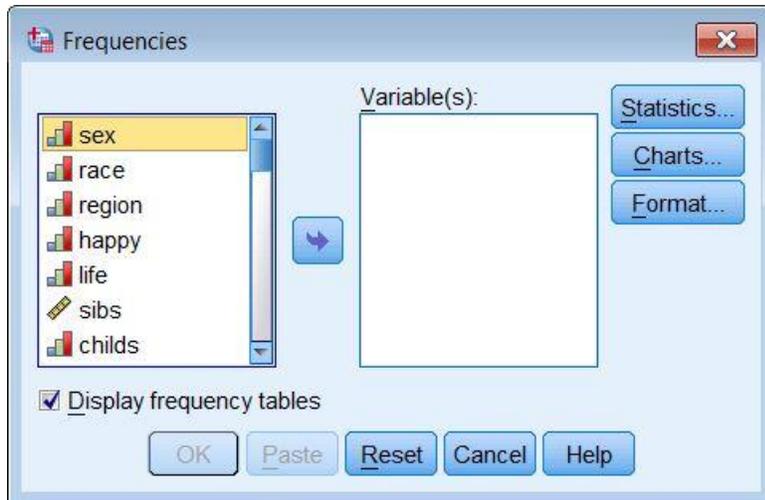
(The keyword `tnumbers` is a bit deceptive, because string-valued data may also have value labels!) See the documentation for the `set` command for more options.

Variable Lists

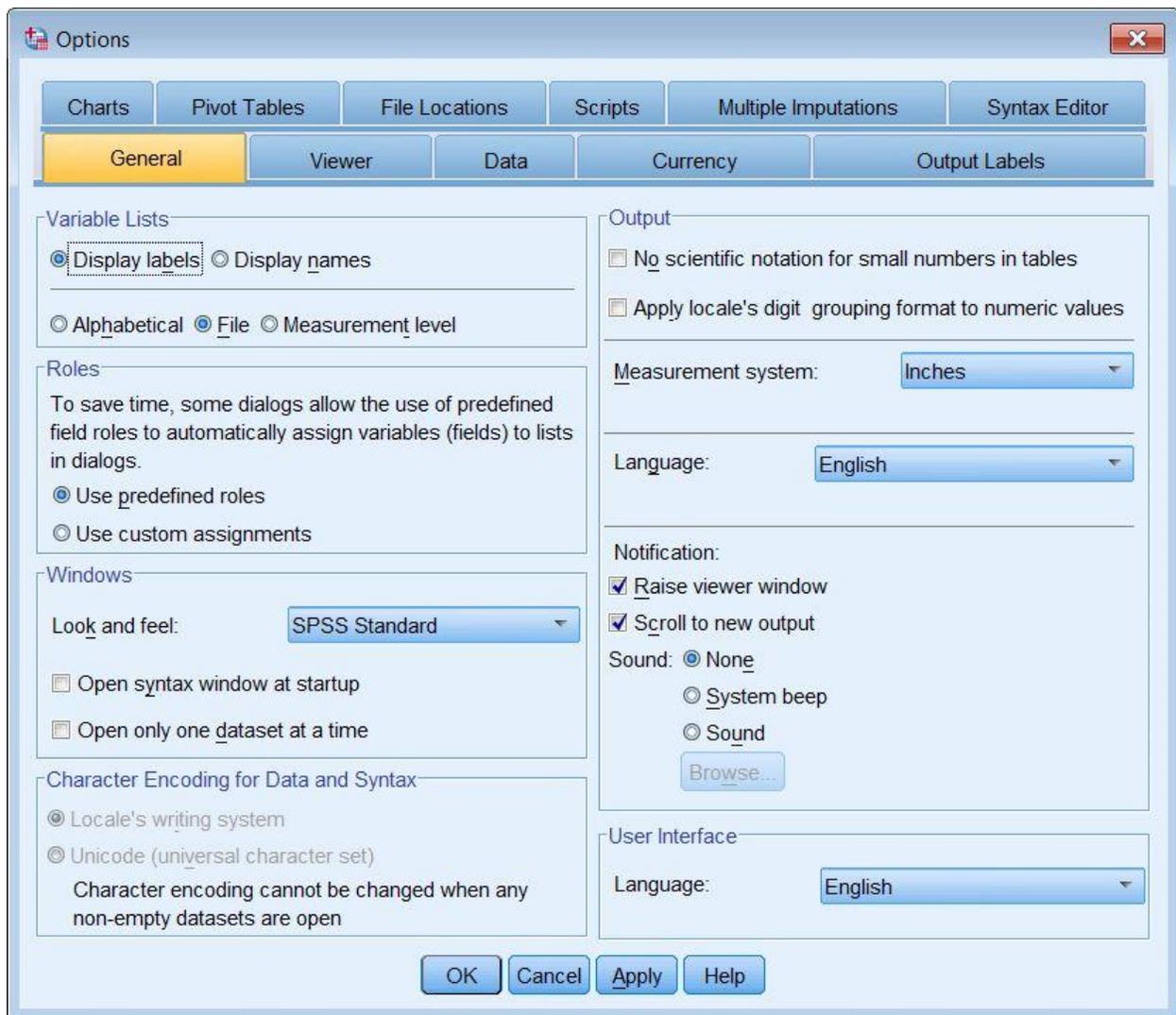
If you are using dialog boxes to set up statistical or graphical commands, you regularly have to pick variables out of lists of variables. By default, SPSS shows you variable labels in these lists:



This truncates the variable label in the list (you can see the full label for one variable at a time by holding your cursor over each label stub). If you are more familiar with your variable names than their labels (because you also use names in syntax), it might be easier for you to pick out the variables you need from the named list.



To change the display, click **Edit, Options ...**, and then the **General** tab. The very first set of options, **Variable Lists**, lets you chose between displays of variable labels and displays of variable names.



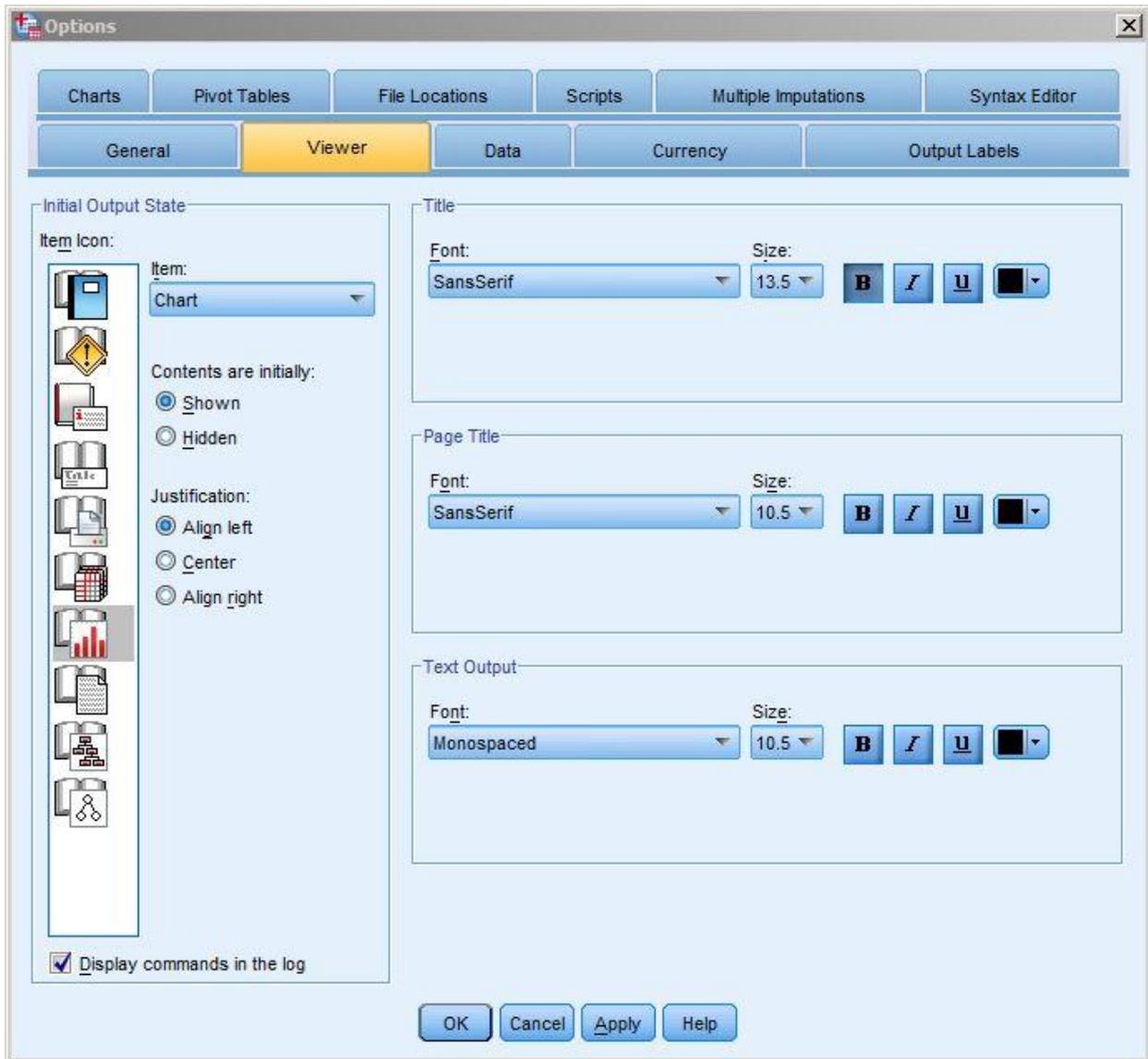
Command Echo

By default, SPSS echos your commands back to you in Log entries within your Output window. If you are trying to produce output that can be used by people not familiar with SPSS, all those commands are just noise that detracts from the tables and graphs you want them to focus on.

You can turn off the command echo by clicking **Edit, Options...**, and clicking the **Viewer** tab. In the bottom left corner is a box, “**Display commands in the log**”, that you can check or uncheck. (The commands associated with specific statistical tables will still be in the hidden Notes in your output.)

You can achieve the same result with the syntax command:

```
set printback=off.
```



Learning More

To learn more about specific data management or statistical tasks, you should try the on-line Help files. Click **Help, Topics** and you can read about a variety of basic SPSS topics, or search the index. To find more help on specific commands in syntax, click **Help, Command Syntax Reference**.

Your instructor and/or TA are your best resource for class-specific problems, but we are always willing to look at work for classes.

[Doug Hemken](#), a statistical computing specialist for the SSCC, is available to help you with homework and class projects. His hours are 10-2 Monday through Friday, or by appointment

(email dehemken@wisc.edu) in 4226I Sewell Social Sciences Building. If he is not available, other SSCC staff may be able to assist you: go to 4226 and then look for the red “Stat Consultant” or the yellow “SSCC Consultant” sign.

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