

Delphi Books: A Comparative Overview

Reviews by Bob Swart and Steve Troxell, Overview by Chris Frizelle

Since Delphi was first released there has been what seems like a deluge of books published which aim to help you get more out of the product we have all come to know and love. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of a selection of these books and help you choose the right ones for your needs.

Over the months we've carried reviews of some of these books, but our prolific contributors Bob Swart and Steve Troxell have between them read 15 in total. They have assessed the books for us according to three criteria:

- > Quality of the technical contents (bearing in mind whether the book is aimed at beginner, intermediate or advanced developers);
- > Quality of writing (how easy the book is to follow);
- > Value for money (based on the USA price).

Finally, they came up with an overall assessment of each book. The results are shown in the table opposite (where a rating of 5 is best and 1 worst).

The Reviews Database

However, not content with this, Bob Swart set about creating a database application to store the review information, plus details of publisher, price, the ISBN and summary comments too, from Bob and/or Steve.

The fruits of Dr. Bob's labours are included on this month's free disk (in directory DELBOOKS). The screenshot on the front cover should whet your appetite! Note that this application requires the Borland Database Engine to be installed and the database is read-only. See the README file for help.

We've extracted the summary reviews for what we feel are overall the best books of the 15 reviewed

and included them below, under the three levels described earlier.

Beginner Level

There have been a lot of books written at this level and my personal opinion (this is Chris Frizelle writing!) is that some of them have not been very good – the computer books field is filled with manual re-writes and me-too books.

From our overview, Neil Rubenking's *Delphi Programming For Dummies* seems a clear winner.

> Delphi Programming For Dummies (by Neil Rubenking)

Bob Swart's comments:

This book assumes nothing, only that you've got a computer and copy of Delphi (installed or not – it actually assists in installing Delphi). Neil believes that the best way of learning Delphi is by doing, so a lot of the stuff in the book requires you working at the computer. Not typing long listings of code, mind you, but simply dropping and arranging a component or two on a form, modifying a property or two, writing one or two lines of code, and presto a self-made Windows file editor, Towers of Hanoi puzzle, a database system, DDE or OLE links with other applications and so on. The book will make sure you get results right away, while you can learn the technical stuff later on – if you want to, that is.

Published by IDG Books at \$19.99 in the USA, ISBN: 1-56884-200-7

Intermediate Level

At this level the quality of the books is generally very good and you will probably benefit from reading any of those we have reviewed. However, if a choice has to be made, the following two stand out as exceptionally good.

> Delphi Developer's Guide (by Xavier Pacheco and Steve Teixeira)

Bob Swart's comments:

Like Charlie Calvert (*Delphi Unleashed*), Steve Teixeira and Xavier Pacheco were part of the development team that actually created Delphi. As such, they had time to write down their own first-hand experience with Delphi. The book consists of three parts: Getting Started (which is actually taking you way beyond just getting started), Real-World Building Blocks (six very nice small but powerful programs) and Real-World Applications (two bigger actual applications – using every part of Delphi you can imagine). If you read only one book in addition to the Delphi manuals, then let this be the one; it contains everything you need to become a professional Delphi programmer!

Steve Troxell's comments:

Briefly touches on Delphi basics; gets right to the meat. Detailed, technical coverage of a variety of programming techniques, but minimal discussion of database concerns. Not for the beginner, but a great technical resource.

Published by SAMS at \$49.99 in the USA, ISBN: 0-672-30704-9

> Delphi Unleashed (by Charlie Calvert)

Bob Swart's comments:

Charlie Calvert knows Delphi like no other and what started out as a few example programs designed to highlight the programming environment turned out to be a truly massive book. The book offers a relatively complete description of Delphi and its accompanying tools and language. Since the scope is so large, Charlie discusses both introductory and more advanced techniques in this book. The introductory sections form a solid

Title and [Author(s)]	Technical Contents	Quality of Writing	Value for Money	Overall Assessment
Beginner Level				
Delphi Programming for Dummies [Neil Rubenking]	4	5	5	5
The Tao of Objects (2nd ed) [Gary Entsminger]	4	4	4	4
Developing Windows Applications Using Delphi [Paul Penrod]	4	3	4	4
Teach Yourself Database Programming with Delphi in 21 Days [Nathan and Ori Gurewich]	4	3	3	3
Instant Delphi Programming [Dave Jewell]	3	4	4	3
Delphi by Example [Blake Watson]	3	4	3	3
Teach Yourself Delphi in 21 Days [A J Wozniwicz, N Shammas & T Campbell]	2	3	3	3
Intermediate Level				
Delphi Developer's Guide [Xavier Pacheco & Steve Teixeira]	5	4	5	5
Delphi Unleashed [Charlie Calvert]	5	5	4	5
Delphi Starter Kit [Jeff Duntemann, Jim Mischel, Don Taylor]	4	5	5	5
Mastering Delphi [Marco Cantu]	4	5	4	4
Delphi - A Developer's Guide [Bill Todd & Vince Kellen, with Ray Novak & Brad Saenz]	4	4	5	4
Delphi Programming Explorer [Jeff Duntemann, Jim Mischel, Don Taylor]	4	5	4	4
(Special Edition) Using Delphi [Jon Matcho, David R. Faulkner et al]	4	4	4	4
Advanced Level				
Borland Delphi How-To [Gary Frerking, Nathan Wallace, Wayne Nidderly]	5	4	5	5

➤ Summary information for the books reviewed (Note: 1 = Bad, 2 = Poor, 3 = Fair, 4 = Good, 5 = Best)

foundation for Delphi and especially Object Pascal, the advanced sections present ways to extend Delphi and your way of working with Delphi. Whether you need a solid introduction to Object Pascal or just want some detailed database or multimedia topics, this book will be right for you!

Steve Troxell's comments:

An excellent and thorough overview of Delphi covering the IDE, Pascal programming, OOP and the VCL better than most books.

Published by SAMS at \$45.00 in the USA, ISBN: 0-672-30499-6

Advanced Level

There's only one book we felt able to put into this category, but we can wholeheartedly recommend it.

➤ **Borland Delphi How-To (by Gary Frerking, Nathan Wallace, Wayne Nidderly)**

Bob Swart's comments:

Borland Delphi How-To is a very good book to read *after* you've read some other (often introductory) Delphi books and are ready to do some real world projects. The book consists of 113 problems with (detailed) solutions, divided and grouped into 12 chapters like Forms, Standard Components, Documents and Text, Mouse and Menu, Graphics, Multimedia, Environment and System, Peripherals, Database, OLE and DDE, The Polished Application, and some miscellaneous Tips and Tricks. All problems/solutions have a little indication about the complexity level

(either easy, intermediate or advanced) to prepare the reader.

Steve Troxell's comments:

An excellent reference containing detailed, concise, self-contained solutions to over 100 common and not so common Windows development tasks in Delphi. Makes no attempt to teach Delphi, purely a problem-solver book. My personal favourite.

Published by Waite Group Press at a price of \$39.95 in the USA, ISBN: 1-57169-019-0

In Conclusion

Soon there will be a new batch of Delphi 2.0 books in the shops and we plan to keep you updated on these, so watch this space!