

An Electronic Roadmap to SAS Discussion and Support

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Abstract: This paper / demonstration will show entry to INTERNET facilities via a common on-line service (PRODIGY). Other facilities will be explained, including SAS-L, TSNEWS, EMITS, and SIBBS. Over the past several years, SAS users have been "hit" with a barrage of electronic services and facilities to help solve and report problems, exchange information, and perform other tasks formerly done by telephone and direct human contact. There are so many new facilities and so many ways to access these facilities that many users are understandably confused.

The presentation will meet the following objectives: First it will introduce a structured way of looking at the various facilities to better understand attendant functions and to identify those which overlap or are redundant. Second, the talk will present a roadmap to using available on-line services and INTERNET to access SAS Newsgroups and a World Wide Web Browser. Finally, access to SAS information on the SAS Institute Bulletin Board System (SIBBS) via a direct dial line is presented. As time and equipment permit, demonstrations of the last two items will be shown.

Categorization: Groups of Information and Methods of Access. One of the reasons that this topic is so confusing is that there are so many "pieces" of information available about SAS. These "pieces" change or are augmented so rapidly, that they cannot be clearly documented in a single location. This confusion is compounded by that fact that each "piece" of information can be accessed in several ways.

Perhaps one way of grasping all that is available is to try to categorize the information "pieces" and to identify the methods that are available to access each "piece." Specifically, this paper will divide information into three major areas and cross these areas with access methods to build a matrix. Sample information "pieces" or sources are shown with associated methods of access.

There are many ways that we might try to "bucket" pieces of information into major information categories. This paper defines three groups:

- I. Data Interchange / Discussion.
- II. Technical Support Information.
- III. Problem Analysis and Tracking.

The Data Interchange / Discussion Group (I above) includes bulletin boards, electronic information subscriptions, and newsgroups. Many of these are traditional "INTERNET" type services. However, it is important to note that the information area does not necessarily dictate the method of access. This particular group of data is defined as those "pieces" that are a general user information exchange that is not specifically supported by the SAS Institute or that are supplied to the user in a passive manner.

The Technical Support Information Group (II. above) includes such things as an "up to date" SAS Notes file and a history of TSNEWS. We might define this as SAS information that the user must actively pursue, but requires no specific reply by SAS Institute.

The Problem Analysis and Tracking Group (III. above) consists of methods for exchanging information, fixes and other data with the SAS Institute. It could be argued that this is true technical support or a subgroup of II above. However, we distinguish it from II by its function of logging and solving specific problems.

Each of these areas only has meaning when looking at specific examples or "pieces" of information and how those "pieces" are accessed. These access or retrieval methods can also be placed into three groups.

- A. E-MAIL
- B. Bulletins / Global Postings
- C. SAS Institute Bulletin Board System (SIBBS)

Separating the method of access from the information seems a bit confusing on first sight. For example, we will see how SIBBS is a system that has many "pieces" of information as well as being an access method. However, SIBBS type information can be accessed using other facilities. It is only by trying to separate the retrieval method from the information "piece" that can make these concepts a little clearer

In order to explain the relationship of the information with the retrieval methods, we may build the following matrix:

Information / Retrieval Matrix.			
Retrieval Methods	A.	B.	C.
Info Groups	E-MAIL	INTERNET	SIBBS
I. Data Interchange			
II. Tech Support			
III. Problem Tracking			

I. Data Interchange / Discussion:

We defined this segment of information as including bulletin boards, electronic information subscriptions, and newsgroups. Some examples and usage of this segment are shown in the table below.

Information / Retrieval Matrix.			
Retrieval Methods	A.	B.	C.
Info I.	E-MAIL	INTERNET	SIBBS
Data Interchange			
TSNEWS-L	X		
MWSUG-L	X		
SAS-L		X	

TSNEWS-L and MWSUG-L can be subscribed to so that information is received via E-MAIL. TSNEWS-L is maintained by SAS and contains information about "nasty" problems and important solutions to "nasty" problems. MWSUG-L is for the

Midwest SAS users group to post local questions and exchange information. In order to subscribe to these, the user must send an E-MAIL via INTERNET using his E-MAIL address (company, institution, or service, such as PRODIGY or CompuServe.)

For TSNEWS-L

To: LISTSERV@VM.SAS.COM
 From: *your internet id*
 Subject: *whatever you want*

SUBSCRIBE TSNEWS-L <firstname lastname>

For MWSUG-L

To: LISTSERV@CMSUVMB.CMSU.EDU
 From: *your internet id*
 Subject: *whatever you want*

SUBSCRIBE MWSUG-L <firstname lastname>

Several items should be noted with respect to this retrieval method. First, in this implementation, information is obtained passively. That is, once the user subscribes to this information, he will receive notification of any changes to those boards. Secondly, although not shown here, E-MAIL can be used to actively retrieve information from one of the information groups. However, other means of obtaining information is preferred. Finally, only two "subscription" type interfaces are shown. Others certainly exist, such as the "Electronic Mail Interface to Tech Support" (EMITS). In addition, NEWGROUPS may be subscribed to, so that you are posted by E-MAIL every time an entry is placed in the NEWSGROUP. A sample NEWSGROUP, SAS-L, is explained below.

SAS-L is an INTERNET NEWSGROUP. This is a facility that allows SAS users to ask questions, present solutions, or generally discuss SAS with other SAS users around the globe. The user can pose questions or make an announcement by placing an entry in SAS-L. Questions may be answered privately to the "requester" or posted for all to see.

Setting up to be a user of SAS-L will vary from service to service and will depend on your interface to INTERNET. Below is an example of adding SAS-L to your personal NEWSGROUP list under PRODIGY, followed by a sample of normal usage.

On first entry, the user must follow the script below..

SAS-L Setup (first entry):

1. PRODIGY: JUMP: INTERNET
2. Click on NEWSGROUPS
3. Click on NEWSGROUPS again in USENET WINDOW
4. Click on Find NEWSGROUPS
5. Search NEWSGROUPS for textSAS
6. Add SAS-L to your NEWSGROUP List

Subsequent entry in this NEWSGROUP would consist of the following script:

SAS-L...Subsequent Entry

1. PRODIGY: JUMP: INTERNET
2. Click on NEWSGROUPS
3. Click on NEWSGROUPS again in USENET WINDOW
4. Click on COMP.SOFT-SYS.SAS
5. Pick articles

Read

Post (pose own questions).

Reply / aid / answer.

Caution: May be habit forming.

We have essentially defined this group of information as that which is maintained by SAS Institute, but is not related to direct problem analyses / problem reporting. SAS Notes, for example provides the user with an "up to the minute" version of the SAS Notes facility shipped with SAS. The archive of TSNEW-L allows the user to look at all past entries of the TSNEWS-L that is described in information group I.

Again, the three "pieces" of information listed are meant only as samples, and are by no means all encompassing. It is evident from the matrix, however, that there is a number of ways into this type of information. In some cases, all three retrieval methods are available for one information sub-group.

A very effective way into some of this data is via INTERNET's "World Wide Web." SAS provides what is known as a WEB BROWSER that lets the user "walk through" some "hyper-text" screens into his area of interest. Following is a sample entry through PRODIGY, along with a "test script" to allow one to exercise some of the facilities. Note that this script was effective at the time of this writing, but these menus may be subject to change. Do not follow script blindly, but use it only as a guide.

II. Technical Support Information

This element of information is defined as that data provided by SAS to aid in Technical Support and other user support facilities. This area, by definition, excludes information interchange for direct problem analysis and tracking, which is handled as information group III. The matrix below shows sample information "pieces" in this category.

Information / Retrieval Matrix.			
<i>Retrieval Methods</i>	A.	B.	C.
<i>Info II</i>	E-MAIL	INTERNET	SIBBS
<i>Tech Support</i>			
SAS Notes	X	X	X
TSNEW-L archive		X	X
EMITS	X	X	X

WEB Browser Entry / Usage Script:

1. PRODIGY: JUMP: INTERNET
2. Click on World Wide Web
3. Click on Browse the Web
4. Click on NAVIGATE drop down
5. In NAVIGATE drop down, click on
Get URL
6. In entry window, enter:
http://www.sas.com/
(can also be placed in your URL Hotlist)

Your in....following is a usage script.

7. Initial screen...click on text version.
8. Click on Technical Support?????
9. Click on Support Services.
10. Click on Technical Support
11. Click on one of many.....
SAS Notes
then on searchable database.
then back.
12. Click on FTP Access
then additional info on FTP...
then back.
13. Click on TSNEW-L
then on history.
then back.
14. Click on EMITS
SAS Notes
then on searchable database.
then back.

III. Problem Analysis / Tracking

This information area is also an area of Tech Support. It is distinguished from II, above, in that it involves responses and discussion with SAS to track and solve a particular problem. The matrix below shows samples of functions categorized in this group.

Information / Retrieval Matrix.

Retrieval Methods	A.	B.	C.
Info III	E-MAIL	INTERNET	SIBBS
Problem tracking			
Report / review Problems	?	X	X
Upload logs, etc Download fixes			X
Requests, orders etc.			X

(? indicates uncertainty of access availability)

Most of this information group is tied closely to SAS Institute's direct dial line and the SAS Institute Bulletin Board System (SIBBS). Because of this, it is difficult to discern what is the information provided by SIBBS, versus how it is accessed. The fact is that SIBBS provides more than problem reporting and tracking facilities and crosses all three information areas. In addition, some of the information group III elements are available from E-MAIL or the WEB Browser (INTERNET).

Following is an explanation of how to get on "SIBBS". In addition, a sample script is shown on how to get into a few of the areas. The menus are very straightforward, and it is suggested that you "walk around" to get the feel of this facility.

SIBBS - Direct Dial to SAS

1. Setup: Procomm or similar package.
9600-N-8-1 VT100 1-919-677-8155
2. MAIN Menu enter "S"
3. SAS Tech Support Forum enter "U"
4. SAS Notes enter "A"
5. SAS Version 6.xx enter "S"
6. Search Usage Notes

Sample SIBS Entry Screen		
SAS Institute BBS (SIBBS)		
Main Menu		
Interest Areas [S] SAS Tech Support Forum [J] JMP Tech Support Forum [A] Jobline - Jobs at SAS Inst. [R] Marketing & SUGI Info [P] Book Sales & Publications		Misc Areas [D] Download Files to your system [U] Upload Files to Consultant [W] General SAS Suggestions [B] View Current Bulletins [&] Misc Function Area [M] Message Area
----- <G> Goodbye ----- <I> Immediate Logoff -----+ Line: 1 9600 Baud		

Summary and Conclusions

There is an incredible amount of information available electronically about SAS and from SAS. In addition, there is a number of ways to retrieve, peruse or access this information. If there is a problem in all this, it is that there is simply too much to easily understand. Each SAS user has unique requirements and must determine what type of data he requires (data interchange, tech support, problem resolution), and how to access it (E-MAIL, INTERNET, SIBBS).

In closing, note the following observations. If cost is a major consideration of access, one must weight the price of INTERNET and the World Wide Web, against SIBBS long distance. The World Wide Web access to SAS is "pretty" and easy to use. SAS-L is fun to use and could be a valuable tool in solving a problem or helping others solve their problems. SIBBS can be very useful in accelerating the Institute's handling of your report problem.

If all else fails, one might consider the initial electronic method for dealing with SAS problems and questions. That script goes something like this:

Lift receiver.....dial 1-919-677-8008.

References for: An Electronic Roadmap to SAS Discussion and Support

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