

Tutorial F – Working with Fixed Width Files

What is a fixed-width file?

A fixed width file contains data fields with a fixed starting point and a fixed length. Every line in the file has exactly the same length and data fields are found at exactly the same position in each line.

A sample fixed-width file

Here is an example of a fixed-width file:

```
01Alabama                203.85
04Arizona                266.5
11District of Columbia208.8
24Maryland              212.35
```

In this example the first field is the state FIPS code and it always starts at position 1 on each line. The FIPS code is two characters long.

The next field, the state name, always starts at position 3 and could be up to 20 characters long.

Next, we have a numeric field representing the cancer rate which starts at position 23, and could be up to 6 characters long including the decimal point. Numeric values can also be right-justified.

Notice, that all fields start at exactly the same position in each line.

When creating or viewing a fixed-width file it is better to use a fixed-width (monospaced) font such as Courier.

Fixed-width files in Micromaps

Linked Micromaps software allows you to work with fixed-width files just as you would with delimited files. The only requirement is that first you need to create a file that describes the layout of your data by specifying the starting position and length of each field.

For the data file above this layout file may look similar to this:

```
FIPS,1,2
StateName,3,20
Rate,23,6
```

Simply list the field's name, starting position, and length, separated by commas. Each field needs to be on a separate line. You can create this file in Notepad or any other simple text editor.

When starting a new Micromaps session with a fixed-width data file, you will be asked to provide this file first. Micromaps will use it to process the data file.