Background: If you are attempting to create a scale and one of the items is reverse coded from the others in the scale or if you need to combine or break down a variable into larger or smaller categories so that you can run a statistical test, you will need to recode a variable.

In this example we are going to break our scapel variable into three groups (low, medium, and high).

1) Plan how the variable will be recoded

If you will be attempting to recode a variable, then it is best to first make a list of what the new values will correspond to the old values.

In this example, we have run frequencies on the scapel variable and selected the option under the “Statistics” button to see the cut points for three equal groups. (See the “Frequencies in SPSS” guide for more information.) So we are planning to break the variable down this way:

- values between 0 and 2 = 1 (low)
- values between 2.25 and 3.75 = 2 (medium)
- values between 4 and 14.25 = 3 (high)

2) Select “Recode into Different Variables”

Click on the “Transform” tab at the top of the page ⇒ Select “Recode into Different Variables” from the list
3) Select your variable to recode and give the new variable a name

1) To select your variable, click on the variable name in the left hand column so it is highlighted and then click the arrow in between the two columns to move the variable to the right column.

2) Name the variable that will result from the recode. I recommend just putting the letter “r” in front of the variable name you are recoding. Don’t forget to give it a meaningful label as well. Click the “Change” button.

3) Click on the “Old and New Values...” button.

4) Click “OK”

4) Fill in the old and new values

1) Type in a value or a range of values from the variable to be recoded.

2) Type in the new value to be assigned to that old value or range of values.

3) Click “Add” and repeat these steps for all of the values or ranges of values that need to be recoded. This includes missing values as well.

4) Click “Continue”
5) Click over to the variable view and add in the values for the new variable

See the “Getting Started in SPSS” guide for more information about inputting values.

6) Run frequencies on both the old and new variables to make sure that nothing was miscoded

See the “Frequencies in SPSS” guide for more information on how to run frequencies