
Subject: Re: Undocumented functions in IDL
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 01 Mar 2013 14:08:53 GMT
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timothyja123@gmail.com writes:

> I have to disagree entirely. I hear the I dont care about how it works I just want to get the job done over and over from scientists I work with. The problem is they end up writing code that takes them longer to finish then is almost impossible to maintain. I would hardly call that a triumph. When I'm asked to do something they are often amazed at how fast I can accomplish it. My problem is not with IDL itself its that SOME of the people that use it as wasting more time trying to work on maintaining horrible code than investing the small amount of time to learn how to do things properly to begin with.

I'm just saying that as someone who has spent my entire career trying (and mostly failing) to get scientists to write more elegant and maintainable IDL programs I am beginning to appreciate, as my career winds down, why this quest was so very, very hard. At the end of the day, whether an IDL program is fast or elegant matters much less then either you or I wish it would. What matters is whether a Ph.D. was earned, a scientific result arrived at, a paper written, a career advanced. Who cares in the end how much time was saved or wasted? It is all part of the work we do.

Sure, choose 10 IDL programs at random and 9 of them will be awful. But, almost every one of them will work and get the job done. (Although, God knows, I often wonder how.) I'm probably going soft in the head. After so many years spent engaging the enemy at every turn, I'm beginning to feel friendly towards him, starting to appreciate his ferocious skills.

Let's just say it makes me hopeful that you "disagree entirely," since then the fight will go on and maybe there will be a few more well-written and elegant IDL programs in the world. But, I'm turning my attention elsewhere. I've other battles to fight. Right now, for example, I'm trying to get my ultralight backpack under 12 pounds for a trip of a life-time to the wilds of Patagonia. I'm pretty sure, when I talk to my grandchildren about my accomplishments later, this trip will come to mind much sooner (and be a hell of a lot more interesting to them) than how many wonderful IDL programs I've written. :-)

Cheers,

David

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David Fanning, Ph.D.

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Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: <http://www.idlcoyote.com/>
Sepore ma de ni thue. ("Perhaps thou speakest truth.")
