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Adobe RoboHelp

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About the Tutorial

This is a tutorial on Adobe RoboHelp 2017. Adobe RoboHelp is a **Help Authoring Tool** (HAT) that allows you to create help systems, e-learning content and knowledge bases. The latest version of RoboHelp is packed with features, which allows you to create Responsive HTML5 layouts that work on any device size.

This tutorial will help the readers in understanding the basics of the program and enable to create help files or documentation for various technical communications.

Audience

Adobe RoboHelp is used by industry professionals looking to create great technical content for their end-users. As such, it does require some knowledge of HTML and other web technologies. Some advanced features such as creation of custom dialog boxes require programming knowledge in Visual Basic, C/C++, Java or JavaScript.

However, newer versions make it easy for anyone to get started without having to write a line of code. Therefore, users of all experience levels can follow this tutorial.

Prerequisites

The reader should have proficient knowledge of navigating your way around the Windows OS (Windows 7 or later) along with good technical knowledge of the software for which the readers are going to prepare the documentation.

Adobe RoboHelp is part of the **Technical Communication Suite** (TCS). You can purchase a subscription to TCS, which will also give you access to tools such as **FrameMaker**, **Captivate**, **Acrobat** and **Presenter**. If you are interested only in RoboHelp, the reader should purchase a separate license, which can be either an individual license, a perpetual license as part of the Cumulative Licensing Program (CLP), perpetual license as part of the Transactional Licensing Program (TLP) or an Enterprise Term License Agreement (ETLA).

Prices and licensing options can be checked on the following link – http://www.adobe.com/products/robohelp/buying-guide.html. The reader can also download a fully functional 30-day trial version to test out the software from the following link – https://www.adobe.com/products/robohelp/download-trial/try.html#.

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1. RoboHelp – Overview

Adobe RoboHelp is a popular Help Authoring Tool (HAT) from Adobe. It is used by industry professionals to deliver engaging **help content**, **e-learning resources**, **organizational policies** and **knowledge base articles** to a wide audience irrespective of device form factor. The latest version of RoboHelp (2017 release) helps you to easily create next-gen Responsive HTML5 layouts, which enable seamless navigation and rich interactivity.

RoboHelp was first created by **Gen Kiyooka** and released by **Blue Sky Software in 1992**. Blue Sky Software was acquired by **Macromedia**, which was subsequently acquired by **Adobe** in 2005. Adobe RoboHelp 2017 is versioned as 13.0 although technically it is version 21 taking into account the previous versions released under Macromedia.

RoboHelp has evolved from being just a HAT to a versatile tool, which can help you create eBooks and even web sites. RoboHelp can output to a variety of help formats using the following **Single Source Layouts** (SSLs) –

- Responsive HTML5
- eBook
- Microsoft HTML Help
- JavaHelp
- Oracle Help
- Eclipse Help
- Adobe AIR Help
- Standard Word and PDF documentation

One of the biggest challenges faced in content delivery is ensuring that the intended audience is able to view it. RoboHelp allows content creators to create native apps for Android and iOS without the need for any extra software.

With a plethora of new features in the latest release, Adobe RoboHelp remains the industry standard HAT for creating engaging help, e-learning and technical content which addresses the varied needs of the target audience in a dynamic way. It is easy to use – both by seasoned authors as well as by novices.

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2. RoboHelp – New Features

The 2017 release of RoboHelp packs in many new features. These include –

- Next-generation HTML5 layouts
- Auto-complete
- Thumbnail support
- Favorites in Responsive HTML5 layouts
- Baggage file folder import
- Variable views

Let us understand them in detail.

Next-generation HTML5 layouts

The 2017 release of RoboHelp promises to help you create visually engaging borderless HTML5 layouts. These layouts offer a superior search and navigation experience and are preloaded with many features like topic sliders, show/hide widgets, etc. The responsive design enables the content to scale well across screens of different sizes.

Auto-complete

Now you can get predictive search results in the search field of the responsive HTML5 output after typing the first few characters. The results appear instantaneously and are contextual without the user having to enter the full search string. The results are ranked based on the frequency of the keyword in the content.

Thumbnail support

You can now publish thumbnails of images, which can reduce page loading times, saving bandwidth, while also being mobile friendly. If needed, the user can simply load the larger image by clicking on the thumbnail. It is possible to maintain a standard thumbnail size in order to maintain consistency throughout the content.

Favorites in Responsive HTML5 layouts

It is now possible to mark topics as favorites and add custom links with the new Indigo themed Responsive HTML5 layout.

Baggage File Folder Import

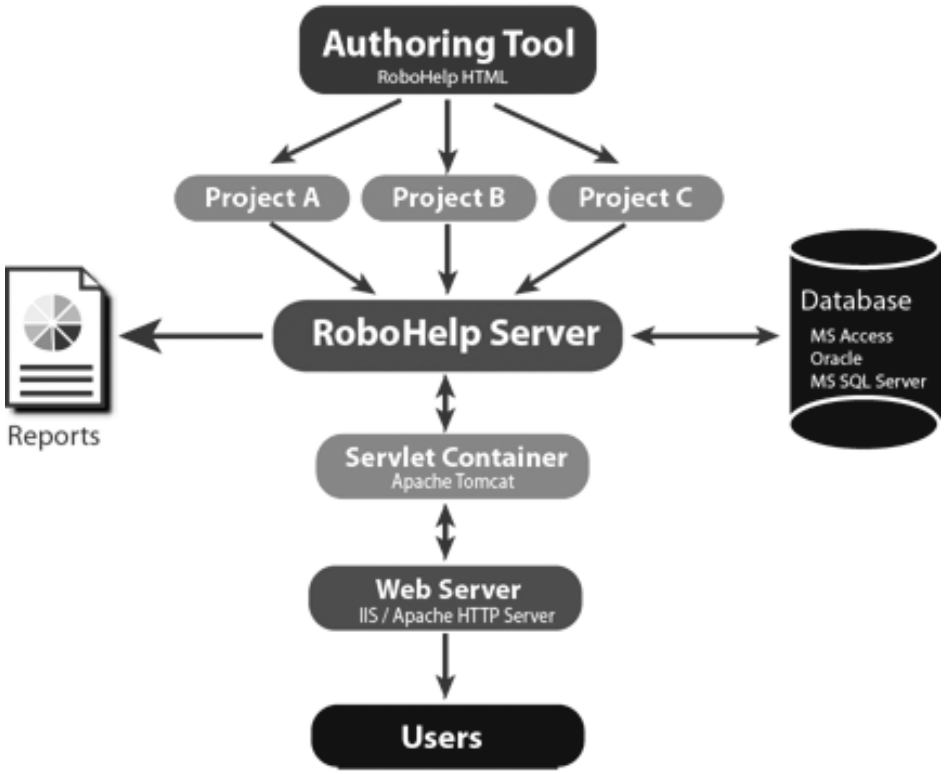
You can now add multiple baggage files stored in a folder in a single click by adding the folder to the project thereby making it easy to import folders containing support information.

Variable views

You can now easily toggle between the variable name and its value by a keyboard shortcut or from the context menu. You can toggle a single variable or all variables to view content exactly as your audience would view it.

3. RoboHelp – Server

Adobe RoboHelp Server is a server based help solution. You can upload your help content on a server, which can then provide real-time end user feedback. It can log data on the queries, which is asked by the users. RoboHelp Server can graphically show how users are navigating around the help system.



(Image Source: Adobe RoboHelp 2017 documentation)

You can use an authoring tool to author the content, which can include multiple projects and upload the entire project onto the RoboHelp Server. The RoboHelp Server includes automatic project merging, which allows authors to work on different projects at different schedules and publish all of them to the same server. Authors can also publish projects written in various languages on the same server.

The RoboHelp Server can also interface with database servers such as Oracle or MS SQL Server and generate reports and logs. The response to the user query is relayed back via an Apache HTTP Server.

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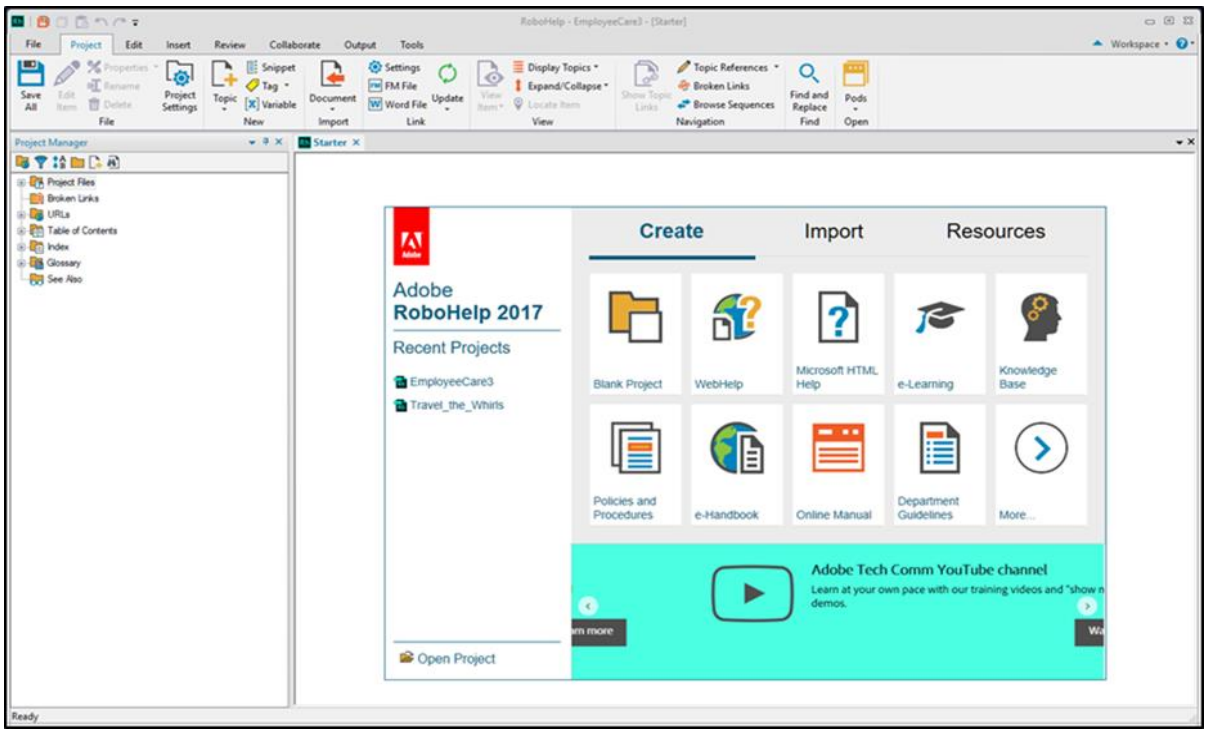
4. RoboHelp – Workspace Overview

The typical RoboHelp workspace comprises of elements called **Pods**, **Panes**, **Bars** and **Windows**. Let us have a look at some of the components of the workspace.



Quick Access Toolbar

The Quick Access Toolbar provides access to frequently used commands. It can be customized to access the commands you access the most.

The default commands include: Save All, Copy, Paste, Undo, and Redo.

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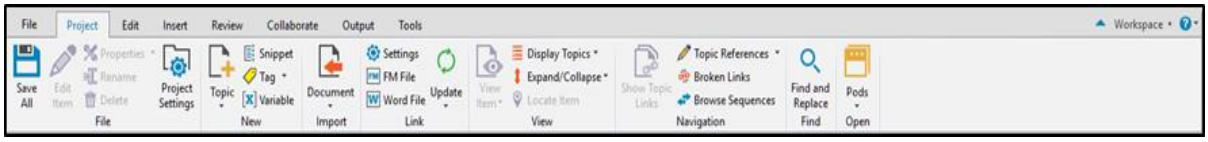
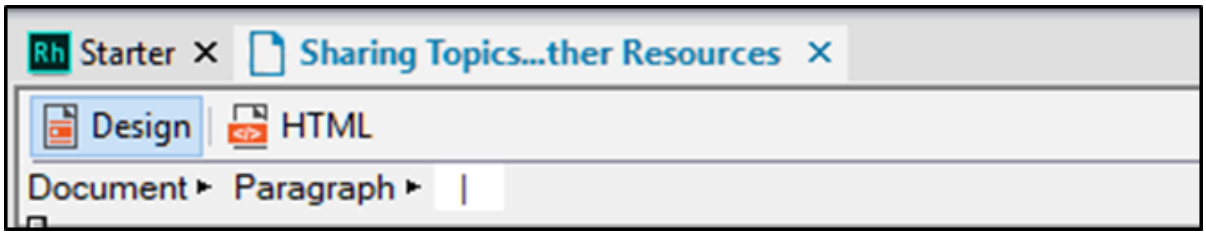
Tabs

Tabs are logical groups of commands put together. A tab contains commands of related functionality. Tabs are contextual and change depending on the type of content and formatting.



Document Pane

The document pane generally comprises of three rows of tabs as shown in the following screenshot.



These tabs are explained below.

- The first row is the **Tabbed Document Pane**. Each tab comprises of one project. You can work on multiple projects at once and copy paste assets between these projects.

- The second row is the **Design and HTML View Panes**. For any given document, you can toggle between the design you are working on and the HTML code of your design. You can edit the HTML for even finer control. The HTML code is auto-generated as you keep working on the design.

- The third row shows the **Document Area Selectors**. These help you to jump to various sections of the document such as Paragraphs, Headings and Hyperlinks.

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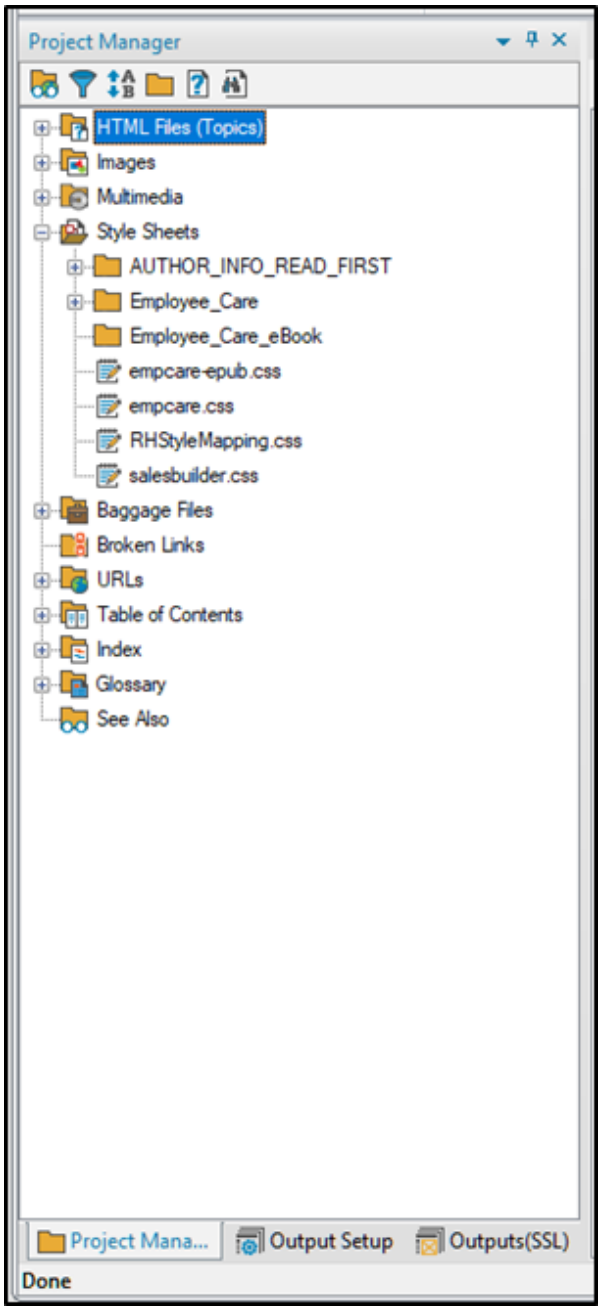
Pods

Pods are panes that you can dock anywhere in the workspace to get access to all features, which are logically grouped. For example, the Project Manager pod shows all the components of the project. Pods can be grouped together or can be free floating on the workspace.

You can also make them auto-hide or move them to a different monitor.



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5. RoboHelp – Working with Tabs

RoboHelp makes it easy to locate and identify commands associated with a particular function by organizing them into tabs. The tabs are organized in a ribbon similar to the Microsoft Office suite of programs.

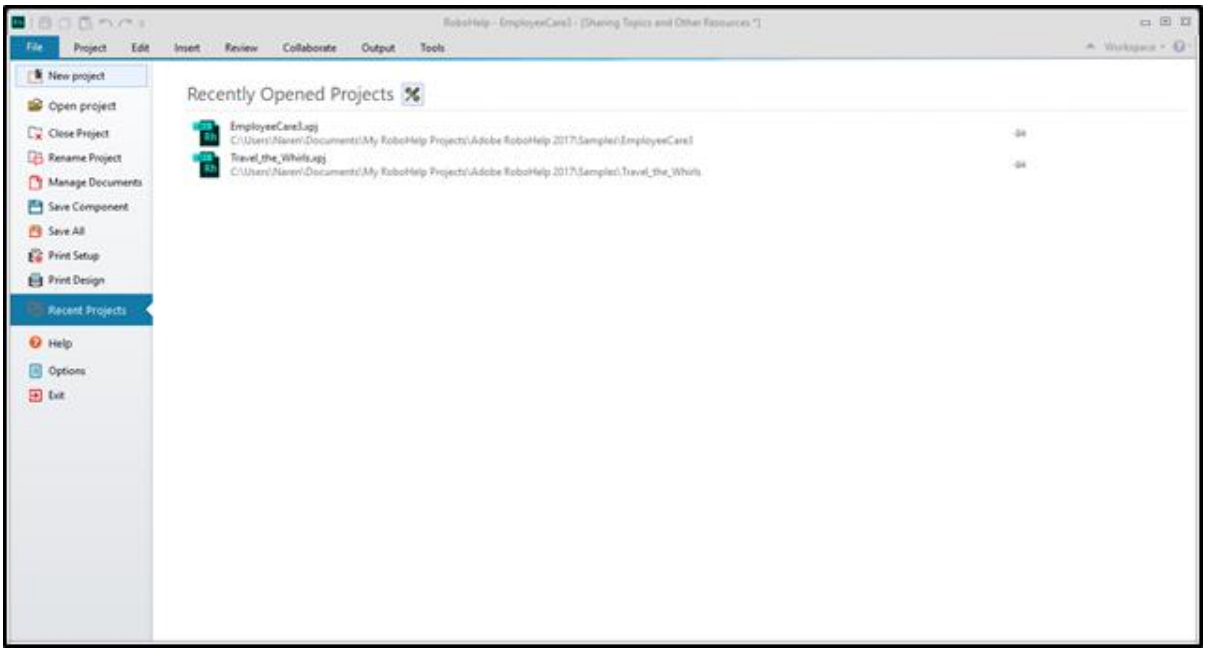
The ribbon comprises several tabs, which include –

- File
- Project
- Edit
- Insert
- Review
- Collaborate
- Output
- Tools

Let us understand each of these in detail.

File

Create new projects, open, save the existing project, view recent projects and change program settings.



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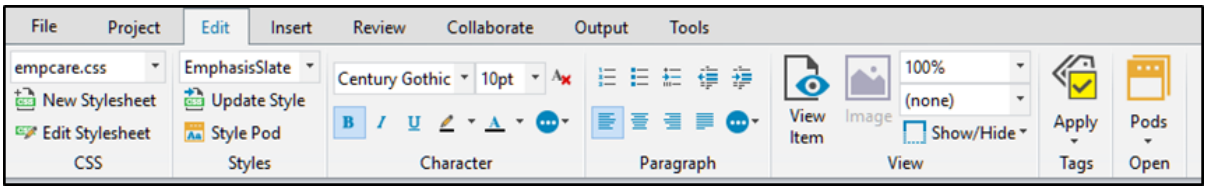
Project

Create, import, edit, and delete project components such as topics, snippets, tags, and variables. You can save the currently unsaved changes across the project.

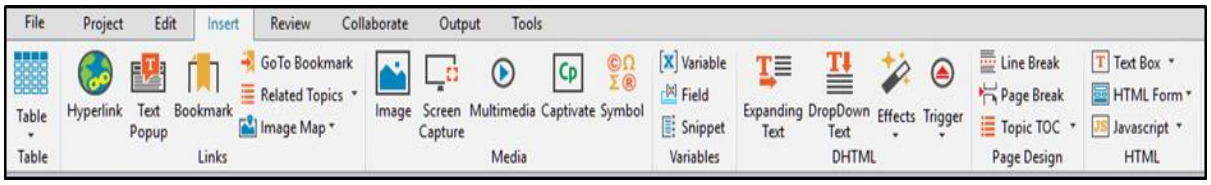
Edit

Creating and editing stylesheets, text formatting and content tagging.



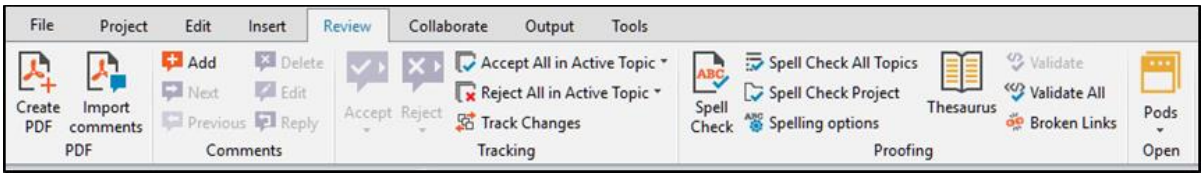
Insert

Insert objects such as tables, images, Adobe Captivate content and snippets.



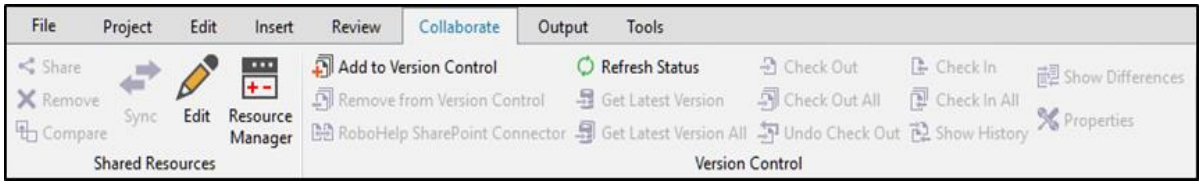
Review

Track changes, accept and reject changes in a document review.



Collaborate

Share project resources across users and enable version control.



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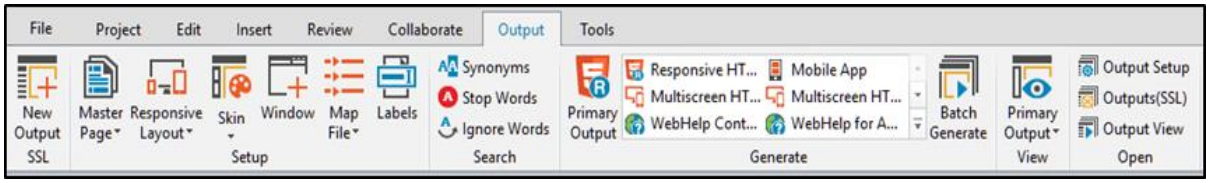
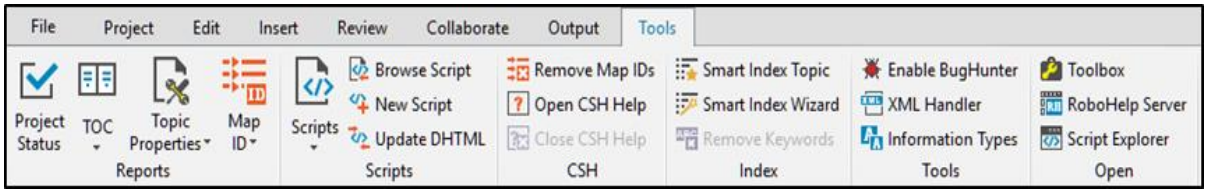
Output

Create, search, setup, generate, view and open RoboHelp outputs.



Tools

You can create and view reports. RoboHelp ships with a number of scripts, which you can use to perform certain commands. Select and execute scripts from the Scripts list in this tab.



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6. RoboHelp – Working with Pods

A pod is a floating or docked window of the workflow or associated functions organized in a logical manner. To open a pod, go to the Project tab, then in the Open section, click on the Pods icon to reveal a list of pods. Select a pod from the list. You can either dock the pod or keep it floating on your desktop. You can also auto-hide the pod or open it as a tabbed document.

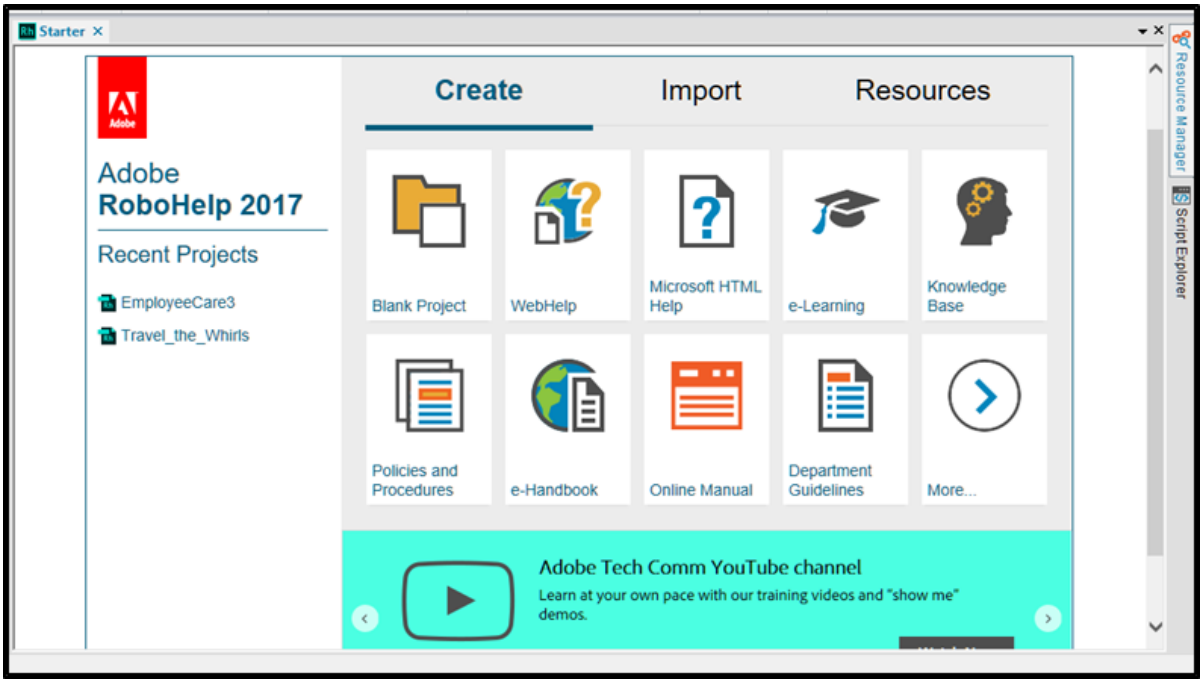
RoboHelp includes many types of pods. Some of them include –

- Starter Pod
- Project Manager Pod
- Output Setup Pod

Let us discuss each of these in detail.

Starter Pod

The Starter Pod usually appears as a tabbed document but just like any other pod, you can make it float or even dock it. It usually the starting point in the RoboHelp workflow.



The Starter Pod comprises of four sections, which are –

- **Recent Projects –** Shows a list of recently opened projects.
- **Create –** Lets you choose the type of help file you want to create.
- **Import –** Import content from Microsoft Word, Adobe FrameMaker, Adobe PDF files, HTML or other supported formats.
- **Resources –** Contains links to help resources, seminars and knowledge base articles to help you get the most out of RoboHelp.

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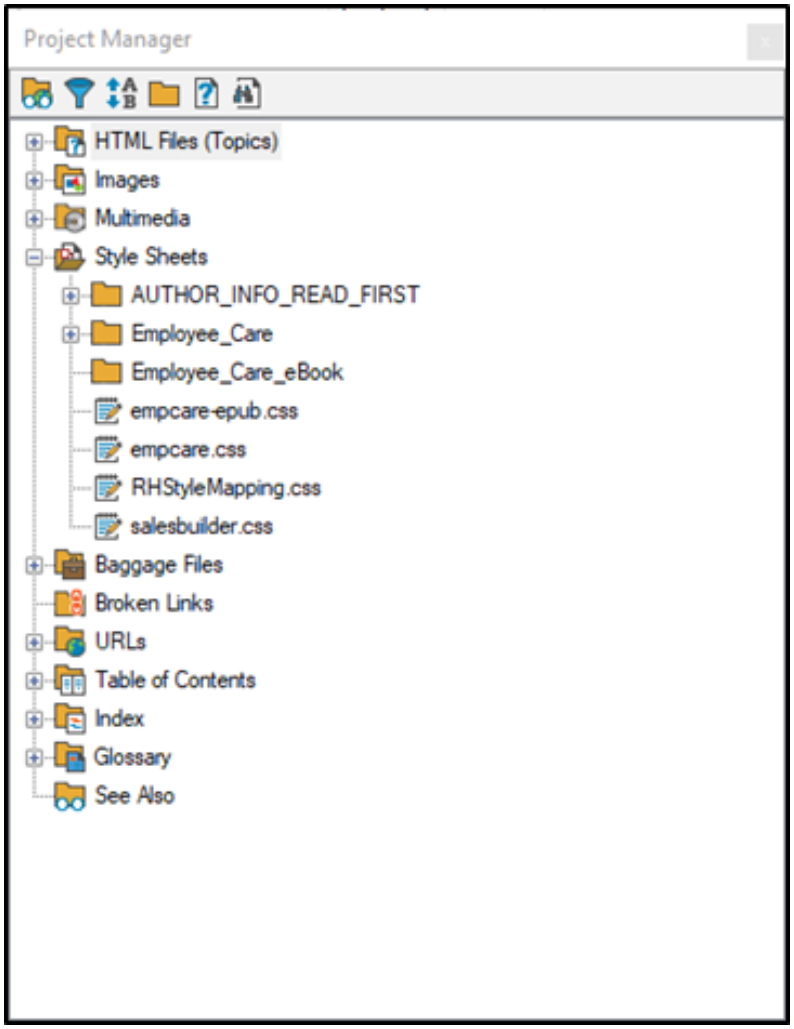
Project Manager Pod

The Project Manager pod contains all the various folders in which you store and edit your project files. The Project Manager pod has default folders for each content type.

For example, all images in the project are stored under the Images folder, videos and sounds are stored under the Multimedia folder, etc.



The Project Manager Pod also contains the **Baggage Files** folder, which contains the indirectly linked files that are part of the project. The baggage files might include –PDF files, PowerPoint presentations, etc. Double-clicking on files within the Baggage Files folder opens the file in its associated application.

Output Setup Pod

The Output Setup Pod helps you to view and modify the output of the content based on the targeted device. It contains a hierarchical organization of the different output components such as the Window, Master Pages, Skins, Device Profiles, Screen Layouts, etc.

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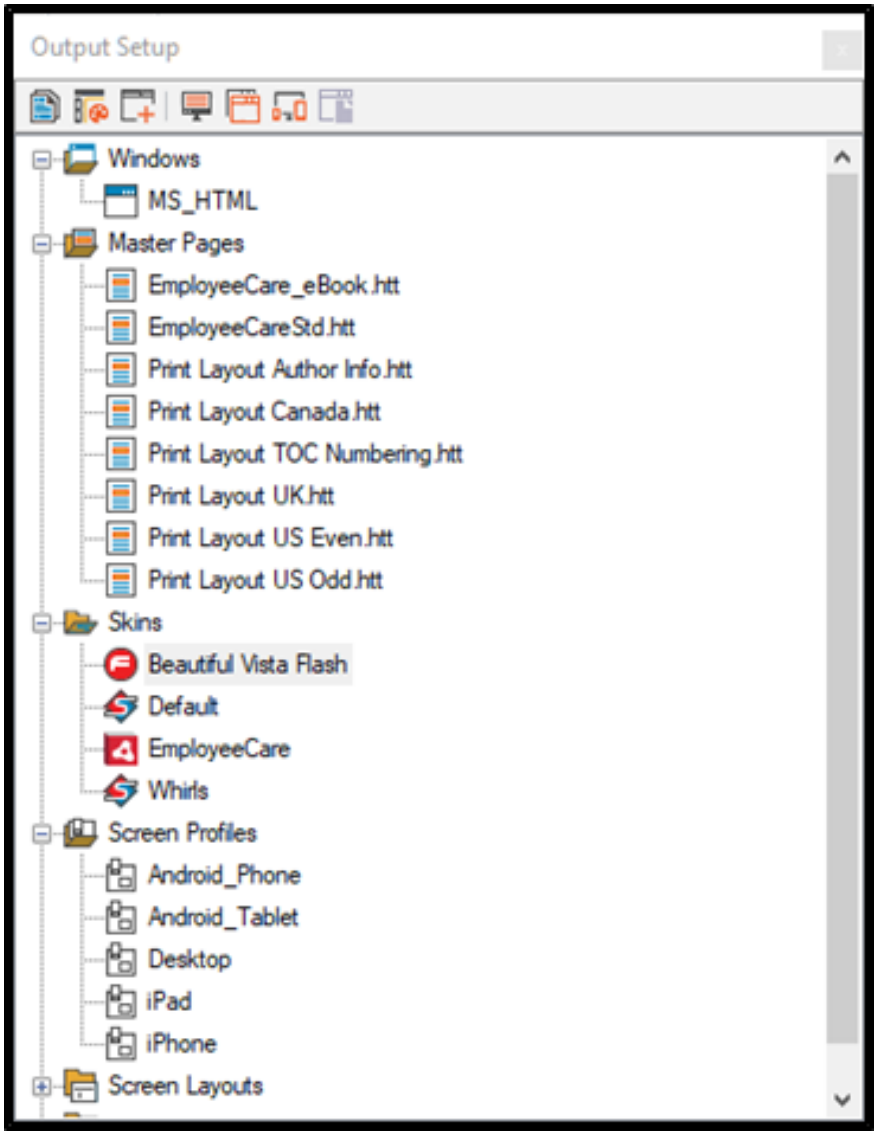

Right-click on any container to change its properties.

For example – If you want to alter the dimensions of the **MS_HTML** output window, right-click on the MS_HTML container in the Windows folder and select how you want the window to be displayed on the screen.

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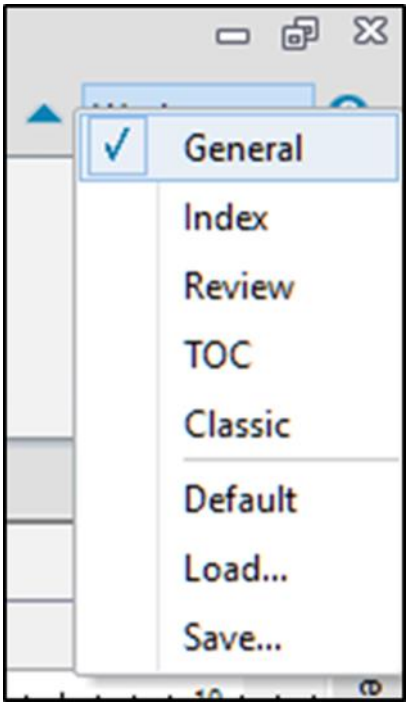
7. RoboHelp – Environments

The arrangement of workspace elements such windows, pods and other elements is called an environment. Environments can be customized as desired by the user. There can be specific arrangements of windows and pods, which can be saved as an environment.

Environments can then be recalled by selecting the environment from the **Workspace** menu on the upper right hand corner of the window. Environments are saved in an '.rhs file', which can be exchanged with other authors.

Creating and saving an environment

Arrange all the pods in the workspace. Click on the dropdown arrow next to the Workspace in the upper right hand corner of the RoboHelp window. Click on **Save...** and select a location and name for the workspace.



Loading a Saved Environment

Click on the dropdown arrow next to the Workspace in the upper right hand corner of the RoboHelp window and select **Load...**

Browse to the file location of the **.rhs** file and click on Open to load the environment.

Deleting an Environment

To delete an environment, navigate to the location on the disk, where the .rhs file was stored and simply delete the .rhs file pertaining to that environment.

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