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Subject: Re: widget\_control and group\_leader

Posted by [Richard French](#) on Sat, 23 Dec 2000 14:26:32 GMT

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JD Smith wrote:

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> Whatever you do, make it 1 notch more general than you think you need,

> and you'll thank yourself later.

>

This is a piece of advice I've been trying to follow for the past few years, and it really came back to help me this past week, when a research

colleague came to visit for four days of hard work. We were able to process 75 Gbytes of radar observations of Saturn's rings, using very slight modifications of the code we wrote for last year's data set, even though this year's observations had very different formats.

In four days, we don't have time to write fancy widget programs, but we use IDL the old-fashioned way - direct graphics and no objects.

Still, last year's effort in taking the small amount of extra time to avoid hard-wiring in numerical constants that 'couldn't possibly change', and keeping all of the user-defined variables near the very top of the code, made it much easier to adapt the programs to our unexpectedly different circumstances this year.

I mention this only because I used to approach IDL as though the I in Interactive meant 'interactive programming' - I'd start a journal file, fiddle with the observations and analysis and display, edit the journal file, and call it a program. I still take this approach for rush projects, but taking the few minutes to annotate the code and reorganize it so that it can be used again is now a high priority for me.

Although I have written some widget programs over the years, I still find myself quite often using IDL in this seat-of-the-pants mode when I start a new project. I'd be curious to know how many other readers of this news group use IDL primarily in this way.

Dick French

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