[Commentary by **John F Hall**]   [Last updated: 10 August 2017]
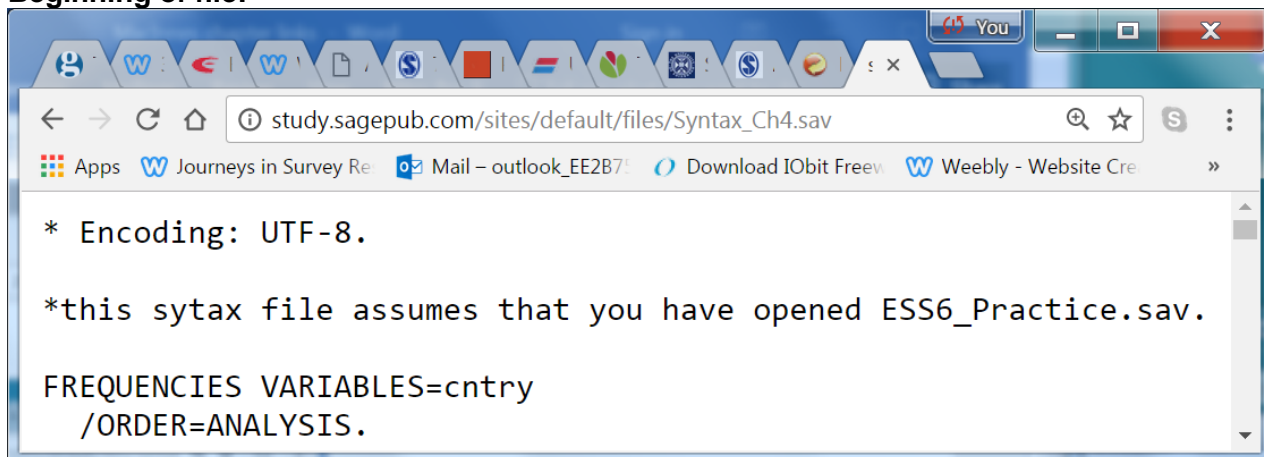
John MacInnes
An Introduction to Secondary Data Analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics
(Sage, Dec. 2016)

Chapter 4: Getting Started with SPSS

4.1.3: Downloading the SPSS syntax

Go to Chapter 4 syntax   [**Direct link** from this page]
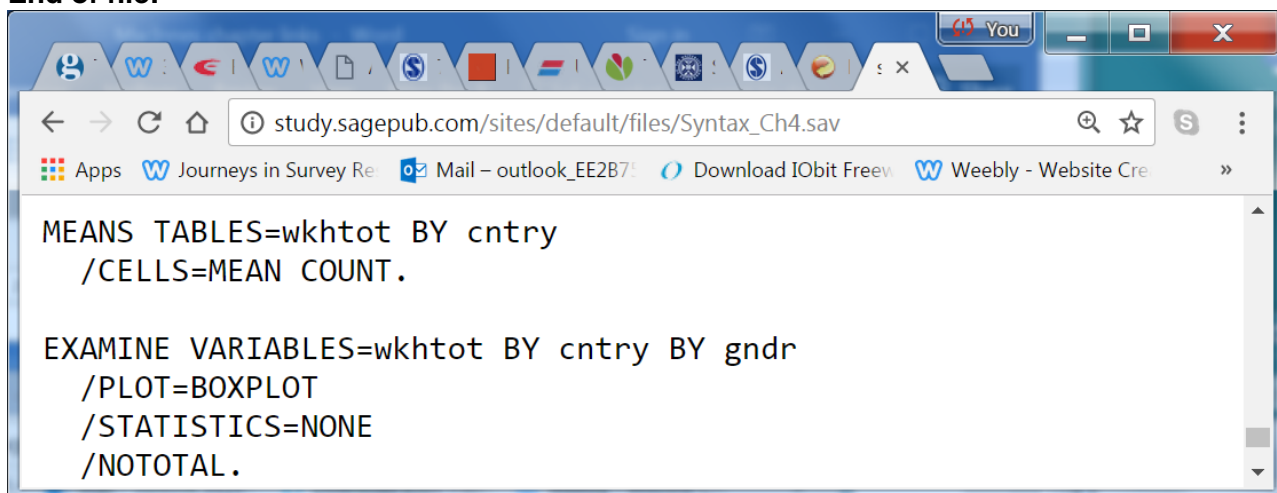
Beginning of file:

[Note the spelling mistake "sytax"]

Scroll up and down to see the full contents.

End of file:

 [**NB:** File **Syntax_Ch4.sav** is **not** an SPSS ***.sav** file, but a Notepad ***.txt** file **Syntax_Ch4.sav.txt** containing plain text "syntax" for all the Chapter 4 exercises in a single file]

To copy file **Syntax_Ch4.sav.txt** to your folder **<MY ESS files>**, right click anywhere in the file:
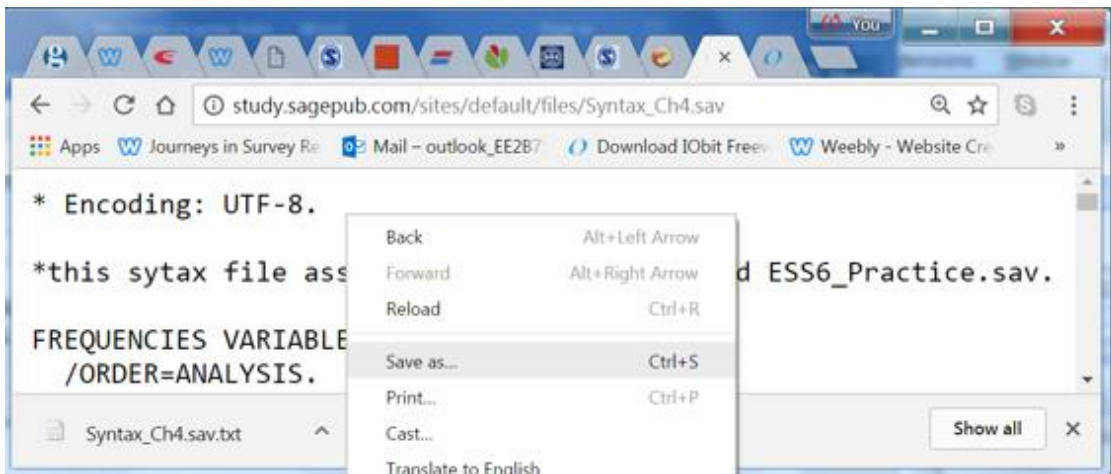
Click on **Save as …**

Make sure **<My ESS files>** is the **target folder** (browse if necessary)
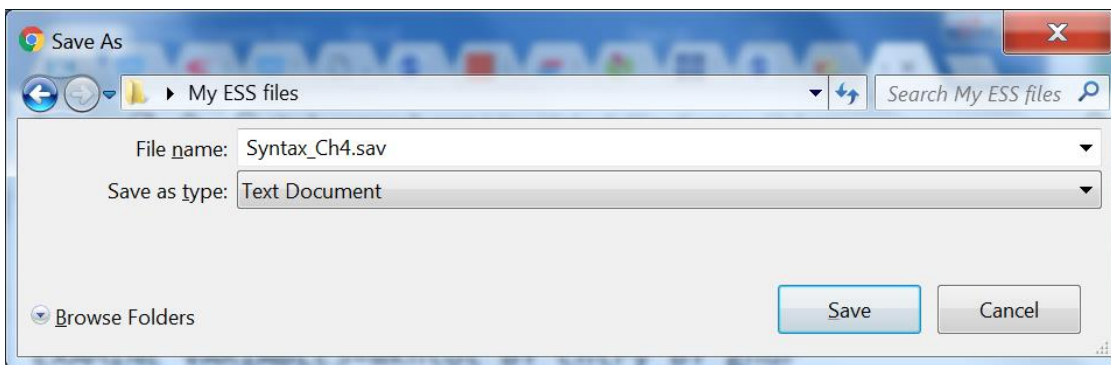
[**NB:** Although "File name" is displayed as Syntax_Ch4.sav which normally indicates an SPSS saved file, "Save as type" is actually displayed as Text Document. Changing the name to **Syntax_Ch4.sps** makes no difference.]
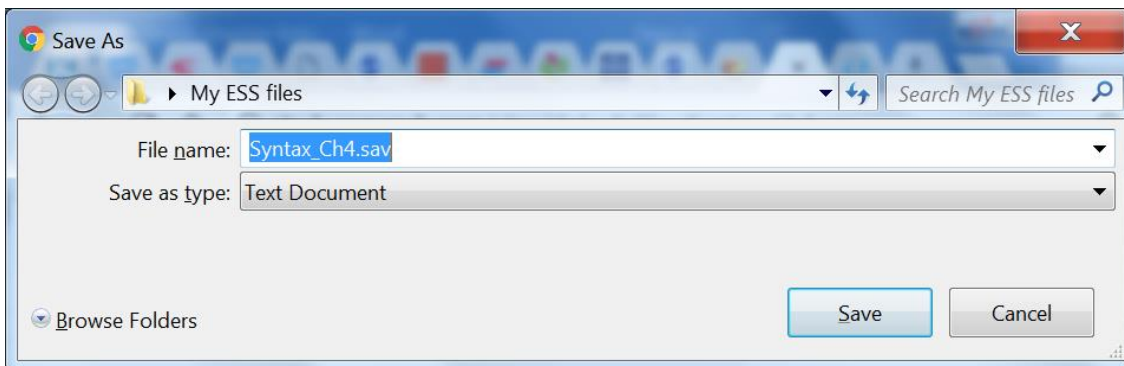
If you try to delete the ***.sav** extension you will see that the file is actually called **Syntax_Ch4.sav.txt**

Save As

My ESS files | Search My ESS files

File name: Syntax_Ch4.sa

Syntax_Ch4.sav.txt

Save as type:

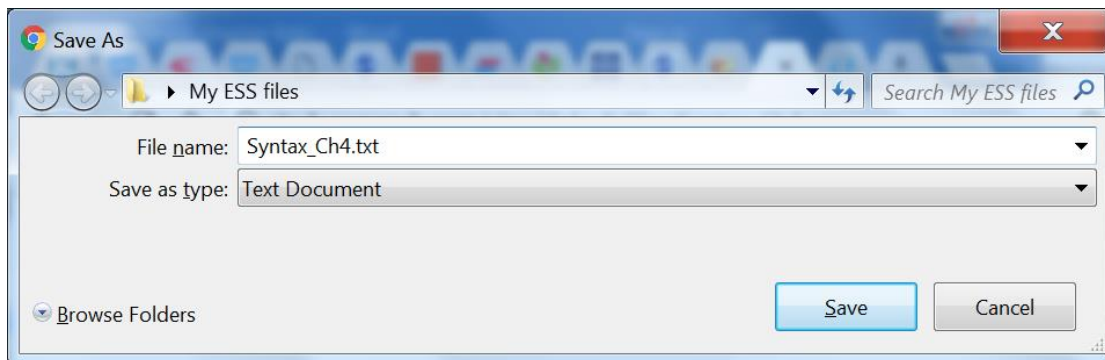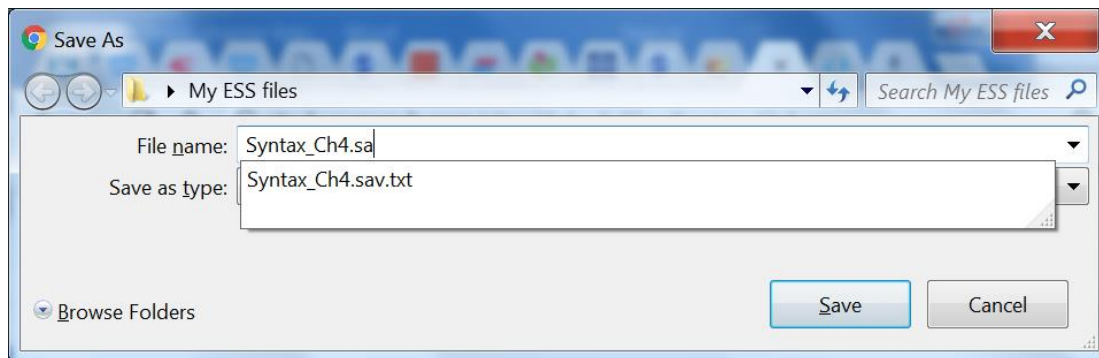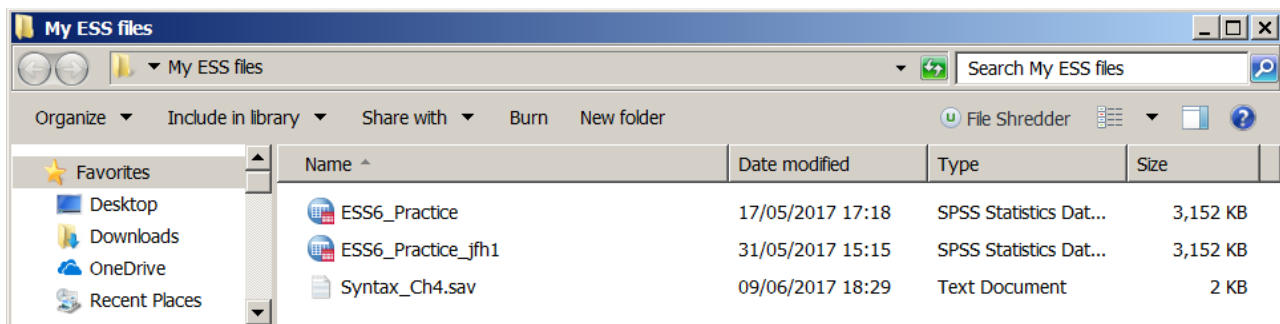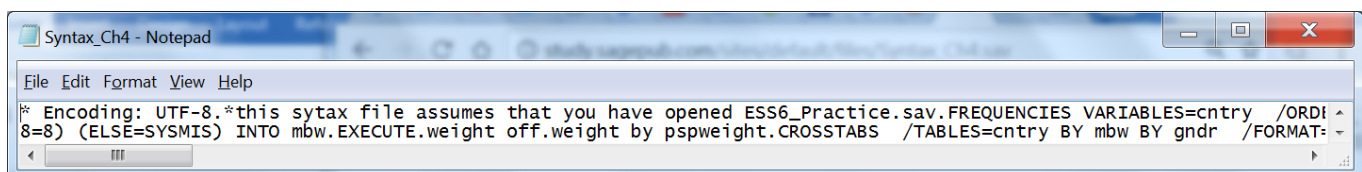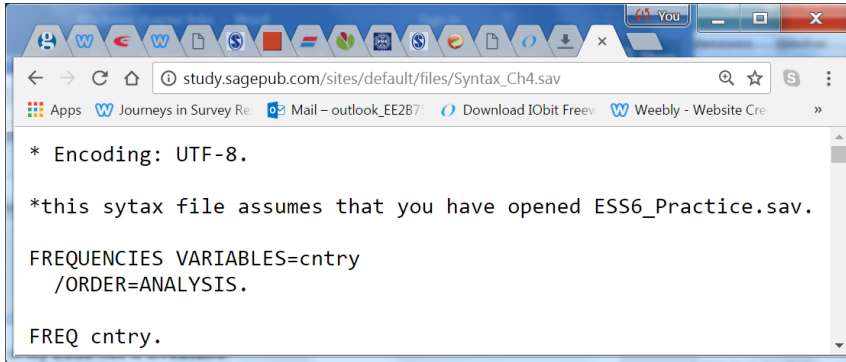Browse Folders | Save | Cancel

Save As

My ESS files | Search My ESS files

File name: Syntax_Ch4.txt

Save as type: Text Document

Browse Folders | Save | Cancel

Click on **Save**

Folder **<My ESS files>** now contains three files:

My ESS files

My ESS files | Search My ESS files

Organize ▾ | Include in library ▾ | Share with ▾ | Burn | New folder | File Shredder

Name	Date modified	Type	Size
ESS6_Practice	17/05/2017 17:18	SPSS Statistics Dat...	3,152 KB
ESS6_Practice_jfh1	31/05/2017 15:15	SPSS Statistics Dat...	3,152 KB
Syntax_Ch4.sav	09/06/2017 18:29	Text Document	2 KB

Favorites
Desktop
Downloads
OneDrive
Recent Places

Double click on **Syntax_Ch4.sav**

Syntax_Ch4 - Notepad

File Edit Format View Help

```
* Encoding: UTF-8.*this sytax file assumes that you have opened ESS6_Practice.sav.FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=cntry   /ORD
8=8) (ELSE=SYSMIS) INTO mbw.EXECUTE.weight off.weight by pspweight.CROSSTABS  /TABLES=cntry BY mbw BY gndr   /FORMAT=
```

Oops! The text is collapsed on to two extremely long lines and is **completely unreadable[1]**.

---

[1] If you open a new Word file and copy into that instead, the syntax lines appear as needed. They can then be copied back into a new *.txt file.

To get the text properly displayed, you have to work directly from the file on the companion website. Go back to file http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Syntax_Ch4.sav on the companion website:

Before any of this "syntax" can be executed by SPSS it needs to be copied into an SPSS **Syntax Editor** (a file with ***.sps** extension) containing instructions which can be used by SPSS to manage and analyse the data.
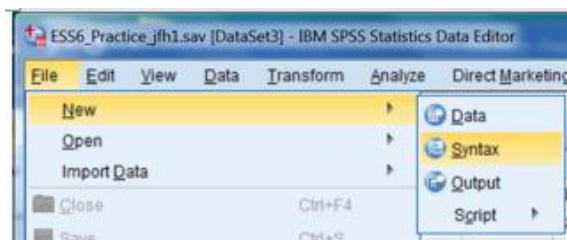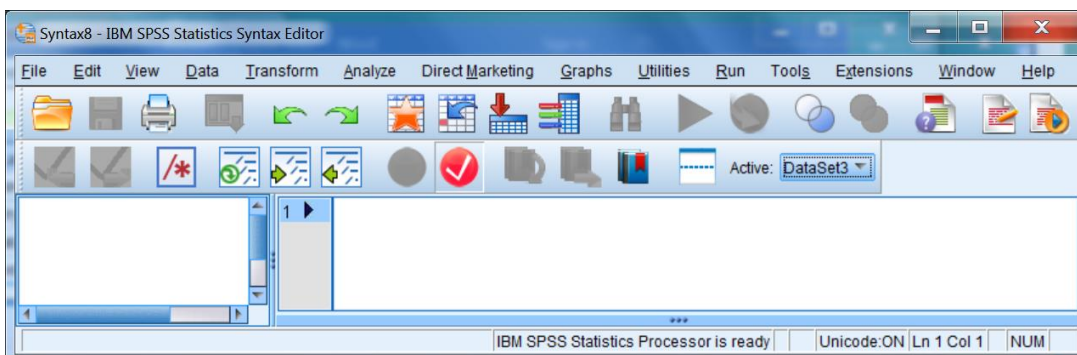
Go back to your **copy** of ESS6_Practice:
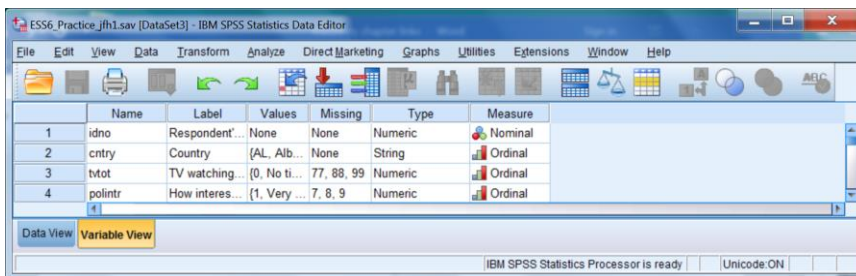
In the top left corner, click on File >> New > Syntax:

. . to open a new SPSS **Syntax Editor**:

Unless you have already watched the earlier video tutorials, this may be the first time you've ever seen one of these. The right hand pane is for you to write English-language-like SPSS syntax consisting of **commands**, **subcommands** and reserved **keywords** (which are automatically colour-coded by SPSS)

> **FREQUENCIES** happy **.**

> **CROSSTABS** sex BY happy
> /CELLS ROWPCT **.**

> **MEANS** TABLES= happy BY sex
> /CELLS=MEAN COUNT **.**

English sentences end with a full stop (period). So do SPSS commands. If you forget the full stop SPSS displays the commands in **red e.g.**

> **FREQUENCIES** happy

The left pane keeps a list of all commands in the current **Syntax Editor** and can be used for quick navigation of long syntax files.

To copy the contents of http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Syntax_Ch4.sav use **CTRL**+**A** to highlight the complete text:
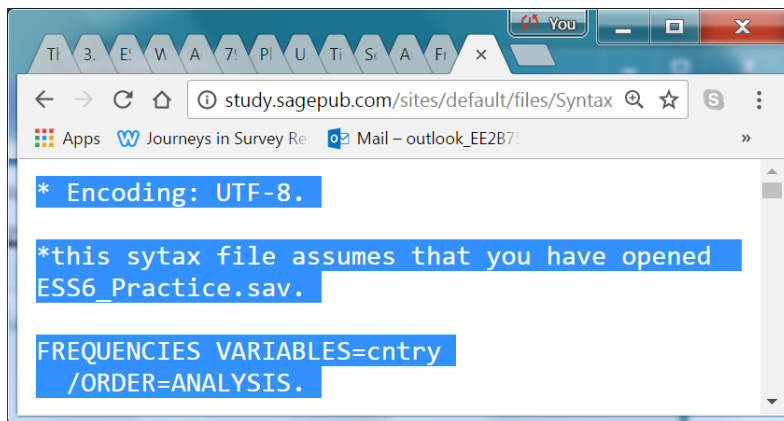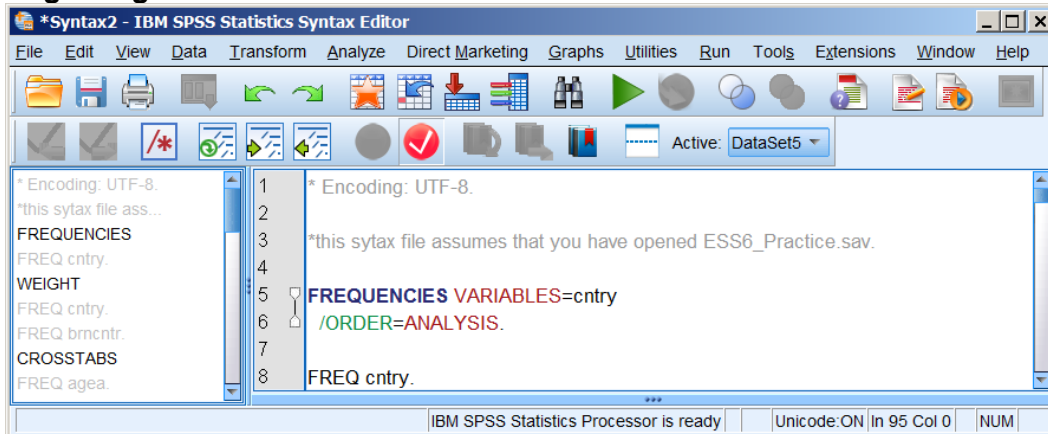

. . then **Ctrl**+**C** (or right click >> **Copy**) to copy the contents to the clipboard.

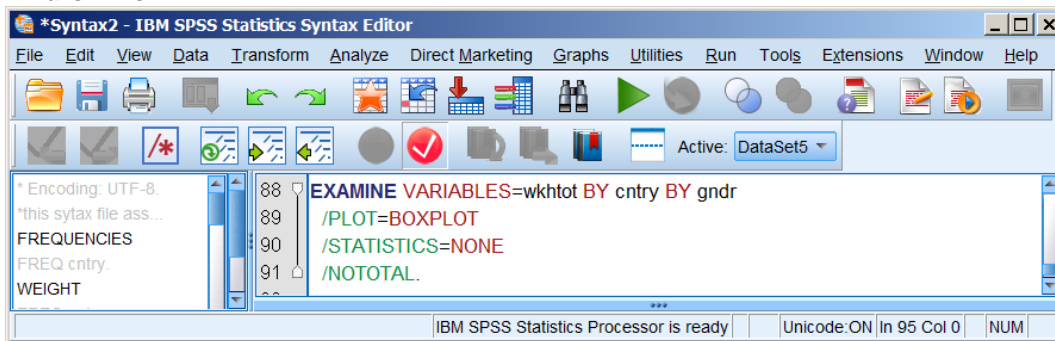Go back to your (blank) **Syntax Editor**
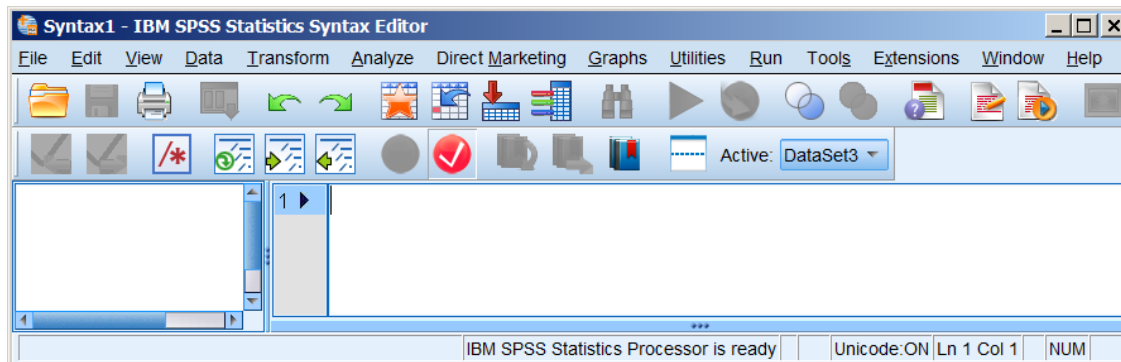
To paste the text from your clipboard into the **Syntax Editor** use Ctrl+V (or right click >> **Paste**)
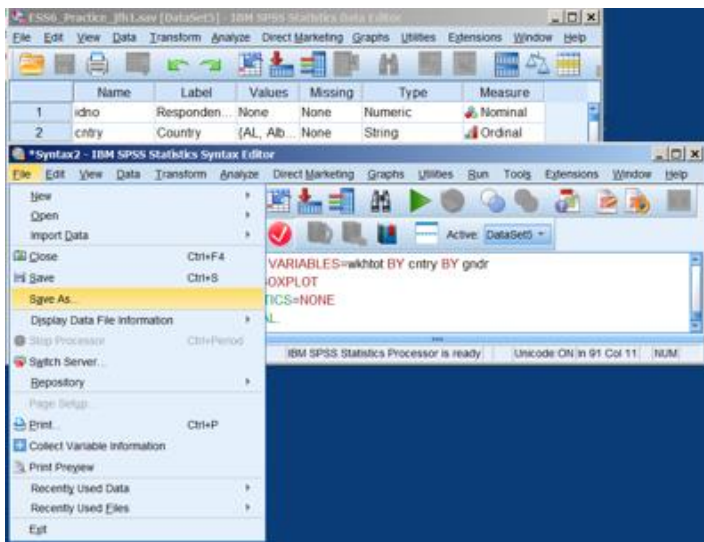
Beginning of file

Scroll up and down to see the contents.
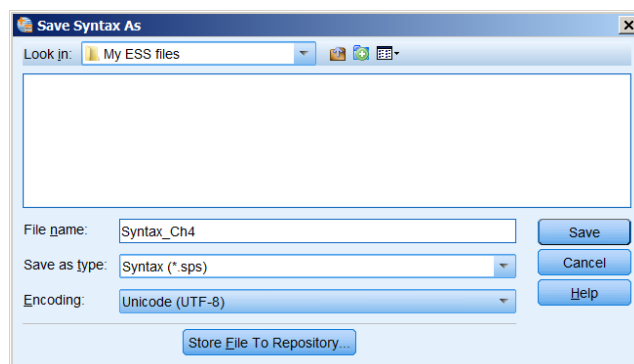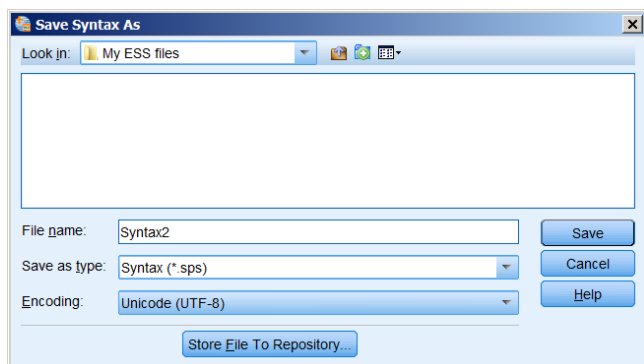
End of file

This file still has its temporary *Syntax name. To save it with its proper name:
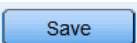
Step 16: Click on File >> Save as

Change **Syntax**   to **Syntax_Ch4**

Click on [Save] and a new syntax file Syntax_Ch4 will be saved in folder **<My ESS files>**
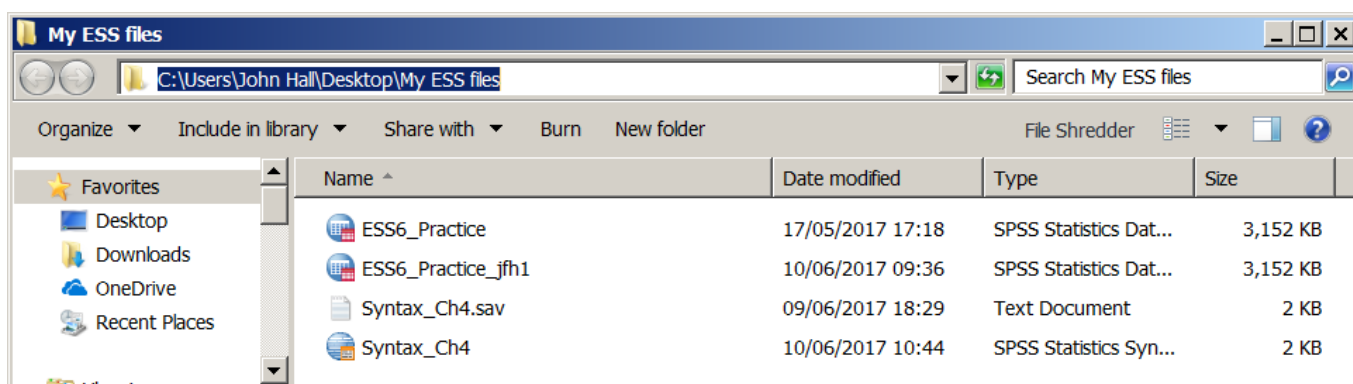
Double click on   Syntax_Ch4 to open the file.
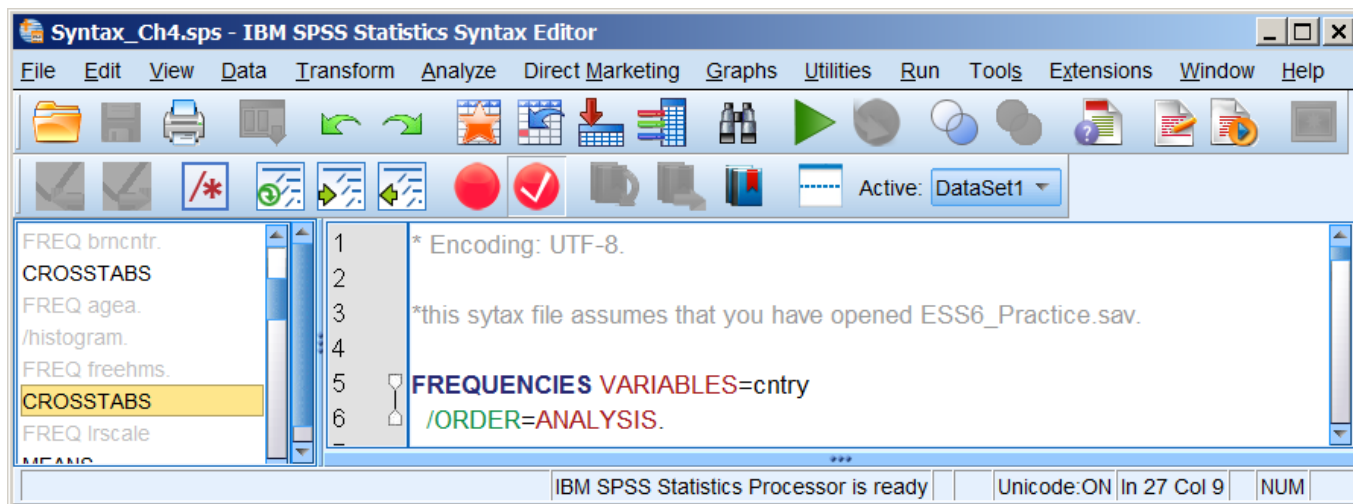
Scroll down the left pane to see the list of SPSS **commands** interspersed with (greyed out) comments.

Scroll down the right pane and you will see a very long set of the full syntax instructions for each of the video tutorials in Chapter 4.

   1: **Starting SPSS**
   2: **Frequency tables**
   3: **Crosstab brncntr x cntry**
   4: **Histogram agea**
   5: **Freehms & Cis**
   6: **Crosstabs & chisq**
   7: **Means procedure**
   8: **Recoding vars**
   9: **Subsetting & 3 way crosstabs mbw**
10: **Mbw excel chart**
11: **Auto recode**
12: **Boxplots**

The greyed out comments are difficult to read, but you can change them to another colour which is easier to see.

In the top left corner click on Edit >> Options:

. . then on Syntax Editor:
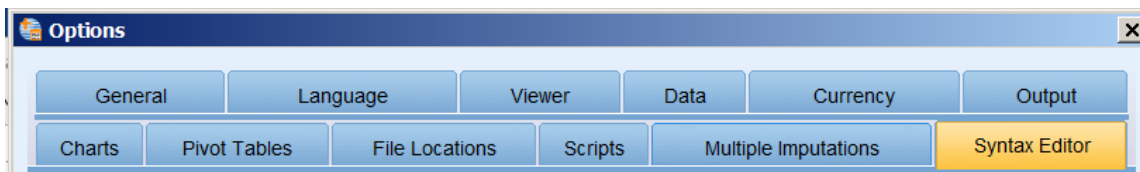
Choose a colour (Magenta which is easier to see and sufficiently different to avoid confusion)

On Comments click on   to obtain the palette   then choose a **colour**:
↓   (at bottom right)

Click on Apply   then   OK

The comments are now much easier to read:

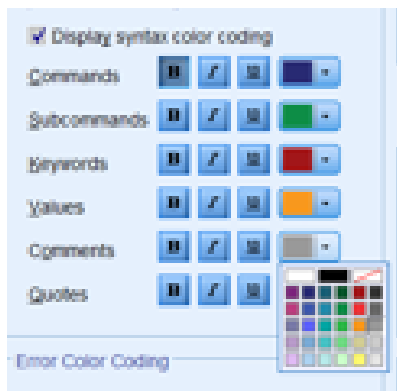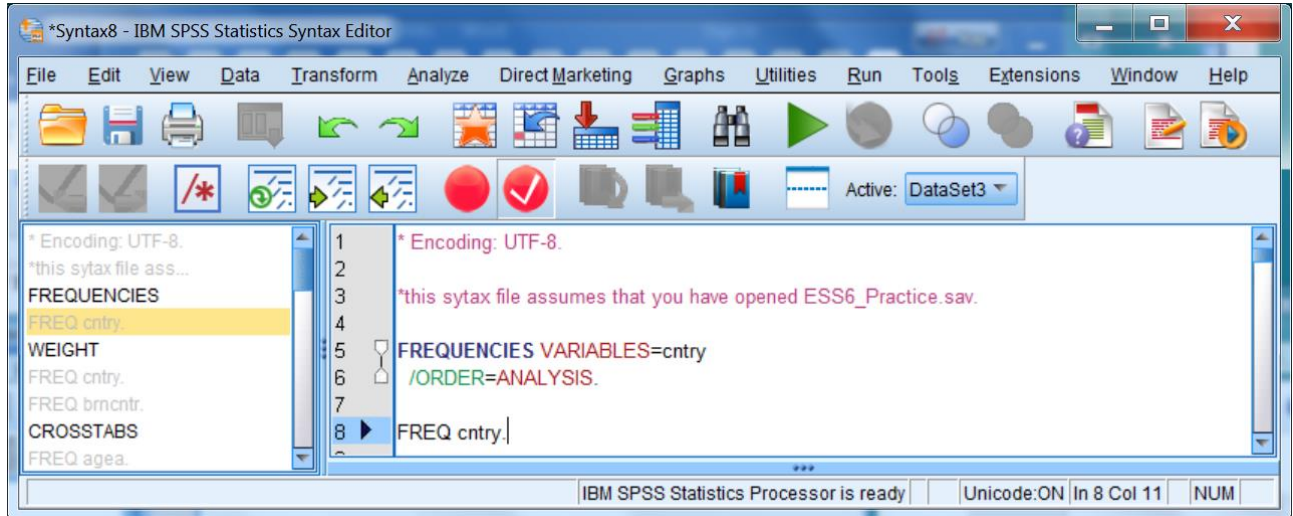Rather than execute every command in the file, it is better to run short extracts one at a time, but first an explanation of the contents.

SPSS syntax is a bit like English-language sentences with their rules of grammar and ending with a full stop. It comprises colour-coded **commands**, sub-commands, reserved keywords and comments. User-supplied variable names and formulae are left in **black**. SPSS syntax and variable names are case insensitive (**FREQUENCIES** is the same as **frequencies**: **Age** is the same as **age**). SPSS accepts abbreviated syntax (**freq** for frequencies, **cro** for **crosstabs**) but abbreviations are not colour-coded.

Many examples in this file seem to have been constructed using the **PASTE** facility in the Graphic User Interface (GUI). Using the GUI involves clicking on icons in the SPSS taskbar to obtain drop-down menus, and repetitive clicking to choose procedures from them, complete specifications, sometimes in minute detail. This produces accurate syntax, but can be very tedious and time-consuming, even for quite basic analysis.

For basic data management and analysis, the same output can be obtained more easily and quickly by typing in syntax direct.

For instance:

    freq gndr.

    . . produces exactly the same output (with fewer key-strokes) as going via the GUI to generate:

    DATASET ACTIVATE DataSet1.
    FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=gndr
     /ORDER=ANALYSIS.

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	24929	45.6	45.6	45.6
	Female	29727	54.4	54.4	100.0
	Total	54656	100.0	100.0	
Missing	No answer	17	0.0		
Total		54673	100.0		

End of: **4.1.3: Downloading the SPSS syntax**

Back to: MacInnes (2017)