Quit or I stop

Simon Collin explains what to do when a database acts up, makes sense of DOS program settings and finds a cunning way of redirecting batch files

I have been trying to get my DOS applications (or rather, one database in particular) to run under Windows 95. The software detects that Windows is running and refuses to continue; displaying an error message telling me to quit from all other applications (ie Windows). Is there any way of getting round this?"

PCW *Many disk utilities and low-level products want sole use of the PC. Win95 includes two switches which let you tame DOS programs into working in a controlled Windows environment.*

The first hides Windows from DOS programs. The second runs the DOS program in an exclusive mode that ensures no other applications (including Windows application) are running simultaneously

To access these two switches, highlight the DOS program icon that's being difficult and click the right mouse button to display the program's properties sheet. Select the Program page tag and click on the Advanced button. This Advanced page displays three check-boxes: the last lets you set up a unique environment for this DOS session (covered in previous issues); the first lets you hide the fact that Windows is running from any DOS application that might otherwise object to sharing resources.

To avoid problems in which two programs are running at the same time and possibly interfering, use the third checkbox in its simple mode to ensure that this application is running exclusively on this PC. To maintain exclusivity, select the MS-DOS Mode checkbox and make sure that the "Use current configuration" button is selected.

You can use both these settings to force applications to work with and under Windows, but consider why the application might not want to run with Windows before you use the options. For example, if it is a disk utility and will defrag the disk, it will run into problems since Windows could access its virtual memory disk file during the defrag and crash.

"I'm trying to get to grips with DOS under Windows 95 but am confused by the way my DOS settings are stored. I have read that all Windows settings are stored in a central registry rather than individual PIF or INI files. Is there any way of editing this file to make changes to program settings?"

PCW *Win95 stores its settings for DOS and Windows applications in different places. The DOS program settings are stored in the equivalent of PIF files (a text file called APPS.INF). The settings for Windows programs are stored in a central Registry that you cannot edit using a text editor (as you did with INI files).*

The APPS.INF file is interesting for DOS users because it acts as a master for all DOS program settings. If you view its contents, you'll see there's a section called [PIF95] which refers to specific DOS settings.

The first lines show: which DOS programs have been set up, their title, icon and extra details. These lines refer to relevant sections later on in the APPS.INF file that give more detailed settings for the particular program.

If you are installing a DOS program and it makes changes to a PIF file, these should be reflected in this settings file: if you are having problems finding a fault or

want to check the program settings, this is the place to look.

"I have been following your example batch files over the past months and would like to try and combine some of the features of each tip. The batch programs are in separate files (as in your examples) so I tried to combine two by using the redirection symbol to send the output of one to be the input of the second. Nothing worked, which I assume is a problem with the redirection. Is there any way of redirecting the output of batch files?"

PCW *As you discovered, it's almost impossible to redirect the output from one batch file to the input of another. This is not a problem with standard DOS commands that you can type in at the prompt, but the two exceptions to the rule are batch files and the FOR statement. Neither will work with the redirection symbol >.*

To solve the problem you have to use cunning and a peculiar loophole in the DOS operating system: you can redirect the output of the command COMMAND which is normally rarely used and serves to start another copy of the DOS command interpreter. The COMMAND word will run any other command that follows it as if it had been typed at the command prompt. For example, to get a directory listing you could type in:

```
DIR
   or
COMMAND/C DIR
```

Both lines will run the DIR command. The difference is that the second is doing so in a separate copy of the command interpreter that is only loaded while DIR is being executed. If you don't use the /C switch, COMMAND will start a second copy of the command interpreter and you will have to remove it manually by typing in EXIT.

The point to this background, is that since COMMAND is a standard DOS command, you can redirect its output. You could use the following line to redirect the output of batch1.bat to be used as the input of batch2.bat.

```
COMMAND/C batch1 > batch2
```

This will solve your problem with multiple batch files and should prove useful if you are experimenting with batch files or the FOR command.