SPSS has a tool that makes frequency tables. It will also make bar graphs and pie charts. The following instructions assume your data are nominal. If they are ordinal or scale, they need different treatment. Please refer to the documents Frequency tables for ordinal data click here and Frequency tables for “scale” data click here, as appropriate.

1. Open your data file or type in your data. Take particular care of the level of Measurement. In this document, data are assumed to be nominal, so please make sure the Measurement column says Nominal. Your data may be accompanied by frequencies, relative frequencies, or percents. If so, please make sure their level of Measurement says Scale.

2. Are your data actual, individual measurements (that is, “raw” data)? If so, skip to Step 3. If instead you have data values and their frequencies, you must weight the cases. This tells SPSS which frequency goes with which data value.¹ This way, SPSS knows how many of each measurement you have, and can correctly calculate statistics and create graphical displays. To weight the cases, . . .
   • Look on the button bar for a picture of an old-fashioned “pan balance” type of scale (for weighing things), and click it. A dialog appears.
   • In the dialog, click the radio button for Weight cases by . . .
   • Identify the variable that contains the weights (frequencies, relative frequencies, or percents), select it, and click the arrow button to move that variable to the Weight cases by . . . box.
   • Click OK. Nothing will change on your screen. If you want to check your work, you can click the “weight the cases” button again and see whether you’ve done it right.² You are now done weighting the cases.

3. In the Analyze menu, click on Descriptive Statistics. A submenu will appear.

4. In the submenu, click Frequencies . . . The Frequencies dialog will appear.

5. In the Frequencies dialog, select the name of the variable that has your data values in it (NOT THE WEIGHTS!), and click the arrow that points to the Variables box. The name of your variable will move from the one box to the other. (This tells SPSS which variable you want to use.) If you want to analyze more than one variable, move the names of all the variables of interest to the Variables box. (WARNING: IF YOU HAVE WEIGHTED THE CASES, SPSS WILL ASSUME THAT THE SAME WEIGHTS APPLY TO ALL OF THE VARIABLES.)

6. If you want a bar graph or a pie chart, then . . .
   • . . . click the Charts button. The Frequencies: Charts dialog will appear.
   • Click the radio button for either Bar charts or Pie charts, as desired. (If you are analyzing more than one variable, you will get the same type of graph for all the variables you use. In this analysis.) DO NOT SELECT Histogram. Histograms are for numeric data only!

¹Relative frequencies and percents are OK, too.
²One reason for having the right level of Measurement for each variable is that SPSS will not allow you to accidentally use a non-Scale variable to weight the cases with.
• If you want your graph to be labeled with Frequencies or Percentages, click the appropriate radio button. (The default is Frequencies.)
• Click Continue. SPSS returns you to the Frequencies dialog.

7. If you want a frequency table, make sure the Display frequency tables checkbox has a check mark in it. (Clicking on the box will toggle back and forth between having and not having a check mark in the box.)

8. Click OK. The Frequencies dialog closes, and the Output or Viewer window opens.

9. Reading the output:
• The first thing in the output is a collection of commands like GET and FREQUENCIES VARIABLES. This is just SPSS’s report of what it thinks you asked it to do. You can skip this, if you like.
• Next is the output from the Frequencies dialog, headed up by a small table called Statistics. This table tells you how many of your measurements were valid and how many were not. ALWAYS CHECK THIS to make sure all your data got used. (There is a column in this table for each variable in your analysis.)
• Next is a table showing the frequencies, percentages, and cumulative percentages of the various categories that appear in your data. WARNING: BECAUSE YOUR DATA ARE NOMINAL, THE CUMULATIVE PERCENT COLUMN HAS NO MEANING HERE. (There will be a separate table for each variable in your analysis.)
• The table also contains a column for Valid Percent. You will not need this, if all your data were valid. If some were not, then comparing the entries of this column with those of the Percent column can help identify invalid measurements.
• Finally, if you asked for a bar graph or pie chart, it will appear after the frequency table. (There will be a separate graph for each variable in your analysis.)

As always, if you have questions, please ask them!