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SAS®-L – A VERY POWERFUL RESOURCE FOR SAS® USERS WORLDWIDE

JoAnn Matthews, Highmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Pittsburgh, PA

ABSTRACT

SAS-L is an electronic mail discussion group that was developed to allow SAS® users worldwide the potential to communicate with some the best and most powerful SAS users in the world virtually instantaneously via discussion groups or listserv e-mail servers. Originally SAS-L messages were sent over electronic bulletin boards in the days prior to the Internet. Now topics of interest to the SAS user world are sent via e-mail list servers via the Internet. Using SAS-L, a SAS user can send a message to the listserv, and a copy of that message is sent through the listserv e-mail facility to every subscriber to the service, virtually instantaneously, depending on the speed of the server. Responses, comments or correct code soon appear, almost instantaneouly. This can be a very powerful resource for both the beginning SAS programmer, who might be struggling with a simple syntax question, or for a power SAS user, with a complicated SAS programming problem. Difficult coding questions can be solved by "SAS-L experts” quickly, virtually before a SAS programmer has time to look the topic up using a manual. Topics include SAS programming questions, announcements of interest to the user community, complaints about SAS Institute, or any subject that is deemed appropriate to the SAS user community. SAS-L is one of the oldest, most successful programming oriented e-mail lists, founded in 1985, at the University of Georgia.[1] While it is "officially" independent of SAS Institute, SAS Institute frequently monitors the service to ensure accuracy of the information that is being disseminated.

SAS-L

New users of SAS software may not be aware of a very powerful free resource that is available to them, the SAS –L listserv.   SAS-L is an electronic mail discussion group listserv that was developed at the University of Georgia by a guy named Harold that gives users the potential to communicate with some best and most powerful SAS users in the world via the internet.[1] Electronic mailing lists provide a forum for SAS users to participate in discussions or receive e-mail about SAS. Listserv's make use of a software that manages the distribution of mail to thousands of subscribers called **"list servers" or "a listserv"**.[1] A list server automatically distributes an e-mail message from one member of a list to all other members on that list. A listserv is a kind of electronic mail facility, if you will, that allows subscribers to the listserv to participate in electronic discussion groups on any of thousands of subjects.

 If you have an interest in a particular subject, chances are excellent that there is a discussion group on that subject. As of October, 2001, there were 49,014 listservs (out of over 199,000) catalogued on the website CataList.[2] The University of Georgia supports 1,800 such newsgroups for their university administration. Prior to the Internet, discussion groups resided on Bulletin Board software, such as Wildcat Bulletin Board Service, on the UseNet,. UseNet was a collection of networked computers, consisting of government, university and corporate computer systems that made use of dial-up modems. The UseNet was the beginning of what is now known as the Internet. [3]

What makes SAS-L so exciting is apparent after you have tried to research syntax using a standard SAS manual. Often times, trying to find information in a SAS manuals can be daunting. Sometimes, just figuring out where to look is the major stumbling block. SAS manuals are not written to be particularly "user friendly". In the time it takes to open the manual and begin the arduous process of scanning the index, a SAS user can post a question via the SAS-L list-serve and have a quick answer. Why reinvent the wheel? There are SAS experts, waiting to solve SAS problems, or showcase their keen SAS knowledge, for the world to see. Your question will be answered almost immediately, and by several SAS experts, with possibly several solutions. You can then pick the solution that makes the most sense to you.

So how does SAS-L work? you might ask. Originally SAS-L messages were sent over electronic bulletin boards in the days prior to the Internet. Now topics of interest to the SAS user world are sent via e-mail LISTSERV servers over the Internet. SAS-L is a "peered" list, which means that it resided on a number of listservers, and messages on one server will be sent to all listserv servers. This is a powerful feature of a listserv. The listserv is also "gated" to a newsgroup named comp.soft-sys.sas., which means you can access SAS-L several ways; 1) either subscribing to the listserv, 2)

viewing newsgroups, or 3) via a website, Goggle.com that mirrors the listserv.[4]

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

You can subscribe officially to SAS-L , and send and receive all SAS-L messages directly, by sending a message to: listserv@usa.cc.uga.edu at the University of Georgia, or listserv@listserv.vt.edu at Virginia Polytechnic University, or listserv@AKH-WIEN.AC.at the University of Vienna . What is of utmost importance is that the subject line of your e-mail be very specific: To subscribe, type: subscribe, space, sas-l, space and your name.

Subject: SUBSCRIBE SAS-L JOHN SMITH

If you deviate at all from this format, the subscription will not be processed. If you have typed the subject line correctly, and your subscription is processed, you will receive a confirmation from the listserv, with instructions on how to confirm the subscription.

Another option is to be a "casual subscriber" to SAS-L by using newsgroups, and visit SAS-L unofficially, without actually subscribing. In order to do this you will need to configure your browser to access the newsreader in your browser, either Netscape Messenger, or Outlook Express, in Microsoft Explorer. The name of the newsgroup is comp.soft-sys.sas. The advantage of being a casual SAS-L "browser" rather than a full-subscribe is that your e-mail quota does not get filled with the hundreds of e-mails that are sent each day via the mail facility. When a regular subscriber to SAS-L sends a message to the list-serve with a question, a copy of that message is sent to every subscriber to the service, virtually instantaneously, depending on the speed of the server. At present there are several thousand subscribers to SAS-L. Those messages accumulate quickly in your e-mail box, and depending on your disk quota, this can be a very serious consideration.

Lastly, you can access the information on SAS-L via a website, www.google.com. Google.com mirrors the usenet discussion forum, has all postings on SAS-L, and even allows you to post a message. Go to the website, and go into Google Groups, the comp, then Next 30 groups, to comp.soft-sys.* and finally comp.soft-sys.sas. The beauty of SAS-L is the speed with which responses appear. Questions that were sent minutes before are answered. Coding questions are quickly solved. SAS-L can be a most amazingly powerful resource for both the beginning SAS programmer, who might be struggling

with a simple syntax question, or a power user, with a very complex question or difficult esoteric programming problem. Difficult coding questions are usually solved by "SAS-L experts" quickly. And more often than not, there are several solutions. Thus, a new user can pick the solution that makes the most sense to him.

While it is "officially" independent of SAS Institute, SAS Institute frequently monitors the SAS-L to ensure accuracy of the information that is being disseminated. SAS employees however, are not supposed to be on SAS-L. This is a list-serve for the SAS community, not SAS Institute. Theortically, complaints about SAS Institute, should be safe from retaliation. Dr. Sally Mueller of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is the liaison between SUGI and SAS-L. She offers a BOF (Birds of a Feather) session at SUGI where you can learn more about SAS-L and have an opportunity to meet frequent SAS-L contributors.

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AUTHOR CONTACT INFORMATION

JoAnn Matthews
Highmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield
120 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15253-5069

(412) 544-2397
E-Mail: joann.matthews@highmark.com