

ORACLE[®] **White Paper**

Designer/2000

MS-Help Generator

VERSION 1.0: JANUARY, 1996

September 1995

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Introduction

What is the MS Help Generator ?

MS Help Generator creates Microsoft Windows Help directly from module definition information recorded in the Repository. Windows Help is a practical way of providing online assistance for the Windows-based applications you can design and develop using Designer/2000 Generators:

- Oracle Forms Generator
- Visual Basic Generator

The main source for MS Help Generator is Help text, which is defined against modules and their detailed table and column usages using Designer/2000. Generated Help files may be used standalone, or integrated within generated applications.

Generating MS Help

MS Help Generator is a standalone tool, and independent from the generation of the actual application. Planning the Help and entering the Help text can be done during module design, or when the application design is complete.

The MS Help Generator is run in a similar way to the other Designer/2000 Generators, using one of the following tools:

- Module Data Diagrammer
- Preferences Navigator
- Module Structure Diagrammer
- Repository Object Navigator

During generation, MS Help Generator tells you what is happening by means of a generation dialog. This dialog consists of status information and informative messages. After generation you must compile the Help file.

You are likely to generate Help source files several times, even for the simplest Help file. A typical generation cycle follows this pattern:

- generate the Help source files
- compile the Help source files
- run the Help file
- test it and see what needs to be changed
- make some modifications
- generate again

Before You Start Generating Help

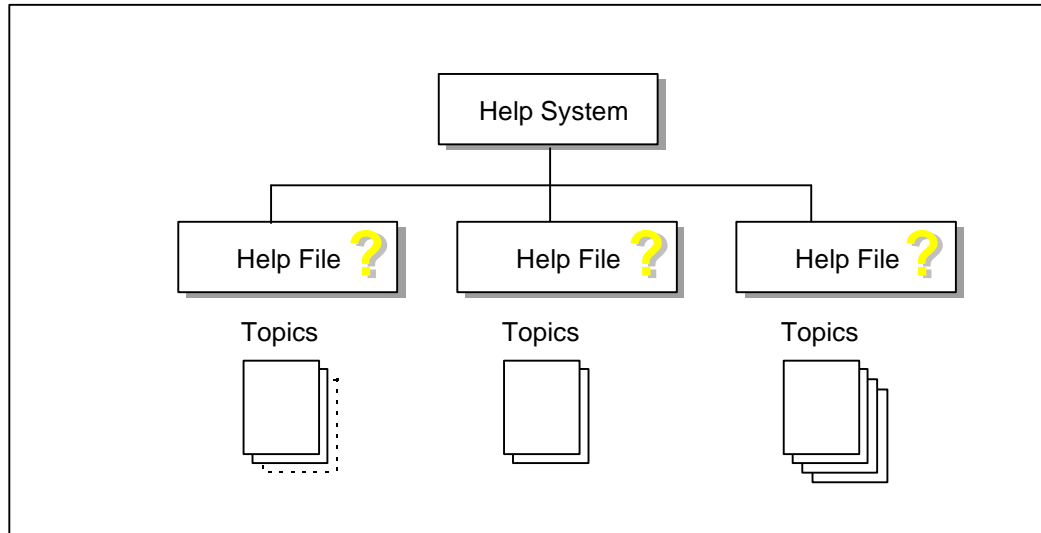
Typically you would use Module Data Diagrammer to design and generate the modules which make up your generated Windows application, before using MS Help Generator to produce its associated Help file. Once the modules are complete you will have a clear idea of the scope and contents of the Help file(s).

The following information should already be recorded in the Repository before you start to enter Help text, or try to generate Help:

- one or more module definitions (Module Data Diagrammer)
- associated table and column usages
- links between base table usages, if appropriate
- links between modules, if appropriate (Module Structure Diagrammer)

Key Windows Help Concepts

A Windows Help system consists of one or more Help files (.HLP) and each Help file contains one or more topics;



Windows Help features a number of elements which allow you to organize the Help information logically, display the Help effectively and allow the reader to find information quickly and easily. The elements are listed here, and described in more detail below:

Displaying Help Information

Topics

Help files are broken down into a hierarchy of topics. Each topic appears in the Help window as an individual page of information, and can contain both text and graphics.

Hypertext links, also known as 'jumps' allow the reader to display related topics, rather like cross-references in a book.

Popup Windows

Supplementary information, such as definitions of terms and illustrations are often displayed in popup windows which temporarily superimpose the main Help window.

Finding Information

Contents Page

Every Help file must have a Contents page. Like the contents of a book, this page provides an overview of all the topics and the means to access Help file information. Most Help files have a 'Contents' button on the toolbar of the main Help window. When pressed, this button displays the Contents page and this is often used as a navigational aid.

Keyword Searching

The keyword search facility acts like a book index and is often the fastest way to access a specific Help topic for information. During a search all the topic titles relevant to the keyword subject are listed for the reader.

Glossary

Explanations of words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to the reader are normally displayed in popup windows. These terms are often compiled into a separate Glossary which the reader may browse through, independently from the main Help window.

Navigation Aids

Browse Buttons

Related topics are grouped together in 'browse sequences'. Browse Forward (>>) and Browse Back (<<) buttons on the Windows Help toolbar allow the reader to move through topics, rather like turning pages in a book.

Opening Windows Help

Help Icon

Help for a Windows application is often displayed as an icon in the Windows Program Manager. If you double-click on the icon the Contents page is displayed.

Help Menu

Most Windows applications provide a Help menu item. If you select the Help menu the Contents page is normally displayed.

Help Button

Windows dialog boxes often provide Help buttons. If you select a Help button the Help topic relating to the current dialog is displayed.

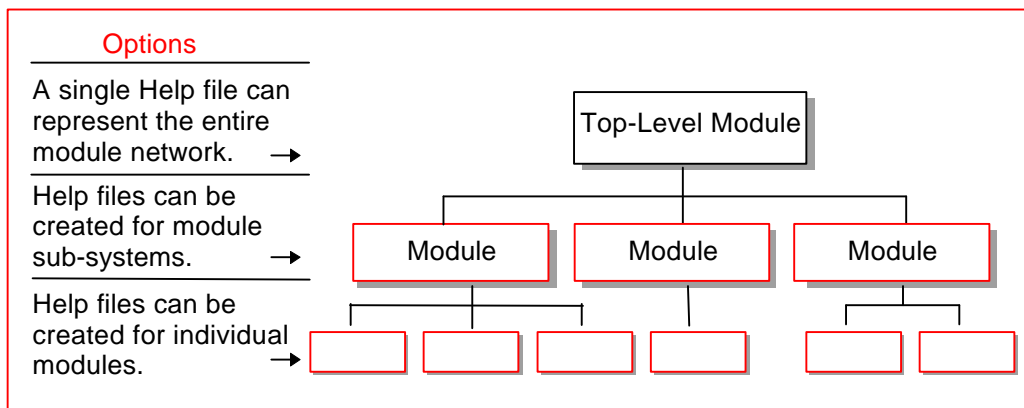
Pressing F1

Most Windows applications provide 'context-sensitive' Help systems. This means that if the person using the application presses F1, the Help file opens at the topic directly relating to the application item currently in focus, or the Contents page.

Scope of the Help System

A module network represents the links between the modules that make up your Windows application. It is this module network which governs the overall scope of the Help system. However, you may choose whether the entire module network is implemented as a single Help file, or if the Help system is broken down into a hierarchy of smaller Help files.

This diagram illustrates the various options:



The nature, size and complexity of your Windows application will influence how you choose to define the scope of each Help file.

You define the scope, by setting the Help File Name property for the 'top-level' module of your Help system. This property appears in the Module Definition dialog.

Note: *The module network is defined using the Module Structure Diagrammer.*

Topic Structure

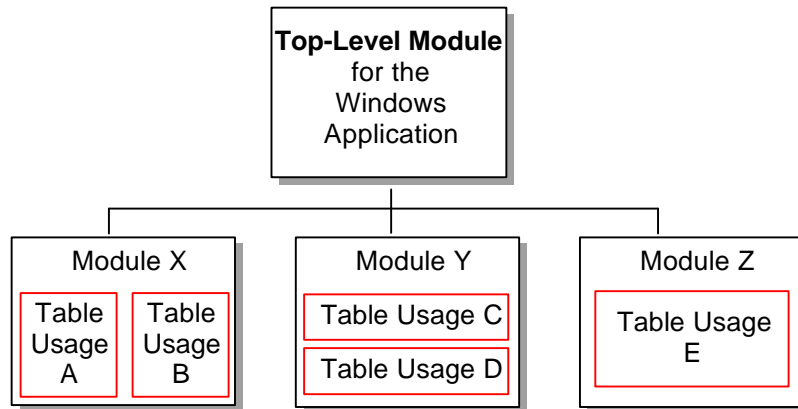
Topics in any Help file are structured into a hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy is a table of contents which lists the categories of topics available to the user. Each successive step down the hierarchy reveals more detailed information about the application.

MS Help Generator generates Help files in exactly the same way, deriving the overall topic hierarchy from the module network. The help information generated for any one module in the network, may be further broken down into a hierarchy based on the module table usages, and the links between them.

Example

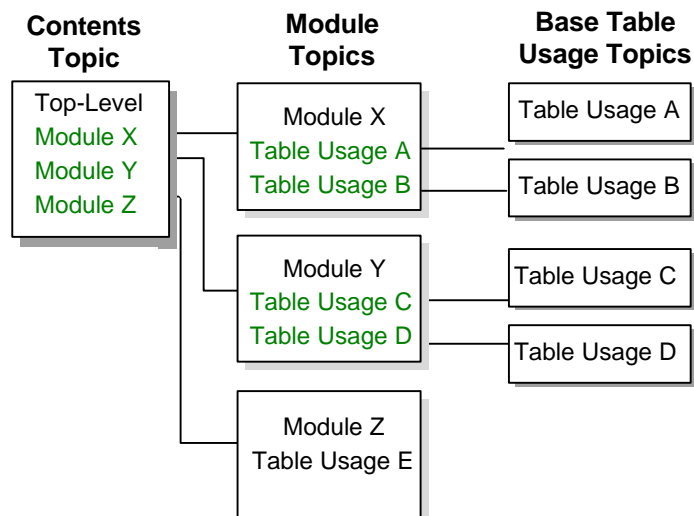
Sample Module Design

A typical Designer/2000 application comprises a number of modules with detailed data usage information. An example network is shown in the illustration overleaf:



Generated Topic Structure

The topic structure of a generated Help file, relates directly to the levels of module design and this is illustrated in the diagram below. A series of hypertext links allow the reader to jump from the Contents topic, to lower level topics which contain more detailed information.



Customizing the Topic Structure

The diagram above shows the default topic structure for the sample application. MS Help Generator also provides two preferences which allow you to customize the topic structure to suit your application:

- Base Table Usage Topics Combines the module and base table usage topics.
- Item Group Topics Splits up base table usage Help text, by creating separate topics which describe each item group within a table usage.

Topic Text

The Module Data Diagrammer provides a general facility for developers to document their detailed module designs. It also lets you enter Help topic text against the following module elements:

- module definition
- base table usages

- detailed column usages

During generation, MS Help Generator extracts this Help text and transforms it into Windows Help topics.

MS Help Generator can be configured to make use of other text sources, if Help topic text is omitted for these module design elements. The No Text Entered For Table and No Text Entered For Column preferences allow you to choose which other, Repository held text to use as a substitute:

- table definition Help text
- column definition Help text
- column usage hint text

Graphics

Graphics significantly enhance the appearance of any Help file. MS Help Generator allows you to display a graphic of your choice at the beginning of each module topic. All you have to do is specify the name of the graphic file and where it is stored, so it can be located when the Help file is compiled.

Typically graphics defined for each module are used to illustrate, or clarify the purpose of the module:



Open New Customer File



Close Customer File

You can also define a graphic on the contents page (top-level module) to simply display a company, or product logo:



Company ABC

Including graphics in a Help file is optional. You can incorporate three different types of graphics in your Help system; Bitmaps (.BMP), Windows Metafiles (.WMF) or Multi-resolution bitmaps (.MRB)..

Help File appearance

MS Help Generator uses a pre-defined template to create the layout of Help files and this ensures that Help text is displayed effectively and consistently. The template design is based on standard, online documentation design principles which take into consideration suitable:

- paragraph styles
- heading styles
- font types
- use of white space etc.

You may customize the appearance of your Help files by:

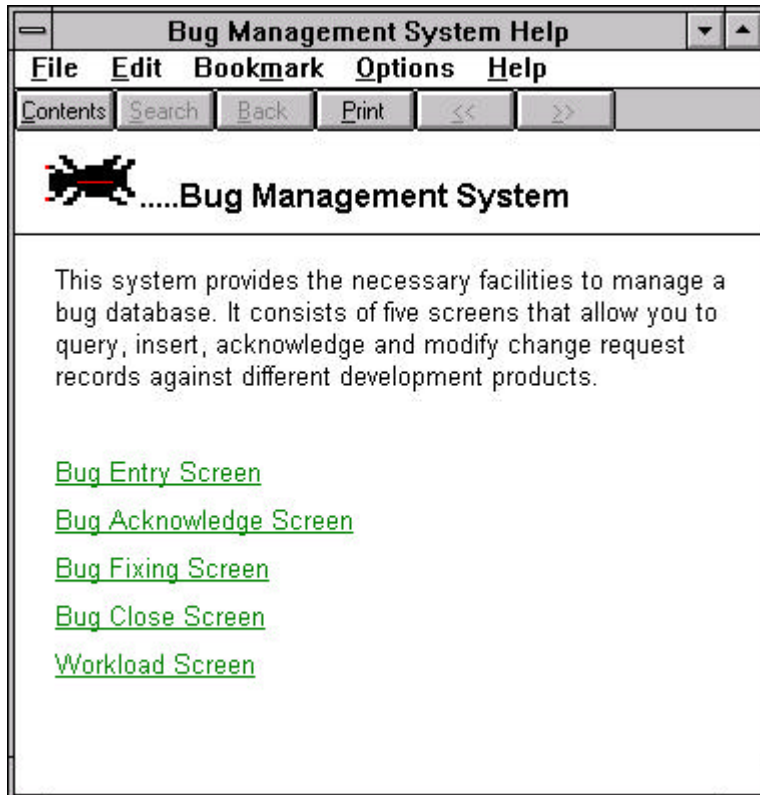
- adding illustrations to enhance the appearance of module topics
- setting Help design preferences which dictate the content and structure of topics

Contents Page

Every Windows Help file has a Contents page. MS Help Generator creates a Contents page from the top-level module of the Help file. At the start of the Contents topic there is normally a description of the application, derived from the Help text defined for the top-level module.

The introduction is followed by a series of jumps to topics which describe those modules which are called by the top-level module. There may also be jumps to topics which describe lower level table usages, however it is unusual for the top-level module to have table usages.

Here is an example of a typical, generated Contents page.



Normally when you open a Help file the Contents page is displayed first, rather like the first page of a book. The exception to this rule is when you use F1 to open context-sensitive Help, here the Help opens at the topic which describes the application item in focus.



The Contents button on the Windows Help toolbar allows you to navigate to the Contents page at any time.

