

August, 2005

Advisor Answers

Colors in the Property Sheet

VFP 9

Q: I notice that in VFP 9, there are a bunch of different colors in the Property Sheet. What are they? Can I control them?

A: The VFP team put a lot of work into improving the Property Sheet (formally called the "Properties Window") in VFP 9. The biggest change is the addition of MemberData with its ability to specify custom property editors. (See my article in the December, 2004 FoxPro Advisor as well as Pamela's answers in the November, 2004 and February, 2005 issues for details on these changes.) In addition, however, there are a number of cosmetic changes that make working in the Property Sheet easier than ever.

The Property Sheet has always used visual characteristics to provide information. In VFP 7 and earlier, read-only properties and methods are shown in italics while properties and methods changed in the current class or form are shown in bold. VFP 8 continues that practice, but in addition, for ActiveX controls, properties and methods belonging to the ActiveX control itself are shown in blue. You can change the color for ActiveX PEMs by right-clicking on the Property Sheet and choosing ActiveX Color.

VFP 9 does much more with color than its predecessors. In addition to specifying a color for PEMs of ActiveX controls, you can also distinguish PEMs added at the current level from those added higher in the class hierarchy, and differentiate properties changed at this level from those set elsewhere. Table 1 shows the choices. The first four are listed in the Property Sheet's shortcut menu; you can specify the colors you want. The Default group is always shown in the font color for the Window setting of your Windows appearance scheme (generally, black).

Table 1. Colorful Property Sheet—You can have up to five different colors in VFP 9's Property Sheet.

Color group	Includes
ActiveX Color	PEMs of any ActiveX control.

Non-Default Properties Color	PEMs set at the current level of the class hierarchy.
Custom Properties Color	PEMs added at any level other than the current level of the class hierarchy.
Instance Properties Color	PEMs added at the current level of the class hierarchy.
Default	All other PEMs, that is, built-in PEMs not set at this level of the class hierarchy.

You may have noticed that the specified color groups are not mutually exclusive, that is, some PEMs may fit more than one group. VFP 9 uses the following order to decide what color to use for a given PEM:

- All PEMs added at the current level of the class hierarchy use the Instance Properties Color, whether or not they've been changed in the Property Sheet.
- All other PEMs changed at the current level use the Non-Default Properties Color, whether they're built-in or inherited. This includes PEMs of ActiveX controls.
- All custom PEMs inherited from the parent class and not changed at this level use the Custom Properties Color, including PEMs of ActiveX controls.
- All PEMs of ActiveX controls not changed at any level in the class hierarchy use the ActiveX Color.
- All remaining PEMs use the Default color.

To change any of the colors other than the Default, use the shortcut menu for the Property Sheet. (You don't have to use different colors for each of the five groups. If you find that much color distracting, choose the same color for multiple groups.) To open the shortcut menu, right-click above or below the pageframe that makes up the bulk of the property sheet, as in Figure 3.

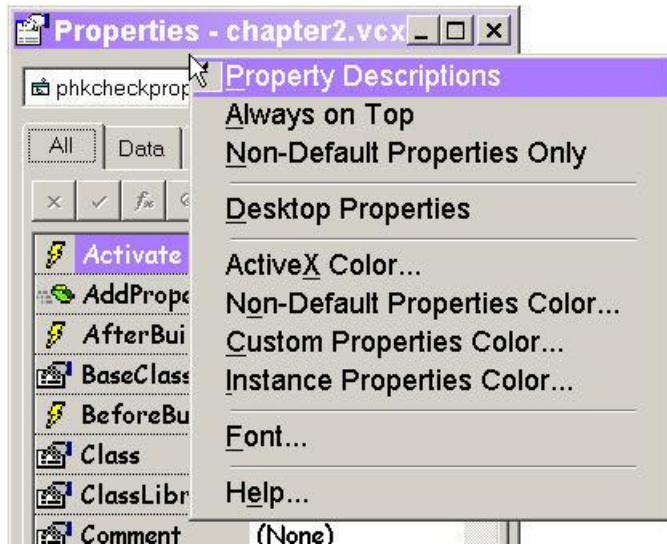


Figure 3. Shortcut menu—To access the Property Sheet's shortcut menu, click above or below the big pageframe.

VFP 9 also introduces two other appearance-related changes in the Property Sheet. First, as you can see in Figure 3, each PEM has an icon indicating whether it's a property, an event, or a method.

In addition, you can choose the font and size used in the Property Sheet. In earlier versions, the Property Sheet's shortcut menu lets you choose between Small Font, Medium Font and Large Font. VFP 9 offers a Font... choice instead; choosing it opens the Font Picker. You can choose any font and size you want. (The figure shows 12-point Comic Sans.)

You can also choose Bold and/or Italic. When you choose either one, you change the role of that characteristic in the Property Sheet. As noted above, italic generally indicates a read-only PEM; when you choose an italic font for the Property Sheet, read-only is indicated by the absence of italics. Similarly, bold normally indicates a changed property; when the chosen font includes bold, changes are shown by regular text.

All in all, the VFP 9 changes make it easier to see what's going on in the Property Sheet at a glance. Experiment to find the settings that work for you.

–Tamar