Subject: Documentation
Posted by Richard G. French on Wed, 14 Apr 1999 07:00:00 GMT
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Several postings have hinted at this topic, so I thought I would raise the issue directly, in the hopes that we might have some effect. David F., you said not to get you started, and so this is my attempt to get you started!

What helpful suggestions can we give RSI about its documentation? Here is my list:

1) Enable help to be read using NETSCAPE.

2) Make sure that ALL the keywords for all procedures are documented. It is hard to know if undocumented keywords are in the category of "Don't use this since we reserve the right to change it" or are simply left out because no one updated the documentation.

3) Math routines that work! In the version of CURVEFIT that was distributed a couple of years ago, there were so many serious errors that I had to hack the code all over the place to get it to compute the parameter errors properly. Just saw the posting on the SVDFIT routine which also seems to have bugs. I love IDL, but I must admit that I have gotten to the point where I don't even trust that it computes Bessel functions properly without doing some cross-checks with other programs.

4) Has someone found a real manual for the GUI builder? If so, I'd love to read it! I've tried to track it down in the Help menu but just have not been able to navigate to a manual that actually shows you how to use the thing, rather than simply telling you that it exists.

5)I would LOVE to have as easy reference for each function a history list of what changes were made in what version of IDL. I know this is asking for too much, but it sure would help when trying to figure out why things that used to work don't work any more!

6)The old DEMO routines in the old days actually did simple things like draw plots of sine waves in black and white - the kind of thing that a beginning user would like to know how to do. I used to be able to have my students learn IDL by running the DEMO and then looking at the code that produced it. This is no longer possible. The demo is so high-powered that it is impossible for beginning IDL users to use it as a way of learning how to program in IDL. I think this is a real loss. I learned IDL by looking over someone's shoulder and by reading through programs that did close to what I wanted to do myself.

That's enough of a list for now - I'm eager to see what others have to

say!

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