Subject: Re: Function names (was mean and sdev) Posted by J.D. Smith on Tue, 03 Mar 1998 08:00:00 GMT

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Brian Jackel wrote:

> Dr. G. Scott Lett wrote:

>>

- >> The MOMENT function is obscure and slow when all you need is
- >> the mean and standard deviation, so we're adding the more obvious
- MEAN, STDDEV, VARIANCE and other statistics functions for IDL 5.1.

>>

- >> Best wishes.
- >> Scott Lett

- I'm not sure who the "we" above refers to, but I'd like to
- > make a general comment. IMHO IDL is already dangerously
- > cluttered with lots of special purpose functions that could
- > perhaps be more usefully bundled together. In the case of
- > statistics it would be better to have a function like MOMENTS
- > that could return any or all required moments. Even better
- > would be something (perhaps called STATISTICS) that could
- > provide a number of useful quantities. Although the use
- > of square brackets should eliminate the confusion between
- > functions and arrays, the proliferation of built-in functions
- > (especially with common names) may cause problems if the
- name has been used for existing code.

>

Does anyone else have an opinion on this subject?

>

> Brian Jackel

I agree wholeheartedly. It seems to me that making multipurpose routines fast was the reason (among others) for introducing the function arg present. One can use it to make a version of MOMENT for instance. that only calculates variance, skew and kurtosis if the user wants them. I think in general a balance has to be struck between ease of use and over-cluttering. In this case, since mean and stdev are likely the most common calculations performed, they may merit their own functions, but I do agree that restraint is in order (or a more robust shadowing mechanism... but I won't hold my breath).

JD

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