

Gupta and Edmonds *Sharpening Your SAS Skills*

Reviewed by Frank DiIorio

Book Review

Anyone who has even considered writing a book focused on Base SAS software is aware of the magnitude of the task. There is so very, very much to talk about, and it has to be filtered for the book's target audience and presented at an appropriate level of detail. Add publishers' constraints on page limits and the like, and you see why niche, specialty topics dominate bookstore shelves.

Sunil Gupta and Curt Edmonds buck the niche trend with their new book, *Sharpening Your SAS Skills*. Their objective is to improve the SAS literacy of intermediate and advanced SAS programmers. They employ a variety of graphic and tabular devices to summarize the SAS language and describe subtleties that other publications may have missed. Exercises accompany each chapter, and the authors discuss their examples in good, conversational prose. With all this put together in visually appealing layout that enhances their main points, the result is a solid, usable book.

The question is, for whom? The back cover identifies the audience as intermediate and advanced programmers, but the book covers a considerable number of topics that people in these groups should have already mastered. The distinction between IF and WHERE, and DO WHILE and DO UNTIL is pretty basic, as is the description of the SELECT statement and PROC FORMAT. And then there are topics that really *are* suitable for the target audience, such as compilation versus execution activities, construction of the program data vector, audit trails, and the like.

All of this leads me to conclude that the book would actually be most useful to SAS programmers with a little experience under their belts and share one or both of two characteristics. First, they would like to improve their knowledge by learning some of the finer points of the language. Second, they need a review text for taking basic SAS certification exams. *Sharpening* is especially good for exam preparation because most of its material is at an appropriate level for the Base SAS exams and it has review questions that will get the reader into the appropriate test-taking mindset.

The text is not without quibble-worthy material. Features that warrant extended discussion become vague due to brevity (functions, TABULATE, SQL, among others). Discussion of syntax is often wrapped into a narrative flow, sometimes making it difficult to tease out individual features (bulleted lists would have been helpful). Several times the authors recommend coding practices that may not be uniformly appropriate (for example, hard-coding a 0 in a MEANS argument list in order to ensure a result of 0 if all other arguments are missing).

These few issues notwithstanding, I would readily recommend "Sharpening Your SAS Skills" for anyone with some exposure to SAS who wants to learn the language in greater depth, particularly those who are considering taking the SAS certification exams.

Book Review Quote

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"Frank DiIorio is President of CodeCrafters, Inc. and the author of "SAS Applications Programming: A Gentle Introduction" and (with Ken Hardy) "Quick Start to Data Analysis with SAS."