



# An Introduction to Altium Designer

## Summary

Article  
AR0137 (v1.3) March 11, 2008

If you are ready to get productive with Altium Designer, then this is the right place to start. Read on to learn how and where to find the answers to your design questions, and how to get the most out of the vast pool of knowledge available for and within Altium Designer.

The Altium Designer software includes a selection of documents that will help you to understand the Altium Designer environment, find your way around the system, and learn the basics of working in the various editors. It also includes basic tutorials that quickly take you through the process of capturing simple, working projects.

As you read through various articles, keep in mind that they are just a small fraction of the total Altium Designer knowledge available to you. The articles are taken from the comprehensive online documentation library supplied as part of the Altium Designer installation, and accessible from within the Altium Designer system. Within this online library you'll find thousands of pages of additional information that cover all aspects of electronic product development with Altium Designer.

## Learn as you Work – the Knowledge Center Panel

The most efficient way to learn is to have the processes and features of the software explained to you as you explore and work with the environment. This is exactly what the Altium Designer **Knowledge Center** panel does. Display the **Knowledge Center** panel by clicking the **Help** button at the bottom right of the Altium Designer workspace. Keep this panel open as you work and it will automatically provide you with information on the command you are just about to click on, the dialog you just opened or the workspace panel you are operating in.

The Knowledge Center is your portal into the vast library of knowledge about Altium Designer available within the system. It provides you with access to all the information you need to learn and become productive with Altium Designer.

The top section of the panel dynamically updates as you use Altium Designer to provide context-sensitive information about the features and processes of the software you are currently interacting with. Where appropriate, you will be provided with links to more detailed information about the specific aspect of Altium Designer you are viewing.

The lower portion of the **Knowledge Center** panel is a navigation system that you can use to browse through the entire product knowledge. Here you can directly access the documentation library, containing large amounts of information. You can also access on-line demonstration videos – an exciting new approach to helping you learn about Altium Designer. New videos are continually being developed, so check regularly to catch up with the latest ones.

From the **Help** button at the bottom right of the Altium Designer workspace you can also activate a dynamic **Shortcuts** panel. Like the **Knowledge Center** panel, the **Shortcuts** panel is context-sensitive and gives you a comprehensive list of keyboard shortcuts that are available for the current editor or operation you are performing.

With the **Knowledge Center** and **Shortcuts** panels open as you work, you'll have immediate access to the information you need to quickly become productive with the Altium Designer environment.

## Finding Answers – How the Knowledge is Structured

The Altium Designer **Knowledge Center** panel (click the **Help** button at the bottom right of the Altium Designer workspace and select **Knowledge Center**) gives you access to the entire online documentation library supplied and installed with the product. Within the documentation library you'll find comprehensive information on the product, and the electronic development process.

The information is broadly divided into two categories – “applied” information and “reference” information. Applied information is written from your point of view – “how do I create a component?”; “how do I program my FPGA?”; “what do I need to know about projects?”. Reference information is written from the software’s point of view – this is what the Smart Paste command does; this is how a 3D body object is used; this is what a particular DelphiScript command does.

In general, applied information explains how you accomplish a particular design process or task within Altium Designer, and reference information details the operation of the commands and design objects available within the system. The combination of both types of information within the documentation library allows you to learn not only about the features of the product, but how to use the features to bring efficiency and productivity to the design process.

## ***An introduction to Altium Designer***

The documentation library is packaged into PDF files, ideal for on-screen reading and printing, that can be searched from within the **Knowledge Center** panel. We encourage you to browse through the topics within the documentation library to get an overview of the depth of information available.

Help is also available in virtually any dialog box. To access help for dialog box controls, click the ? at the top-right corner of the dialog, then click on the control to see any available help for that particular control.

## **Join the Altium Designer Community and Learn Even More**

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Regardless of your level of design experience or familiarity with software, there's always more to learn. One of the best ways to expand your knowledge is to interact with other designers, learning from their experiences and sharing your expertise with them. Altium is dedicated to fostering an active and productive Altium Designer community so that all Altium customers can get the most from their software.

Visit the Altium website at [www.altium.com](http://www.altium.com) and look for the **Community** pages. Here you can access the vast array of short questions and answers in the Knowledge Base, find out about accredited training programs, sign up to an Altium-hosted user forum, and much more.

The Altium Designer user forum is a must for all Altium Designer customers. It is active 24 hours a day, and Altium technical staff, developers and application engineers contribute to the discussion threads along side customers. Here you can get a quick answer to a specific problem, or join in a discussion about hot industry topics with your peers. If you're ever stuck on a problem and think "Surely someone else must have solved this...", you're probably right. And the answer could well be found on the forum or within the Knowledge Base.

Altium's web-based community resources complement the wealth of product knowledge available within the software, and ensure that you have all the backup you need to be successful in electronic product development with Altium Designer.

## Revision History

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| Date        | Version No. | Revision  |
|-------------|-------------|---|
| 21-Dec-2007 | 1.1         | Minor update to remove references to printed books and add reference to dialog box help. Updated for 6.9. |
| 11-Feb-2008 | 1.2         | Component body references changed to 3D body.   |
| 11-Mar-2008 | 1.3         | Converted to A4.  |

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