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The Vax Book: An Introduction

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The VAX Book An Introduction

J.R. Hubbard

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Preface

*Even while they teach,
men learn.*

SENECA, LETTERS

This book is an expansion of the book, *A Gentle Introduction to the VAX System*. Although its title is different and it contains about 60 percent more information, this book is meant to be just as gentle as its predecessor. In fact, the first four chapters of the two books are essentially the same. The purpose of the book is to guide the novice, step-by-step, through the initial stages of learning to use the Digital Equipment Corporation's VAX computers, running under the VMS operating system (Version 5.0 or later). As a tutorial for beginners, this book assumes no previous experience with computers.

The book covers many of the most widely used features of the VAX. The first four chapters are devoted to the basics of the VAX/VMS command language DCL and its EDT editor. Chapter 5 explains how to use the VAX MAIL utility. Chapters 6-9 introduce, independently, the VAX BASIC, FORTRAN, Pascal, and Ada programming environments. Chapter 10 explains how to use the VAX Symbolic Debugger on programs written in any of these languages. Chapters 11-17 cover various advanced VAX/VMS topics. Finally, chapter 18 offers an introduction to the Minitab statistical package. The 12 appendices occupy about one-third of the book. Most of them provide extensive reference information on topics introduced in the body of the book. For example, appendix E is a reference manual for the VAX MAIL utility introduced in chapter 5.

How to Use This Book

*I hear, and I forget.
I see, and I remember.
I do, and I understand.*

ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB

This book is an instruction manual. It is meant to be read while working at a terminal. Each chapter consists of a sequence of steps that should be performed on the VAX. Plan to spend about 60 minutes working through each chapter and its self-test exercises. Make notes in the margins of the book. Although no supervision should be needed as you work at the VAX, it would help to have someone experienced nearby in case you get stuck. If that option is not available, the next best thing is to work together with another newcomer like yourself. And don't hesitate to experiment; it's o.k. to try things that aren't described in this book.

Do the first four chapters in order. They provide a foundation on which everything else is based. After that, most of the other 14 chapters can be done independently. The exception is chapter 10, which should be preceded by at least one of the chapters on programming (chapters 6–9). After you have completed chapters 1–4, review appendices A–D. Thereafter, you will want to refer to these appendices frequently.

No one can remember all the commands available on the VAX. To use the VAX, you will need an authorized account. You also need to know the username and password assigned to your account. Beyond that, all you need is some time, patience, determination, and curiosity. Bon computing!