

When you received your computer system, it probably came with 1,000 to 2,000 pages of documentation. Included were certainly a DOS manual (about 500 pages) and a printer manual (about 200 pages). Also, you may have received a BASIC language manual (about 400 pages) and a Guide To Operations (200-400 pages). And, of course, each application software package you use came with a manual.

What we are attempting to do in this section is to provide a distillation of the DOS manual and the Guide To Operations. It stands to reason that we will not cover every aspect of computer operation, nor will we be able to explain all 70 DOS commands and programs. However, we feel that the 80/20 rule (80% of your work is done with 20% of your tools) can be applied to the micro operations situation quite handily. We'll cover the fundamental DOS commands and other operational skills needed to make effective use of your system.

2.1 Bare Minimum DOS Commands, Concepts, and Tools

Of the 70 or so DOS commands and programs, 9 of them are commonly used on a daily basis to keep data and program files organized. We have set up the description of each command in much the same way as IBM has done in its DOS Reference Manual, but hopefully in a somewhat more readable fashion. If (or should we say when) you need to refer to the DOS documentation for more esoteric uses of these and other commands, you should feel quite familiar with the layout.

Before these commands can be discussed, however, a few concepts, tools, conventions, and definitions need to be outlined.

2.1.1 Essential Definitions

A number of English words have quite narrow meanings when applied to microcomputer hardware and software. Herewith are definitions of some of the main ones.

Bit	BIrary digiT. A unit of the binary system, either 1 or 0. Signifies the smallest unit of data, and is used to mean the PHYSICAL representation of a binary digit, e.g. as a magnetized spot on a recording surface or a pulse in an electronic circuit.
Byte	A group of 8 adjacent binary digits (bits) operated on by the computer as one unit. A Byte is required to represent, in the computer, one character on the keyboard.
Command	In DOS, a statement consisting of a KEYWORD followed by PARAMETERS which instructs a program to perform a specific task.
Default	What a program will do during a particular task unless specified otherwise by the user.
Delimiter	A character used to separate the parts of a command (usually a Space, a Comma, or a Period.)
DOS	The Disk Operating System. A group of essential programs used to perform file, disk and program management functions on the microcomputer. DOS is made by the Microsoft Corporation, and marketed as MS-DOS; IBM markets it under licence from Microsoft and calls it PC-DOS. It may be modified by various firms such as Compaq, Zenith, and Tandy and released as MS-DOS, however the releases are not generally interchangeable.