How to recode data in SPSS

Sometimes it’s necessary to change several values in your data set. For example, if you have questionnaire data which includes reverse-scored questions. The following instructions show you to recode data for this purpose in SPSS.

1. Make sure you have entered all your data first, as the re-code function does not automatically update when you enter new data.

2. Go to Transform – Recode into Different Variables

3. Move across to the central box the first variable that needs re-coding. The ‘Output Variable’ section on the far right becomes active. As the re-coded data will appear in a new column in the data view, we need to give it a name. Enter a name for the new variable in the ‘Name’ box. In the example, as I will be reverse scoring question 4 I’ve called the new variable ‘Q4Rev’. Click on Change once you have named your new variable.

4. Move across any additional variables that will be re-coded in the same manner and name these too.

5. Click on Old and New Values.

6. In this example I want to reverse score a 5 point Likert Scale, so 1 becomes 5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2 and 5=1. In the ‘Old Value’ box on the left, enter 1 and in the ‘New Value’ box on the right enter 5. Then click Add to move the values into the ‘Old->New’ box. Repeat this process for all the values, including those that will be staying the same (eg. 3 still stays as 3 in this example).
7. Click **Continue** and **OK**. In your data view, additional columns will be created for the new scores.

8. Remember to use these new re-coded columns in any total score calculations or analyses, not the original columns.

Note: You can also go to **Transform – Recode into Same Variables** to recode data, however this will overwrite the original data, so if you are not confident with recoding data it is safer to use the **Recode into Different Variables** option.