

Book Review:

Title: The How-to Book for SAS/Graph Software

Author: Thomas Miron

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Reviewer: Lesley Harschnitz

Lesley Harschnitz works at a large Canadian manufacturing company and is a current member of the Executive of the Toronto Area SAS Society. Please note that the following review represents only the opinion of the reviewer and not that of any organization or company to which she has an affiliation.

Lesley has held positions in data administration, information quality, solutions programming and decision support. Lesley has used SAS since 1986, and continues to act as an internal support person for SAS at Dofasco.

Review:

The How-to Book for SAS/Graph Software is an excellent basic reference for creating business graphs with SAS. The sections are well organized and the code is properly commented and easy to understand. The only issue with the book is that it is written for Version 6. This means that it has no information on the output delivery system (ODS) and newer procedure enhancements.

Section 1 of the book deals with the basics of getting up and running. For those who remember Version 6, this means that device drivers are the focus of this section. It is a good basic introduction to device drivers and is well organized to help the new user understand how to put out graphs properly. One chapter in this section that is very useful and still up to date is Chapter 6- 'How to Structure Data for Graphs'. This is often a pitfall to new SAS users in that when they do get the data out and want to produce a graph, they find themselves with rows when they really need columns. This chapter can help you to avoid some of those mistakes. There is even a bit of code showing how to restructure your data if necessary.

Section 2 concentrates on bar charts. I often find myself using these charts first when investigating data and trying to determine the correct way to report it. This section builds very nicely, moving from basic default charts through to more complex charts. Each section is well organized, tying the code used to the output result very clearly. I especially like the "closer look" notes at the bottom of the page that give some tips and tricks or may note something that is going on behind the scenes. Did you know that the FREQ= option uses only the integer portion of the frequency weight variable? A weight of 5.8 will be represented as 5. In statistics this makes sense, how can you count a half of an occurrence, but it is interesting to know as well. The examples selected for this section were well chosen to cover those I would expect most people to use frequently, without exhausting each and every possibility.

Section 3 moves on to plots, and follows the same format as Section 2. Again the author moves from default plots to those that are more complex. For the new user there are some very good tips, such as the need to sort data before producing a line plot so that they are connected in order. The examples move through most of the frequently used plots including multiple plots on a page and cumulative plots. At the end of the section instructions on how to control the appearance of plots are given. Throughout the section most of the general options are introduced including axis, symbol and legend statements.

Section 4 deals with maps. This is a short section, but as with the others contains all of the basics required to start producing this type of output.

Section 5 moves on to pie charts, and follows with the previous sections. All of the basics are covered, as well as the most frequently used options.

Section 6 is called 'fine-tuning Your Graph' and contains a lot more detail on the options that were introduced in the previous sections. Using section 6 a user would be able to take more control of

formatting, axes, legends and overall graph appearance. As well, there is a short section on managing graphs in libraries.

Overall, this book is an excellent reference for those beginning to use SAS/Graph, or wanting a smaller book that brings all the basics together in an easy to use reference. This book does not contain any advanced topics such as Greplay or Annotate, but does refer to them in the notes and in the additional references provided at the end of each chapter. In my view, this book would be a good candidate for a new revision that includes ODS, and possibly some selected enhancements for Version 8, as most of the material it contains is still relevant to users.