

Using FAR to Index HTML Help Projects

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FAR (Find and Replace) is a shareware utility developed by The Helpware Group to simplify the process of creating and editing HTML Help projects. FAR acts as a front end to Microsoft's HTML Help Workshop, and you can use it to quickly create an HTML Help project, compile a Help project, and create and edit a table of contents (TOC) and index for a Help project. As an editor and a part-time indexer for my writing group, I have found the indexing feature of FAR so helpful that I have never used HTML Help Workshop to index a Help project.

FAR Features

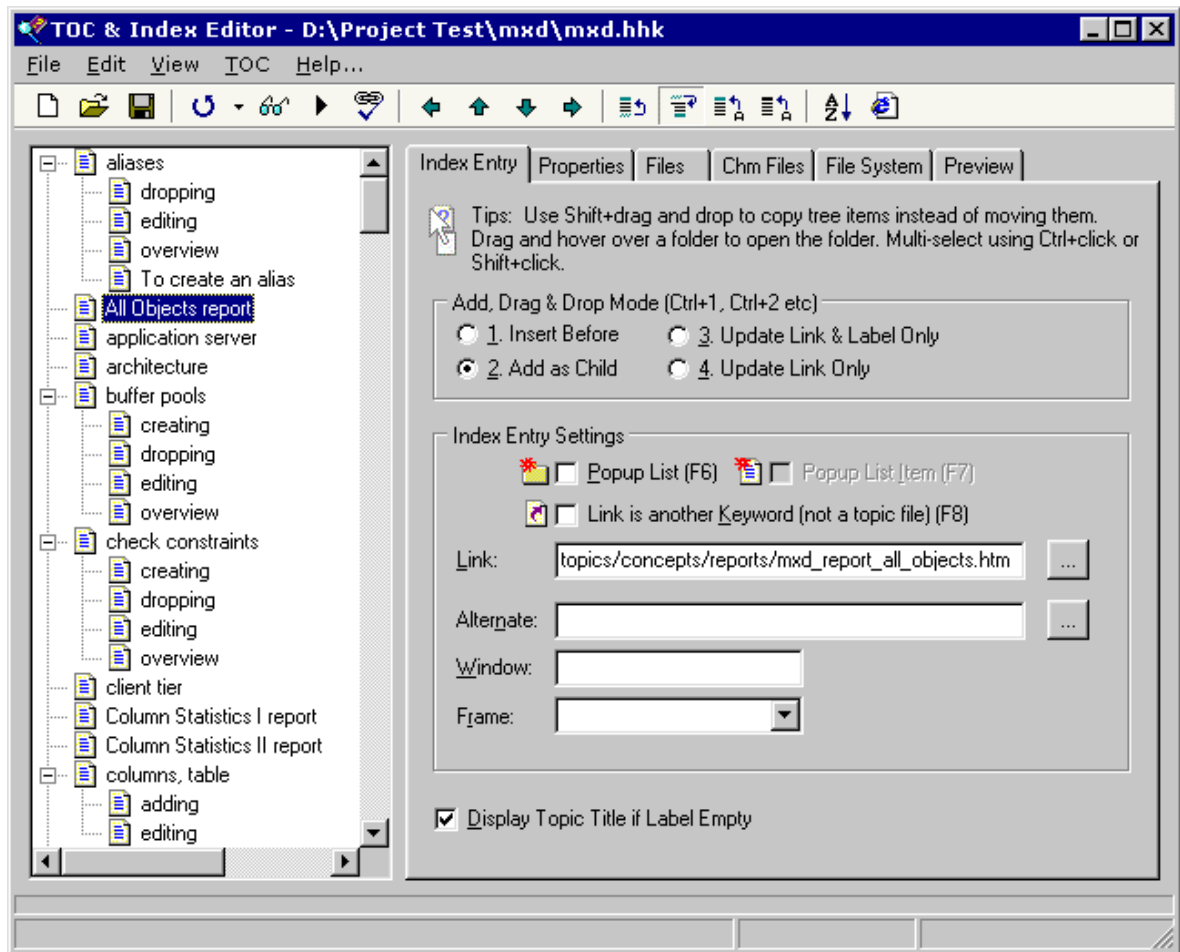
Before I describe the excellent indexing features of FAR, I will briefly summarize some of its other functionality:

- **Find and Replace Text.** As the name suggests, the utility provides a robust find-and-replace tool that searches through user-created lists of HTML files. You can use this tool to find and replace text in an entire Web site or Help project.
- **Create and Edit Compiled HTML Help.** A Help Wizard walks you through the steps of creating a new HTML Help project (**.hhp**) file, populating it with **.htm** files, selecting navigation features for your Help window, creating new or editing existing TOC (**.hhc**) and index (**.hhk**) files, and compiling and viewing the project. You can then use the HH Project Editor to manage existing HTML Help projects.
- **Create Uncompiled Help Web Sites.** You can use the Make Uncompressed Help tool to add a TOC and index to an existing Help Web site by using HTML frames. The resulting Web site, with a navigation pane, works in any browser.

Index Editor

FAR can create default TOCs and indexes using the titles of your **.htm** files. However, the real indexing power of FAR lies in using the Index Editor (Figure 1 on page 2) to create index entries and subentries directly from your **.htm** files. You can use the editor to create an index from scratch or to work with any existing **.hhk** file.

Figure 1 The FAR Index Editor. The left pane shows the index as you create it. You use the tabs, menus, and toolbar to structure the index, format the entries, access the file system, and preview topic entries.

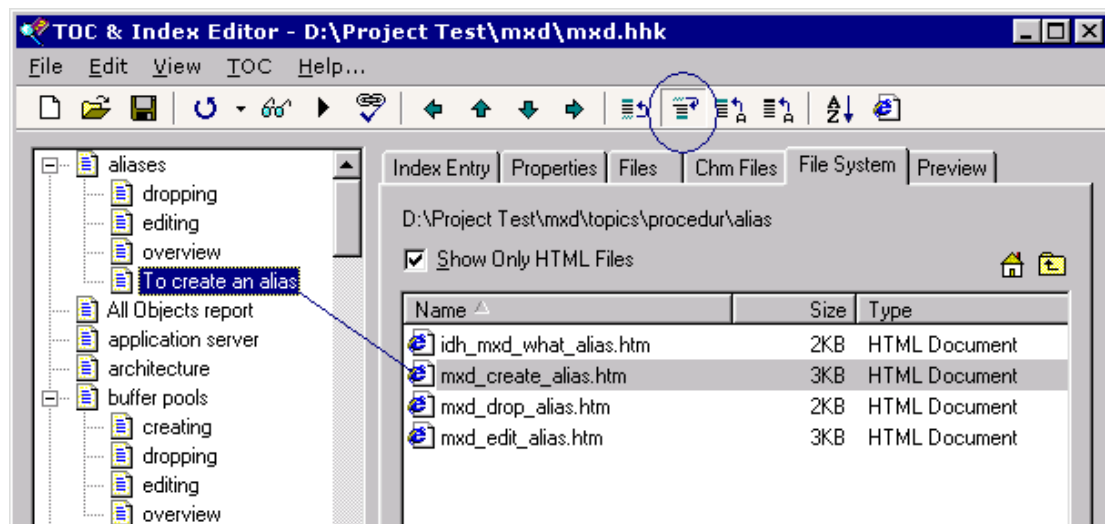


Creating Entries

After you open your **.hhk** file in FAR, the existing entries appear in the index pane (the left pane). The **File System** tab of the Index Editor provides access to all of the topics in your Help directory. To create an index entry for a topic, you drag that topic's file to the index pane and edit the text of the entry to the appropriate index keyword. For example, Figure 2 on page 3 shows the addition of a subentry to an existing main entry. After selecting the **Add as Child** toolbar button, I dragged the **mxd_create_alias.htm** file from the **File System** tab to the *aliases* main entry in the index pane. FAR added the file as the last subentry under *aliases*. To complete the subentry, I would simply edit its text to *creating*. (When you drag and drop files, the topic title appears by default.)

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Figure 2 File System tab. You can drag-and-drop any file into the index pane, reword the resulting entry, and move the entry up or down the tree structure to create a main entry or subentry.



You can easily add, delete, rename, copy, move, and sort your entries by using the menus and toolbar buttons. You can also check your links by choosing **Validate Links** from the **TOC** menu.

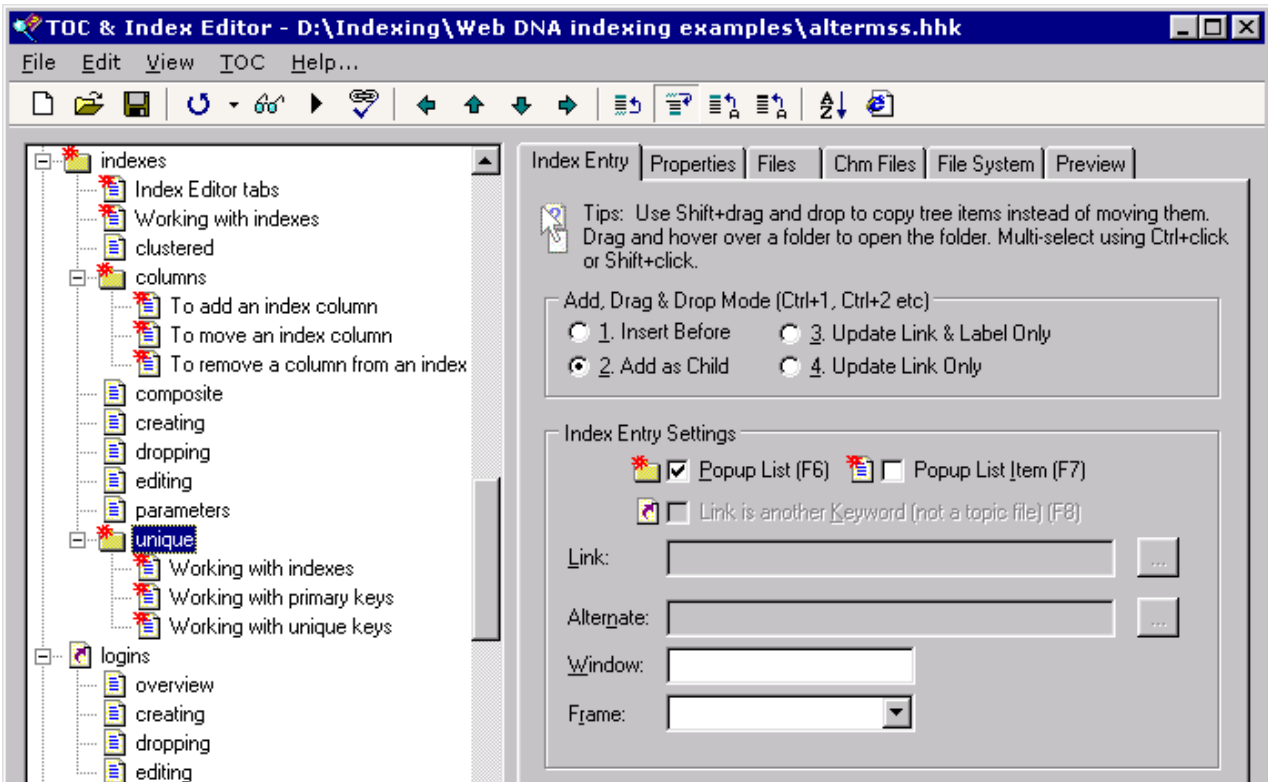
Associating Topics with Keywords

FAR lets you associate multiple topics with one keyword, one topic with one keyword, or no topic with a keyword.

Associating Multiple Topics with One Keyword

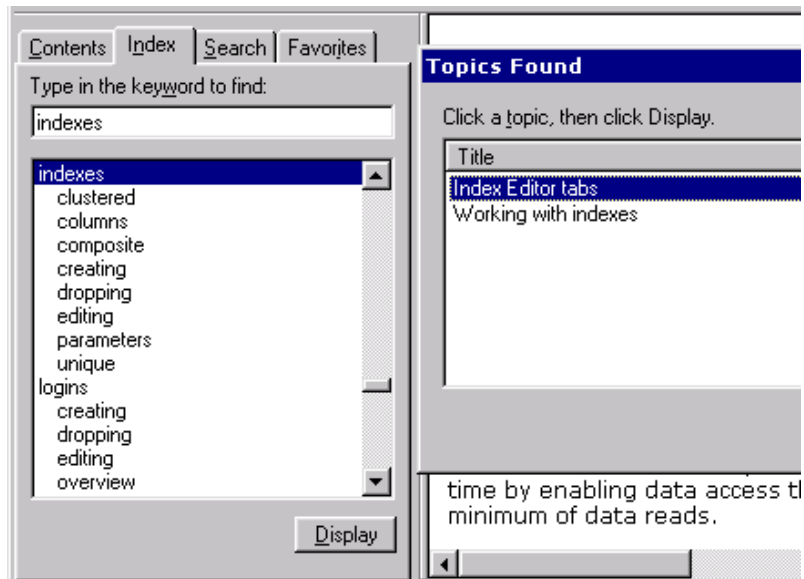
When you associate multiple topics with a keyword, the index in the compiled Help file shows a Topics Found dialog box when the user selects that keyword. Figure 3 on page 4 shows a main entry, *indexes*, which in addition to having several subentries, has two topics associated directly with it (“Index Editor tabs” and “Working with indexes”).

Figure 3 Index Entry tab. The icons next to the entries in the index pane correspond to the check boxes on the **Index Entry** tab and indicate the type of entry. A plain page icon indicates a one-to-one entry/topic association.



In the compiled index (Figure 4 on page 5), when the user clicks the entry *indexes*, a Topics Found dialog box appears with those two topics listed (the topic title is used by default). You use the check boxes and text boxes on the **Index Entry** tab to determine how the entries behave. For example, *indexes* is set as a **Popup List**; the two topics to which it links are set as **Popup List Items**. Notice that two of the subentries under *indexes* (*columns* and *unique*) also have multiple topics associated with them.

Figure 4 **Compiled Index.** This index shows a main entry that is associated with two topics.



Associating One Topic with One Keyword

Entries such as the subentry *clustered* (in Figure 3 on page 4), or the entries shown in Figure 2 on page 3, have one-to-one topic associations. On the **Index Entry** tab for these types of entries, none of the check boxes are selected and the path to the topic appears in the **Link** text box (see Figure 1 on page 2). When users click these entries in the index, the associated topic immediately appears.

Associating No Topics with a Keyword

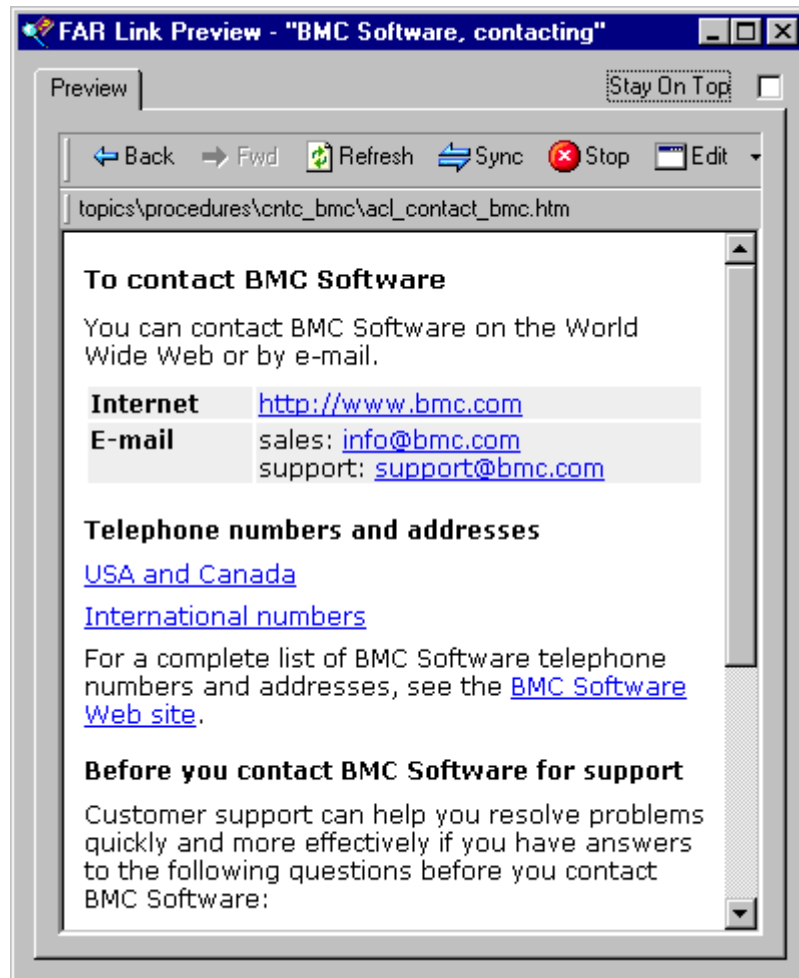
If you do not have a topic to associate with a keyword (as can happen with main entries that have subentries), you can link the keyword to itself rather than to a topic (see the main entry *logins* in Figure 3 on page 4) by selecting the **Link is another Keyword** check box on the **Index Entry** tab. When the user clicks this type of main entry in a compiled index, a message appears telling the user to select one of the subentries in the list. You can also use the **Link is another Keyword** feature to code *See* and *See also* entries.

Determining how entries behave can seem complicated at first, but as you work with the entries and preview the index, the options become clear and easy to use.

Preview and Test Features

As you create and modify your index entries, you can see the topic to which any entry links by clicking the **Preview** tab. However, if you want to work with the other tabs and still see the topics, you can choose **Preview Window** from the **View** menu. This command shows the **Preview** tab in a separate FAR Link Preview window, which you can position anywhere on your screen (Figure 5 on page 6). The **Preview** tab or window shows the associated topic when you click a keyword in the index pane or a file name on the **File System** tab.

Figure 5 Preview window. You can detach the **Preview** tab from the Index Editor window to view topics in a separate window.



You can also test your index as you build it by choosing **Test** from the **TOC** menu. A test Help window is launched in Internet Explorer, with the **Index** tab in focus. Of course, you can also use FAR to easily compile your project at any time to get a true view of the index in progress.

Product and Download Information

You can get download and purchase information for FAR, as well as access to the utility's online Help, at <http://www.helpware.net/FAR/index.html>. From this site, you can download a full version of the utility and try it for eight weeks before registering it. A single license costs only \$49, and the cost per license declines as you buy more licenses.

In the two or so years that I have been using FAR, several upgrades have been available for free to registered users. Each upgrade is easy to install and has enhanced the look-and-feel and functionality of the utility.

If you index online Help, try using FAR. You'll never go back to HTML Help Workshop!