
Subject: Help for non-RSI libraries under IDL 4.0
Posted by [Eric Deutsch](#) on Fri, 26 May 1995 07:00:00 GMT
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I've installed version 4.0 of IDL, and the new help system is fairly helpful, although just as ugly as the MS Windows help browser.

However, there seems to be one terrible thing lacking: it appears to me that the new help system provides no support for linking other help files from user-created or downloaded libraries to the new help system. i.e., whereas in IDL 3.6 and before, help files for the JHUAPL library, etc. where browsable from the '?' facility, this appears to be no longer possible.

Can someone point out how this can be done? I must be wrong in thinking that it is no longer possible to browse .HELP files...

thanks,
Eric

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Subject: Re: Help for non-RSI libraries under IDL 4.0
Posted by [thompson](#) on Sun, 28 May 1995 07:00:00 GMT
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twf@pfc.mit.edu (twf@pfc.mit.edu) writes:

> In article <3q36dl\$iid@nntp5.u.washington.edu>,
> Eric Deutsch <deutsch@astro.washington.edu> writes:

>> I've installed version 4.0 of IDL, and the new help system is fairly helpful,
>> although just as ugly as the MS Windows help browser.
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>> However, there seems to be one terrible thing lacking: it appears to me that
>> the new help system provides no support for linking other help files from
>> user-created or downloaded libraries to the new help system. i.e., whereas
>> in IDL 3.6 and before, help files for the JHUAPL library, etc. where
>> browsable from the '?' facility, this appears to be no longer possible.
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>> Can someone point out how this can be done? I must be wrong in thinking

>> that it is no longer possible to browse .HELP files...

> The word from RSI is that the help files can only be created by using a
> third party proprietary product. They have begun to get complaints about this
> problem. The short term workaround is to use the same procedures that were
> invoked by the ? before to access user libraries:

> IDL> man_proc, '*'

> I hope this is not the final answer. One of IDL's nicest features was the
> ability to extend its functionality in a way that made the extensions seem
> like they were part of the IDL package. Providing one help facility for
> RSI's functions and procedures and a separate lower class help facility for
> add on's is not very appealing. Perhaps the license for the help compiler is
> reasonable enough to make all of this a mute point. I don't know the answer
> to that.

The modern standard for hypertext is HyperText Markup Language (HTML) as used in the World Wide Web. RSI should consider moving to this standard as this will be what their customers will be most familiar with.

We've long since given up on using help files for getting help on procedures. Instead, we use the routine XDOC which is able to retrieve the documentation header from any routine in IDL's path. When used with X-windows, it can also display the entire source code, and has some other nifty features. A particular advantage is that you don't need to create separate help files, which may end up being out of date with the current software. One place you can find the XDOC and associated routines is in

<http://sohowwww.nascom.nasa.gov/softops/cds/util/help/>

Bill Thompson

Subject: Re: Help for non-RSI libraries under IDL 4.0
Posted by [sterner](#) on Wed, 31 May 1995 07:00:00 GMT
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sterner@strdev.jhuapl.edu (Ray Sterner) writes:

> I agree that HTML should be used for help. Something like netscape
> should be able to do pretty much everything that the new IDL 4.0
> help does. The 4.0 help cannot be copied from the help window and
> pasted into IDL (or anywhere else). HTML does not have this problem.

To clarify the statement about not being able to copy help text, that is not quite right. You can copy the text, it takes an extra step: Use the Copy option from the Edit menu. A new widow appears

with plain text which can be copied.

I have learned some of the reasons for not using HTML for IDL 4.0 help. The same text is used for both online help and the published manuals. The current help system took a considerable time to develop and when started HTML browsers were not as widely available or as good as now. Plus they still do not have good support for easy cross referencing and indexing. Perhaps if HTML support software becomes more widespread the balance will change.

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Subject: Re: Help for non-RSI libraries under IDL 4.0
Posted by [sterner](#) on Wed, 31 May 1995 07:00:00 GMT
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thompson@achilles.nascom.nasa.gov (William Thompson) writes:

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If HTML were used for help adding your own help would be as easy as making your own top level HTML page and including a link to the IDL HTML help page. A system variable could then be set to point to your own help page.

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