

# Quick Tips



## Quick Tips 21

### Record the Decisions You Make with Your Data

Keep track of the decisions you make during data entry about how you handled the coded information. Refer to this information when you analyze data and interpret results. There are several reasons why you should keep a journal or a “code book.”

These reasons include:

- Some respondents give answers that do not readily fall within the categories provided to them. Once you have made a decision about how to treat the information, you should to treat all of your data for that question according to those decisions.
- Others interested in your study may want to work with your data at a later date. Having a written record of decisions you and others make can save a great deal of time and confusion for everyone. Furthermore, if your support staff and others who have helped you move on to other projects, those who assume their tasks need to know what decisions were made.
- Other groups and agencies may have an interest in your data. If you allow others to use your data, they need to understand what coding decisions affect the data entry and its interpretation.
- If you are interested in measuring change over time, the coding decisions you make need to be consistent in order to properly compare your target group before and after your program, campaign or intervention.

#### EXAMPLE

A respondent gives the value “2.5” on a scale of 1 to 5, even though only whole integers are offered as response options. If you coded “2.5” as “2” (rounding down) for your baseline survey, but coded it as “3” for your post-program survey (rounding up), you might falsely inflate that amount of change that is associated with your program.

- You may want to repeat this evaluation approach with other programs and/or groups. Having a record of your decisions saves time.

#### Further reading:

Rose, D., & Sullivan, O. (1993). *Introducing Data Analysis for Social Scientists*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.