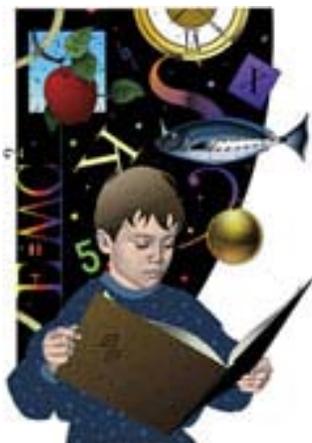




Andrew T. Kuligowski has been a SAS user for over 20 years, with experience in the petrochemical and media research industries as well as in the public and non-profit sectors. He's chaired two SAS conferences in the past 10 years, and estimates that he has been an Invited speaker at over 40 SAS user group conferences and meetings. He is an active member of the SESUG Executive Council, devoting his time to aiding Site Selection for the annual conferences, as well as actively participating in both operational and academic support.



Andy's Book Reviews:

Combining and Modifying SAS Data Sets: Examples, 2nd Edition, by Michele Burlew

One of the differences between attending school and going to work – although paled by concept of “salary” – is that most tests in school have questions like “Explain the usage of the MERGE statement,” while on the job, questions are more like “How can I combine two datasets together by a group of common variables?” The answers may turn out to be very similar – but the initial inquiries look at the situation from two totally opposite viewpoints.

The same is true for most manuals and how-to programming books. They aim to explain terminology – “What is the MERGE statement?” – through a combination of prose and examples, similar in style to a dictionary or encyclopedia. Michele Burlew takes the opposite approach in her new book, Combining and Modifying SAS Data Sets: Examples, 2nd Edition. She states the problem, lists the software tools that will be used in the example, and provides some sample data with a little explanation to go with it. Then, and only then, does she provide a sample program to solve the problem. This approach is familiar to those who follow along with the instruction pamphlets that come with items they might purchase at a hardware store, but is rare in items found on the “Computer” shelf at the local bookstore.

There is one major difference between the structure of this book and “Getting Started with Your New Lawnmower”. The good folks at Toro and John Deere provide “the” guide to assembling and using their equipment. Of course, every programmer learns early in their career that there is never just one way to solve a problem programmatically! This is why my favorite feature of Combining and Modifying SAS Data Sets: Examples, 2nd Edition is that most examples are concluded with a section called “Related Technique(s)”, where alternate approaches to solve the problem are also provided and explained.

To illustrate the format and ease of use of Combining and Modifying SAS Data Sets: Examples, 2nd Edition, let's cite an example from the book. Thumbing to a point in the middle of the text, Example 4.4 is called “Performing Multiple Lookups for Each Observation in a Data Set”. Ms. Burlew

fleshes that short description out under the “Goal” category, and lists under “Example Features” that the example will use the DATA Step and the DATA Step Hash Object. (She also provides a preview that the “Related Technique” will use PROC FORMAT CNTLIN=, plus the DATA step with PUT and END=.) Next, she provides “Input Data Sets” – 3 sample datasets accompanied by prose descriptions of those data. This is followed by “Resulting Data Set”, a depiction of what the output should be expected to look like. Finally, she provides the example routine – “Example Overview” explains things at a high level, while “Program” finally shows the code with a running commentary as to its functionality. Two columns are used, with the code on the right side of the page, and corresponding prose on the left. Finally, Ms. Burlew provides a “Related Technique”, again using the two column prose/code format.

I anticipate that this book will be an excellent addition to many personal and corporate bookshelves – starting with my own.

Combining and Modifying SAS Data Sets: Examples, 2nd Edition by Michele Burlew is scheduled to be published by SASPress in early October, 2009. ISBN 978-1-59047-920-9, \$44.95.

