FAQ –Negative Values, -1

When you look at a simple frequency or cross-tab, often the numeric negative one (-1) is predominant. This designates an 'appropriate skip' meaning the question leading to that variable was not asked of all respondents.

The CATI questionnaire is a program with relevant skip patterns (and data range checks) programmed to only display questions to the correct base population. For example: Children under 15 are not asked if they are drivers--this question is only asked of respondents 15 or older. So for the variable DRIVER, all persons younger than 15 are automatically coded -1.

Another example involves the usual commute characteristics that are part of the person interview. The NHTS has a series of questions about how people 'usually' get to work that closely match the Census Journey to Work. The CATI is programmed to ask the series on 'usual commute' (including DISTOWK, TIMTOWK, and WRKTRANS) if:

- The person was 16 or older and was identified as a worker in the screener interview or who answered the question on primary activity (PRIMACT) as working or temporarily absent from work, or

- Answered a follow-up question on whether they do any work for pay or profit (PAYPROF) 'Yes', and:

- Did not have "HOME" coded in WKSTNUM and WKATHOME is coded as '1', and

- Did not have 'NONE' coded in WKSTNUM and WKFXDWKPL is coded as '1' (indicating no fixed work place)

When those conditions are filled the series of questions (E14-E20) appears on the CATI screen and the interviewer asks them. When those conditions are not filled the series of questions does not appear on the screen and the variables in the series are automatically coded with 'appropriate skip (-1)'.

It is extremely important to remove the missing variables when running means or averages. For instance, a correct estimate of mean Usual Time to Work (TIMTOWK) would only include records where TIMTOWK>0.

Explanation of the negative values:
-1 appropriate or legitimate skip
-7 refused
-8 don't know
-9 not ascertained