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Stata tip 18: Making keys functional

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Did you know that you can create custom definitions for your *F*-keys in Stata?

F-key definitions are created via global macros. On startup, Stata sets the *F*-key defaults to

F-key	definition
F1	`help`
F2	`#review;`
F3	`describe;`
F7	`save`
F8	`use`

You can redefine these keys if you wish.

When a definition ends with a semicolon (;), Stata will automatically execute that command as if you typed it and pressed the Enter key; otherwise, the command is immediately entered into the command line as if you had typed it. Stata then waits for you to press the Enter key. This allows you to modify the command before it is executed.

For example, to define the *F4* key to execute the `list` command, you would type

```
. global F4 "list;"
```

The "`F4`" here is actually a capital `F` followed by the number `4`.

The best place to create these definitions is in an ASCII text file called `profile.do`. Every time Stata is launched, it looks for `profile.do` and, if it finds it, executes all of the commands it contains. For more information, type `help profile`.

Let's say that you want to create a definition for *F4* to open a window showing the contents of a particular directory. You could do this on Windows by typing

```
. global F4 `"winexec explorer C:\data;"'
```

On a Macintosh, you could type

```
. global F4 `"!open /Applications/Stata8/Stata;"'
```

You can also create *F*-key definitions to launch your favorite text editor.

```
. global F5 `"winexec notepad;"'
```

Yet another application is programming the ` and ' keys, which Stata uses to delimit local macros. Many keyboards do not have the left- or open-quote character of this

pair, so an alternative is to define an *F*-key to be that key. For symmetry, you might want another *F*-key to be the right- or close-quote character. But how do you define a replacement for a key if you do not have that key in the first place? One answer lies in Stata's `char()` function:

```
. global F4 = char(96)
. global F5 = char(180)
```

You may want to make a note that *F10* is reserved internally by Windows, so you cannot program this key. Also, not all Macintosh keyboards have *F*-keys.

For more information on this topic, please see [U] **13.2 F-keys**.