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Subject: Re: How do I use FORMAT as I would SPRINTF?? Please Help!

Posted by [James Kuyper](#) on Thu, 19 Sep 2002 15:06:56 GMT

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Brian Huether wrote:

>  
> I am quite perplexed by the IDL FORMAT keyword. I am used to MATLAB where I  
> can quite simply use the sprintf command. For instance, in MATLAB, the  
> command  
>  
> s = sprintf('IDL has been driving me crazy for the last %d days', 10)  
>  
> would result in a string that contains  
>  
> 'IDL has been driving me crazy for the last 10 days'  
>  
> What I really need to do is something like this:  
>  
> s = sprintf('SIZE(%s, /%s)', arrayname, somekeyword)  
>  
> So if arrayname is A and somekeyword is TYPE, then the resulting string  
> would be  
>  
> 'SIZE(A, /TYPE)'  
>  
> It is a meaningless example but hopefully you see what I want to do (i.e. I  
> need to execute IDL commands in a loop, where each time through, the command  
> input parameters are varying and are specified by indexing arrays that  
> contain the parameters)

```
IDL> arrayname = 'A'  
IDL> somekeyword = 'TYPE'  
IDL> s = 'SIZE(' + arrayname + ', /' + somekeyword + ')'  
IDL> print,s  
SIZE(A, /TYPE)
```

This technique is simple and straightforward, but doesn't work for numbers; you need to convert them to strings. That's what the `STRING()` function is for, and it takes a `FORMAT` argument. That format argument uses the same codes as the `'print'` command, which include C-like formats such as `%f`.

```
s = STRING(arrayname, somekeyword, FORMAT='(%"SIZE(%s, /%s)"))
```

I strongly recommend reviewing the online help; look in the index for 'printf-style format codes'. The rules aren't quite the same as for C (and presumably for MATLAB), often in very frustrating ways.

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