Customizing Windows Help

[...why?]

[...what?]

[...who?]

[action!]

Because it can be done, and because it's a useful idea.

World Wide Web browsers for the Internet function in much the same way as Windows helpfiles.   Most of the better browsers allow you to change default colors to make it easier both to read and understand the structure of what you're reading.   Windows Help allows you to change these colors too, but this is a "hidden capability" only a small percentage of users know about.

This little utility is designed to allow you to change these options at will.   Each option screen has a **test changes** button so you can instantly see the results, and if you like changing color schemes on a regular basis you'll definitely appreciate this ability to alter the look of Windows Help.

Here's what this tool can modify in Windows Help:

The default color of links.   This is the ideal "eyesaver" if the default green links look horrible with your color scheme.   Red works much better with light-blue and greenish background colors, and blue works well with light-yellow.

Separate default colors for different types of links.   This borderless window is a pop-up, and Windows allows it to have its own link color.   Some links are *macros* that perform functions such as playing sounds or snooping around your system for information, and macros too can have their own unique color.

Turn off all custom background colors.   This helpfile uses your default Windows Help background color.   If this text is any other color than black, text or hotspots in some Windows Help files might be barely visible to you.   This option will force Windows to display helpfiles in *your* chosen color scheme.

Use hotkeys to "step" through helpfile topics in sequence.   A simple modification to WIN.INI will allow you to do this with all helpfiles.   It is unlikely that this key combination will conflict with a keyboard macro, and hotkey stepping will allow you to find "hidden" topics in many helpfiles.   The **Browse** buttons (the Windows Help toolbar buttons with the >> and << arrows) don't give you this flexibility and don't exist in all helpfiles.

Change the Windows Help background colors.   The "blue wave" you see on WINHELP.EXE's main screen when you start WINHELP without loading a file can be changed to any two-color wave you like.

Links are hotspots, which in turn are highlighted word or phrases or areas in a helpfile where your mouse cursor changes to a pointing finger.   The color of the word "links" which you just clicked is your current default link color.

This link will take you back to the explanation of features.

This utility is used as a "catalog-carrier" program for some of our software.   Since you already have one of our products, you don't need to see our catalog, so here's a small bit of computing humor:

Q: What do computer geeks eat for breakfast?

A: "I don't remember seeing anything in the manual about eating..."

(When we said small, we *meant* small, the thickness of the skull, of course, being inversely proportionate to the value of its contents...)

Change link color

Change popup color

Change macro color

Separate "if" color

No background color

Hotkey stepping

Change Help colors

Restore defaults

Change link   or jump colors

[How it's done]

[Menu]

[Test changes]

If you do not select any other link color options, this screen will change the default colors for all links in Windows Help.   If you like, you can add separate link colors for popups and macros too. However, once you define custom colors for the other two link types the color you select here will only be for jump topics.   Jump topics are help topics which appear within the main Windows Help window.   This is an example of a jump topic.

Blue	**Green**	**Red**	**Cyan**
Magenta	**Yellow**	**Crimson**	**Navy**
Teal	**Forest**	**Earth**	**Purple**
Black		**Dark grey**	**Light grey**

Change popup colors

[How it's done]

[Menu]

[Test changes]

This option will change the default colors for popup hotspots only.   Any change you made in the previous section will still apply to jump hotspots.

Blue	**Green**	**Red**	**Cyan**
Magenta	**Yellow**	**Crimson**	**Navy**
Teal	**Forest**	**Earth**	**Purple**
Black		**Dark grey**	**Light grey**

Change macro colors

[How it's done]

[Menu]

[Test changes]

This option will change the default colors for all macro hotspots in Windows Help.   Many Windows helpfiles include links that do not jump to new information, but instead perform all kinds of interesting functions, such as playing sounds, displaying video and allowing custom

configuration options such as those provided by this utility.   You might find it interesting to give macro hotspots their own unique color to see how some of the more complex helpfiles are put together.

Blue	**Green**	**Red**	**Cyan**
Magenta	**Yellow**	**Crimson**	**Navy**
Teal	**Forest**	**Earth**	**Purple**
Black		**Dark grey**	**Light grey**

Change "If" colors

[How it's done]
[Menu]
[Test changes]

This final link color option changes colors for an important link type most people never consider: "if" colors.   Some hotspots are designed to take you to topics in helpfiles other than the one you are viewing.   This option alters both IfJumpColor and IfPopupColor entries to the *same* color. You can manually alter them to different colors using SYSEDIT.   **Note:** Once this option has been selected, it will have to be altered every time you change your color scheme unless you manually erase the WIN.INI entries for IfJumpColor and IfPopupColor.

Blue	**Green**	**Red**	**Cyan**
Magenta	**Yellow**	**Crimson**	**Navy**
Teal	**Forest**	**Earth**	**Purple**
Black		**Dark grey**	**Light grey**

Change WinHelp logo colors

[How it's done]

[Menu]

[Test changes]

This option will change the default background color gradient which Windows Help displays when it is loaded without a helpfile.   Windows' default background colors are navy (start) and blue (end).   (**Note:** If you are using a custom color scheme, one of these colors may display incorrectly.)

Starting color:

Blue	**Green**	**Red**	**Cyan**
Magenta	**Yellow**	**Crimson**	**Navy**
Teal	**Forest**	**Earth**	**Purple**
Black		**Dark grey**	**Light grey**

Ending color:

Blue	**Green**	**Red**	**Cyan**
Magenta	**Yellow**	**Crimson**	**Navy**
Teal	**Forest**	**Earth**	**Purple**
Black		**Dark grey**	**Light grey**

Force default background colors

[How it's done]

[Menu]

[Test changes]

This is a wonderful option for people who use "sightsaver" or therapeutic color schemes.   Many Windows helpfiles use custom background colors which can conflict with the default colors you may have selected for your desktop text.   This option will force Windows Help to use the background color schemes *you've* chosen, so that helpfile text should be readable regardless of your chosen color scheme.

● **NOTE:** First Train use specially-formatted graphics with white backgrounds designed to appear transparent or "borderless" on your screen.   Turning off custom background colors will result in a degradation of the graphical effects used by First Train.   Return to this utility to restore the graphical balance if this is unacceptable to you.

Force background to display the system color

Allow the helpfile to set
the background color

Activate hotkey stepping

How it's done

Menu

Test changes

Here's an option Microsoft must have felt was too good for anyone but programmers.   There is a hidden feature in Windows Help that allows you to step through every topic in a helpfile in the order the author compiled them, one by one, using a hotkey combination.   It's unlikely you'll ever need this combination for system macros, so why not use them to browse helpfiles?   Many helpfiles also contain hidden "Easter egg" topics that most users are never meant to see, and this option gives you access to these goodies.

Activate hotkey stepping

Deactivate hotkey stepping

Restore Windows Help defaults

Has someone been monkeying with your Windows Help settings?   Can't remember what the defaults were and want to get them back?   This option will restore all Windows Help custom settings created by any program to the Microsoft recommended defaults.

● **NOTE:** If your computer uses nonstandard Windows Help custom settings, then resetting everything to default values may be an undesirable option.   It should be used only if there is something wrong with Windows Help's behavior or if you know that resetting all factory defaults will not impair Windows Help's performance.

● **This option may crash the utility**
●
but your changes will still be recorded.

Restore Windows Help defaults

How to use this option:

1. Click a color from the table and this hotspot type will be instantly changed to that color.

2. Click the **test changes** button to see the new color scheme.

3. If you don't like the new color, select a different one and test it again.   Repeat the process as often as you like.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Forest green is the default color used by Windows for *all* text hotspots.   If you want to restore Windows' original colors, set **all three** link types (jump, popup and macro) to **Forest**.

HOW IT'S DONE: Windows allows a section of your WIN.INI file to be used to set several default options for Windows Help.   Normally you will never see or need to modify this section of WIN.INI, but by using special commands within the helpfile, you can add these commands quickly and harmlessly to your WIN.INI file.   As long as you have this utility, you can change them as often as you like.   (**Winhelp authors**: the source and graphics for this helpfile should be widely available and are free for use in other programs and help tools.)

How to use this option:

This time you can choose either one or two colors.   If you only choose one, Windows Help will use its current default as the second color.

1. Select a color from the first table to change the starting color from WINHELP.EXE's top left-hand corner.

2. The second table changes the ending color at the bottom right.

3. Experiment.   There are some interesting effects you can achieve -- and some rather nauseating ones as well!   If you accidentally click the wrong color, you can try a different one right away.

TIP: You don't have to close Windows Help after testing the new colors.   You can have several copies open to compare color schemes and close them all later once you find a color pair that you like.

How to use this option:

By default, Windows does not let you step through topics one after the other in the order they were originally written.   The author defines the order and may give you **Browse** buttons to allow you to follow a predetermined sequence of topics, but many helpfiles don't have **Browse** buttons.   This option adds a command to WIN.INI which turns this feature on.   Microsoft must have felt that novices who "accidentally" pressed these three keys at once might get confused, so the default is *off*.   The name of this INI entry is SeqTopicKeys.

The three hotkeys used by Windows Help to step through help topics are as follows:

Ctrl+Shift+Right Arrow: moves to the next topic in the compiled helpfile.

Ctrl+Shift+Left Arrow: moves to the previous topic in Windows 95; does nothing in Windows 3.1/3.11.

Ctrl+Shift+Home: Windows 3.1/3.11: moves to the first topic in the file.   This is often *not* the first topic you see when you start a helpfile.   This feature does not work with Windows 95.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Windows will display an error message when you reach the end of the helpfile using hotkey stepping, and display it not once, but twice.   Ignore it; it's a bug.

How to use this option:

Many helpfiles change Windows Help's background to a specific color to achieve certain visual effects.   But if you use an ergonomic color scheme, yellow text on a white background is *not* going to be very helpful if the author didn't pre-select an appropriate text color for you.

By default, Windows allows the helpfile to set the background color.   Some authors preset the text color for you too so you won't notice a conflict with a non-standard color scheme, but less experienced authors don't usually do this.

If you use a non-standard color scheme in Windows 95 on *most* systems (apparently not all), Windows Help won't allow you to see custom background colors regardless of this setting, even if you use the right-click **Options** menu to request them.   However, you can still use the WINHELP.EXE program from Windows 3.1, run it on its own from Win95, and load the desired help file from the **File** menu if you're *really* desperate for authenticity.   Just don't replace the WINHELP.EXE in your Win95 `\WINDOWS\` directory or you may have system conflicts.

How to use this option:

No instructions should be needed.   Just click, and the next time you launch a helpfile all options will be restored to their defaults.   The only exception is window sizes.   **Annotation** and **History** windows will be slightly larger than normal since Windows Help's defaults are widely considered to be too small to be useful for the average user.

How does the utility use this option?   It uses a sequence of macro calls to write default values to thirteen standard Windows 3.1 INI settings and one Windows 95 setting not normally used by Windows 3.1.   If the values are already set to their defaults or if no INI setting exists for that particular option, then the new line written to WIN.INI simply tells Windows what it already knows.