the LITTLE

DOS 5

BOOK

Kay Yarborough Nelson

The Little DOS 5 Book

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For Wanda
my new sister-in-law
Now you have no excuse for not "doing" computers.

Introduction

DOS—your computer's disk operating system—has some pretty impressive capabilities, but most of us don't need to know everything there is to know about them. All we do is day-to-day chores such as formatting disks, copying files and disks, deleting and renaming files, and things like that. And that's what this book concentrates on: helping you do those daily jobs and giving you some tips you can use to speed them up or straighten them out. You can also grab this book when you get stuck and don't know what to do next; it won't take up much room on your desk.

If you've never used a computer before, you'll find an introduction to some of its mysteries in Chapter 1 (like where the power switch is and which disk drive is which). You can skip that chapter if you know all that already. Chapter 2 will give you a guided tour of DOS 5's new graphic interface, called the Shell, so that you can get an idea of how to use it and what it can do. Then the book will discuss, in short chapters, the kinds of skills and topics you need to know more about so that you can actually do productive work with your computer without having to read some fat book that was really written for programmers.

This book assumes that you'll want to use the Shell for the things that are easiest to do with the Shell. For example, you can rename directories with the Shell; you can't do that at the command line! You can also start a program by double-clicking on it. And you can type the first few characters of a file's name to immediately go to it

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Some things you can't do in the Shell, though, and you have to use the command line (or the Run command). You can look up all the DOS commands, complete with everyday examples of how you'd use them, in the back of the book.

Why DOS 5?

There are really two basic reasons to switch to DOS 5. If you're running Microsoft Windows, DOS 5 will give you more memory. (Windows is a memory hog and wants as much as it can get for itself and its programs.) If you're not running Windows, DOS 5 will give you just about the same features that Windows does, even if your computer is an old XT clone. You just won't be able to cut and paste between programs like you can in Windows.

DOS 5 is a big improvement over whatever version of DOS you've been using. In addition to the easy-to-use Shell, which gives you a graphical interface and the ability to point and click with a mouse, it takes up a lot less room in memory, so you can use that memory for your other programs. And because of the way DOS 5 manages memory, you can have several programs in memory and switch between them with a new feature called the Task Swapper.

You also get a lot of neat new utilities with DOS 5, like an Undelete command that lets you retrieve files you've deleted by mistake, a Quick Format command that will erase a used disk in 10 seconds or less, online help, and a full-screen text editor.

Try it; you'll like it.

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CHAPTER 1

DOS: The Basic Basics

"Pay no attention to the little man behind the curtain!"

FRANK MORGAN as the Wizard in MGM's
The Wizard of Oz (1939).

DOS is your computer's operating system. Without it, your computer and your favorite programs, like Lotus 1-2-3, WordPerfect, and even Windows wouldn't run. DOS, which stands for Disk Operating System, is the little man behind the curtain, controlling everything. And unfortunately, we're not in Oz, and you do have to pay some attention to it. Some, but hopefully not a lot.

If DOS isn't already on your computer, you'll need to install it. How can you tell whether it's there or not? Turn on your computer. The ON switch is probably on the right side or on the front. It's usually red. You may also need to switch on the power to your monitor, or video screen. That control is normally under the front edge of the monitor.

The Command Line

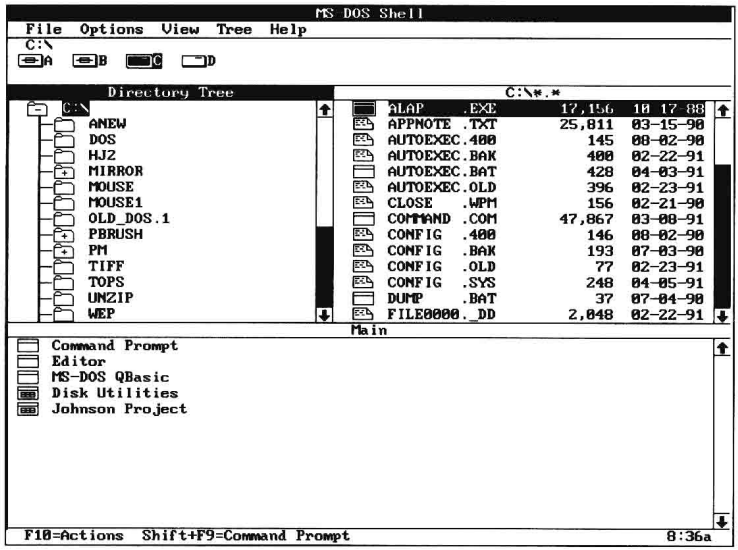
OK, does the computer start (it may take a minute to start up, or "boot") and do you see an A> or C>? Or something that begins with A:\> or C:\> or maybe even D:\>? That's called the **DOS prompt,** and it indicates that DOS is waiting for you to type a command there (that's why it's also called the **command line**). If you see the C:\> (or one of

the variations), DOS is there. Check to see what version it is by typing *ver* and pressing Enter (that funny-looking key on the right side of the keyboard; it may just be labeled with a bent arrow on it). If you're not running version 5 (or if you're not running DOS at all), go to the appendix, which will tell you how to install DOS 5.

The Shell

You may instead see a screen like this one when your computer starts.

Tip: *You can use DOS either with the Shell or with the command line.*



Tip: *To switch from the Shell to the command line, press Shift-F9. To switch back from the command line to the Shell, type* exit *and press Enter.*

This is called the **Shell**. DOS 5 may have been set up to show you this screen when it was installed. The Shell lets you pick and choose from menus instead of having to remember the special commands for everything you do, so it's a lot easier to use than giving DOS direct commands.

To see the Shell if it's not showing, type *dosshell* at the DOS prompt and press Enter.

When you set up DOS 5, there's an option for whether you want the Shell to start automatically or not. But if you've already set up DOS, you don't have to set it up again to do this. If you want the Shell to come up when you start your computer, see Chapter 10.

DOS Versions

As you can tell from its name, DOS 5 is the latest in a long series of DOS's. What's the difference? Well, anything earlier than version 3.3 is pretty useless if you've got a hard disk, and you probably do. Version 3.3 was designed to handle large hard disks, whereas the earlier versions of DOS weren't. Version 4 added a shell feature, much like the DOS 5 interface, but it took up so much memory that a lot of people didn't want to use it. DOS 5 was improved to take up less memory and also give you more features, like being able to switch between programs quickly, get online help, get files and directories back if you accidentally erase them, search for the particular file you're looking for, and unformat disks and do quick formats. If you run Microsoft Windows, you'll appreciate how little memory DOS 5 takes up, too.

In fact, DOS 5 is quite similar to Windows. It gives you a graphical interface with icons (small pictorial representations of what you see on the screen) and menus that you can use with or without a mouse. Also, because of the more efficient way DOS 5 manages memory, you can have several programs running and switch between them by pressing a "hot key."

The DOS 5 Shell is the most noticeable improvement to DOS. You'll take a guided tour of the Shell in the next chapter so that you can get an idea of what it can do. But first, you need some basic skills so that you can "talk" to DOS.

The Keyboard

Because a lot of what you do with DOS is done with the keyboard, let's take a quick look at some of those funny keys.

The Enter Key

The most important one is the **Enter key**. As you saw earlier, it's the weird-looking key on the right side of your keyboard. It's probably gray. It may be labeled Return. We'll call it the Enter key because you use it to *enter* commands. DOS can't read what you've typed until you press Enter.

The Backspace Key

▶ **Tip:** *You can also delete text with the Del key.*

The second most important key is the **Backspace key**. It's just above the Enter key, and it has a backward-pointing arrow on it. It may or may not be labeled Backspace, but that's what it is. You use it to correct mistakes. When you press Backspace, you erase the character to the left of the cursor (the blinking underline). So if you make a mistake in typing before you press Enter, just press Backspace, erase it, and correct it. You'll see more about entering commands later in the book.

The Function Keys

The gray keys labeled F1 through F10 (you may have more than those, depending on what keyboard you have) are either on the left side of the keyboard or across the top.

The Numeric Keypad

▶ **Tip:** *If you see an instruction to use the F1 key, press the gray F1 key; don't type* f *and* 1.

Over on the far-right side of your keyboard is an arrangement of number keys that may also have arrows on them. That's the **numeric keypad**. It's designed to be used to enter numbers quickly, like a ten-key calculator. When Num Lock is on (you toggle it on and off by pressing the Num Lock key) and you press those number keys, you get numbers. When Num Lock's off, those keys move the cursor. You may have a light on your keyboard that comes on when Num Lock is on, or you may not. On some keyboards, Num Lock comes on when you start your computer.

You'll also see Home and End on a couple of these keys. You can use them to go to the beginning and end of a list in DOS 5. The keys marked PgUp and PgDn also move you through lists, one screen at a time.

The Cursor Keys

▶ **Tip:** *The cursor isn't the same as the prompt. The cursor is a small blinking underline that shows you where you are on a line.*

If you have an older keyboard, you'll need to use the numeric keypad (with Num Lock off) to move the cursor. Look closely, and you'll see arrows on the 4, 8, 6, and 2 keys. They represent the direction the cursor will go when you press that key. To move the cursor down one line, you'd press 2, and so forth.

If you've got a newer keyboard, there'll be **cursor keys** at the bottom of the keyboard on the right. They're arranged in an upside-down T formation. They'll move the cursor so that you don't have to worry about whether Num Lock is on or not.

Other Keys

There are a lot of other keys, aren't there? Here are a few more you may need to know about:

- The **Esc key**, on the upper-left side of the keyboard, will cancel a command.
- The **Tab key**, just under the Esc key, moves the cursor one tab space. You also use it to move from area to area in the Shell. It may not be marked Tab but may have two arrows on it, or it may have Tab and the two arrows.
- The **Ctrl key** is used in combination with other keys. You'll probably see it represented like this: Ctrl-C. That means "press Ctrl and C at the same time." Pressing Ctrl-C is like pressing Esc; it bails you out of whatever's going on.
- The **Shift key** shifts you from lowercase to uppercase. DOS doesn't care which you use, so you can use either, or a combination of both.

▶ **Tip:** *DOS doesn't care whether you use uppercase or lowercase.*

- The **Print Screen key** (it may be marked Prt Sc) will send a copy of what's on your screen (called a screen dump) to your printer. Be sure to turn your printer on first.
- The **Alt key**, just under the Shift key, works like the Ctrl key: you press it in combination with other keys. When you see Alt-R, for example, press Alt and R and the same time.

▶ **Tip:** *To restart your computer without actually turning the power off, press Ctrl, Alt, and Del, all at the same time. This is usually represented as Ctrl-Alt-Del.*

- The **Pause** or **Break key** (you may have both of these, or just one) will stop whatever your computer's doing. If you don't have a Pause key, you can press Ctrl and Num Lock at the same time.

The Mouse

You may or may not have a **mouse**. If I were you, I'd get one. Having a mouse makes DOS and most of your programs a lot more fun to use. If you're not sure whether you have a mouse, look for a rectangular object about the size of a cigarette pack attached by a cord to your computer. Technically, it's a pointing device that controls the position of the pointer on the screen. As you move the mouse on the desktop, the pointer moves on the screen.

▶ **Tip:** *If you want to use a mouse, you'll need to have installed it according to the directions that came with it.*

In DOS, the mouse only works when you're running the Shell or Editor, so we'll wait for the guided tour of the DOS Shell to practice your mouse skills.

There are a couple of other things you may need to know about. One is about your disk drives and where they are. Why are they important? Think about it. All the programs you buy come on floppy disks, and they have to get onto your hard disk in some way. That's through your floppy disk drive.

Disk Drives

Your computer has at least one floppy disk drive. The main one's called drive A. If you have two floppy disk drives, drive A's the one on the left. If one floppy disk drive is above the other, drive A is usually the one on the top.

The second floppy disk drive, if you've got one, is called drive B. Drive C is your hard disk. If you have more than one hard disk, or if you've divided a great big hard disk into smaller sections called partitions, the next drive's drive D, and so on.

Tip: *The Disks chapter has more information about floppy disks.*

Disk drives come in two sizes, one for 5.25-inch floppy disks and one for 3.5-inch floppy disks (which aren't very floppy; they're the little hard plastic ones). The little ones hold more data. And because they're harder, they're less likely to get damaged. They're also more expensive than the bigger ones. But you have to have a 3.5-inch disk drive to use them, and some computers (like the IBM XT) don't have that kind of drive as standard equipment. It's nicest when you have both types of drives—then you can use both kinds of disks.

Inserting Disks

When you put a disk in your floppy disk drive, slide it in with the label facing up and the little oval going into the drive first (if it's a 5.25-inch disk) or the metal shutter going into the drive first (if it's a 3.5-inch disk). Match the sizes to the slots: don't try to put one of the little 3.5-inch disks into a big 5.25-inch slot.

Tip: *Store your floppy disks in a safe place that's relatively cool and dry. Keep them away from magnets! Magnets destroy whatever's on a disk.*

Then make sure you close the drive door, if you're using a 5.25-inch disk. Pull the door latch down. (On a 3.5-inch drive, the door will close when you push the disk in far enough.)

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