
OPTIONS FORMCHAR

Here's a tip from Professor Russ Lenth (Statistics Department, University of Iowa):

How to make SAS tables/output print correctly

SAS is set up to use its own fonts, and this causes annoying problems when you try to incorporate some of its output in a report. In particular, the lines used in plots and tables come out as odd-looking characters.

It is possible to tell SAS to use a different set of characters for these lines; this is done via the FORMCHAR option (global option or option on some PROCs). Here are two ways to change it:

1. Start the SAS code with this:

```
OPTIONS FORMCHAR = "|----|+|----+|=|-\<>*" ;
```

If you save this statement in a file named AUTOEXEC.SAS in the directory where SAS is started, it will be loaded automatically when you start SAS.

2. If you have SAS installed on your own system and hence can modify its installation files, find its configuration file. On my system it is

```
C:/Program Files/SAS Institute/SAS/V8/SASV8.CFG
```

Edit this file using Notepad or other plain-text editor. Comment-out the line that starts with -FORMCHAR, and un-comment the similar line 3 lines later that says

```
-FORMCHAR "|----|+|----+|=|-\<>*"
```

This will change it once and for all.

You can include other options as well while you're at it. For example, when I edited the config file, I also added these lines

```
-NOCENTER -NODATE -LINESIZE 79
```

Having these in the configuration file is equivalent to starting the SAS program with the statement

```
OPTIONS FORMCHAR = "|----|+|----+|=|-\<>*" LS = 79 NOCENTER NODATE;
```

```
data one;
input x y z;
cards;
1 2 3
4 6 8
7 9 8
;
run;
```

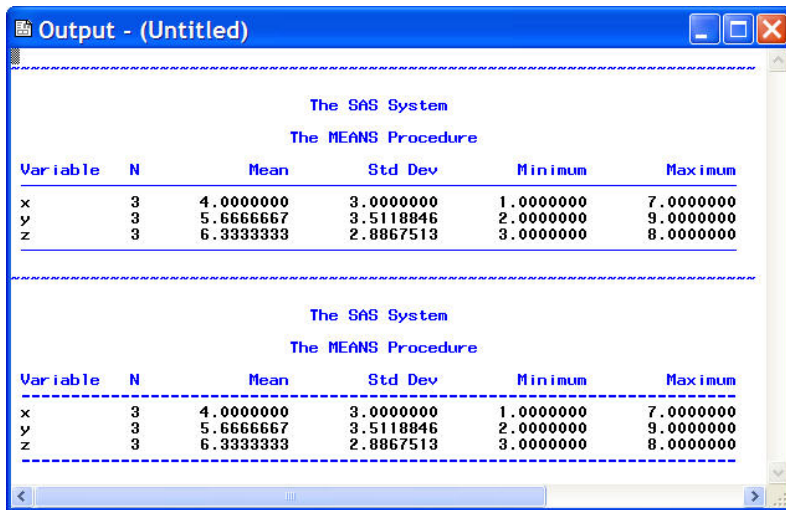
Example:

```
proc means data=one; run; *1ST PROC MEANS, BEFORE THE OPTIONS STATEMENT;

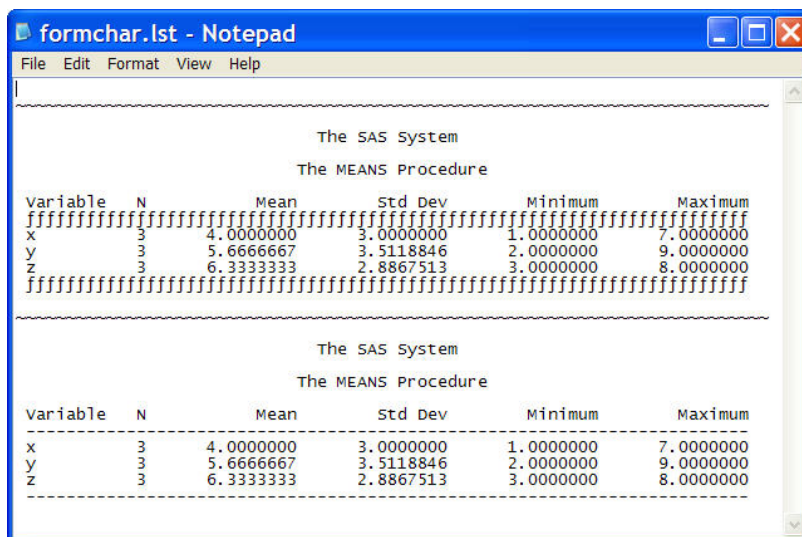
OPTIONS FORMCHAR = "|----|+|----+|=|-\<>*";

proc means data=one; run; *2ND PROC MEANS, AFTER THE OPTIONS STATEMENT;
```

If you run this code, you will see the following appear in the OUTPUT window:



No real difference seems to be there between the two PROC MEANS outputs. But, if you save the output window contents (e.g. formchar.lst) and view this file in a text editor, you will see what is shown below.



Here, notice the strange characters in the output for the 1st PROC MEANS. If you were to copy and paste that output into a text document (such as Microsoft Word), those strange characters will appear and it makes the output not as readable when compared to the 2nd output.

This OPTIONS statement is also useful for output from PROC PLOT and PROC FREQ.