
Online Help

User Experience: Help Technologies



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Apple Inc.
1 Infinite Loop
Cupertino, CA 95014
408-996-1010

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Introduction to Online Help

This programming topic describes the various types of on-line help found in Mac OS X. Your application rarely needs to contain code to display on-line help. Instead, you use Interface Builder and Xcode to set up on-line help for your application.

Organization of This Document

This programming topic contains the following articles:

- ["Comprehensive Help"](#) (page 7) describes the comprehensive help you can provide.
- ["Tooltips"](#) (page 9) describes the short bits of text that can describe a user interface element.
- ["Specifying the Comprehensive Help File"](#) (page 11) describes how to specify the location for your comprehensive help.

Comprehensive Help

Most applications provide some form of on-line help that is more comprehensive and detailed than tooltips, such as conceptual or task help. NSHelpManager allows you to provide this sort of comprehensive help. Apple Help is HTML-based, so you can use a variety of tools to create your content. Mac OS X uses the Help Viewer to display your comprehensive help.

The Help Viewer is a browser that displays standard HTML content. The Help Viewer is optimized to take advantage of AppleScript and the Mac OS X search engine through the use of special HTML tags. Apple Help can access and display HTML content from remote HTTP servers, allowing you to install a core set of help content on the user's system and maintain less frequently accessed pages in a separate location.

If you've properly registered your help information in your application's property list, when the user chooses the Help menu item the help file you have specified for your application is displayed. That file should be the starting point of your help, and should allow users to access whatever information they might need.

Tooltips

A tooltip is a bit of text that provides information about a view. If the user holds the cursor over the view for more than the default delay, the tooltip text is displayed in a small framed rectangle next to the cursor. By default, a view does not display a tooltip. To turn on tooltip display for a view, you invoke the `setToolTip:` method to install tooltip text for the view. To turn display off, you invoke `setToolTip:` with an empty string.

See *Providing Help Tags in Carbon* for guidance in writing tooltips.

If you do not want the tool tip to be displayed for the entire view, you can create one or more tool tips that apply to only sections of the view. The tool tip text also can be either static or determined when the tool tip is displayed. To create a tool tip for only a section of the view, you invoke `addToolTipRect:owner:userData:` with a rectangle identifying the tool tip area and an object, the owner, that can later provide the tool tip text. To remove individual tool tips created with this method, you invoke `removeToolTip:` with a tag identifying the tool tip. To remove all tool tips assigned to the view, you invoke `removeAllToolTips`.

Specifying the Comprehensive Help File

If you've registered your help information in your application's property list (`Info.plist`), when the user chooses the Help menu item the help file you specified for your application is displayed. This file should be the starting point of your help, and should allow users to access whatever information they might need.

Place a folder containing your help files in the `Resources` folder inside your application's bundle. An HTML meta tag in must be specified on your help's title page (the "`AppleTitle`" tag). Use Xcode to specify the two necessary `Info.plist` keys, which are `CFBundleHelpBookFolder` and `CFBundleHelpBookName`.

It's possible for applications to have more than one command under the Help menu and to have each command open a different help file. To implement this, connect each of the Help menu commands to a different action method. The action methods should call one of the functions from the Apple Help API to display your help.

Document Revision History

This table describes the changes to *Online Help*.

Date	Notes
2006-06-28	Updated the reference to the Help Viewer search engine.
2003-10-29	Provided direct link to "Providing Help Tags in Carbon", as well as corrected title of document. Reorganized topic introduction.
2002-11-12	Revision history was added to existing topic. It will be used to record changes to the content of the topic.

