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Review of The Workflow of Data Analysis Using Stata, by J. Scott Long

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Abstract. This article reviews *The Workflow of Data Analysis Using Stata*, by J. Scott Long.

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1 Introduction

The Workflow of Data Analysis Using Stata (Long 2008) is a must read for every Stata user. The book defies a simple description. It is not a substitute for Stata's own reference manuals on data management or programming, but most readers will keep *Workflow* handy as a reference book for when they cannot remember how to do something. It is a great supplemental book for statistics courses precisely because such courses rarely spend much time on the topics this book covers—topics that students need to know to be effective Stata users. *Workflow* is a reflection of what a senior scholar has learned about what happens as we move from raw data to a published report.

Workflow presents many guidelines and few readers will agree with all of them. Many of the guidelines may seem obvious to experienced users, but this is only because they were learned the hard way. For example, on page 143 Long writes, "Never change a variable unless you give it a new name." Those of us who have, on occasion, ignored this advice learned its importance when a pivotal variable was irreparably destroyed. I fear that some beginning Stata users who read such guidelines are likely to ignore them. Long minimizes this risk by showing the likely consequences of ignoring many of his guidelines. Seeing the damage that can be done by ignoring his advice encourages closer attention to all the guidelines.

How the book is best used depends on the reader. My beginning graduate students will be told to read the entire book and to reread the relevant sections before asking me to solve a problem. (Think of how often you have had to explain a loop to a beginning student, one-on-one.) Whoever has the responsibility of organizing, cleaning, and managing datasets for a project should read the entire book and, hopefully, follow many of the guidelines. Data analysts who are working on a project that has a well-managed dataset can read the book selectively but will learn to appreciate the critical role of the data manager and will learn why they should not always do what is quickest for their own particular purpose. Experienced Stata programmers and data managers

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