

# Making the Switch to CFEclipse

## The obvious alternative



By Jeffrey Houser

I've been using CFEclipse for about four months. When I started writing ColdFusion code, ColdFusion Studio was the editor of choice. Slowly I moved over to Dreamweaver as Homesite's support started to wane.

About a year ago, when I wrote an article on Dreamweaver (<http://coldfusion.sys-con.com/read/48232.htm>), I used half of Dreamweaver and half of Homesite. Today, as I write this, half my development is done in CFEclipse and the other half in Dreamweaver. Unfortunately I used Dreamweaver as a really advanced text editor, something it's not that great at. CFEclipse seemed like the obvious alternative so I got it installed and I'm slowly learning its power. The learning curve for CFEclipse has been steep, since, coming from Dreamweaver, its interface is counterintuitive. Assuming that other people are having the same problem, I thought I'd share my thoughts.

### Installing CFEclipse

CFEclipse is built on top of Eclipse, the popular Open Source editor used by many Java Programmers. There are plug-ins available for just about anything you could want to do, including Web development, UML modeling, database access, and version control with utilities such as Surround or CVS. CFEclipse is just another plug-in that makes Eclipse operate like ColdFusion Studio/HomeSite+. It has tag insight, color-coding, automatic indentation, and snippets.

Unfortunately, there's no CFEclipse install/setup wizard like you'd find in many other products such as Dreamweaver or ColdFusion. So the first step in setting up CFEclipse is to download Eclipse. First you need to install Eclipse and then you'll have to install the CFEclipse plug-ins. You can download Eclipse from the Eclipse.com web site at <http://www.eclipse.org/downloads/>.

Eclipse is unique compared to any other product I've used in having a no-install install. Once you unpack the file you downloaded (I grabbed a Win32 zip, however, tar and gz options also exist), the product is installed. That's all you need to run the program. There are no ini files and no registry installs. You're good to go. I unzipped the zip into a directory called "C:\Eclipse." Click on the eclipse.exe in that directory and this

window will pop up similar to Figure 1.

This dialog asks you to select your default workspace. A workspace is how Eclipse manages projects, plug-ins, and other settings. What would you use workspaces for? Perhaps you'll want to set up a workspace for Java development and one for ColdFusion development. Or, perhaps you want a different workspace for each project you're working on. If you like me, you might want a workspace for each client. For purposes of this tutorial, you can use the default settings for your workspace.

The next step is to install the CFEclipse plug-in in your Eclipse workspace. From the "Help" menu, select "Software Updates" then "Find and Install." This will bring up the Install/Update window with two options: Search for updates to current features and Search for new features to install. Select "Search for New Features To Install" and click Next. You should see a screen as shown in Figure 2

Click the New Remote Site button and this window should show up (see Figure 3).

For the name enter CFEclipse. For the URL enter <http://www.cfeclipse.org/update>. Click OK and CFEclipse should be added to your sites. Make sure to select it and click Finish. CFEclipse will show a new window with all available updates (see Figure 4).

You have two options: either install the latest stable release of CFEclipse or the Bleeding Edge release. The Bleeding Edge release is usually an "in process" version. I prefer to go with the stable releases. Check what you want to install and click Next. Read through the license and click "I accept the terms of the license agreement." Click Next to review your updates. Then click Finish to install. CFEclipse will download. You'll see a feature verification window. (This is your last chance to cancel the install if you're having cold feet). Click Install then Yes to restart the workbench. CFEclipse is installed.

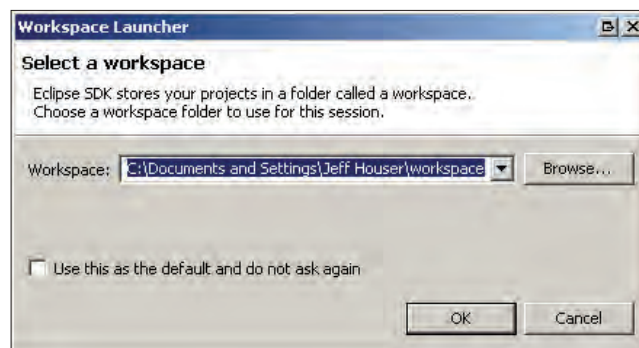


Figure 1 Select a workspace

You'll find a much more detailed account of this install process in the ACME Guide located at <http://www.stephencollins.org/acme/>. ACME stands for Apache, ColdFusion, MySQL, and Eclipse and talks about setting up all them in a development environment.

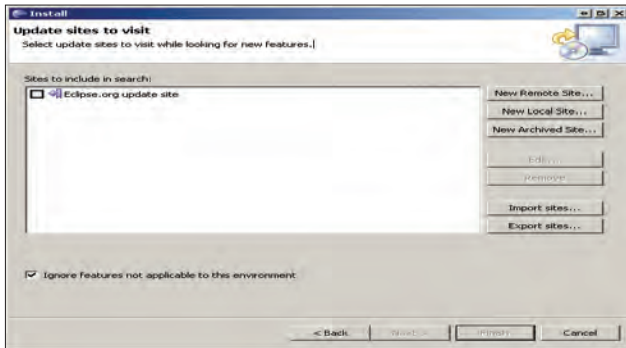


Figure 2 Install the Eclipse plug-ins

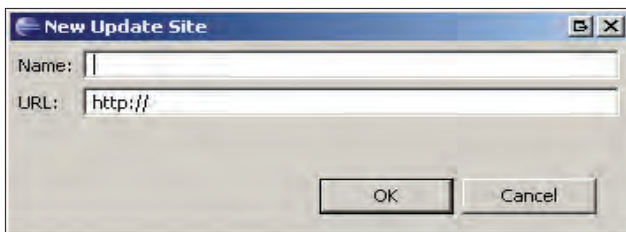


Figure 3 Add an update site

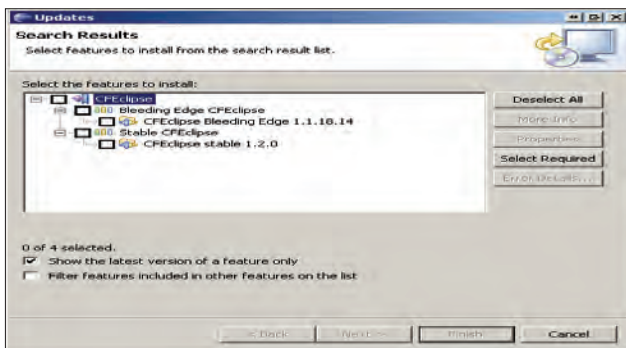


Figure 4 Update CFEEclipse

## Setting up a Project

Now that CFEEclipse is installed, the interface doesn't look any different, does it? Nope, the interface doesn't look any different (yet). From the window menu, select Open Perspective and other. CFEEclipse should be in the list of perspectives. Select it. A perspective is the default layout for your workspace.

In my Dreamweaver article, I talked about setting up a site. You'll probably want to do the same thing in CFEEclipse. In CFEEclipse, a project is the equivalent of a Dreamweaver site. This is how you can set it up:

1. While in the CFEEclipse Perspective, select File > New > Project. You'll get a list of all available project types as shown in Figure 5. Expand CFEEclipse and then select "CFML Project." Click Next (see Figure 5).
2. This puts you in the new Project Dialog. Give the project a name and specify its directory location. Most likely you're going to be starting a new project so feel free to use the default directory, which points to the workspace directory. Click Finish. Now the project is created.
3. CFEEclipse isn't as full-featured in its project settings as Dreamweaver, but there are a few that you may want to make note of. In the navigator on the left side of the screen, you should see the name of the project and a list of all files/directories that are part of the project. Right-click on the project name and select Properties. Select CFEEclipse properties and you should see something like Figure 6.

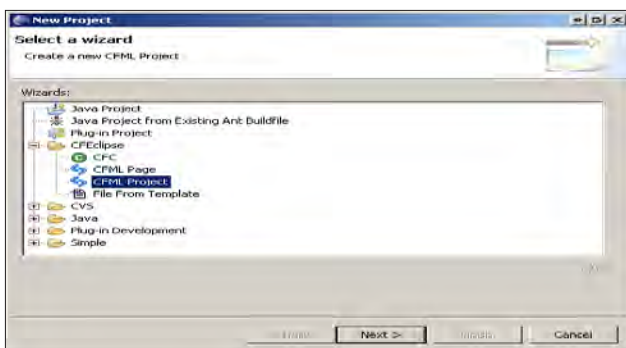


Figure 5 Creating a project in CFEEclipse

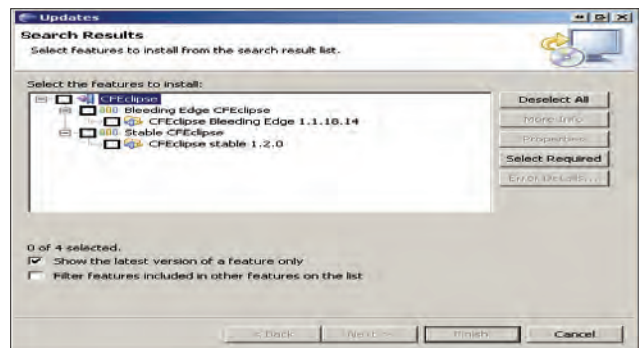


Figure 6 CFEEclipse project properties

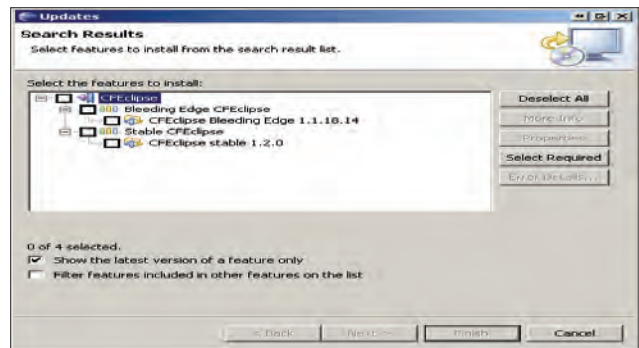


Figure 7 Component wizard

This will let you specify the project URL and the path to your snippet directory. If you're using different workspaces, but want to share snippets, you can do so here. You can also enter the docroot, which refers to the browser view, an option underneath the code view. If you want a quick browse of the files in your project, this is the way to do it without switching to a different window.

## Dealing with Components

It seems that with every passing day I spend more and more time dealing with CFCs, either creating them or editing them. The CFEclipse creators didn't let me down in that regard. They have a few handy tools for creating and using components. This is how to use the wizard for creating a component:

1. From the file menu, select "New Project." From the project menu (see Figure 5) select CFC. You'll get the New Component wizard in Figure 7.
2. Enter the path for the component, the component it extends, the hint, and the display name. Click Next.
3. You can add properties (aka Instance Variables) to the component in the next window. You can specify various options including the option to generate getter and setter methods, the hint, and the type.
4. Click Next and you can add Functions to the component in this window. You can also specify each attribute in the component tag, such as access, return type, roles, hint, displayname, name, and output. Click Next.
5. In this step you can add parameters to each function you have in the component. Click Finish to create the component.

Let's examine a few of the other windows in your workspace. Open up a CFC file. (I opened the address.cfc from my December '04 article for this column). In the right half of the screen you'll see a method view, which should look something like Figure 8.

This is a nice quick outline of all the methods in your CFC. If you double-click on one of the methods, you'll jump right to its place in the component. This can be handy when jumping around long components. The Method view won't work on a regular cfm file even if you have functions inside it, however, the outline view will. The outline view gives you a collapsible hierarchical view of your files.

## Miscellaneous Features

There are a bunch of things about CFEclipse that make it a joy to work with. None of these things are so amazing that they'll make you want to switch from another editor, however if you do switch I'm sure you'll find them useful.

- **Snippets:** CFEclipse has snippets. They are very similar to HomeSite-style snippets. My favorite feature here (something lacking in Dreamweaver) is that you can insert snippet variables such as the current date and time inside a snippet. You can read more details about it at the CFEclipse web site <http://www.cfeclipse.org/index.cfm?objectid=C1F58502-EA69-0EC7-FF3FD40329552407>.
- **Parenthesis Marking:** When dealing with nested function calls or complicated SQL queries, you'll often end up with a lot of

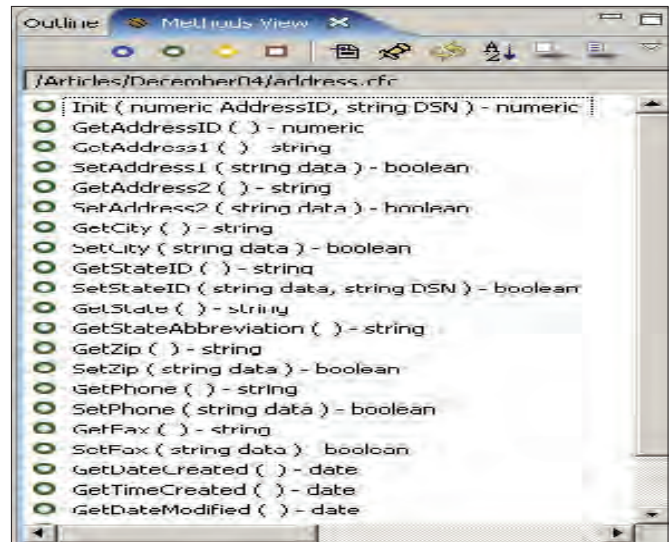


Figure 8 Method view

parenthesis. When your cursor is at one parenthesis, its foil will be highlighted so you can see the order of operations grouping. This is extremely useful.

- **Problems Tab:** CFEclipse will point out some syntax errors (such as a missing end tag) and mark them visually and in the problems tab at the bottom of the screen. I hope that future versions will advance this feature, creating a CF pseudo-compiler that will catch syntax errors.
- **Task List:** CFEclipse includes a simple task manager right in the IDE. In the middle of one thing you probably don't want to stop to fix another. So just make a quick note to come back to it.
- **Search and Replace:** The multiple file search and replace feature is a great way to search through all the files in your project. You can get a flat list of results like with Dreamweaver or a hierarchical list sorted like the file structure. When you open a template that has search results, CFEclipse will visually highlight those features with a bullet next to the scroll bar.
- **Hiding Panels:** By clicking the square in the top right corner of a panel, CFEclipse will expand any panel to the full size of the screen. I use this a lot to expand the code view.

## Final Thoughts

CFEclipse isn't perfect yet. (Is anything ever perfect?) But it sure stands out as a quick editor that's not a resource hog. I found it does almost everything I need. And hey, it's free. It's really hard to beat free. Check it out at [www.cfeclipse.org](http://www.cfeclipse.org).

## About the Author

Jeff Houser has been working with computers for over 20 years. He owns a DotComIt, a web consulting company, manages the CT Macromedia User Group, and routinely speaks and writes about development issues. You can find out what he's up to by checking his Blog at [www.jeffryhouser.com](http://www.jeffryhouser.com).

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