The magnificent **seven**

There are some neat tricks you can work with DOS. Simon Collin knows the wrinkles and has selected seven of the craftiest.

The advance of Windows has taken its toll. Since DOS is now merely a part of Windows rather than an operating system in its own right, it makes sense to merge any DOS questions into the *Hands On Windows* column and this will take effect from the next issue.

So to give you a final dose of DOS advice, I have selected some of the neatest tips and tricks from the past couple of years and condensed them into this single page.

This is no mean feat, since we have covered just about every aspect of DOS: from Novell DOS to networking, batch files to hidden commands; it's all covered somewhere in your back issues.

Here then, are my top tips and neat tricks for DOS.

1. Multiple commands

One of the most annoying aspects of batch files is their inability to run multiple commands using wildcards.

For example, if you want to view the contents of all the files with a TXT extension, you'll have to use the TYPE command umpteen times.

Here are three ways of getting around this. The standard method would be to use the FOR command:

```
FOR %F IN (*.TXT) DO TYPE %F
```

This is rather rigid, so you could replace the TXT and TYPE words with user-definable parameters:

```
FOR %%F IN (%2) DO %1 %%F
```

However, it's even better to use the COMMAND/C command to run any DOS command for you:

```
FOR %%F IN (%2) DO COMMAND/C %1 %%F
```

Save this in a batch file called MULTI.BAT and you can type in MULTI TYPE *.TXT to view all your text files.

2. Key press utility

Trying to get a batch file to respond to a key press is pretty hard work. Here's a neat little utility that will return the value of any key that's been pressed as an error level. It returns the character's ASCII value less 48, so that: 1 is 1 rather than its ASCII value of 49; 2 is 2 rather than its ASCII value of 50 and so on.

```
N KEYIN.COM
E 0100 31 CO CD 16 2C 30 B4 4C
E 0108 CD 21

RCX
A
W
Q
```

3. Undocumented DOS features

Microsoft has left a few undocumented features within DOS — some are worthless, but a couple are useful. This one lets you view all the files in a directory, including all hidden files.

Just type in 'DIR ,'. The comma will also work with the ATTRIB command and will reset all the attributes of all the files in the current directory.

The comma is great with the DIR command, but be careful when using it with the ATTRIB command, since it can mess up your backup strategy and will remove any share or read-only attributes.

4. Basic debugging

When testing a batch file, life would be so much easier if you could run it through a debugger to catch all the typos and errors.

DOS doesn't provide quite this level of service, but it does let you step through the batch file one line at a time to check that the program is working correctly. To create your own basic debugging tool, use

the COMMAND command. If you want to step through a batch file called TEST.BAT, enter the following command:

```
COMMAND /Y /C TEST.BAT
```

DOS will load a second copy of the command interpreter and will step through each line in the batch file asking you, with a '[Y/N]' message, if you want to execute this particular line. Once all the lines of the batch file have been executed, this new, second, command interpreter is unloaded.

5. Environment variable

Tailor your version of DOS and speed up searches using some of the internal DOS variables: to see which are currently being used, just type in the command 'SET'.

However, there's one nice little environment variable that's not often mentioned: DIRCMD. Whenever you issue a DIR command, DOS first checks to see whether the DIRCMD variable has been set. If so, DOS will use this as its default and list the contents of the directory. For example, if you often want to check the contents of the \FILES\LETTERS\COPIES\SENT subdirectory, set this into the DIRCMD variable and you'll get a listing of this directory if you enter just DIR with no parameters.

To set an environment variable, use the SET command again:

```
C:\>SET DIRCMD \FILES\LETTERS\COPIES
\SENT
```

6. Making the most of batch files

You can really make the most of a batch file by using the environment variables that your PC stores. If you have Novell DOS, you can access environment variables to display user name, network details and so on. For MS-DOS users, there's a particularly useful tip to let you append a new directory to the PATH variable:

```
PATH=%PATH%;C:\NEW_DIR
```

7. Keeping track of time

Want to keep track of the time within DOS? Here's a DOS Prompt command that uses ANSI sequence codes to display the current time at the top of the screen.

You'll need to load ANSI.SYS in your CONFIG.SYS file for this to work:

```
PROMPT $E[s$E[H$E[K$Dat$T$E[u$P$G
```

● I hope you have found this column useful and that it has helped you to make the most of DOS.