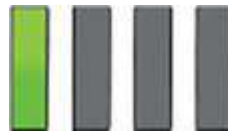


in [Table 4.1](#).

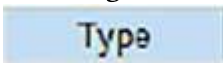


4.6.3 Creating a string variable

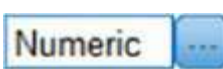
The first variable in [Table 4.1](#) is the name of the lecturer/student. This variable is a *string variable* because it consists of names (which are strings of letters). To create this variable in the variable view:

1. Click in the first white cell in the column labelled *Name*.
2. Type the word 'Name'.
3. Move from this cell using the arrow keys on the keyboard (you can also just click in a different cell, but this is a very slow way of doing it).

Well done, you've just created your first variable. Notice that once you've typed a name, SPSS creates default settings for the variable (such as assuming it's numeric and assigning 2 decimal places). However, we don't want a numeric variable (i.e., numbers), we want to enter people's names, so we need a *string* variable, so we have to change the variable type.

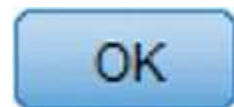
Move into the column labelled  using the arrow keys on the keyboard.



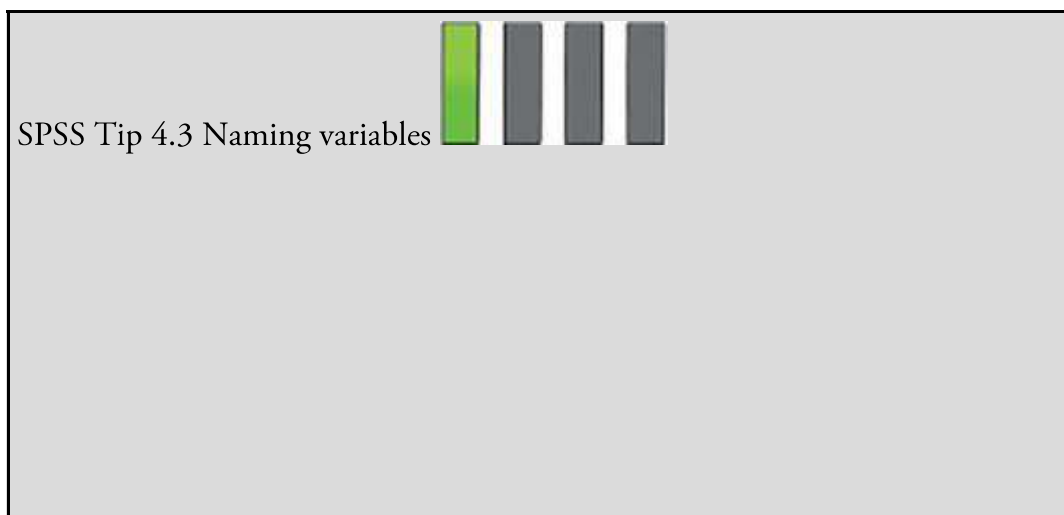
The cell will now look like this . Click to activate the *Variable Type* dialog box. By default, the numeric variable type is selected (

 **Numeric**) – see the top of [Figure 4.9](#). To change the variable to a string variable,

click  **String** (bottom left of [Figure 4.9](#)). Next, if you need to enter text of more than 8 characters (the default width), then change this default value to a number reflecting the maximum number of characters that you will use for a given case of data. Click

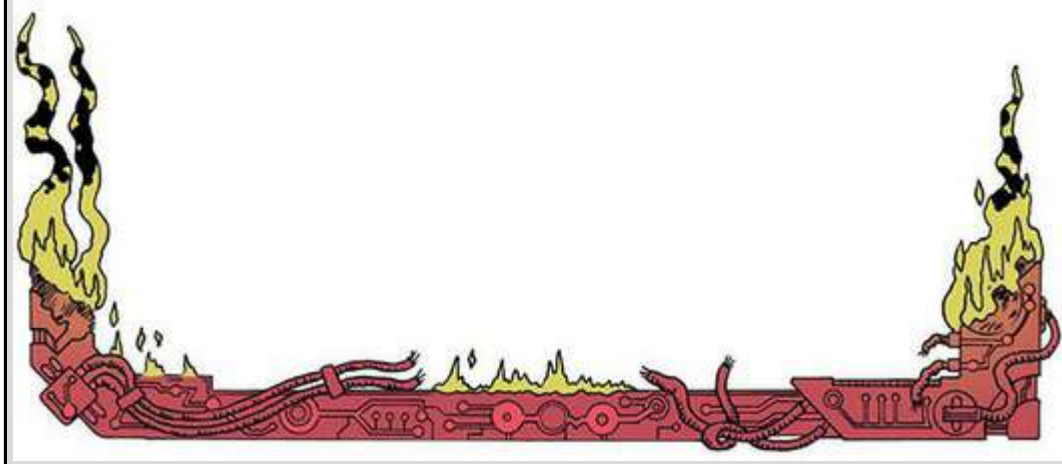


to return to the variable view.





‘Surely it’s a waste of my time to type in long names for my variables when I’ve already given them a short one?’ I hear you ask. I can understand why it would seem so, but as you go through university or your career accumulating data files, you will be grateful that you did. Imagine you had a variable called ‘number of times I wanted to bang the desk with my face during Andy Field’s statistics lecture’; then you might have named the column in SPSS ‘nob’ (short for number of bangs). You thought you were smart coming up with such a succinct label. If you don’t add a more detailed label, SPSS uses this variable name in all the output from an analysis. Fast forward a few months when you need to look at your data and output again. You look at the 300 columns all labelled things like ‘nob’, ‘pom’, ‘p’, ‘lad’, ‘sit’ and ‘ssoass’ and think to yourself, ‘What does "nob" stand for? Which of these variables relates to face-butting a desk? Imagine the chaos you could get into if you always used acronyms for the variable and had an outcome of ‘wait at news kiosk’ for a study about queuing. I deal with many data sets with variables called things like ‘sftg45c’, and if they don’t have proper variable labels, then I’m in all sorts of trouble. Get into a good habit and label your variables.



Next, because I want you to get into good habits, move to the cell in the

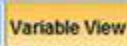
	Label
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 column and type a description of the variable, such as ‘Participant’s First Name’. Finally, we can specify the scale of measurement for the variable (see [Section 1.6.2](#)) by going to the

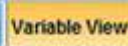
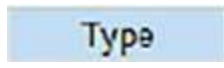
column labelled *Measure* and selecting  **Nominal**,  **Ordinal** or  **Scale** from the drop-down list. In the case of a string variable, it represents a description of the case and provides no information about the order of cases, or the magnitude of one case compared to another. Therefore, select  **Nominal**.

Table 4.1 Some data with which to play

Name	Birth Date	Job	No. of Friends	Alcohol (Units)	Income (p.a.)	Neuroticism
Ben	03-Jul-1977	Lecturer	5	10	20,000	10
Martin	24-May-1969	Lecturer	2	15	40,000	17
Andy	21-Jun-1973	Lecturer	0	20	35,000	14
Paul	16-Jul-1970	Lecturer	4	5	22,000	13
Graham	10-Oct-1949	Lecturer	1	30	50,000	21
Carina	05-Nov-1983	Student	10	25	5,000	7
Karina	08-Oct-1987	Student	12	20	100	13
Doug	16-Sep-1989	Student	15	16	3000	9
Mark	20-May-1973	Student	12	17	10,000	14
Zoë	12-Nov-1984	Student	17	18	10	13

Once the variable has been created, return to the data view by clicking on the ‘Data View’ tab at the bottom of the data editor ( ). The contents of the window will change, and notice that the first column now has the label *Name*. We can enter the data for this variable in the column underneath. Click the white cell at the top of the column labelled *Name* and type the first name, ‘Ben’. To register this value in this cell, move to a different cell and because we are entering data down a column, the most sensible way to do this is to press the ↓ key on the keyboard. This action moves you down to the next cell, and the word ‘Ben’ should appear in the cell above. Enter the next name, ‘Martin’, and then press ↓ to move down to the next cell, and so on.

4.6.4 Creating a date variable

The second column in our table contains dates (birth dates to be exact). To create a date variable, we more or less repeat what we’ve just done. First, move back to the variable view using the tab at the bottom of the data editor ( ). Move to the cell in row 2 of the column labelled *Name* (under the previous variable you created). Type the word ‘Birth_Date’ (note that I have used a hard space to separate the words). Move into the column labelled  using the → key on the keyboard (doing so creates default settings in the other columns). As before, the cell you have moved into will indicate