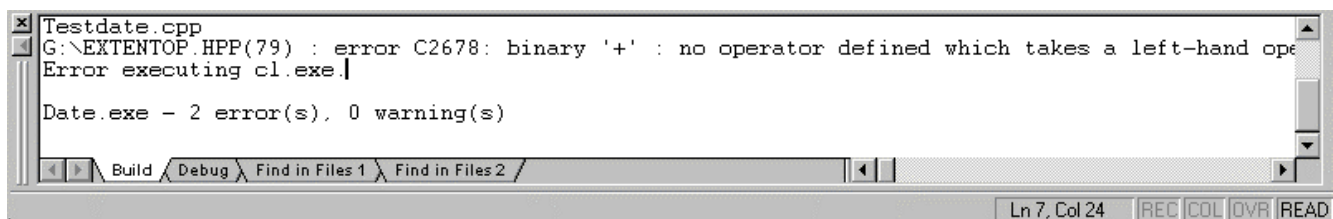


Let's Stamp Out Horizontal Scrolling

Of all the standard GUI elements the most consistently irritating is surely the horizontal scroll bar. We encounter it in situations like these:

1. A map or graphical image that doesn't fit the allotted window or space. Since these are bona fide 2-dimensional objects, that's a legitimate use of horizontal scrolling, especially under "zoom in" magnification.
2. A list box displaying a one-dimensional list in two dimensions. We've taken issue with that one before¹ and we'll no doubt return to the topic in the future.
3. A "message window" containing text of arbitrary length with no line breaks (or, worse, a *multiple*-line text window², where the line breaks are off screen).

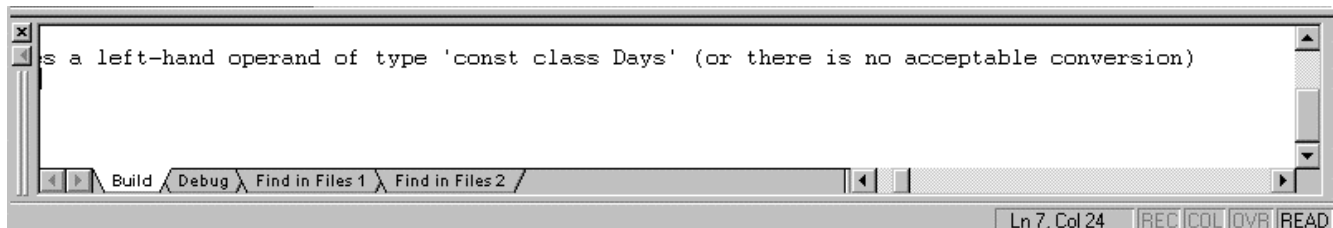
A particularly user-hostile example is Microsoft's *Visual C++ Developer's Studio's* presentation of error diagnostic messages:



```
Testdate.cpp
G:\EXTENTOP.HPP(79) : error C2678: binary '+' : no operator defined which takes a left-hand operand
Error executing cl.exe.

Date.exe - 2 error(s), 0 warning(s)
```

After manipulating the horizontal scroll you get to read the rest of the message:



```
s a left-hand operand of type 'const class Days' (or there is no acceptable conversion)
```

Some of those error messages are so long that you can't remember the beginning when you're reading the end³. I've seen programmers cut and paste a Visual C++ error message into a *Word* document in order to insert line breaks and make sense of it.

An early relational database manager under DOS denied us even that possibility. You used an interactive wizard to generate an SQL statement. You could then view the generated SQL only in a one-line scrollable text box. There was no way to print it. There was no way to move it anywhere else. You could, of course, always copy it with pencil and paper.

I strongly recommend that software development organizations adopt a standard strongly discouraging the use of horizontal scrolling, especially for text boxes and text windows.

¹ "2 Dimensional Display of 1-dimensional Information", *IDI Newsletter*, Spring, 1994.

² The user can often force horizontal scrolling by choosing a large zoom percentage along with a non-full-screen window, but that's his or her choice. With a full-screen window and normal page layout, one horizontal scrolling should be unnecessary.

³ This is especially true of those messages that tell you that one long-winded set of data attributes doesn't match another long-winded set of data attributes. Lining one part up under the other usually clarifies the message immediately.