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Editor
H. Joseph Newton
Department of Statistics
Texas A & M University
College Station, Texas 77843
979-845-3142; FAX 979-845-3144
jnewton@stata-journal.com

Editor
Nicholas J. Cox
Geography Department
Durham University
South Road
Durham City DH1 3LE UK
n.j.cox@stata-journal.com

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Stata tip 26: Maximizing compatibility between Macintosh and Windows

Michael S. Hanson
Wesleyan University
mshanson@wesleyan.edu

A questioner on Statalist asked whether there are problems using Stata in a joint project on different operating systems. My short answer is "No". Underlying this is StataCorp's work to ensure that its official filetypes (`.dta`, `.gph`, `.ado`, `.do`, `.dct`, etc.) are completely compatible across all the operating systems it supports and that Stata can always read those files even from older versions.

My slightly longer answer is "Not with a few basic precautions", but much depends on how the collaboration occurs. Here is some advice for easier joint use of Stata across platforms (and indeed on the same platform).

Standardize Statas. Ideally, everyone should use the same version of Stata, with the same additional `.ado` files installed.

Avoid absolute file paths. (This strikes me as generally a good idea anyway, as it leads to greater portability.) If the project is sufficiently complex, create an identical subdirectory structure below some common project root directory on every file system and only use path references relative to this root.

Use forward slashes in file paths. Note that Stata understands the forward slash (`/`) as separating directory levels on all platforms, even Windows. So use that instead of the backward slash (\) for paths in all `.do` files.

Watch end-of-line delimiters. Text files have different line endings on Macintosh, Windows, and Unix systems. So long as users on different platforms are using sufficiently versatile text editors, it should be straightforward to read both input files (e.g., `.do` files) and output files (e.g., `.log` files) regardless of the line endings used—and, if necessary, to convert to the desired one. Note that how the files will be shared—common server, (S)FTP, email—may have implications for this issue.

Use Encapsulated PostScript. Save graphics in EPS format. (See the help or manual entry for `graph export`.) While the Macintosh can natively generate graphics in PDF format, the PC cannot (without jumping through some hoops and purchasing Acrobat, that is). WMF, EMF, and PICT do not translate well across platforms, and while you could use PNG, nonvector formats do not scale well. (As they are at a fixed size, when enlarged, they still contain only the lower-density information of the original, and when they are reduced, information must be lost to reduce their size.)

Use other open-standards file formats. More generally, collaboration will be easier if everyone uses open-standards file formats (e.g., plain text, PNG, TEX, or LATEX, etc.)—instead of those tied to proprietary software.

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