



Guidance from the
Counting Practices Committee
on topics important to you



Help!

iTip # 1 – (version # 1.0)

iTips provide guidance on topics important to the FPA community. They explain the application of IFPUG FPA method in a common situation. iTips are not rules, but interpretation of the rules, and provide guidance using a realistic example to explain the topic being covered.

This iTip is focused on describing the IFPUG FPA method as it applies to counting help functions available in a typical application. Other applications may include different functionality. This is an example of a single application, not an exhaustive examination of the subject.

Background

Help functionality may be present in an application and typically consist of up to three unique levels.

1. Application Level Help – This level of help applies to the entire application and is typically found as a “help” menu on GUI based systems. Help manuals and videos available to applications will also qualify if they meet the normal IFPUG criteria described below.
2. Screen Level Help – This level of help applies to a specific screen in a GUI or Web based system.
3. Field Level Help – This level of help applies to a specific field in an application and usually provides guidance on the format for expected input.

Applying the FPA methodology we can count one transactional function for each level of help provided that the help data comes from a source of maintained data. In addition, one data function is counted to account for the storage of the logical help data. All of these functions are usually low complexity. If the help data is hard-coded then there is no functionality to measure.

When applications have multiple methods of initiating the same level of help, only the first instance is counted since additional instances are no longer unique. An example would be application level help that can be initiated either by clicking a menu item or pressing the **Shift** and **F1** keys simultaneously. Even though application level help can be accessed both ways, only one transaction is counted.

Remember that if the help information is maintained in the application being sized, transactional functions required for maintenance of the help data must be counted as well.

Example

The following fictional application contains all three levels of help. A sample screen of this application is shown below. Information about DETs crossing the application boundary has been provided to our analyst by the Subject Matter Expert (SME) responsible for this application and will be disclosed in the explanation.

The screenshot shows a window titled "IFPUG Help Illustration" with a blue title bar. Below the title bar are five tabs: "Employee", "Job", "Assignment", "Location", and "Help". The "Employee" tab is active. The form contains the following fields:

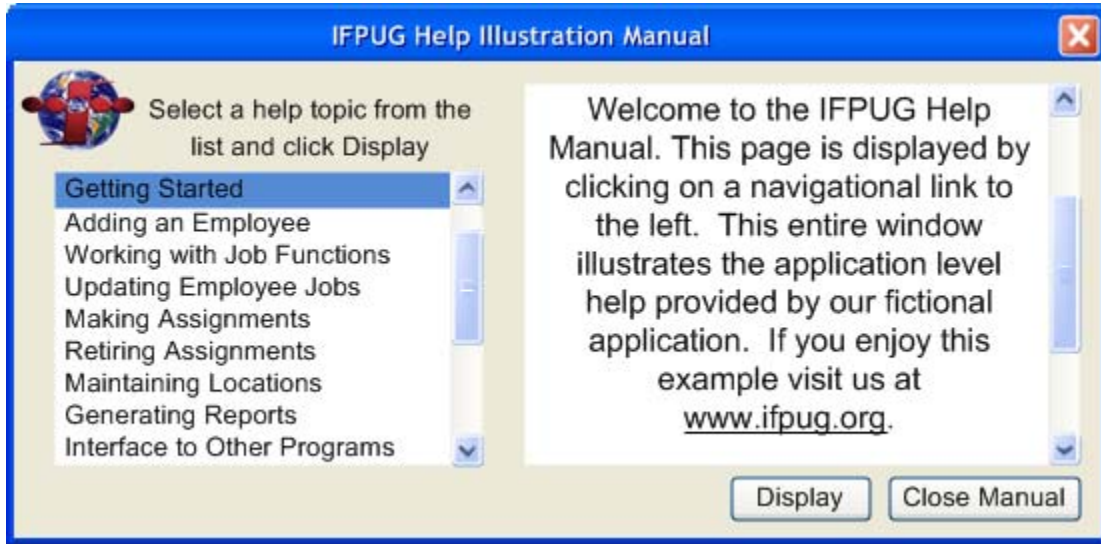
Field	Value	Help Icon
Last Name	Schmidt-Taylor	No
First Name	Kathleen	No
Middle Initial		No
Social Security	456 - 78 - 9012	Yes
Location	Main Plant	Yes
Date	03/28/1993	No
Salary	428.97	No
Performance Rating	Satisfactory	Yes

There is a "Screen ?" button in the top right and a "Submit" button in the bottom right.

Help Application level help ? Field level help
Screen ? Screen level help

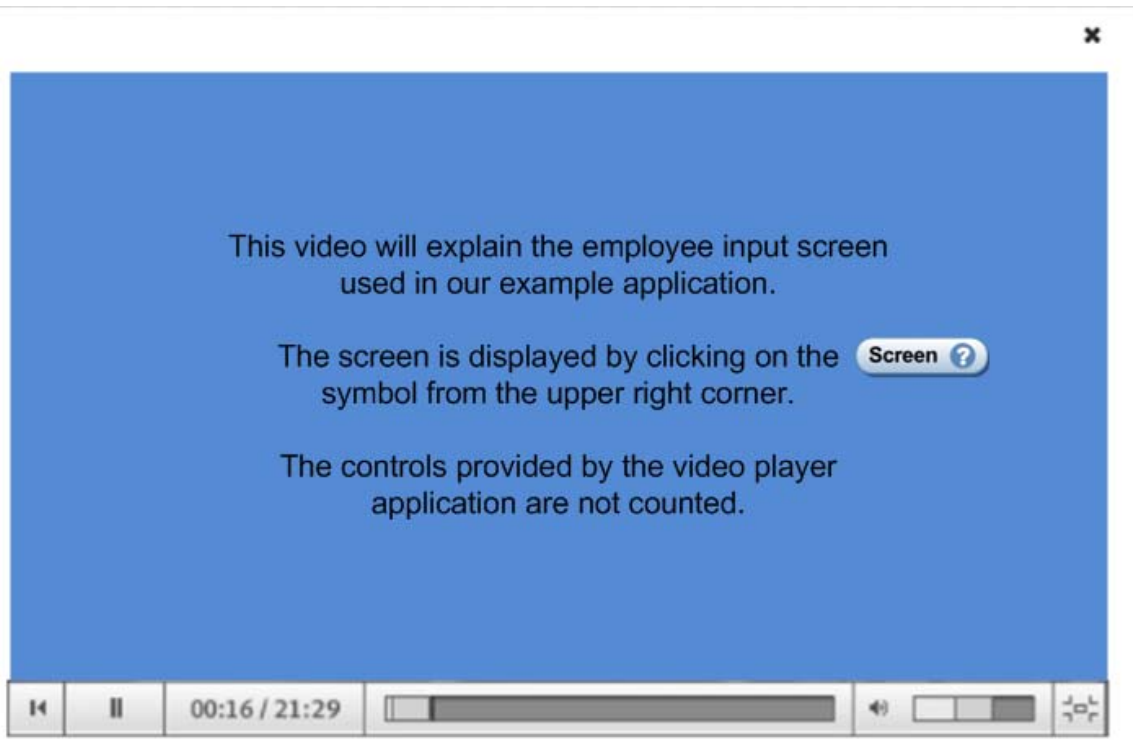
In the above example one low complexity ILF containing four DETs (one for a screen identification labels, a second for field identification labels, a third for application help chapters and a fourth the help message itself) is counted for the entire application. This is a single ILF because all of the help data is logically grouped together regardless of how they are physically stored and the data is maintained by the application being counted.

Application Level Help



A single low complexity EQ is counted for application level help as seen in the above example. Clicking on the **Help** menu link navigates to this help screen. Users select a chapter from the list on the left then press the display button to display the content on the right side. This EQ has three DETs, one for the help chapter selection, a second for the help displayed and a third for the action clicking the Display button.

Screen Level Help



A single low complexity EQ is counted for screen level help as seen in the above example. Clicking on the [Screen ?](#) link sends a single DET for the action clicking and a second DET for the screen name. The second DET was revealed to us during interviews with the SME, but was also found in the design documentation for the application. The output side includes a third DET for the help video.

Controls for handling the video such as the pause button and the speaker volume and screen maximize are provided by the video player and do **not** contribute to the count.

Field Level Help



A single low complexity EQ is counted for field level help as seen in the above example. Clicking on the [?](#) link sends a single DET for the action clicking, a second DET for the screen name and a third DET for the field name. The DETs for screen name and field name were a requirement found in the application design documentation. The output side includes a fourth DET for the retrieval of the help text.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q 1. Is help ever counted as something other than an EQ?

A. The primary purpose of help is to display information. It's possible that the display could include derived data or it might update an ILF and that would require that help be counted as an EO. Such a situation would be rare.

Q 2. Are multiple help ILFs counted if several physical executable programs exist inside the boundary of the application?

A. One logical grouping of help information is counted regardless of the number of physical executable programs. If the data is maintained outside of the application boundary it is counted as a single EIF, inside the boundary as a single ILF.

Q 3. Doesn't different field level help text cause the function to be unique?

A. No, it's just a case of the same function displaying different data values.

Q 4. Are there ever more than three levels of help?

A. Yes. Other levels can exist, but the levels shown in this iTip are most typical.

Q 5. Are all three levels of help always present?

A. No. Many applications provide only application level help or no functional help because data is hard-coded. Some applications provide application and field level help but nothing on a per screen basis. Use this iTip to identify the functionality present and include only what you find.

Q 6. Is an extra FTR counted for the help ILF/EIF for screens providing help functions?

A. The help ILF/EIF is an FTR for the each of the help transaction(s) counted. Other transactions do not reference the help ILF/EIF directly, so they do not count an extra FTR.

Q 7. My help menu item provides a drop-down of selections such as “search help,” “upgrade,” and “about.” Are all of these help functions?

A. Search help is counted if it meets all the normal FPA criteria (i.e., references a data function and is unique from other transactional functions). Other selections such as “upgrade” and “about” may well provide additional functionality. In our experience “about” or “about this program” often displays hard-coded text or code data, so use caution when examining it.

Further Reading

IFPUG CPM version 4.3.1 Part 4, page 2-155 “Additional Help Functionality”



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