

Guidelines for a Codebook

What Is a Codebook?

A codebook is a document describing each variable in your dataset. A codebook includes the following:

- Variable names and labels.
- Values/codes assigned to the variables and their labels.
- Missing data codes.
- Special instructions on how to use data.
- Other relevant information.

Why Is a Codebook Important?

A codebook is a reference guide for your evaluation team. It also helps others understand your data.

Codebook Contents

Variable names must be unique and short. If you will analyze data with a statistical program, the variable names cannot contain spaces and special characters. Use underscores instead of spaces.

Variable labels describe the meaning of variables. A good label is concise but descriptive.

Values and labels represent the contents of a variable. For example, the variable *sex* in the codebook below has two possible values, 0 and 1. Each value should have a corresponding label describing the meaning of the value (for example, 0=Male and 1=Female). As a general rule, give numeric codes to categorical variables, and assign a value to each category.

- If missing data have special codes, indicate these codes in the codebook. Typically, missing data for continuous variables are represented with an impossible value such as -88, -99, or -999.

A codebook can also include a description of the measures used, instructions on how to use data, and information about who created the data, when, and how.

Sample Codebook

Survey Item #	Variable Name	Variable Label	Values and Labels
N/A	Teacher_ID	Unique teacher identification code	Values 001 to 200
1	Sex	Teacher sex	0=Male 1=Female
2	Race	Teacher race	99=Missing 1=White 2=Black 3=Other -99=Missing
3	Satis_Eval	Teacher satisfaction with district evaluation process	1=Very dissatisfied 2=Dissatisfied 3=Neutral 4=Satisfied 5=Very satisfied -99=Missing

Note. Adapted from the following sources:

Bélisle, P., & Joseph, L. (2015). *Codebook cookbook: How to enter and document your data*. McGill.
<http://www.medicine.mcgill.ca/epidemiology/joseph/pbelisle/CodebookCookbook.html#section3.2>

Kent State University Libraries. (2020, November 10). *SPSS tutorials: Creating a codebook*. Retrieved December 28, 2020, from
<https://libguides.library.kent.edu/SPSS/Codebooks>

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