

Don't Panic - An Introduction to the Slate Material Editor

One of the most compelling new features to 3dsmax and 3ds max Design is the Slate Material Editor. If your running into this for the first time and are totally confused by it, don't panic, you can always flip back to the Classic Editor or the "Compact Material Editor". In fact, I've been creating my materials in Compact mode and then refining in Slate mode.

For as long as I can remember, the material button on the Main toolbar has opened the "Material Editor". The first time I used it to open the material editor I got the Slate editor. While I had been exposed to it in all of our development meetings, I totally panicked and couldn't remember how to access the other mode. Closed it and tried to use the "M" button to bring it up. The "M" key will now bring back whichever mode you left the material editor. Only after a deep breath, did I remember how to flip from one mode to another. So if you get nothing out of this entry, remember how to flip your Material Editor Modes.

Main Toolbar Material Editor Flyout.

From the Main tool bar, pick and hold the Material Editor button to access the 2 mode options.

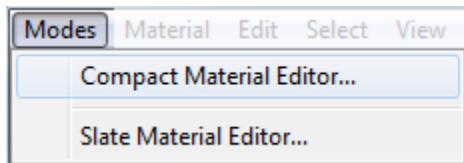
The "Classic" or Compact Mode has the mini Material editor



The Slate Material editor shows a bar moving to another bar.

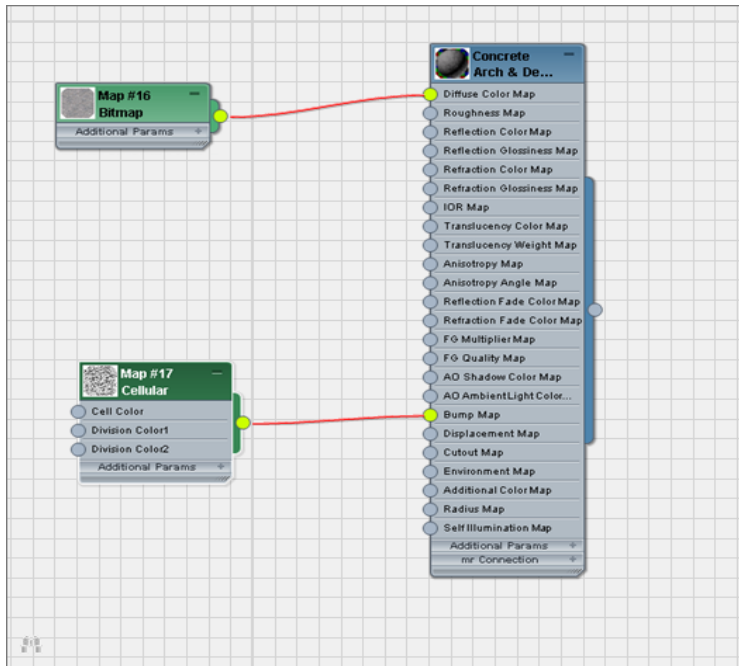


I can also flip from one mode to another from inside the Material Editor. By accessing the Modes drop down menu, I select the desired mode.



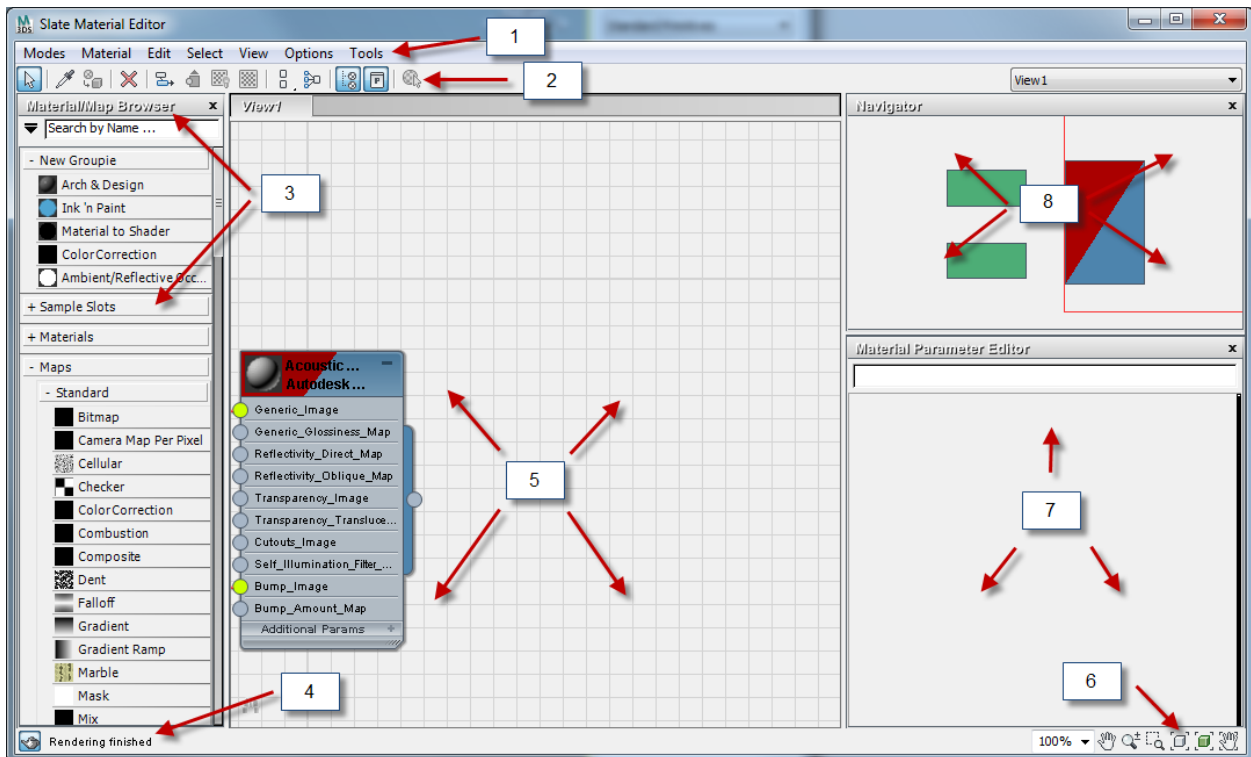
Better now? Good. Ready for more?

Now, that we know there's a map back to a safe haven; let's take a quick view of what is this Slate Material Editor. The Slate Material Editor (Slate) is a "Node Based" editor. Rather than drilling through dialog box to dialog box, jumping through Parents and Children, all of which was a great source of frustration to new users, we now see each component of a material as a separate module that gets connected to slots.



Immediately, you can see how easy it is to identify the components being used to create the Concrete material I've started.

User Interface



1. Menu bar
2. Toolbar

3. Material/Map Browser
4. Status
5. Active View
6. View navigation
7. Parameter Editor
8. Navigator

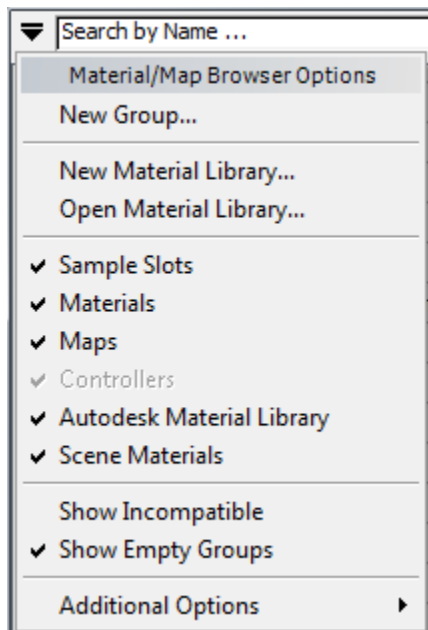
We will spend many posts here to help you become a “SM” (Slate Master), but for now baby steps. I have found that creating materials in the Compact Material Editor and tweaking in the Slate Editor is a good productivity strategy. However you approach the new capabilities, the first element to understand is the Material Map Browser.

Material map Browser

Integral to the Slate Material editor or accessible by the Get Material button in the Compact Editor, the Material Map browser has gotten quite a bit of attention.

Don't overlook the Search by Name... option. With 1200 Autodesk materials to sift through, this alone will make this a speedy tool.

Navigation through the Browser is pretty straight forward. Plus signs (+) open sections, minus signs (-) closes them. What is not as obvious are all of the capabilities associated with the pulldown next to the Search by name window or with the right click in the Material Map browser. Here you can access material Libraries, create groups, etc.



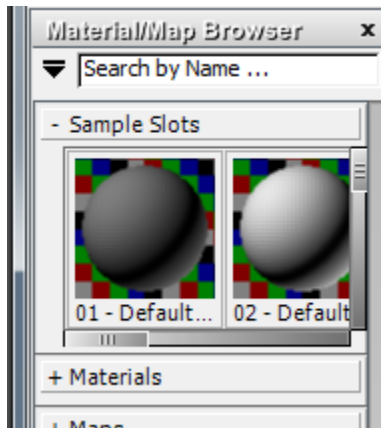
Alright, by now you should be feeling a little better. See, it's all here.
Baby step Number 2.

Reset your Scene

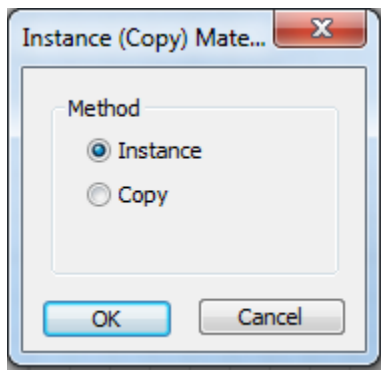
Open the Material Editor

Set your mode to Slate

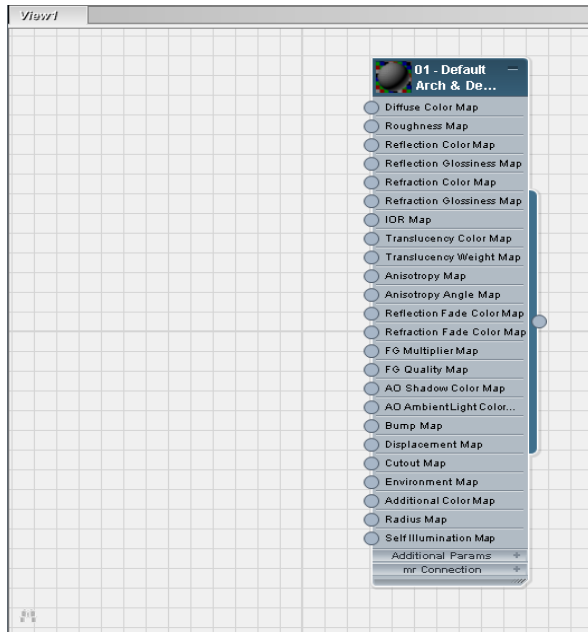
Expose the Sample Slots if not already exposed



Drag a sample sphere (01 – Default) into the Active view (View 1) and pick Instance.



Look like this?



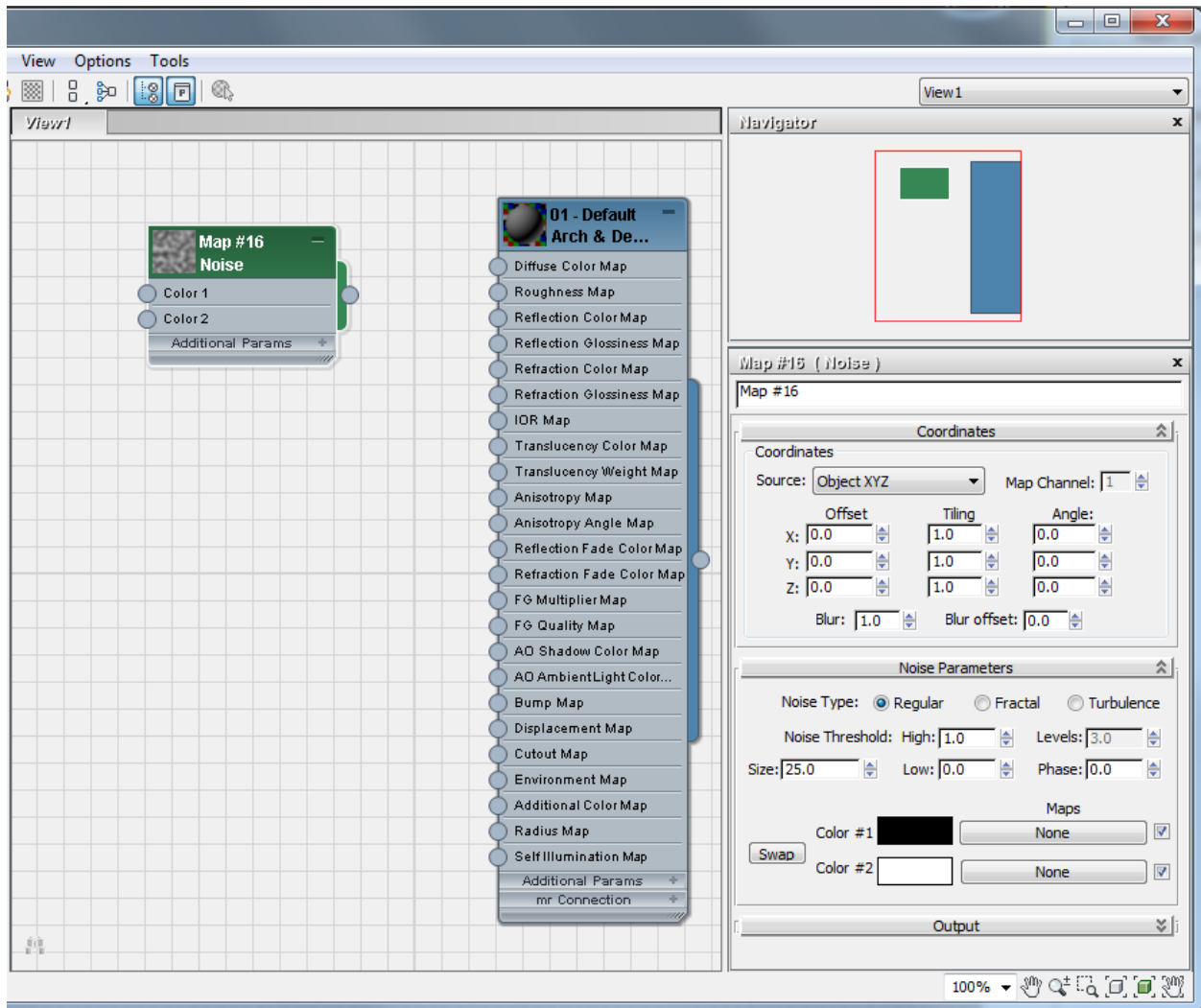
Good

Now expose the Maps.

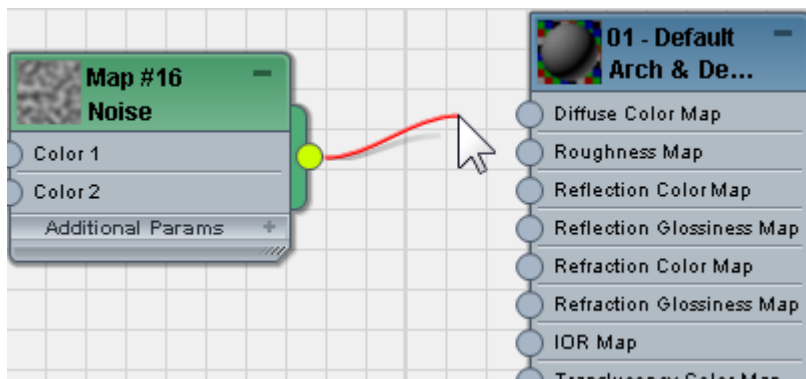
Drag a noise map into the view.

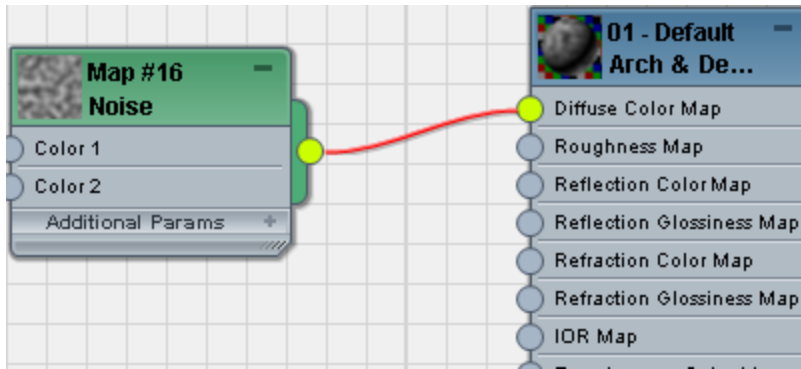
Double Click on the noise map to open its values in the Parameter Editor.

You now have access to all of the Noise Parameters.

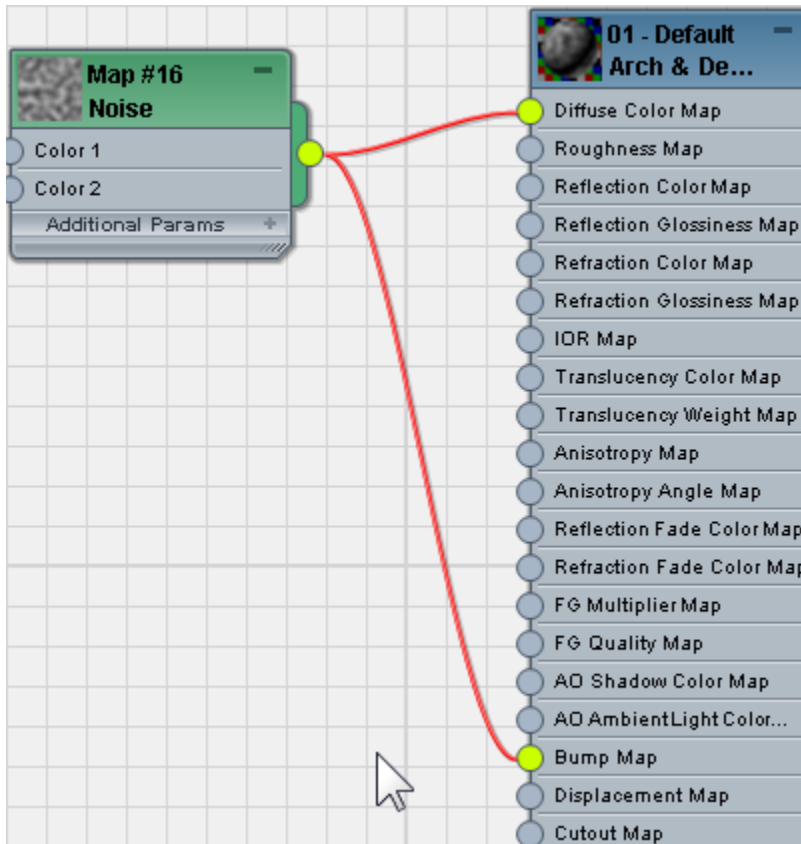


Connect the Noise Map to the Diffuse Slot by dragging the output node (circle) to the input node of the Diffuse Color Map.





Now Drag the Output Node of the Noise to the Input Node to the Bump Slot.



Now you're instancing your maps from one slot to another.

So that's it in a simple scope. Can you do more? ABSOLUTELY! We'll take a deeper dive as time goes on. But for now, I hope you feel a little bit more comfortable in the new Slate Editor. 'Til then.