

What's Hot, What's Not - Skills for SAS® Professionals

Kirk Paul Lafler, Software Intelligence Corporation, Spring Valley, California
Charles Edwin Shipp, Shipp Consulting, San Pedro, California

Abstract

As a new generation of SAS® user emerges, current and prior generations of users have an extensive array of procedures, programming tools, approaches and techniques to choose from. This presentation identifies and explores the areas that are hot and not-so-hot in the world of the professional SAS user. Topics include Enterprise Guide, PROC SQL, PROC REPORT, PROC FORMAT, Macro Language, ODS, DATA step programming techniques such as arrays and hashing, business intelligence, sasCommunity.org®, JMP®, SAS/GRAPH®, SAS/STAT®, and SAS/AF®.

Introduction

The definition of a skill is the ability to perform a task well. Skills are typically developed or enhanced over time, with the help of training resources and experience. Critical success factors include assessing what your current skills and skill levels are, determining what skills are hot, as well as what skills are not, and identifying where and how to access resources to acquire the necessary skills. As a SAS® professional, the skills you acquire will, perhaps, enable you to embark on a more rewarding journey leading to exciting opportunities, projects and better way of life. To assist in getting started, a self-survey questionnaire appears at the end of this paper to help you assess where you are and the skills needed to achieve those goals.

Taking Inventory of Your Skills

Taking inventory of your skills is an important first step in understanding what you can provide clients and prospective clients is a valuable ingredient for success. First and foremost, the services you intend to offer should be perceived as adding value in an already highly competitive marketplace. Next, keep in mind that there will almost certainly be intense competition from other like-minded individuals. Taking inventory of your skills involves the following steps:

1. List your skills/services (e.g., DATA step programming, macro design and programming, database design, technical support, systems analysis, strategic planning, market analysis, technical writing, etc.)
2. Perform the following rankings for each skill/service:
 - a. Level of competence (e.g., up-to-date (current), competitive, and out-of-date)
 - b. Income level production for the past 12 months (largest to smallest)
 - c. Assess whether each skill/service is "Active" or "Passive" (e.g., Active---critical to clients you are pursuing, Passive--non-critical to prospective clients)
 - d. Specify your skill rating as "Very proficient", "Productive", "Some working knowledge", "None".
3. Once ranked, categorize each skill by functional discipline (e.g., programming, design, analysis, teaching, consulting, marketing, etc.)
4. Capture comments including, strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures about each skill. These comments, along with rankings, will be used to help you to better understand the direction(s) you should take.

Seeking Your Level

Once you have determined the skills to pursue, consider the appropriate level and resource needed to succeed. Assess your skill level, including what your objective is, and what you like to do most. Your past experience doing similar things is critically important in this equation. You should also obtain the recommendations and advice of other professionals you know. One good way to begin gaining experience is to team with more experienced consultants.

Improving Skills/Expertise

Many professionals believe they have already mastered all the necessary skills to be successful. But as technology evolves, it becomes increasingly important to continue the process of learning, essentially evolving along with the area you are pursuing. It may even involve splitting a large area of interest or endeavor into smaller pieces, a process known as specializing. Even if you consider yourself an expert at what you do with interests and abilities in several areas in the SAS software, specialization is becoming not only popular, but necessary. To assist with your skill building, consider additional training from the following sources:

- 1) SAS-led courses (lecture / hands-on workshops)
- 2) Non-SAS Institute Instructor-led courses
- 3) Self-paced computer-based training (CBT)
- 4) Online SAS documentation in PDF and HTML format
- 5) User-written books from SAS Press, Books by Users (BBU)
- 6) "White" papers on sasCommunity.org, support.sas.com, and other websites
- 7) User Group presentations and Hands-on workshops
- 8) Podcasts and webinars on sasCommunity.org and support.sas.com

SAS professionals can improve or brush up on skills by attending instructor-led or hands-on workshop training courses. Training by experienced vendors is frequently available on a variety of topics and offered at local training centers and at conference events. For example, the SAS Global Forum (SGF), the annual regional SAS conferences (e.g., MWSUG, NESUG, PNWSUG, SCSUG, SESUG, and WUSS), and industry-specific SAS conferences (e.g., PharmaSUG) offer affordable half-day and full-day instructor-led training. Users can attend these cost-effective training sessions before and/or after the conference event. Also, many of the conferences offer "free" 80 – 120 minute hands-on workshop sessions for users to attend during the conference event. These can be very attractive ways to learn a topic of interest or brush up on the latest techniques from a leading expert in a hands-on environment.

As an alternative to attending a training class in person, self-paced computer-based training (CBT) modules are available for purchase or through subscription. From time to time, "free" limited trial access is available for evaluation purposes. All you need to access this treasure-trove of information and learning is a computer and Web browser (e.g., Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator or Mozilla FireFox). SAS Institute, for example, offers topics that can be accessed and studied for a 90-day period on the Web.

sasCommunity.org

sasCommunity.org is an exciting and new collaborative online community for SAS users worldwide. This virtual online community supports technology for SAS users to collaborate with other users anywhere in the world; access SAS-based content including blogs, presentations, and code examples; learn about upcoming events, forums and user group conferences; and discuss anything and everything that is related to SAS software, from SAS users to SAS users. As organizations experience declining travel budgets, improved broadband and Internet technological advances, and a need for greater productivity, sasCommunity.org expands its presence among SAS professionals.

SAS Certified Professional Exams

To give your career a significant boost and to improve your prospects for success, the SAS Institute offers certification testing for users in three key areas: 1) SAS Programming, 2) Predictive Modeling and 3) Data Warehousing. These globally recognized certification tests are administered in more than 140 countries by a global leader in testing services in the IT industry, and are taken in a controlled environment.

Two credentials are offered by SAS Institute for SAS programmers to consider:

- 1) SAS Certified Base Programmer Credential for SAS 9
 - a. SAS Base Programming Exam for SAS 9
- 2) SAS Certified Advanced Programmer Credential for SAS 9
 - a. SAS Base Programming Exam for SAS 9
 - b. SAS Advanced Programming Exam for SAS 9

SAS Institute offers users a credential for predictive modelers to consider:

- 1) Predictive Modeling Using SAS Enterprise Miner 5.2 Credential
 - a. Predictive Modeling Using SAS Enterprise Miner 5.2 Exam

Two credentials are offered by SAS Institute for SAS data warehouse professionals to consider:

- 1) SAS Certified Warehouse Development Specialist Credential
 - a. SAS Advanced Programming Exam for SAS 9
 - b. SAS Warehouse Technology Exam
 - c. SAS Warehouse Development Specialist Concepts Exam

- 2) SAS Certified Warehouse Architect Credential
 - a. SAS Warehouse Technology Exam
 - b. SAS Warehouse Architect Concepts Exam

SAS Alliance Partner Program

SAS professionals may want to consider applying to become a SAS Alliance Partner. Five core programs are available to choose from, 1) Technology Program, 2) Consulting Program, 3) Application Program, 4) Outsourcing Program, and 5) Reseller Program. Each program has three levels: 1) Platinum, 2) Gold and 3) Silver. For more information about Alliance partnership opportunities, prospective candidates should access and review the SAS Alliance Program Guide on the SAS Institute web site at <http://www.sas.com/partners/programs/index.html>.

Conclusion

There are many avenues to help determine what skills are hot and what are not in the world of the SAS professional. Education and a desire to acquire new skills experience in the main areas of SAS programming are very important. Careful planning, preparation, organization, the ability to handle multiple tasks, and diligence are important factors for any SAS professional to possess.

It's also important to identify and acquire specific techniques from others, along with their successes and failures, to improve the likelihood for greater success while enhancing your skills. Other professionals may be able to share their own expertise to help you acquire, or brush up on, specific skills, including resources like SAS-L, sasCommunity.org, and various web sites designed for SAS professionals. These resources include instructor-led and hands-on workshop training available at SAS user conferences, self-paced computer based training (CBT) applications, self-study web resources including "white" papers, published programming tips and techniques, and certification. Also, a good SAS programming and/or user-written technical book, or two, can provide a wealth of knowledge for the inquisitive, and self-starting, professional.

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About the Authors

Kirk Paul Lafler is consultant and founder of Software Intelligence Corporation and has been using SAS since 1979. Kirk provides IT consulting services and training to SAS users around the world. As a SAS Certified Professional, Kirk has written four books including PROC SQL: Beyond the Basics Using SAS, and more than four hundred peer-reviewed papers and articles. He has also been an Invited speaker and trainer at more than three hundred SAS International, regional, local, and special-interest user group conferences and meetings throughout North America. Kirk's current interests include serving on the sasCommunity.org Advisory Board; contributing SAS- and SQL-related topics; writing and supporting a SAS Tips column called, "Kirk's Korner of Quick and Simple Tips" for numerous SAS User Group newsletters and websites; and sharing his fun-filled SASword Puzzles in SAScommunity.org.

Charles Edwin Shipp is a programmer, consultant and author with more than 30 years of experience working with the SAS and JMP software, is an active member on the sasCommunity.org Advisory Board, and runs the Consultants Corner. He has written more than one hundred articles, and has been an Invited speaker at more than one hundred International, regional, local, and special-interest user group conferences and meetings throughout North America. Charlie has co-authored the popular Books by Users (BBU) book, Quick Results with SAS/GRAPH Software, and is currently involved with sasCommunity.org, SAS and JMP consulting, and web development.

Comments and suggestions can be sent to:

Kirk Paul Lafler
Software Intelligence Corporation
E-mail: KirkLafler@cs.com

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Charles Edwin Shipp  
Shipp Consulting  
E-mail: CharlieShipp@aol.com

## SAS<sup>®</sup> Professional Skills Survey

SAS Professional: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been using SAS?    \_\_\_ < 1 Year    \_\_\_ 1 – 5 Years    \_\_\_ 6 – 10 Years    \_\_\_ > 10 Years
2. How would you rate the level of your SAS expertise?    \_\_\_ Novice    \_\_\_ Intermediate    \_\_\_ Advanced (Expert)
3. Have you been certified as a SAS Professional by passing the certification exam?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
4. Are you a SAS Alliance Partner?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No    If you answered 'Yes' to previous question, how long?    \_\_\_\_\_ Years
5. What method(s) do you use to improve your SAS skills?    \_\_\_ CBT    \_\_\_ Instructor-led Training  
      \_\_\_ Hands-on Workshops    \_\_\_ User Group Presentations    \_\_\_ Webinars  
      \_\_\_ Podcasts    \_\_\_ Computer Based Training (CBT)    \_\_\_ support.sas.com  
      \_\_\_ SAS Press Books    \_\_\_ SAS Online Documentation    \_\_\_ Other

6. Rate your SAS programming/skills in the following areas (1=None, 2=Novice, 3=Some Knowledge, 4=Very Good, 5=Expert):

|                                | Currently | 1-Year from Now | 2-Years from Now |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------------|
| - Base SAS                     | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SQL Processing               | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Macro Programming            | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Output Delivery System (ODS) | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/FSP, SAS/AF and SCL      | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Business Intelligence        | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Statistical Consulting       | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/IntrNet                  | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/PC                       | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/Connect                  | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/ETS                      | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/OR                       | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/Graph                    | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - SAS/XML                      | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Data Mining                  | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Data Cleaning                | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Other _____                  | _____     | _____           | _____            |
| - Other _____                  | _____     | _____           | _____            |

7. What makes your skills unique and/or successful? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. What are your goals, directions, and future plans? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in this survey! We expect that the results of this survey will be compiled, analyzed, and used in future papers. Send us an email with your completed form and we will send you an update.

**Figure 1. Professional SAS Skills Survey**