You’re probably familiar with how other personal computer applications work, and you will find that many SPSS features operate exactly the same way. You probably already know about dragging, clicking, double-clicking, and working with files. If you don’t, you can refer to one of the many basic operating systems books available for Windows or the Macintosh. We assume that you are familiar with the basic operating systems skills such as clicking with a mouse, dragging objects, naming files, etc.

In this first unit, we introduce you to SPSS, beginning with how to start SPSS, and walk you through a tour so that you know some of the most important features of SPSS.

In Lesson 1, “Starting SPSS,” the first of four lessons in this unit, you will find out how the SPSS Windows group is organized and how you start SPSS.

In Lesson 2, “The SPSS Main Menus and Toolbar,” we introduce you to the opening SPSS window, point out the various elements in the window, and explain what they do. The main menus in the SPSS window are your opening to all the SPSS features you will learn about in using SPSS. We also introduce you to the toolbar, a collection of icons that perform important tasks with a click of the mouse.

Lesson 3, “Using SPSS Help,” introduces you to SPSS online help. If you’ve ever used another Windows application, you know how handy it is to have this type of help immediately available and how it can get you through even the most difficult procedures.

In the last lesson in Unit 1, “A Brief SPSS Tour,” we provide a simple example of what SPSS can do including simple analysis, the use of Data View and Variable View, and the creation of a chart. Here we’ll whet your appetite for the terrific power and features of SPSS and what is in store for you throughout the book.
Starting SPSS

After This Lesson, You Will Know

- How to start SPSS
- What the opening SPSS screen looks like

Key Words

- Data Editor
- Data View
- Variable View
- Viewer

With this lesson, you will start your journey on learning how to use SPSS, the most powerful and easiest-to-use data analysis package available.

Keep in mind that throughout these lessons we expect you to work along with us. It’s only through hands-on experiences that you will master the basic and advanced features of this program.

Starting SPSS

SPSS is started by clicking the icon (or the name representing the program) that represents the application either on the Start menu in Windows or on the desktop on the Macintosh. You can also access the SPSS icon through Windows Explorer or in the Applications folder on your Macintosh.

The SPSS Opening Window

As you can see in Figure 1, the opening window presents a series of options that allow you to select from running the SPSS tutorial, entering data, posing an existing query, creating a new query by using the Database Wizard, or opening an existing source of data (an existing file). Should you not want to see this screen each time you open SPSS, then click on the “Don’t show this dialog in the future” box in the lower left corner of the window.
Figure 1. The SPSS for Windows opening dialog box.

Figure 2. The SPSS Data View window.
For our purposes, we will click the **Type in data** option since it is likely to be the one you first select upon opening and learning SPSS. Once you do this, the **Data View** window (also called the **Data Editor**) you see in Figure 2 (on page 3) becomes active. This is where you enter data you want to use with SPSS once that data has been defined. Although you cannot see it when SPSS first opens, there is another open (but not active) window as well. This is the **Variable View** where variables are defined and the parameters for those variables are set. We will cover Data View and Variable View in Lesson 5.

The **Viewer** displays statistical results and charts that you create. An example of the Viewer window is shown in Figure 3. A data set is created in the Data Editor, and once the set is analyzed or graphed, you examine the results of the analysis in the Viewer.

If you think the Data Editor is similar to a spreadsheet in form and function, you are right. In form, it certainly is, since the Data Editor consists of rows and columns just like in Excel and Lotus 1-2-3. Values can be entered and then manipulated. In function as well, the Data Editor is much like a spreadsheet. Values that are entered can be transformed, sorted, rearranged, and more. In addition, SPSS can use formulas to compute new variables and values from existing ones, as you will learn in Lesson 12.

As you will learn in Lesson 10, one of the many conveniences of SPSS is its ability to import data from a spreadsheet accurately and efficiently. This ability makes SPSS particularly well suited and powerful for further analysis of data already in spreadsheet form.

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Figure 3. The Viewer.