
About The Help Manager

You can use the **Help Manager** to provide your users with Balloon Help on-line assistance-information that describes the actions, behaviors, or properties of elements of your application. When the user turns on Balloon Help assistance, the **Help Manager** displays small help balloons as the user moves the cursor over areas such as scroll bars, buttons, menus, or rectangular areas in your windows. Help balloons are rounded-rectangle windows that contain explanatory information for the user. (With tips pointing at the objects they annotate, help balloons look like the balloons used for dialog in comic strips.) You provide the content for these help balloons in the form of descriptive text or pictures. The information should be short and pertinent to the object or element that the cursor is over. For example, when a user moves the cursor to a menu command, a help balloon pointing to that command explains its function. The help balloon is displayed until the user moves the cursor away.

The user turns on Balloon Help on-line assistance for all applications by choosing the Show Balloons command from the Help menu. All normally available features of your application are still active when Balloon Help is enabled. The help balloons only provide information; the actions that the user performs by pressing the mouse button still take effect as they normally would.

The **Help Manager** is available only in system 7.0 or later. Use the **Gestalt** function to determine whether the **Help Manager** is present.

Use the **Help Manager** if you want to provide descriptive information for the menus, windows, dialog boxes, or alert boxes used by your application, desk accessory, control panel, Chooser extension, or other software that interacts with the user. If you presently offer another help facility for your users, you should now let users gain access to your information through the Help menu. The **Help Manager** topics explain how you can add your own menu items to the Help menu to provide one convenient and consistent place for the user to look for help information.

You can provide help for the menus, dialog boxes, and alert boxes of your existing applications, desk accessories, or control panels by simply adding resources to your resource fork. In addition, you can provide help for the content area of windows by using either resources or **Help Manager** routines.

To use the **Help Manager**, you also should be familiar with the section on the **Resource Manager**. You provide help for your application by storing the information regarding help balloons in resources. To provide help for menus, windows, dialog boxes, or alert boxes, you should also be familiar with the **Menu Manager**, **Window Manager**, **Dialog Manager**, and **Control Manager**.

You can use the **Help Manager** to provide help for these elements of your application:

- menu titles and menu items

- dialog boxes and alert boxes
- windows, including any object in the frame or content area
- other application-defined areas

Providing help balloons for menus, dialog boxes, or alert boxes is quite simple: you need only create resources containing the help information that you want to relay to the user. The **Help Manager** automatically sizes, positions, and draws the help balloon and its content for you. It is equally simple to provide help balloons for a window whose elements do not change location within its content area.

It takes a little more work to provide help balloons for windows in your application that contain objects that are dynamic or that change their position within the content area of the window. You provide Balloon Help assistance for these objects by tracking the cursor yourself and using **Help Manager** routines to display help balloons. You can let the **Help Manager** remove the help balloon, or your application can determine when to remove the help balloon.

The user turns on Balloon Help on-line assistance by choosing **Show Balloons** from the Help menu. The Help menu is identified by an icon consisting of a question mark enclosed in a small help balloon. It appears to the left of the Application menu (and to the left of the Keyboard menu, if a non-Roman script system is installed) and to the right of all other menus. Users can turn on Balloon Help assistance even when your application presents a modal dialog box, because the Help menu is always enabled.

When Balloon Help assistance is turned on, the **Help Manager** displays any help balloons for the current application whenever the user moves the cursor over a rectangular area that has a help balloon associated with it.

The **Help Manager** provides a default help balloon for inactive windows and displays default help balloons for the title bar and other parts of the active window. The **Help Manager** also displays default help balloons for other standard elements of an application's user interface.

Default Help Balloons for Menus, Windows, and Icons

describes the default help balloons. (Though you probably will not want or need to change the messages in these default balloons, you have the ability to do so. For more information, see

Overriding Other Default Help Balloons.) The **Help Manager** displays the default help balloons for your application whenever Balloon Help assistance is enabled, even if your application does not explicitly use or create help balloons.

All normal features of your application are available when Balloon Help assistance is on. The **Help Manager** can display a balloon when the mouse button is pressed as well as when the mouse button is up. Help balloons do not interfere with your application. The user can still click and double-click as normal when Balloon Help assistance is enabled.

The display of help balloons is driven mainly by the action of the user. For those balloons defined as standard help resource types, the **Help Manager** automatically tracks the cursor and generates the shape and calculates the position for the help balloon. The **Help Manager** displays each help balloon as the user moves the cursor to the area associated with it. The **Help Manager** removes the help balloon when the cursor is no longer over the associated area.

Once the user chooses **Show Balloons**, help is enabled for all applications. When the user chooses **Hide Balloons** from the Help menu, the **Help Manager** removes any visible help balloon and stops displaying help balloons until Balloon Help assistance is turned on again.

Help Balloon Display describes how the **Help Manager** displays help balloons and

Default Help Balloons for Menus, Windows, and Icons gives information on the default help balloons.

Using the **Help Manager**, you can

- create the text or picture content for help balloons
- create resources for help balloons for menus, dialog boxes, and alert boxes
- create resources for help balloons for windows
- add your own menu items to the Help menu
- override the default help balloons provided by system software
- write your own balloon definition function