Blackout Help Index

The index lists all Blackout Help topics.

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Overview

Blackout is a user-configurable game for Microsoft Windows.   It is a fun way of learning to use a mouse, since the better your mouse skills are, the higher your scores are likely to be.

The object of Blackout is to find and click on all target rectangles before all non-target rectangles turn black.   The following section explains how to play the game.

Blackout is played by moving the mouse cursor to a target rectangle and clicking the left mouse button somewhere inside its boundaries.   If done sucessfully, the target rectangle will be marked as "found" by turning red.   Each target rectangle that is "found" will increase the player's score.

The object of the game is to find (click on) all target rectangles before all of the other, colored rectangles turn black.

If the player correctly finds each target rectangle on the playing grid before a total blackout of all colored rectangles occurs, a bonus is awarded and a new level is started that contains more target rectangles and faster-changing colored rectangles.   This process continues until a "Blackout" occurs, or until level 10 is successfully completed.

In addition to finding target rectangles, the playing is kept more challenging and interesting by the addition of *Bonus Rectangles*, *Replay Arrows*, and *The Boogeyman*.   Proper use of these elements allows much higher scores, but overuse can increase the risk of having a blackout occur, which will cut the score by 50%.   To learn more about these elements of Blackout, read the Rules of the Game section

Related Topics

Playing the Game
Rules of the Game

Playing the Game

The object of Blackout is to find and click on all target rectangles before all non-target rectangles turn black.   The following section explains how to play the game.

To "Find" a Rectangle:

Using the mouse, move the mouse cursor so that it points inside of one of the target rectangles. Now, press the left mouse button ("click" it).   The rectangle should turn red, and, if the game's "Sound" option is turned on, you should hear the "found" sound.

In addition to the target rectangles, you may see some of Blackout's special playing elements, including *Bonus Rectangles*, *Replay Arrows*, and *The Boogeyman*.   To learn more about these elements, read the Rules of the Game section.

To Start a New Game:

From the Game menu, choose New, or click on the New button.

Monitoring the Game's Status

Several aspects of the game's status are constantly displayed in the game's status line, which is at the bottom of the game window, to the right of the Command Buttons.   The status line will always have the current score and game level, and, during play, will have accurate counts of the number of target rectangles remaining to be found and the number of black rectangles on the screen.   In particular the target-rectangle count is helpful when you don't know how many rectangles are left to find.

Related Topics

Overview
Rules of the Game

Rules of the Game

Blackout Rules:

The game is paused until you make the first mouse click.   At that point, the game will start, and the colored rectangles will begin to change color and some will begin to turn black.

Each time you correctly click on a target rectangle, your score will be increased.   Each time you click on any non-target rectangle, that rectangle and the eight others surrounding it will immediately turn black, as a penalty for clicking in the wrong area.   Depending on the current setting of the Scoring Parameters points may be subtracted for a wrong click.

At the completion of each level, that game will pause and you will see a dialog box with the current game score.   Clicking on the "OK" button in this box will start the next level.   At each level, the score awarded for a correct click increases.   Also, at each successive level, there are more target rectangles to find, and the non-target rectangles will turn black more quickly.   If you successfully click on ALL target rectangles at any given level, you will be awarded a bonus score that increases at each level.

The level is over when no more target rectangles remain to be found, or when there are no more normally-colored rectangles (a "Blackout").

The game is over when no more levels remain to be completed (there are 10 levels), or when a "Blackout" occurs at any level.

Note that many of Blackout's scoring and playing rules can be altered by changing the game's configuration.

If a "Blackout" occurs, the score is lowered by 50%.

If a player achieves one of the 10-highest Blackout scores, the High Scores dialog box is automatically invoked, allowing the player to enter their initials.   The high-score table is then updated with the player's initials and score.

Bonus Rectangles:
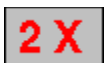
While playing the game, there will occasionally be "Bonus Rectangles" which will appear momentarily.   Each bonus rectangle is a light-gray box with red lettering.   The lettering in the box will indicate the level of bonus to be awarded if the box is clicked on before it disappears. The "2 X" box is worth twice as many points as a regular target rectangle.   The "3 X" box is worth three times as much, and so on.   There are "2 X" thru "5 X" boxes available, and clicking on them can greatly enhance your score - but be careful!   Spending time finding the Bonus boxes may cause you to be unable to complete the level, and result in a Blackout!, which definitely won't help your score.

The Replay Arrow:

Another element of Blackout is the "Replay Arrow".   The replay arrow is a black box with three colored arrowheads pointing to the in the direction of the arrow's movement.   The replay arrow

will appear at random times.   It always moves from one edge of the playing surface to the opposite edge, and usually moves quite rapidly.   If you can successfully click the replay arrow, all black blocks on the playing surface will be returned to the normal, colored state.   This will allow you to get a second chance to complete a level, or to continue to play the bonus rectangles at a level.   Be very careful with replay arrows, since a "near miss" (within one block of the arrow's real location), will be counted as a miss, and you will "kill" the arrow.   Only click on it when you have a clear shot, or when you are desperate for time.

The Boogeyman:

The "Boogeyman" is a black rectangle with a face in it.   If this block appears, you will be unable to score until you successfully click on it.   As the Boogeyman moves around on the playing surface, it will occasionally restore a target rectangle from a "found" state to an "unfound" state, causing the target to reappear.   Since the speed of the boogeyman's movement can make it very difficult to click on, there is no penalty associated with a "miss" when you try to click on the boogeyman - wild, uncontrolled clicking may be the only way you can get it! You cannot score any targets or bonus blocks when a boogeyman is present, and there will be no replay arrows during the time a boogeyman is on the screen.   Blocks will continue to turn black, however, so you should get the boogeyman as soon as possible after it appears.

Related Topics

Playing the Game
Strategy and Hints

Strategy and Hints

This section contains helpful hints for playing Blackout successfully.

- Use the mouse to click the target rectangles as smoothly as possible.   "Jerky" mouse motions will result in mistaken clicks and lost bonus opportunities.

- Discipline yourself to locate and click all target rectangles in a given area of the game surface before moving to a new area.   This results in less mouse movement and faster play, as well as preventing mistaken mouse-clicks.

- Establish a pattern of motion for locating target rectangles.   Move from upper left to lower right, for example, or in an up-and-down vertical "sweeping" pattern.   Be consistent in your strategy, and your speed will increase.

- Use the Setup Game menu choice to establish a default starting speed and level appropriate for your level of skill.   This prevents having to set the level and speed manually at the start of each game, and also keeps a skilled player from having to play through levels that are too easy.

- Learn how to effectively use Bonus Rectangles!   They can greatly increase your scores, since they are worth multiples of the current level's normal target rectangle score.   Just remember that you must finish each level without a Blackout! , so that play can continue, so spending too much time on Bonus Rectangles can backfire!

- The Replay Arrow can be used with dramatic results, since successfully clicking on it erases all of the current level's black rectangles.   This means you will have more time to finish the level, or to continue to score the bonus rectangles at that level.   But be careful not to wildly click around the area where a replay arrow is, since missing it means you are lowering your score and increasing the number of black rectangles.   You can also "kill" the replay arrow with a "near miss", so you should only click on it when you have a clear shot, or when you are desperate for time.

- Since there may be times when the playing surface just seems to get ahead of you, and there may be no way to get all of the target rectangles in time, it is possible to "live to fight another day" by deliberately clicking on non-target rectangles which are close to groups of target ones.   This has the effect of "sacrificing" your ability to score on the target rectangles (and your chances for a bonus score), in return for avoiding a Blackout!, so that at least you can move to the next level.

  Note that the advisability of using this technique depends on the Game Play Parameters settings, since there may be too stiff of a point penalty for deliberately causing black rectangles for this technique to be of any use.

Related Topics

Playing the Game
Rules of the Game

Game Menu Commands

New

Starts a new game of Blackout.   You can start a new game at any time, even in the middle of a game.   You can also start a new game by clicking on the New button.

Pause

Pauses the game and stops all color changing.   You can pause a game at any time.   Choosing Game Pause again will toggle the paused game back to active.   Another way to reactivate a paused game is to simply click on a target rectangle.   You can also toggle the pause-mode on and off by clicking on the Pause button.

High Scores...

Displays a dialog box showing the 10 highest scorers' initials and their scores.   Press the "OK" button in the dialog box to continue.   This dialog box is also used to collect the player's initials when the player achieves a score in the 10 highest.   You can choose this item at any time, even in the middle of a game.

Score...

Displays a dialog box showing the current game score and level.   Press the "OK" button to continue.   You can choose this item at any time, even in the middle of a game.

Setup Game...

Displays a dialog box containing all of the game playing parameters.   It is possible to reconfigure the game's scoring rules, playing behavior, and default startup parameters from this dialog box. You can choose this item at any time, even in the middle of a game.

For more information on game parameters and how to set them up,   see the Configuration topic.

Configure Sounds...

Displays a dialog box containing sound setup parameters.   This menu choice and the dialog box it displays are mainly used in Windows installations where multi-voice sound hardware is installed.   It is functional with any Windows setup, but only setups with special sound hardware (like the Soundblaster or Adlib board) and appropriate Windows driver software (like Monty Schmidt's FM.DRV shareware driver) can really make use of the choices in the dialog box.   You can choose this item at any time, even in the middle of a game.

For more information about the use of this dialog box, refer to the Configuration topic.

Exit

Immediately stops the current game and closes the Blackout application.   You can choose this item at any time, even in the middle of a game.

Options Menu Commands

Level

Displays a second-level menu with 10 numbered choices.   Each of the 10 choices is a successively more difficult level.   You can immediately move to any level by choosing the desired level from this menu.   The level can be changed at any time, even in the middle of a game.   The current level will appear on the level menu with a checkmark to its left.

Sound

Choosing this item toggles game sounds on or off.   If game sounds are currently ON, a checkmark will appear to the left of the Sound menu choice.   Otherwise, no checkmark will appear.   Turning sound OFF disables all game sounds made by Blackout.   You can choose this item at any time, even in the middle of a game.

Speed

Displays a second-level menu with 3 choices - Slow, Medium and Fast.   The game speed determines how fast colored rectangles will change colors, and has a dramatic effect on how quickly the colored rectangles will black out.   The fastest speed is the most difficult.

Command Buttons

Pause

At the bottom left side of the game window, there is a button marked "Pause".   This button is just a shortcut way of toggling the pause-mode on and off (without having to choose <u>Game Pause</u> from the menu).

New

To the right of the Pause button, there is a button marked "New".   This button is a shortcut way of starting a new game (without having to choose <u>Game New</u> from the menu).

Configuring Blackout

This section contains information about configuring Blackout.   Game-playing parameters are set by selecting the <u>Game/Game Setup</u> choice, and filling out the <u>game configuration dialog box</u> that is displayed. Sound setup parameters are set by selecting the <u>Game/Configure Sounds</u> choice, and filling out the <u>sound configuration dialog box</u> that is displayed.

The Game Configuration dialog box

The game configuration dialog box can be used to change Blackout's scoring rules, playing behavior, and default startup values. The dialog box is divided into four sections, each containing parameters for a general aspect of the game's behavior:

Scoring Parameters: Specify new values for the 3 kinds of scoring rules for playing level one and each subsequent level
Game Play Parameters: Specify new values for the 2 kinds of playing rules for each of the three possible game speeds
Startup Defaults: Specify the startup defaults for playing level and playing speed
Game Switches: Switch game options on or off

After you have finished entering configuration values, you can press one of the three buttons at the bottom of the dialog box to tell Blackout what to do with your values. The three buttons do the following:

Save   Tells Blackout to save all parameters in the dialog box for future use.

NOTE: Using the Save button only saves the parameters for *future* use - the *current* playing parameters will be unaffected by pressing the Save button.

Test Play   Tells Blackout to return to the game, using all parameters   in the dialog box as the current playing parameters.

NOTE: Using the Test Play button just allows you to play the game using the selected parameters.   The parameters are NOT saved for future use unless you press the Save button described above.

Cancel   Tells Blackout to discard any values you entered into the   game configuration dialog box. Your changes are neither saved nor used for play when you press the Cancel button.

Scoring Parameters

This section explains how the values of the scoring parameters are used by Blackout to compute scoring during game play.   The values of the scoring parameters can be changed by choosing Game Setup from the Game menu and modifying the values in the *Scoring Parameters* section of the game configuration dialog box.

Blackout modifies the current game score when any one of three different events happens:

- The player correctly locates and clicks on a target rectangle

- The player incorrectly clicks on a rectangle that is neither a target nor a Bonus Rectangle

- A rectangle is turned black for any reason (random selection or player mistake)

The score is *increased* whenever the first event happens, and *decreased* whenever either of the other two happens.   Each of these events has a separate scoring rule, and the amount of points added or subtracted can be set for each event independently, so there are three sets of parameters to control scoring, one set per event type.

Each of these scoring sets has two values - the first is the point change for the event at level-one play.   The second is the amount to *increment* the first value at each subsequent level of play. For example, if the parameters for an event of the first type (correctly finding a target rectangle) are set to 10 and 5, the score change for that event would be computed as follows, if the current playing level was three:

To the current score, add 10 (the value for *level-one* play) plus 2 times 5 (the number of levels above level one times the *increment* value).   Since 10 + 2 x 5 = 20, the score would be increased by 20 points.

The other two sets of scoring parameters work exactly as described above, except that the score is decremented instead of incremented.   If the score would fall below 0 as a result of the calculation, it is simply set to 0.

The values used in the *Scoring Parameters* section of the game configuration dialog box must be positive integers in the range of 0 to 100.

Game Play Parameters

This section explains how the values of the game play parameters are used by Blackout to compute scoring during game play.   The values of the game play parameters can be changed by choosing Game Setup from the Game menu and modifying the values in the *Game Play Parameters* section of the game configuration dialog box.

During play, Blackout randomly picks rectangles on the playing surface and modifies their colors and properties, perhaps just changing a rectangle's color , but possibly changing the rectangle to a black rectangle, or to a Bonus Rectangle.   Blackout's decision to change a rectangle is made on the basis of *percentages*.   Two of the possible kinds of rectangle changes (to black, or to a Bonus Rectangle), depend on game play parameters which specify the percent-chance that a rectangle will change when it is chosen.

The *Game Play Parameters* section of the game configuration dialog box allows you to modify the percentage chances for these two type of changes.   There are three sets of the parameters, one set per possible game-playing speed, so that you can alter the behavior of Blackout for Slow, Medium, and Fast speeds independently.

Since the values in the *Game Play Parameters* section represent percentages, they must be set to positive integers between 0 and 100.   Note that by setting these parameters to high values it is possible to greatly increase the difficulty of the game, to the extent that some setting combinations will cause the game to be unplayable.   Take care when you change the parameters to adjust them by small amounts at a time, so you can get a feel for the effect of the changes.

Startup Defaults

This section explains how the default playing level and speed can be set, so that each time you start Blackout, your preferred playing level and speed are automatically chosen.   The startup defaults can be set by choosing Game Setup from the Game menu and selecting the desired startup playing level and speed from the scrolling combo-boxes in the *Startup Defaults* section of the game configuration dialog box.

There are 10 levels of play available in Blackout, numbered 1 thru 10, and three playing speeds - Slow, Medium, and Fast.   Using the default Scoring Parameters and Game Play Parameters, the difficulty of play increases at higher levels and speeds and decreases at lower levels and speeds.

When the game configuration dialog box is displayed, the current default starting level and speed will be displayed in the combo-boxes in the Startup Defaults section of the game.   Note that *these are not necessarily the same* as the current playing level and speed - when you change these values, you are changing the Startup Defaults, *not* the current values.   If you want to change the current values for the playing level and speed, you should use the Options Level and/or Options Speed menu choices
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Game Switches

This section explains how the game switches affect game play.   The game switches can be turned on and off by choosing Game Setup from the Game menu and clicking on the checkmark boxes in *Game Switches* section of the game configuration dialog box.

There are a number of game switches in Blackout, and they all represent options which are either *On* or *Off*.   The switches and their effects are:

Pause at New Level   When set **On**, this switch forces Blackout to automatically pause the game when a player completes a level and moves to a new level.   If the switch is set **Off**, the game will immediately begin play as soon as the new game level is ready.

Allow "Click Ahead"   When set **On**, this switch allows the player to "get a head start" on Blackout when a new screen is being drawn, by finding and clicking rectangles during Blackout's new-level redraw.   If the switch is set **Off**, any mouse clicks received before the screen draw is complete will be ignored.

Track High Scores   When set **On**, this switch causes Blackout to automatically display the High Scores dialog box when a new game is started, play is completed at level 10, or a Blackout! occurs, if the player's current score would place that player in the top 10 scores list.   If the switch is set **Off**, no automatic high score tracking will be done.

Use Sound   When set **On**, Blackout will use sound effects during play.   If the switch is set **Off**, the game will play silently.   This switch may also be temporarily changed during play by selecting Option Sound.

Use Replay Arrows   When set **On**, Blackout will use the Replay Arrows described in the Blackout Rules section.   If the switch is set **Off**, no Replay Arrows will appear.

Use Boogeymen   When set **On**, Blackout will use the Boogeymen Rectangles described in the Blackout Rules section.   If the switch is set **Off**, no Boogeymen will appear.

The Sound Configuration dialog box

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The sound configuration dialog box can be used to change Blackout's sound assignments, when a multi-voice sound board (like the Soundblaster or Adlib boards) is installed and an appropriate sound driver for Windows is installed (like Monty Schmidt's FM.DRV shareware sound driver). Blackout has eight different sound events.   Each of these events is tied to some specific game event during play.   Since special sound hardware has the capability of making different kinds of sounds, you may wish to reassign the sound tonality used for each Blackout sound event. Blackout's sound events are discussed below, along with directions for use of the sound configuration dialog box.

Blackout's sound events are:

Found Sound	This sound is made whenever a target rectangle is successfully clicked.
Missed Sound	This sound is made whenever a mouse click is detected over a rectangle that is not a target, bonus block, arrow or boogeyman rectangle.
Bonus Block	This sound is made whenever a bonus block is successfully clicked.
Boogeyman	This sound is made whenever a boogeyman is successfully clicked.
Replay Arrow	This sound is made whenever a replay arrow is successfully clicked.
Bonus Awarded	This sound is made at the end of a playing level when all target rectangles were found, clicked, and are still visible on the playing surface as "found targets". Bonus points are awarded for this accomplishment.
No Bonus	This sound is made at the end of a playing level when no bonus points are awarded.
Blackout!	This sound is made whenever a Blackout! has occurred.

The sound configuration dialog box can be used to change the sound tonalities used by Blackout for its sound events, and to permanently set new defaults for future play. The dialog box is divided into two sections, each containing parameters for a general aspect of the game's behavior:

Voice Selection:	This section allows the user to select a voice (instrument), assign that voice to a specific sound event, and to set whether the Test Sounds section will play the currently assigned voice, or the newly selected voice.
Test Sounds:	This section allows the user to test play any of the different sound events, using either the currently assigned voice for that event, or the currently selected voice from the Voice Selection section.

After you have finished entering configuration values, you can press one of the two buttons at the bottom left of the dialog box to tell Blackout what to do with your values. The buttons do the

following:

Cancel   Tells Blackout to discard any changes you have made to the sound parameters, restore the previous values, and return to the main game.

Save   Tells Blackout to save the changes you have made to the sound parameters for current and future use, and return to the main game.

Voice Selection

This topic explains the use of the *Voice Selection* section of the sound configuration dialog box. This section contains the following controls.

- The **Voice Selector** combo box.   This pulldown list box contains descriptions of the instrument sounds available with your hardware/sound driver combination. The currently selected instrument appears at the top of the box, and is highlighted in the list of instruments.   If you point to another instrument name in the box and click on it, a new instrument is selected as the **Current Instrument**.

- The **Assign Voice** pushbutton.   Pressing this button assigns the **Current Instrument** to the **Current Event** in the Test Sounds section of the dialog box (the **Current Event** will have a selected **Event Selection** radio button to its left).

- The **Sound Selection** radio buttons, marked "Play Default Sound" and "Play Selected Sound".   These radio buttons select whether pressing one of the **Sound Event** pushbuttons in the Test Sounds section of the dialog box will cause the event sound to be played with the **Current Instrument** selected in the **Voice Selector** combo box, or whether it will be played with the default instrument for that sound event (the instrument whose name appears in parenthesis to the right of the **Sound Event** pushbuttons' labels).

Test Sounds

This topic explains the use of the *Test Sounds* section of the sound configuration dialog box. There are three sets of controls in this section of the dialog box:

- The **Sound Event** pushbuttons.   There are eight pushbuttons - one for each sound event.   Each button is labeled with a sound event and the default instrument currently assigned to that event.   Pressing the button will play the sound, using either the default instrument, or the instrument currently selected in the <u>Voice Selection</u> section of the dialog box.   The Voice Control radio buttons in the <u>Voice Selection</u> section of the dialog box control which instrument will play.

- The **Event Selection** radio buttons.   There are eight of these radio buttons - one for each sound event.   They are directly to the left of the **Sound Event** pushbuttons.   Only one of these buttons may be selected at any given time. These buttons are used to control which sound event's instrument will be changed if the **Assign Voice** pushbutton in the <u>Voice Selection</u> section of the dialog box is pushed.

- The **Bonus Block Selection** radio buttons.   There are four radio buttons below the Bonus Block **Sound Event** pushbutton, labeled 2X thru 5X, representing the four bonus block types.   Selecting one of these radio buttons controls which of the four Bonus Block sounds will be played if the **Sound Event** pushbutton for Bonus Blocks is pushed.

Entering your Registration Number

Unregistered copies of Blackout display a "pester screen" dialog box, reminding users to register the software, whenever a new game or playing level is started.   When you register Blackout, you will receive a registration number that can be used to eliminate this "pester screen" and provide uninterrupted game play. This section describes how to enter the registration number into Blackout.

To enter your registration number, perform the following steps:

1) After correctly installing *Blackout* on your system, start the game.

2) If your copy is unregistered, you will see the "pester screen".   One of the buttons on this screen is labeled "Enter Registration Number".   Use the mouse to press this button.

3) *Blackout* will display a "Blackout Registration" box.   Just type your number into the space provided and use the mouse to press the "OK" button.   That's all there is to it.   As long as you entered your number correctly,   *Blackout* will no longer display the "pester screen", and the "Unregistered Copy" message in the "About" dialog box will no longer appear.

4) **Please note that if you delete the "BLACKOUT.INI" file in your *Windows* directory, you will need to go through the registration process again in order to eliminate the "pester screen" feature in unregistered copies of *Blackout*.   Save your registration number, so that you can re-do the registration process, if necessary.**

How to Play

This section contains information about how to play Blackout.

Overview
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Commands

This section contains information about the menu commands in Blackout.

Game Menu Commands
Options Menu Commands