

## Cures for SAS® Documentation Overload Syndrome Mimi Saffer, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC

### ABSTRACT

SAS Institute keeps developing more great software products, and that means more and more pages of documentation. The good news is the Institute is offering alternatives to the standard library to help you cut down on the amount of documentation you need. This presentation explains how new information products and new publishing methods can reduce the strain on your back, your brain, and your bookshelf. Topics covered include abridged reference manuals, custom published books, Books by Users®, online documentation, and document downsizing.

### INTRODUCTION

The very things that make the SAS System a great choice for your organization's information delivery needs are the same things that require weighty supporting documentation. The breadth and depth of SAS software and the number of operating systems that the SAS System supports result in a large number of features and applications to describe. It takes a lot of words to document the more than six million lines of code underlying the SAS System.

But, most of you as SAS users don't use all six million lines of the code. You might use two million lines, or one million, or even a few hundred thousand. And most of you don't want to buy over 100 pounds of books in order to have access to the specific information you need, or to look through tens of thousands of pages for one detail.

So, what are we doing about it?

We recognize this problem at SAS Institute, and we're taking advantage of new technologies to cure your Documentation Overload Syndrome. This presentation is about the choices the Institute offers to suit your particular information needs.

### THE ABRIDGED REFERENCE SERIES

We believe in the 80/20 rule. In this case, we believe that 80% of SAS users use 20% of the features of SAS software, give or take a few features. Whatever the real numbers are, the point is that most of you don't need or want much of what we've documented. Sure, you want access to the complete SAS information set some of the time. But what you probably need at your elbow right now is an abridged reference.

So, we've begun the abridged reference series. The first book in the series covers base SAS, SAS/GRAPH®, SAS/FSP®, and SAS/AF® software. An upcoming book covers SAS/STAT®, SAS/ETS®, SAS/QC®, and SAS/IML® software.

Each abridged reference is a subset of the material from previously published reference books. The writing style and page layout are compact, with the essential reference material from several products in one easy-to-use book. For many programming tasks, an abridged reference provides all the reference documentation you need.

The tricky part of creating an abridged reference is deciding which parts to keep and which parts to leave out. We're making those decisions based on users' choices. Through customer surveys and field testing, we're selecting the material most commonly used.

So far, response to the first abridged reference has been extremely favorable. But some users have asked for a different mix of products in abridged form. We plan to continue identifying popular combinations of product features so that we can publish abridged references to satisfy most users.

### THE WAR ON WORDS, OR, DOWNSIZING SAS DOCUMENTATION

Downsizing is a word that usually has negative connotations. But it's become one of our favorite words in Publications. We are on a mission to downsize every book we publish. Through a variety of techniques including writing and presentation methods, format, and design, as well as appropriate content choices, we're working to make each book as short as we can, but still provide the completeness and accuracy you depend on us for.

So far, we've seen page count reductions between 10% and 45% for works in progress by applying our new rules for "write sizing." By Version 7, we think you'll notice a difference across the SAS library.

### BOOKS BY USERS PROGRAM

Sometimes the best way to find out something about SAS software is to consult another user. The Books by Users (BBU) program publishes and distributes high-quality books about the SAS System written by experienced and knowledgeable users.

The books offered through the BBU program document useful applications and represent some of the best ideas in the SAS user community. For those of you who want to learn about the SAS System through everyday use, Books by Users offers works that expand the dimensions of SAS products by providing fresh insights from the perspective of SAS users.

Here is a list of books in the BBU program:

*Applied Statistics and the SAS Programming Language, Third Edition* by Ronald P. Cody and Jeffrey K. Smith

*Beyond the Obvious with SAS Screen Control Language* by Don Stanley

*The Cartoon Guide to Statistics* by Larry Gonick and Woolcott Smith

*Mastering the SAS System, Second Edition* by Jay Jaffe

*Professional SAS Programmer's Pocket Reference* by Rick Aster

*Professional SAS Programming Secrets* by Rick Aster and Rhena Seidman

*Professional SAS User Interfaces* by Rick Aster

*SAS Applications Programming: A Gentle Introduction* by Frank C. Dilorio

*SAS Foundations: From Installation to Operation* by Rick Aster

*SAS Programming for Researchers and Social Scientists* by Paul E. Spector

*SAS Software Roadmaps: Your Guide to Discovering the SAS System* by Laurie Burch and SherriJoyce King

*SAS Software Solutions: Basic Data Processing* by Thomas Miron

*SAS System for Elementary Statistical Analysis* by Sandra Schlotzhauer and Ramon C. Littell

*SAS System for Forecasting Time Series, 1986 Edition* by John Brocklebank and David A. Dickey

*SAS System for Linear Models, Third Edition* by Rudolf J. Freund, Ramon C. Littell, and Philip C. Spector

*SAS System for Regression, Second Edition* by Rudolf J. Freund and Ramon C. Littell

*SAS System for Statistical Graphics, First Edition* by Michael Friendly

*A Step-by-Step Approach to Using the SAS System for Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling* by Larry Hatcher

*A Step-by-Step Approach to Using the SAS System for Univariate and Multivariate Statistics* by Larry Hatcher and Edward Stepanski

And, by the way, if you think you can write a SAS book that would help cure Documentation Overload Syndrome, contact us:

|                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| David Baggett       | e-mail sasddb@unx.sas.com |
| Acquisitions Editor | fax 919-677-4444          |
| SAS Institute Inc.  | phone 919-677-8000        |
| SAS Campus Drive    |                           |
| Cary, NC 27513      |                           |

## CUSTOM PUBLISHING

With custom publishing we produce books based on the needs of a particular group of users. It is even possible to include material provided by the customer, such as chapters about site-specific information, or local SAS applications.

For example, we're embarking on a pilot custom publishing project with a group of university professors. These professors have identified discrete topics related to several SAS products covered in their courses. They've asked us to produce a supplementary textbook containing only the chapters that apply to their particular SAS topics. Without a supplementary textbook, the students would have to buy a more costly set of three or four SAS manuals, or the professor would have to seek Institute permission to photocopy the relevant material, or the students would have to do without the documentation they need. But with our custom-published book, the students will have what they need at an affordable price, and the professors will not have to compile the text themselves.

Custom publishing on a larger scale becomes feasible through a combination of on-demand printing technology and database technology. The Institute continues to work to develop both these requirements. We expect to be able to fulfill custom publishing requests within two years.

## ONLINE DOCUMENTATION

Of course, the most effective cure for Documentation Overload Syndrome is online documentation, and more of it is coming your way from SAS Institute. Currently, the SAS System offers two forms of online information. The more obvious one is the SAS

Help System, and as of Release 6.10, host-specific documentation for Microsoft Windows and OS/2® is available online. But this is just the beginning.

Upcoming in future releases there will be a complete SAS reference library available online, more online tutorials, and electronic product support systems integrated with windowing products. (Electronic product support systems are a combination of context-sensitive help, reference information, and tutorials that are tightly integrated with the software.) The complete online reference library is slated for Version 7. An experimental release is planned for 1995. Note that we will continue to publish hardcopy books for those of you who prefer to use hardcopies.

## Supported Viewers

Based on customer feedback, the Institute has decided to make the online reference library available through a number of viewing systems supplied by other vendors. Many SAS sites have already standardized access to electronic documents through a particular viewer, such as the IBM® BookManager® product. These sites have asked us to support their chosen viewer to reduce the burden on users and to make corporate electronic documents easier to manage.

Final decisions about which viewers we will support for the online reference library have not been made, but we are researching the prospects for viewers such as IBM BookManager, Interleaf WorldView, Microsoft WindowsHelp, EBT Dynatext, and others. Please contact us at SAS Institute and let us know which viewer you would like us to support.

For those SAS sites that have not chosen a viewer to use as a company standard, we are considering developing and supplying a viewer based on the SAS System.

## Distribution and Updates

Distribution of the online reference library will be on CD-ROM and possibly on tape. We are also considering the feasibility of using network distribution for the library, via the World Wide Web, Gopher, and similar facilities. Currently, performance over the net is too slow to make this practical for the full library, but we hope that performance issues will be overcome in the near future so that network distribution will be feasible.

When the online reference library is in place, updates to the documentation will be much more convenient. Rather than relying on changes and enhancements technical reports, we will be able to deliver updated versions of the manual by electronic media.

## Installation and Access

You'll have a variety of choices for making the online reference library available to users. The library can be installed on servers, locally, or on a host mainframe, depending on the hardware and network at your site.

The content of the online reference library, which will include more than 40 books when complete, will have hypertext links to make information more accessible. You'll also be able to move to topics via the table of contents, the index, and text queries.

## Customization

The online reference library will be customizable in a number of ways. First, you can build your own bookshelf, selecting only those books that you want and use. You can also add bookmarks and annotate the content of the library, to incorporate site-specific and user-specific information.

## Printing

Most users want to be able to print some or all of their online documents. The ability to print pages, sections, or chapters will be a feature of the online SAS reference library.

## CONCLUSION

We want to help you avoid SAS Documentation Overload Syndrome whenever possible. SAS Institute offers a number of information solutions to help reduce the amount of documentation you need to look through to find an answer to a SAS question. Through document downsizing, abridged references, online documentation, and other strategies, you can keep your needs for additional manuals to a minimum, but ensure that you have the right information at the right time. Our goal is not to get you to buy an endless series of SAS manuals. Our goal is to provide the SAS information you need, in the form you want.

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