

Mathematica Dos and Don'ts: Assignments & Function Definitions

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DO clear the symbol name you want to assign to a variable or function *immediately* before you enter the assignment command. If you're defining a function, clear the names of the variable(s) you want to use as arguments to the function as well as the function name.

DON'T use an *immediate assignment* (=) in a function definition unless you have a good reason to do so; except in a few special cases, use the *delayed assignment* (:=) instead. Here are some general guidelines (there are exceptions):

chore	type of <i>Mathematica</i> command	example
to assign a name to an expression or a result of a <i>Mathematica</i> command	immediate assignment (=)	a = Sin[30 Degree] + Pi
to define a function	delayed assignment (:=)	f[x_] := Sin[x Degree] + Pi
to enter an equation	equal (==)	Sin[x Degree] == 12*x

DON'T use the percent sign syntax (%n) to refer to the output of a previous command; instead, assign a name to the output using an immediate assignment (=). If you decide to refer to an earlier command but when you executed that command did not assign a name to the output, scroll up in your session, assign a name, and re-execute the command.