

# **USERS DO READ MANUALS!**

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# 1

# PRESENTATION

# AND SCOPE

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## ABOUT ME

I have been contributing to KDE in various ways for around ten years. It all started when I got a RedHat CD from a magazine which I installed and quickly I chose KDE as my desktop. I then started to translate from English to French and to develop small programs in C++. The KDE-Edu project was then initiated with the aim of being a collection of Free Educational tools based on KDE. I am devoting most of my contribution to KDE-Edu but I do have other interests such as Plasma, helping new people in KDE (I develop a project template generator to easily start programming, called KAppTemplate). Writing documentation and improving the way users can get help is another of my preferred area within KDE!

A mum at home, I currently live in France near Toulouse with my husband and five children. I like sport, both in front of the TV and by going out jogging. I also enjoy listening to music, preferably progressive metal and playing the guitar when I have time!

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## SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Users seeking help within KDE can find it in various places: on the graphical interface of the program they are using, in the application user manual and on the KDE wikis. This document will review all these different help ways and analyse in what situations they can be used. How you can contribute to improve those various tools will also be addressed and I hope this will give you the opportunity to start contributing to KDE!

# 2

# HELP!

I will start by proposing a few keywords to try to define the scope and meaning of help within KDE. Generally help can be defined as being a form of user assistance which is part of the whole user experience. It is therefore an area that is utterly important for the user and on Linux systems that can be provided by distributions as well. Traditional user assistance includes tutorials, wizards, user manual and user interface text. We will see that KDE is not different and provides all those forms of help to its users.

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## KEYWORDS

- **Discovery:** the user would like to know what KDE is and if it is suitable for him.
- **Information:** the user seeks help about a specific area within KDE (“How do I print a document in KDE?”) or about an application. He has already an idea of what is KDE.
- **Precise question:** the user has a question for which he would like an **answer**.
- **Trouble:** the software is not behaving as expected and the user feels hopeless, he is seeking quick and immediate help.

## HELP: WHERE?

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### FOR USERS

There are several types of help available for the user:

- quick online help on graphical elements on a user interface (tooltips and “What's This?”)
- the application User Manual provides a comprehensive guide and an overview of the application features
- the [Userbase wiki](#) complements the user manuals and offers tips and tutorials for some applications as well as general overviews of specific KDE projects.
- in some application, the “Tip of the Day” window can provide the user some elements of use of the application that he did not know.
- the [KDE forum](#) also allows users to ask questions and seek answers.
- a large range of [mailing lists](#) provides a way of easy communication, the [kde](#) one being specialised in answering user's questions.
- IRC on the Freenode network has several channels targeted to help users such as #kde and channels dedicated to specific projects.

### FOR DEVELOPERS

Some help is also targeted to developers:

- The [KDE Techbase](#) wiki contains all documentation specific to development, from setting up a KDE development environment to release schedules and feature plans as well as tutorials for beginners.
- The [KDE Community](#) wiki is a tool for the community. It provides a place for sharing information within the community and preparing events and coordinating community teams.
- The [KDE API website](#) is an online website listing the KDE classes API.

- [LXR](#) is a code searching tool which shows you usage of methods for example in KDE code.
- Specific mailing lists help developers seeking their peers' help, the most used being [kde-devel](#) and kde-core-devel for libraries developers (as well as projects mailing lists).
- IRC on the Freenode network has several channels targeted to developers such as `#kde-devel`

In KDE source code everything is written in English, strings and documentation. Since KDE is used all over the world, the various translation teams will work on translating all those strings into their language, more than sixty five are currently supported. All this help is thus being translated in those languages.

# 3

## GUI HELP

### ELEMENTS

The user interface is the space where interaction between humans and machines occurs. The Graphical User Interface (GUI) is a human-computer interface that allows the user to use a computer by providing windows, icons and menus, which can be manipulated by a mouse and by the keyboard. GUIs make computer operations more intuitive for the user.

KDE aims to offer the user an elegant and intuitive GUI. Part of the user experience, the KDE GUI also provides online help in two forms: tooltips and “What's This?”. They are associated with graphical elements in an interface or a dialog, those elements are called widgets : they can be check boxes, drop down boxes, buttons,... and they require a user interaction. Tooltips and “What's This?” should help the user figure out the exact action he can perform. They should answer immediate questions a user can have about an interface element when he does not understand what action to perform.

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#### TOOLTIPS

Tooltips are small informal windows also called “balloons” (introduced by Apple Computer in their 1991 release of System 7.0., the

name referred to the way the help text was displayed, in "balloons", like those containing the words in a comic strip). They provide quick help in the form of a few words, without a sentence. This tip is a small text reminding the user the function of the widget, it provides a simple explanation about an item on your screen. It is used in conjunction with your mouse pointer.

The user hovers the mouse cursor over a graphical element and the tooltip appears without any further action: it is a small box with a brief text inside.

Check this if you do not want to discover each instance of the same letter.

Good tooltips are short, very precise and do not need to be a sentence. They should provide immediate and quick help about a graphical element without the need for the user to make his way through the User Manual.

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## “WHAT'S THIS”

In some situations, it might be desirable to give more information about a graphical element than can be given by a tooltip.

“What's This?” provides a description of any widget in a graphical interface. The KDE “What's This?” way consists of a single window with a simple explanatory text explaining the interface element usage.

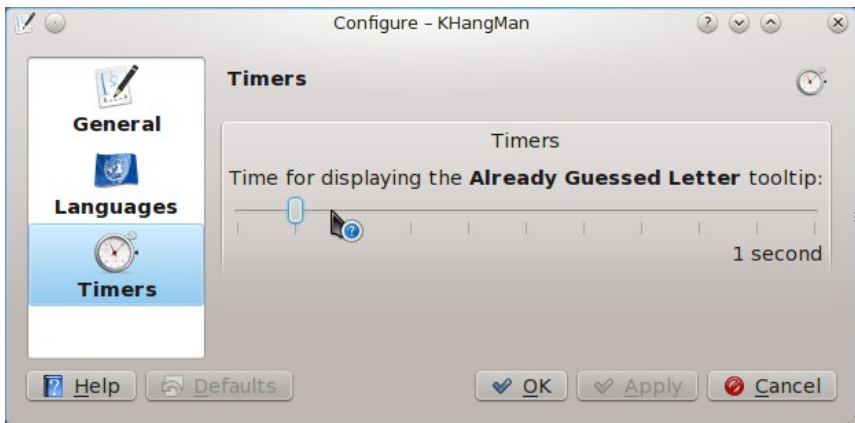
The text is more detailed than in tooltips and can be rich text (supporting bold, italic, URLs and even pictures). The explanation is focused on the widget the user seeks help for. The widget can be a check box, a button, a drop-down box,...

The main benefit for the user is that he does not have to leave the interface in order to get help. The text should be easy to understand without technical words. Naming the interface element also should be avoided. The “what's This?” text should describe what the user will accomplish by using the widget and explain the result of the user's action.

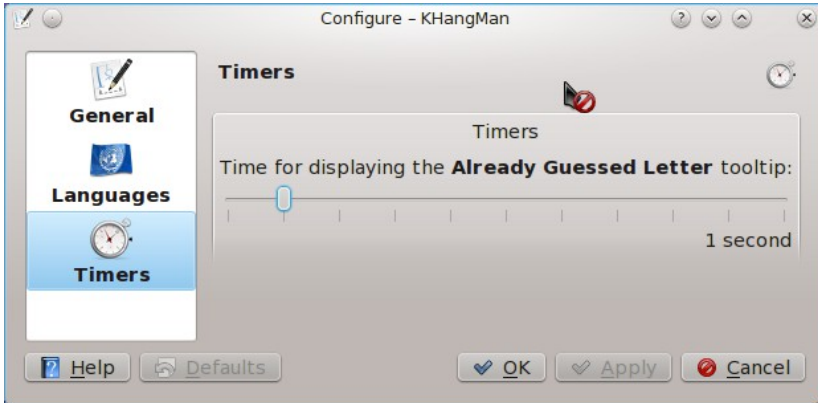
If you check this box, only the first letter will be written if the letter is found in several places in the word. Then you have to rechoose the same letter, to replace the second instance in the word until there are no more instances of this letter. For example, the word to guess is "potato". If this option is unchecked, when you try "o", the two instances of "o" in the word will be discovered at the same time. If this is checked, you will need to try "o" twice.

Default is that for one letter typed, all instances of that letter in the word are discovered.

There are several ways for the user to access “What's This?” dialogs in KDE. The shortcut Shift + F1 makes your mouse cursor change in this mode then simply click with your mouse on a widget. Either the cursor will change with a question mark next to it



and that means there is “What's This?” available or it gets an interdiction symbol as shown below



and in this case there is no “What's This?” help.

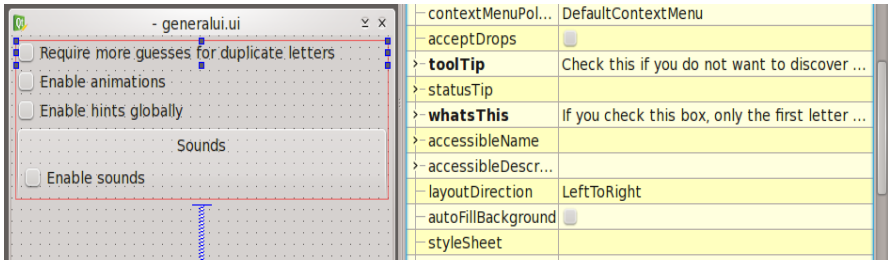
You can also, in any KDE dialog, click the ? Button in the menubar on the right corner of the default decoration (see on screenshot above, the fourth button from the right to the left), then click on the widget you want help for.

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

It is very easy to add tooltips and “What's This?” help in KDE graphical interfaces. If the interface has been designed using Qt Designer there will be a .ui file in the code. You can simply open this file in Designer and for each widget you have a Property dialog.

The classes we use in KDE are Qt classes: QTooltip and QWhatsThis. Qt Designer integrates them automatically and you can fill the corresponding properties as shown on the screenshot below: the widget is highlighted on the form on the left and on the right, the property windows for the screenshot is open. The two relevant fields are **tooltip** where you will write the tooltip and **whatsThis** where you write your What's This text. You can open an edit window with a rich text menu by clicking in the ... small icon. They will be picked without any addition by the translation script.



You can also directly use `QToolTip` and `QWhatsThis` in your code: to add a tooltip to a widget or an action, you will call `QWidget::setToolTip()` or `QAction::setToolTip` and to add “What’s This?” text to a widget or an action you simply call `QWidget::setWhatsThis()` or `QAction::setWhatsThis()`. Do not forget then to wrap then in a `i18n()` function to be picked for translation.

Tooltips answer quickly what the graphical element is about and “What’s This?” answers to “Do I need to use this element? If so, how? What do I put in it?”.

As you can see you can easily add this online help in any dialog which is missing it! So whenever you can contribute to this small help, please do so!

# 4

# USER MANUALS

Most KDE applications come with a comprehensive User Manual which you can reach from various ways:

- by pressing the F1 key from inside the application
- in the menubar by using the Help menu then the first item is the Handbook
- by browsing it directly in KHelpCenter which is the application dedicated to display all user manuals within KDE
- by using the help kioslave in Konqueror: in Konqueror location bar simply type help:<application\_name>
- by going online to the KDE documentation website <http://docs.kde.org> and browsing either HTML or PDF docs for each application.

The User Manual consists of text and of screenshots. User Manuals in KDE are consistent and follow more or less all the same plan: an introduction, how to use the application, a list of the features, the various possible settings, and a list of all the commands. Credits end the manual. Additional sections are added depending on the complexity of the application.

A User Manual should help the user by providing answers for all his questions. It should cover any usage of the application from basic to more advanced use. It should answer the question “What can I do with this application?”.

Users Manuals are written in English US and then translated in more than sixty five languages and ship in the KDE language packages.

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## HOW THEY ARE MADE

User Manuals are written in DocBook which is a subset of SGML (an XML markup language). That looks scary but it is not! The markup is somewhat intuitive and quite easy to understand and to remember. So fear not!

You are not required to learn it though and you can perfectly contribute by sending us simple text snippets that we will convert and include in the documentation. I will cover this in the “How You can Help” section.

A simple documentation folder for an application user manual consists in a text file named `index.docbook` and several screenshots. This is then transformed to HTML in order to be displayed in KDE Help Center, the application which shows the manuals and other help in a nice way.

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## THE DOCBOOK FILE

There is no specific editor for DocBook so you can use your preferred one. Kate for example offers some nice syntax highlighting which helps working with tags.

A DocBook file, being XML, consists on plain text surrounded by tags, similar to HTML. An extract of such a file might look like that:

`<para>`

```
By default, after the first installation of &khangman;, only English and your
&kde; language if it is one of the above and if you have the corresponding
kde-i18n package will be installed. For example if you are a Danish user and if
you have &kde; in Danish, in <guimenu>Language</guimenu> you will see two
items: English and Danish and Danish will be the default. </para>
```

`<para>`

```
You can still play &khangman; in other languages. It is very easy to add new
data in &khangman;. All you need is a working Internet connection. You click on
the <guimenu>Game</guimenu> menu and then on <guimenuitem>Get Words in New
Language...</guimenuitem>. A dialog appears, similar to this one:
```

`</para>`

`<para>` and `</para>` are marking tags and the text inside them will consist in a paragraph in the generated document.

KDE does not use all DocBook tags but only some of them.

A template named `template.docbook` can be found in KDE source in `kdelibs/kdoctools`. It will guide you in filling the various parts with lots of comments to explain the DocBook tags. KDE DocBook reference can be found here: [the KDE DocBook Authors Guide](#)

An exhaustive and complete pure DocBook manual can be found online on [the docbook website](#).

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## SCREENSHOTS

Screenshots included in documentation make the manual more lively and easier to understand. Screenshots should be taken in default KDE theme and preferably without windows decorations. They should be saved as PNG or JPEG in the same folder than the DocBook files.

The detailed instruction son how to make screenshots for documentation are explained [on this page](#).

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## GENERATING THE HTML

KHelpCenter only displays HTML. The DocBook file is usually converted to HTML through compilation and everything is installed in order for KHelpCenter to display it.

For more advanced usage, if you want to check a DocBook file to HTML by yourself, the magic is done by a KDE script called `meinproc`.

The complete process is explained on [this webpage](#).

All user manuals are available from your distribution, each manual being shipped with its application. Additionally all KDE manuals are also available online, in HTML and PDF formats from [the KDE Documentation website](#), both for the current stable release (4.6 at the time of writing) and for the version in development (4.7).

## KHELP CENTER

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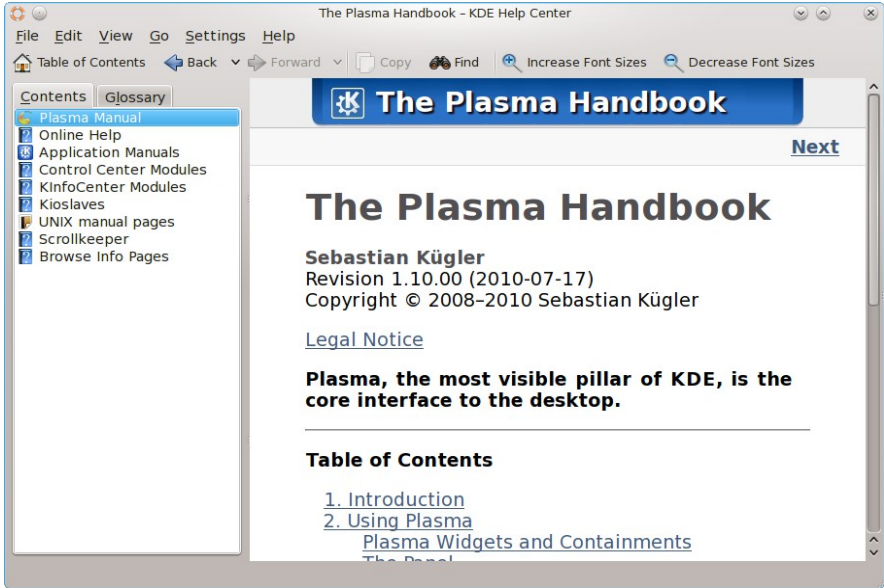
One of the best ways to learn how to use KDE affectively is through its help documentation application named KHelpCenter. KHelpCenter centralises all the available help about KDE and even about UNIX.

You can open it by typing “help” or “khelpcenter” in the command line KRunner (Alt + F2). Typing this in the KDE menu search field will also show you the Help icon and clicking it will open the help center. In any KDE application, the Help menu first entry will open KHelpCenter and display the application user manual.

KHelpCenter displays several sort of documentation: on the left there is a panel with the contents listed and the documentation itself is displayed on the right, in a browser-like window:

- how to use KDE
- how to use each application
- links to online help (requires an internet connection)
- UNIX info and man pages.

A glossary will guide you through technical technologic words and various terminology, it displays entries either alphabetically or by topic. You can navigate down the tree views to the left and items you select will be displayed on the right.



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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

The KDE Doc Team is looking for people! The requirements to contribute to documentation are not high and the main one is to know the application you want to write/update doc for quite well. There is no other requirement except enthusiasm! You need to be able to explain in details to other people how the application works and what it does.

Other than knowing the application well, having a good English level helps as everything is written in English. If you are unsure of your English, the Doc Team will find someone to review your text.

And good news: you do not need to submit DocBook if you do not feel like getting into this. Text only is perfectly OK and we will transform it to DocBook without any problem.

A list of health status of the docs can be found there: [http://techbase.kde.org/Projects/Documentation/KDE4\\_\(health\\_table\)](http://techbase.kde.org/Projects/Documentation/KDE4_(health_table)) You can see in one glance the status of KDE docs and the ones that needs work.

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USERS DO READ MANUALS!

[The KDE Documentation Primer](#) is a complete guide to help you get started in writing or improving your first user manual.

The mailing list where you can send your contribution or ask for any doc related question is the [kde-doc-english mailing list](#).

# 5

## WIKIS

A wiki is a website that allows the creation and editing of web pages in a collaborative way. “Wiki” is a Hawaiian word for “fast” and the first wiki was installed online in March 1995. You need an internet connection in order to be able to contribute to a wiki. The web pages are usually interlinked to allow an easy navigation. Editing is done in a web browser usually with a WYSIWYG editor. The generated text uses a simplified markup language. It does not require any technical skills. A wiki encourages democratic use of the Web.

A wikis is a collaborative tool and it allows for a large number of people to contribute to. It also allows for people to keep it up-to-date and to improve it. It reduces repetitive duplicate input. It is the sum of all those small contributions that gives the power of a wiki. An article or a webpage on a wiki does not have a single author: it has tens or even hundreds.

A wiki keeps track of history so should you make a mistake, it is very easy to reverse it.

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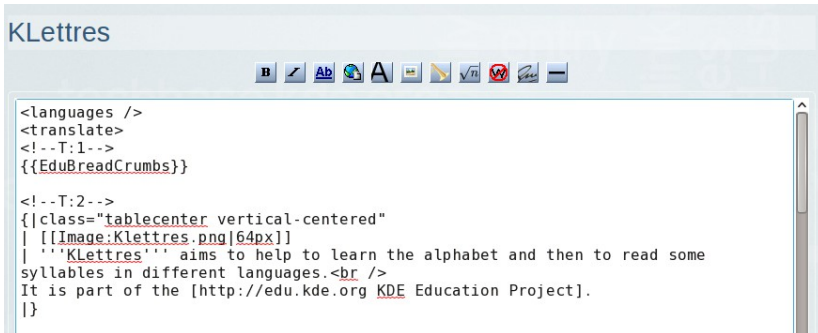
### GENERAL OVERVIEW

Any user can edit a wiki and change its content. You can do so in a plain web browser, you do not need any specific program. You display the wiki url in your favourite browser and then you are asked to log in. You can now use [OpenID](#) in order to log in all KDE wikis

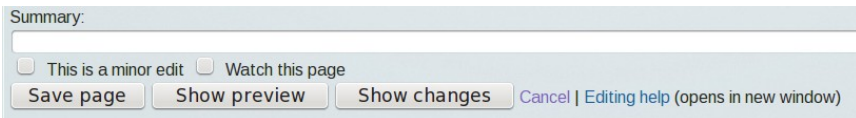
which does not make you register yet another username + password. Once you are logged in, you will see a small icon on top right with a pen.



Click this icon and you will enter the editor mode which has buttons to format text easily.



Once you have made your changes, you can either save the page directly, show a preview which will display the page content formatted accordingly, you can also cancel your edition and call the wiki help.



A “Summary” line invites you to write the purpose of your editing. When you're done, the contribution is displayed on the wiki. Your ID stays in the page history and would you sabotage the pages you would be banned from editing. On the top right, the most right icon displays the history of the page changes.

The Help page explains in details how to format your text and additionally you can find help on IRC #kde-www on the Freenode network.

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## USERBASE

UserBase targets users, it is a repository for all information users might need about KDE. It was started in the summer of 2008 as a showcase for KDE applications, especially as static websites were not up-to-date. The idea of a place which can always be improved and kept up-to-date seems quite better than existing static websites. It has currently 3094 pages which is quite a lot compared to TechBase which has only 1958.

We'll see what you can expect to find on UserBase and how you can contribute to it.

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## OVERVIEW

UserBase is divided into four main sections:

- an introduction about KDE in general. For users who do not know it at all or seeking precisions, it presents an overview of the project, explains Plasma and points to some LiveCD
- the Getting Help section presents the user with all possible ways to seek help: mailing lists, forum, IRC, websites and a troubleshooting page.
- the bulk of the wiki consists on pages about all KDE official applications which is a whole catalogue of all applications. Each application has a webpage with screenshots and basic information on what you can expect from it. Those webpages replace more and more static websites.
- another big section presents you with tutorials and tips which are very precise and focused ways to do a specific task with a specific application. This section also addresses most asked questions about the transition from KDE 3 to KDE 4 for example.

UserBase pools together the knowledge of a group of people (any KDE user has the knowledge to add something) to create the best possible resource.

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## DocBook AND UserBase

One of the ideas we have is to maintain the documentation on the UserBase wiki and to then convert it to DocBook. In an ideal world, it would always stay up-to-date. However it is quite difficult first because we need to have good and finished docs on the wikis and second because it then requires [a script](#) to transform the wiki text to docbook. This is a work in progress and will probably happen in the future.

Currently UserBase adds documentation and tutorials for the user and complements the application manuals.

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## CONTRIBUTING TO UserBase

You can find tasks on [this page](#) as well as tips if you want to start contributing to UserBase. It is probably the smallest and easiest contribution, ranging from typo correction and small improvements to writing full pages. You can start with modifying and improving an existing wiki page: [a tutorial](#) will guide you through this first contribution.

Your contribution (the text you write or the screenshots you upload for example) will be under the [GNU Free Document licence and Creative Commons](#).

You can be famous: there's a [Top 10 contributors page](#) with weekly statistics!

The aim is to provide users with a complete, precise and up-to-date reference regarding KDE software.

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## TECHBASE

[The KDE TechBase](#) wiki is oriented for developers: all the articles from the former static website <http://developer.kde.org> were moved and updated to reside in this new wiki.

TechBase targets technical materials for programmers, artists, translators,... It also provides lots of information for newcomers: how to

set up a development environment, how to get a GIT/svn account, ... You will also find KDE release schedules and feature plans on this wiki.

A large number of tutorials help you getting started in programming.

TechBase is more difficult to maintain and keep up-to-date than UserBase as its content is quite specialised and only people with the specific knowledge can contribute to the wiki. The speed which the KDE development pace is moving ahead also makes it quickly out-of-date, we can see that with the move of KDE code source from svn to GIT and the difficulty to keep the “How to build a development environment” pages up-to-date. If you follow some tutorials or guides from TechBase and find things that are not accurate, I strongly encourage you to correct them immediately. Again, all those contributions, even very small, when added gives developers a large, free and reliable reference.

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## COMMUNITY WIKI

[The KDE Community](#) wiki helps KDE contributors to organise themselves and to manage their projects. A KDE project such as Plasma or KDE-Edu wants to organise a sprint? Community is the place where they can collect information about who wants to participate, set up an agenda, give links to proposed locations and so on. Logs of online meetings are available.

There are pages for KDE projects and proposals of tasks opened for any people who want to contribute. Plasma for example is maintaining [a very active page of tasks](#) that are to be done and are suitable as “Junior Jobs”. KDE-Edu also is starting to follow this. When you choose a task to start working on, simply add your name besides it so other contributors will know you already work on it. Then we you have committed the work, remove your name and write “done” instead. We only recently started this and it was a great success, two new contributors got started that way. The tasks are usually small and you will get great mentoring help from other developers. I know several Indian KDE developers who started that way!

The KDE Community wiki is a coordination tool for people working in KDE and people wanting to work in it!

# 6

## CONCLUSION

There is still a lot of work to be done in order to provide the user a simple and intuitive help in the different area I mentioned and make the user experience even nicer. Contributing to documentation, updating screenshots, writing tooltips or “What's This?” help for your favourite application is probably the easiest contribution you can make (you can see they are missing in a lot of interfaces). For wikis it is the sum of all small contributions that make the difference.

There are areas we could improve a lot when providing help to KDE users. A few things come to my mind:

- generalise the usage of tooltips and “What's This?”. If too many are missing the user becomes wary trying
- have more FAQs and make them more visible. On IRC people ask very often the same questions for example. Why is so?
- improve searching in different tools: with better search boxes, maybe an applet
- make help solutions more visible
- improve KHelpCenter
- make more use of KDE forums by looking on how give developers more feedback about them
- combine UserBase tutorials with the same tutorials in video
- make User Manuals less GUI descriptive and more oriented to describe how the application helps solving tasks

If you want to get started contributing to documentation and improving help in KDE you can benefit from my presence at this conference during the next days and it will be my pleasure to have a chat with you.

You can make this difference, you are KDE!