
Subject: Re: Single Quotes, Double Quotes
Posted by [davidf](#) on Thu, 14 May 1998 07:00:00 GMT
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Charles Cavanaugh (cavanaugh@nicole.eos.ucar.edu) writes:

```
> Can anyone please explain to me why the line
>
>   asciutc = "1993-09-19T06:30:00.000000Z"
>
> fails compilation with the error message
>
>   asciutc = "1993-09-19T06:30:00.000000Z"
>                                     ^
>   % Syntax error.
>
> but the same line, using single quotes instead of double
> quotes, compiles.
```

I don't know the "official" answer, but I suspect it has to do with the way octal and hexadecimal numbers are specified in IDL.

For example, to create a hexadecimal number:

```
IDL> a = "f4"x
IDL> print, a
    244
```

Or, an octal number 12:

```
IDL> a = "12
IDL> print,a
    10
```

Thus, if the "thing" you are assigning to a variable is a number (but you want it as a string), you must use single quotes or it will be mistaken for a hexadecimal or octal number. For example, this fails:

```
IDL> a = "5"
a = "5"
    ^
% Syntax error.
```

But this works:

```
IDL> a = '5'
```

And this works, because the first thing after the double quote is a letter:

```
IDL> a = "A5"
```

Not sure this "explains" it. But perhaps it illuminates the problem enough to suggest a solution. :-)

Cheers,

David

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