SPSS Syntax

There are several good reasons for learning how to work with SPSS syntax. First, when analyzing your data, you may find that you spend a considerable amount of time carrying out similar analyses. Syntax helps you reduce the time needed for repeated analysis. Second, the syntax allows you to document your analyses, which facilitates your, or your fellow researchers', replication of results. A related benefit is that when analyses need to be repeated, you can re-use the previous syntax with little effort. Finally, only syntax provides some types of analysis (such as conjoint analysis), while menus don't.

Every time you select and execute commands from the SPSS menu system, SPSS generates syntax to perform the procedures you initiated. This is done in the background, but you can ask SPSS to document the syntax in a separate window, called the **Syntax Editor**, from where you can modify and run the analysis.

To see how this works, let's open the Oddjob Airways dataset and select the **Explore** option, which you can find under ► Analyze ► Descriptive Statistics ► Explore. Selecting this menu option opens a dialog box similar to that in Fig. A5.1. We will use this option to obtain a series of statistics for *age*. To do so, move *age* into the **Dependent List** box. Next, instead of clicking **OK** (as we would usually do), click on **Paste**. SPSS will now open a dialog box similar to the one in Fig. A5.2 (note that if a syntax file is already open, the new syntax will be pasted into it).
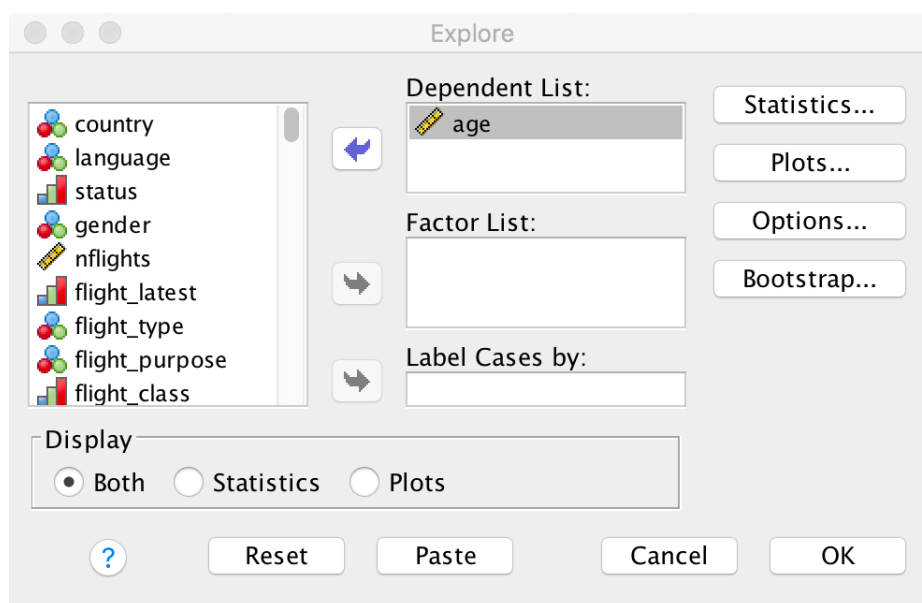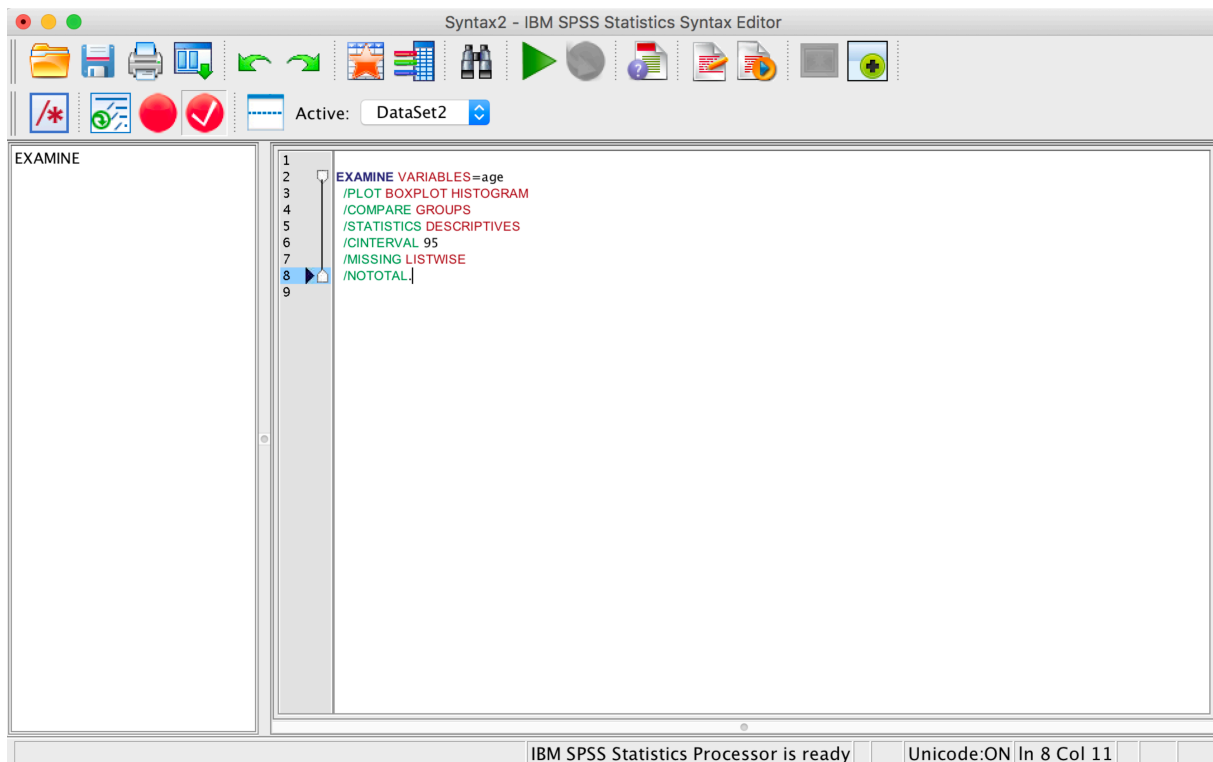

Fig. A5.1 Explore dialog box

Fig. A5.2 Syntax editor

You can now run the analysis by going to ► Run ► All and SPSS will produce a series of tables and figures, including the histogram shown in Fig. A5.2.
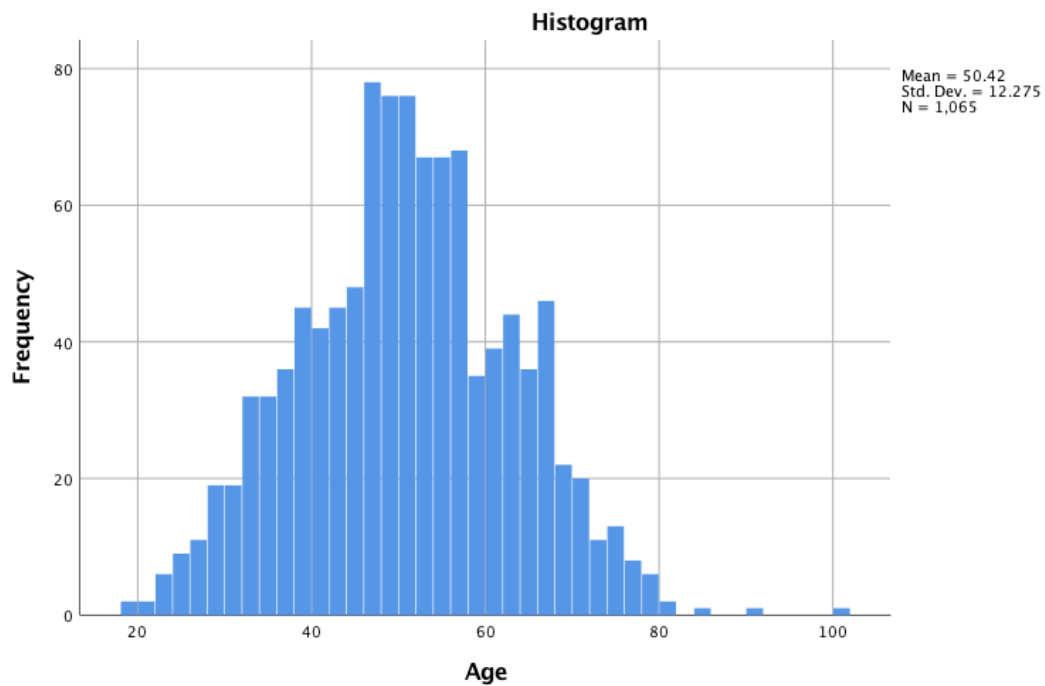

Fig. A5.2 Histogram for *age*

We can now easily re-run the analysis for a different variable, such as *commitment*. To do so, look for the line that reads

```
EXAMINE VARIABLES=age
```

Next, replace *age* with *commitment* and run the analysis by going to ► Run ► All. Alternatively, you can select the syntax code in the window and click on the play button in the menu bar. SPSS will now re-run the analysis for *commitment*. Fig A5.3 shows the resulting histogram for *commitment*.
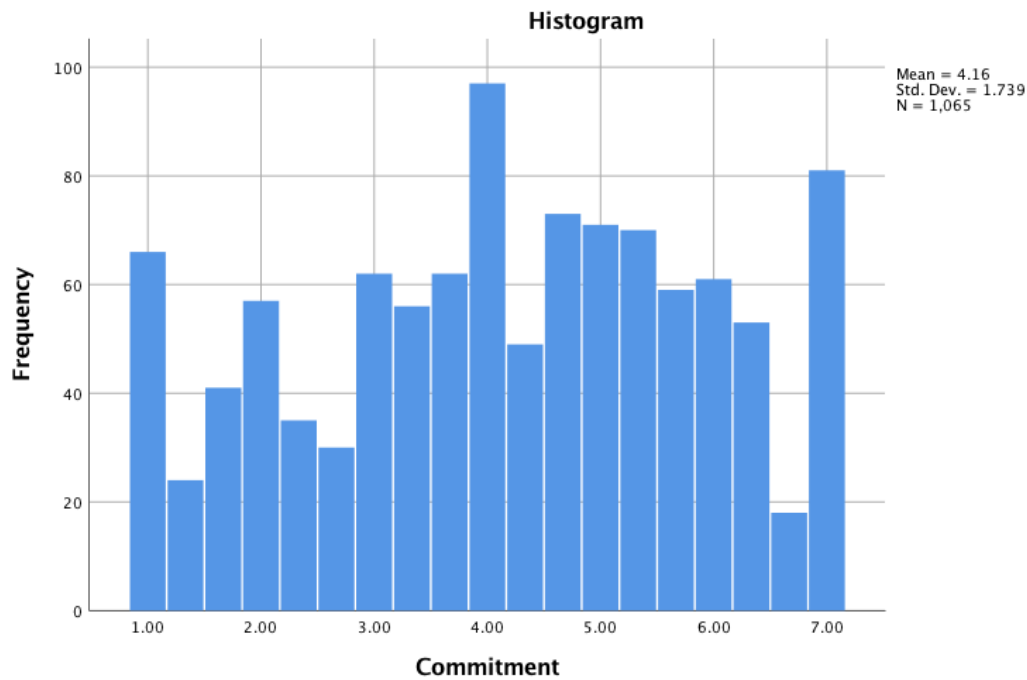

Fig. A5.3 Histogram for *commitment*

You can save your syntax file by going to ► File ► Save as. Syntax files can thus serve as a repository of the analyses already carried out, which will be useful if you have to re-do the analysis. You can open an existing syntax file by going to ► File ► Open ►Syntax in the syntax or the main menu.

Describing the functioning of the syntax in detail is beyond the scope of this book, but if you want to know more, Collier (2010) and Grotenhuis and Visscher (2014) provide comprehensive introductions to the topic.

References

Collier, J. (2010). *Using SPSS syntax: A beginner's guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Grotenhuis, M., & Visscher, C. (2014). *How to use SPSS syntax: An overview of common commands*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.