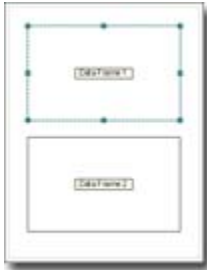


The State of Data Frames in Layout View ★★★★★



From time to time I hear from users or see postings indicating that they find the various states data frames can have a bit confusing.

Data frames on the layout can be active, selected, focused or some combination (or none) of the above.

There is always one **active** data frame. The active data frame tells

Figure 1

ArcMap to use this data frame as the reference when inserting map surrounds, adding data, etc. If there is only one data frame in the map document, it is always active (figure 1). If there is more than one data frame in the map document, the active data frame is indicated in bold in ArcMap's Table of Contents and by a thin dashed outline just outside the data frame's extent on the layout view (figure 2). The thin dashed outline can be turned off by going to the Tools menu, selecting Options, selecting the Layout View tab in the Options dialog and un-checking the checkbox to "Show dashed line around active data frame" under Appearance. As in most dialogs you can use the context help tool (indicated by the question mark button in the upper right) to find out more about the options.

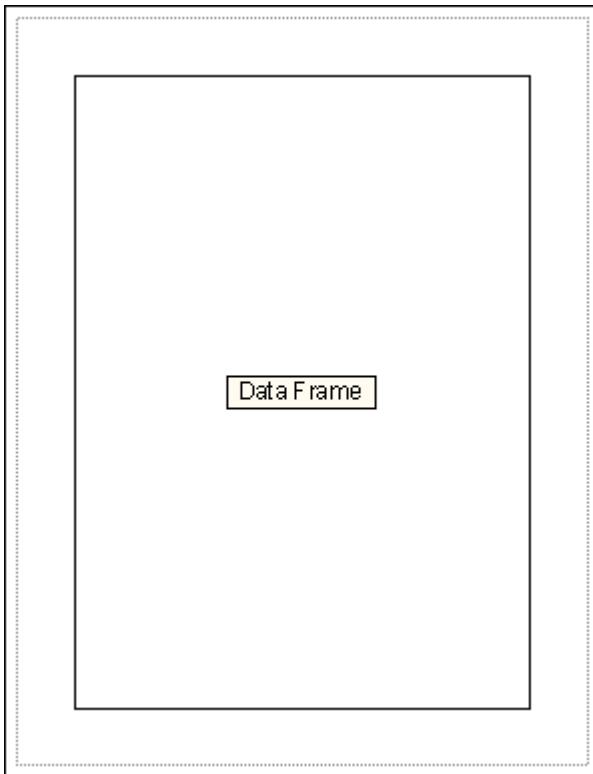


Figure 1. A map with a single data frame. It is active by default. The dashed line around the edge of the page shows the printer margins and has nothing to do with the data frame.

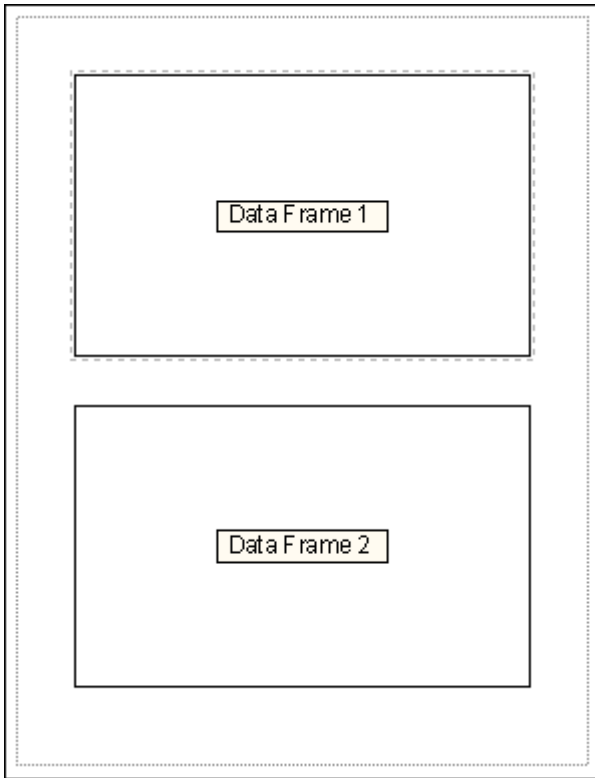


Figure 2. A map with two data frames. Data Frame 1 is the active data frame as indicated by the dashed outline.

Note that you might confuse the dashed line around the active data frame with the dashed line around the edge of the page. The dashed line around the edge relates to the page and not the data frame – it shows you where the printer margins are. You can turn this on or off by right-clicking the virtual page in layout view and clicking Page and Print Setup or click File and click Page and Print Setup. Then check the Show Printer Margins on Layout check box and click OK.

A data frame can also be **selected**, indicated by a dashed outline that falls **on** the data frame's extent and by handles that can be used to resize the data frame (figure 3). Once selected, you can move and resize the data frame or you can right click and use any of the content menu options.

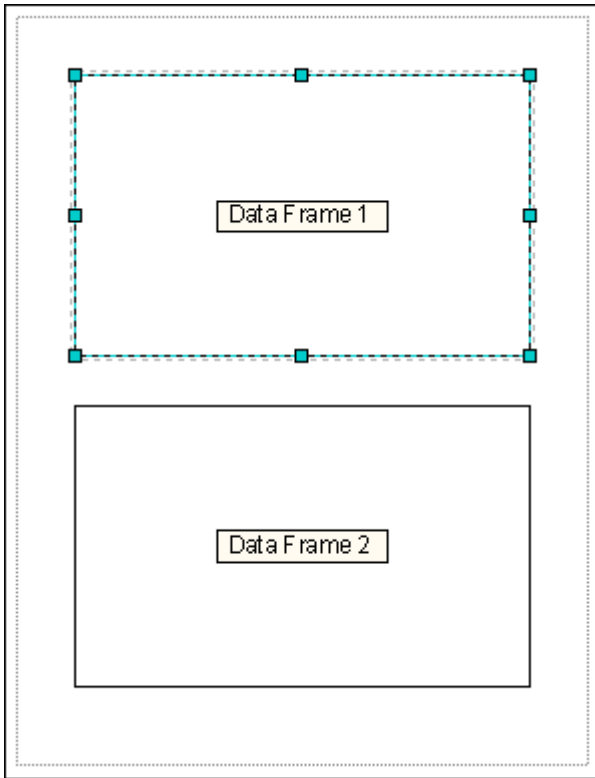



Figure 3. Data Frame 1 is selected and active.

It is possible to select an inactive data frame (to select a data frame, simply click on it in the layout view), and it is also possible to activate an unselected data frame (to activate a data frame, right click the layer name in the table of contents and click Activate.) Note that if you use the Select Elements tool  and click the data frame in layout view, the data frame becomes both active and selected (as in figure 3).

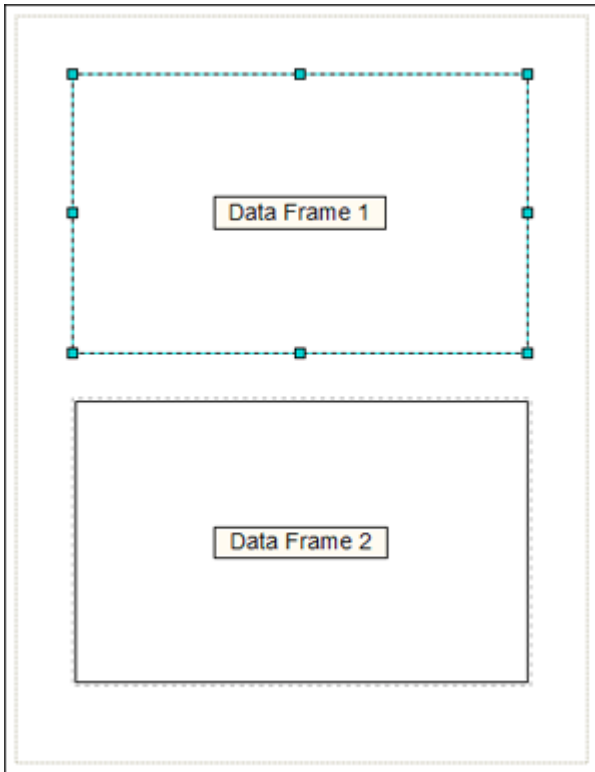



Figure 4. Data Frame 1 is selected and Data Frame 2 is active.

A data frame can also be **focused**, indicated by a wider diagonally hatched outline (figure 5). When a data frame is in this state, you can work with the contents of the frame, such as graphics, graphic text, and annotation groups in the map. Any graphics you draw in the frame when it is in this state will be drawn inside the data frame in **geographic** space and will be available in data view. You can focus the data frame by clicking the Focus Data Frame tool  on the Layout toolbar (figure 6). You can only focus the active data frame. Note that the state of that button provides an indication of whether or not the data frame is focused, which is especially useful if you are zoomed in on the map and can't see the outline of the data frame. When the focus data frame button looks like it's depressed it means the active data frame is focused.

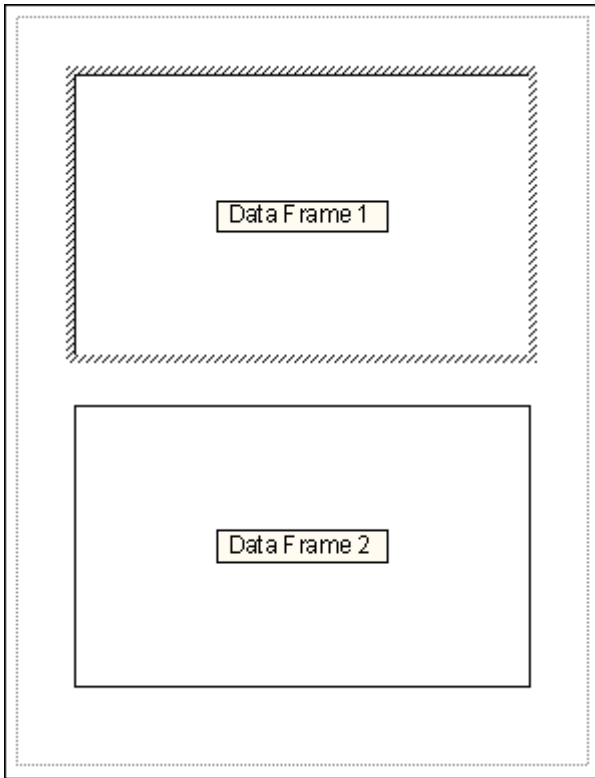


Figure 5. Data Frame 1 is focused.

Figure 6. On this Layout toolbar the Focus Data Frame tool is highlighted in red. The tool appears depressed, indicating the active data frame is focused.

One way I think of the data frames is that they are like boxes – when you work in data view you’re “inside the box”. When you work in layout view imagine that you have boxes with clear lids sitting on the page. Each data frame is one of the boxes. When you focus a data frame in layout view it’s like taking the lid off the box so you can get inside. When the data frame is not focused and you place a graphic on the frame it sits on top of the box lid.

These options and their combinations give you a lot of control over how you work with data frames in ArcMap. Hopefully this blog entry clarifies any confusion you may have had over some of the options.

Filed under: [Map Elements](#), [Page Layout](#)