
Subject: Help with help files.

Posted by [Dyer Lytle](#) on Wed, 04 Sep 1996 07:00:00 GMT

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Hi all,

I was wondering how people handle on-line documentation in IDL. We have developed about 8 different applications in IDL that we distribute to our user base of about 40 people at various locations and each of these applications has associated with it one or more online "help" files. Currently, we ask our users to define their "IDL_PATH" so that IDL can find the various tasks to execute and we have them define a directory called "IDL_DOC" that we reference whenever we call "xdisplayfile" from an application, i.e.

CASE event OF

```
'help': BEGIN
  xdisplayfile,'$IDL_DOC/example.hlp'
END
```

Does anyone know a way to somehow use "IDL_PATH" to find this documentation rather than using a separate environmental variable? Or perhaps someone has a better approach to IDL on-line documentation?

Thanks in advance,

-Dyer

--

Dyer Lytle
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<http://tiger.as.arizona.edu/~dlytle>
HST NICMOS Project
Steward Observatory
University of Arizona

Subject: Re: Help with help files.

Posted by [thompson](#) on Wed, 04 Sep 1996 07:00:00 GMT

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Dyer Lytle <dlytle@as.arizona.edu> writes:

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What we do is to use a program called XDOC which allows one to access the documentation headers at the beginning of each file. It's a very nice program where one can explore the entire IDL_PATH tree.

We also have a routine called FIND_WITH_DEF that finds a file anywhere in a series of directories, so that one could do, for instance

```
xdisplayfile, find_with_def('example.hlp', !PATH)
```

This software is available as part of the Solar Software library at

<http://sohowwww.nascom.nasa.gov/software.html>
<ftp://sohoftp.nascom.nasa.gov/solarsoft/gen/idl/help> (and /system)

I think it's also available from the Astronomy User's Library at

<http://idlastro.gsfc.nasa.gov/ftp/>
<ftp://idlastro.gsfc.nasa.gov/>

Bill Thompson

Subject: Re: Help with help files.
Posted by [A. Maudsley](#) on Thu, 05 Sep 1996 07:00:00 GMT
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My solution doesn't really address your question, but here's another approach for on-line documentation.

I have written some help information using HTML, and then spawn Netscape (or whatever your favorite browser may be) from my IDL application. If Netscape is already defined on the path of your system then you don't need to use another environment variable. I implemented a routine which actually does look for an environment variable which points to the browser executable, but if it isn't defined it defaults to "Netscape 'help_file'.html". You can find the routine SHOWHTML at my (in development) web site:

http://www.va.ucsf.edu/mrs/mrs_vamc.htm

You can pass either a local filename or a URL. I have tested it with SUN and Windows.

Andrew

Dyer Lytle <dlytle@as.arizona.edu> wrote in article
<322DB2EA.263E@as.arizona.edu>...

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> -Dyer

Subject: Re: Help with help files.
Posted by [David Foster](#) on Thu, 05 Sep 1996 07:00:00 GMT

Dyer Lytle wrote:

```
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```

If you include \$IDL_DOC or one of its parent directories in IDL_PATH and then put a single file with the .pro extension in the directory, IDL will find it. It does not include directories that do not contain any .pro files.

We use a similar scheme for help files, and I've written a program that you can call to explicitly display a certain help file, or choose from a list of help files. It also lets you look at .pro files as an option. You can search for text in the file, which is pretty useful. The one big difference is this program expects to find the help files in the same directories as the .pro files. If you think this might be useful or something you could modify, let me know and I'll send you a copy.

Dave

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