

Non-modal help dialog blocked by modal dialogs

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Here is the problem:

I have written a non-modal frame class in Java for displaying help text when a user is using an application. It works as desired in that if the user selects "help" again, the same frame is used -- this is done using a singleton. The user can do other stuff in the main window while the help window is up.

However, when I have a modal dialog pop-up to get information from the user, it blocks events to the help window and continues that way until the modal dialog goes away. You can't even scroll the help window or tell it to go away. What I would like is for the user to still be able to use the help window, scroll it, whatever, and not have it blocked by the modal dialog. But I still want the rest of the application to be blocked until the modal dialog is done.

Example: A user is using a GUI to edit some data. He brings up the help window to see what format the data should be in. The help window being up doesn't block anything. He then clicks a button to edit "item 1", and that data is shown in a modal dialog box for editing. He should not be able to do anything in the main app (like select a different item for editing or click other buttons) until he tells the edit dialog to go away. But he should still be able to work with the help window (scroll it, etc).

I can't be the first person to want to have this kind of functionality, but I haven't been able to find how others have solved this problem. (Note: I am using JDK 1.3.0.)

Thanks for any help you can offer.

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