

Written by Konstantin Golyaev, November 2009

Get Syntax Highlighting in Stata (and More)

Stata is a really powerful statistical package that unfortunately has one major drawback – its own built-in do-file editor is a joke. Seriously, I can hardly come up with another example of a software which you can program and that does not have that feature.

Luckily, there are other people who were upset with this state of the world, and thus there is a solution to this problem. I do not claim any authorship on the solution, I've just put a couple of things together.

There are some files that you will need in order to make everything in this guide work, they can be found in the archive on the same page where this guide is posted.

Get Syntax Highlighting

Step 1

You will have to use an external document editor if you want highlighted syntax in Stata programs. In Windows, there is a great free application called “Notepad++”, which you can download [here](#). Once you download the “.exe” installer file, run it. In case you do not have administrator rights on the computer you are currently using, be sure to install it into a folder which you can write into (something like “C:\Users_your_user_name_” in Vista or “C:\Documents and Settings_your_user_name_” in XP). Make sure you do **not** select the “Do not use %APPDATA%” option (it is not selected by default, keep it this way). Once the installation is complete, Step 1 is over.

Step 2

You now have to teach Notepad++ to “speak Stata”. There is a Stata syntax file for Notepad++ that can be downloaded [here](#) (make sure you right-click on the link and choose “Save link as” or use similar context menu command that would allow you to download the file instead of opening it). Save this file somewhere. Rename it to “userDefineLang.xml”. Step 2 is over.

Step 3

Now press “Win + R” or click “Start-Run” and type “%APPDATA%\Notepad++” and hit Enter. This will open a folder for you, and you have to copy the above file from Step 2. This concludes Step 3.

Step 4

Run Notepad++ and if you did Steps 1 to 3 correctly, you will see “Stata commands” as one of the options when you click on the “Language” menu on top. Open any do-file to see how big a difference it makes.

Step 5 (optional)

You can instead choose to download my syntax file from the archive mentioned in the beginning. It is a slightly modified version of the one that comes from the Notepad++ website, where I tweaked some annoying features of the original code. Two main changes: I added some more commands that the original file did not have and I made sure that the “*” sign is **NOT** a comment trigger. The latter was needed since otherwise all expressions involving multiplications in Stata were treated as comments by

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Notepad++ which was misleading to me. If someone figures out how to explain to Notepad++ that only lines that **start** with “*” should be treated as comments – do let me know.

Running Stata from Notepad++

Ok, we now have syntax highlighting, which is nice and helpful, but we now lost the ability that Stata’s built-in editor has – submit the current do-file for execution with one click. Worry not, for there is a way to get this feature into Notepad++ as well.

Important disclaimer: this will only work if you run Stata from the same computer as the one you use to edit the do-file (so you essentially have to have Stata installed on your computer for the following to work). If you are using Stata from a remote computer (like CLA server), you are out of luck, and there is a tradeoff between editing code with syntax highlighted and being able to execute it with once click. Personally I prefer the former option.

Step 1

Go to [this webpage](#), and download the two archives: [first](#) and [second](#). The first file is what you would need to be able to submit the *whole* do-file for execution, and the second file is what you would need to submit only a selected part of a do-file (I don’t use this feature a lot, but some people seem to). Step 1 is over.

Step 2

Follow the instructions on the page to teach Notepad++ how to run Stata code. It is fairly straightforward.