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Advisor Answers

Dockable System Windows

VFP 7.0

Q: I've just upgraded to VFP 7 and the Command Window is driving me crazy. Instead of going behind the windows I'm working with, it insists on staying on top. Am I stuck with this behavior?

–Name withheld by request

A: No, you're not. The short answer to your question is to right-click on the Command Window's title bar and uncheck "Dockable" (see Figure 1). In VFP 7, by default, the Command Window can be docked on any side of the main VFP window. Undocked dockable windows are "always on top."
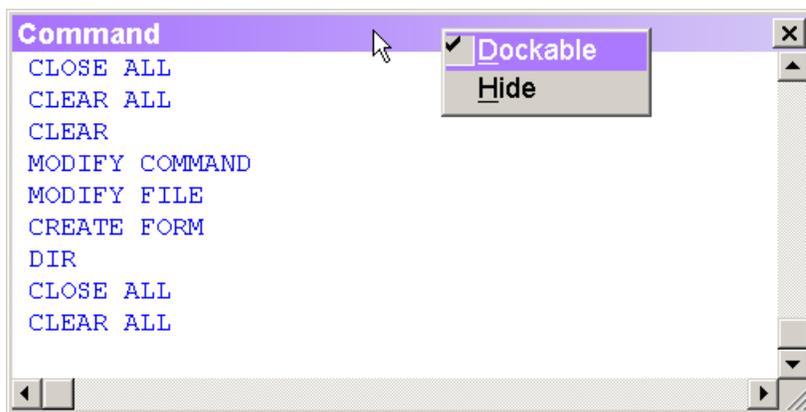
Figure 1. Dockable Command Window–In VFP 7, the Command Window and a number of other windows are dockable. Right-click on the title bar to turn this characteristic off.

A number of other windows are dockable in VFP 7, as well. The list includes the Data Session window, the Property Sheet, and the new Document View window that provides a quick way to move around your code. In addition, when the Debugger is set to the FoxPro frame, all the individual Debugger windows are dockable.

When a window is dockable, you can do a variety of things with it. As you'd expect, you can dock it to the top, bottom, or either side of the main VFP window. Figure 2 shows the Command Window docked at the bottom.
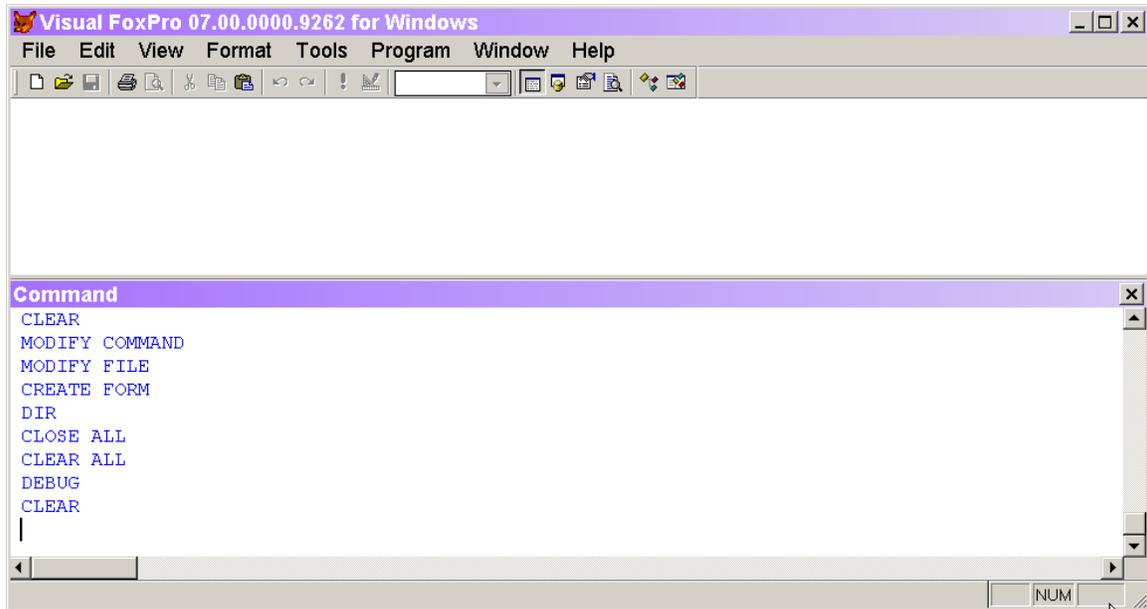
Figure 2 Docked window – The Command Window and the other dockable windows can be docked at any edge of the VFP window.

Dockable windows are not confined to the main VFP window. When VFP is not maximized, you can drag a dockable window completely or partially outside VFP.

VFP 7 also offers two special kinds of docking: linked docking and tabbed docking. With linked docking, two or more windows are consolidated into a single window. Figure 3 shows the Command and Data Session windows combined through linked docking. Note that there's a window surrounding the two linked windows. That window can also be docked, taking the contained windows with it.
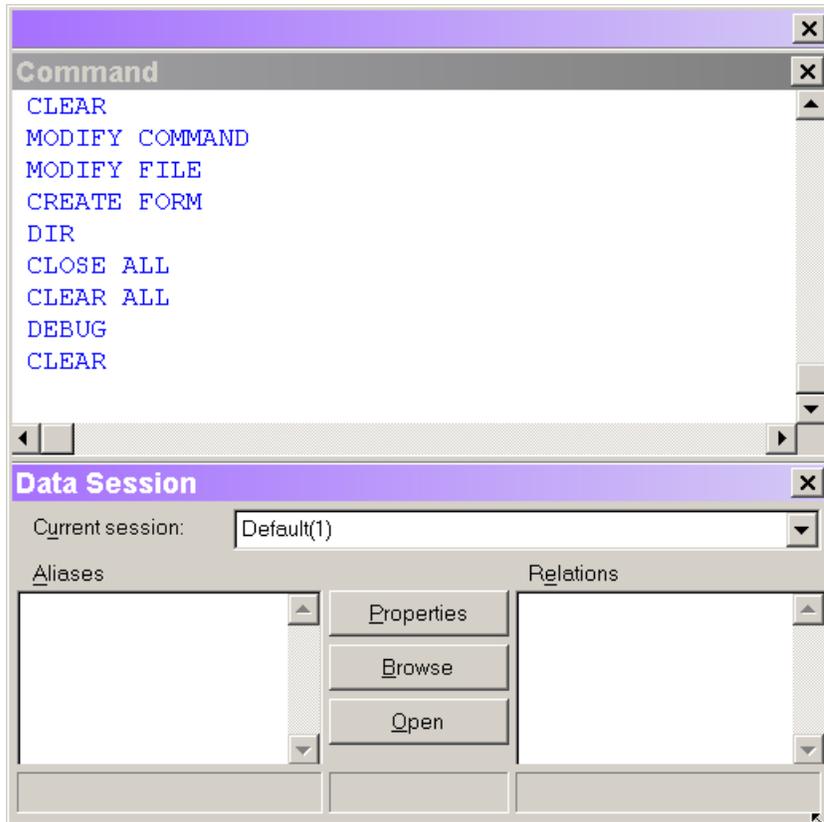
Figure 3. Linked docking–Dockable windows can be joined together to form a single dockable window.

To link two windows, drag one slowly over the other until a light line crosses the target window, indicating that docking is available. To separate link docked windows, drag either one out of the container window.

VFP 7 also offers tabbed docking, in which several windows occupy the same space and offer tabs to choose the one to work with. Figure 4 shows the Command and Data Session windows tab docked.
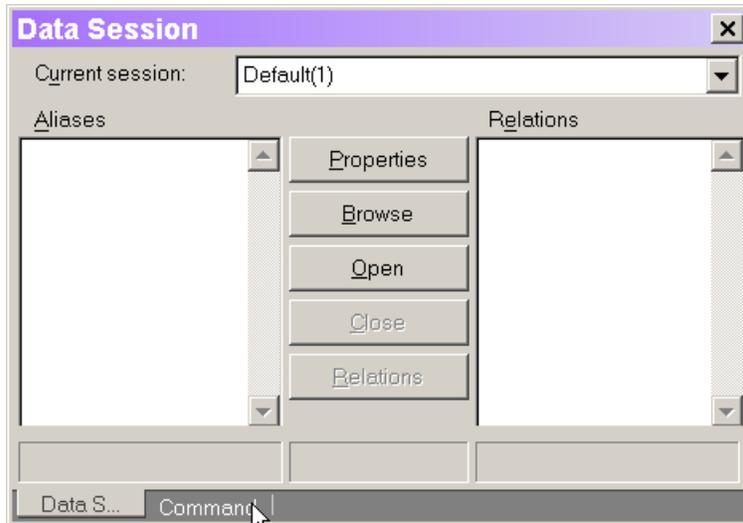
Figure 4. Tabbed docking – With this set-up, windows occupy the same space and you click on the tab to choose which is on top.

To tab dock windows, drag the title bar of one onto the title bar of the other. Light lines appear in the tab area and when you release, the windows are tab docked. To separate tab docked windows, drag the window out by its tab.

You can link or tab dock more than two windows so, for example, you could have the Command, Data Session, Property and Document View windows in a single tabbed group.

Be aware that both linked docking and tabbed docking change the size of the windows; when you undock them, they retain the new size.

Unfortunately, VFP doesn't do a very good job of remembering the way you set things up. When you reopen VFP, only the Command Window is opened, even if you left any of the other dockable windows open. If a window was docked to the VFP border, when you open it, it returns to that position. That's good.

However, when several windows were last link docked or tab docked, VFP's behavior when you reopen them is unpredictable. Sometimes, they reopen docked in the same way, but my experience is that more often, they reopen undocked. The order in which you open the windows appears to make a difference, but I can't find any pattern.

While it's easy to just set things the way you've always done them, you may want to experiment with a variety of the new options to find the one that makes you most productive.

–Tamar