

Questions And Answers

Questions about computing that often spring to mind but are rarely answered in the manuals and magazines

What can a home computer be used for, apart from playing games?

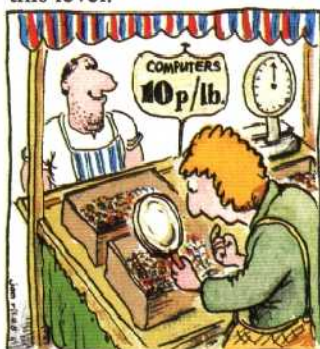
Home computers are used to run small businesses, handle accounts, do word processing, and can even keep records of golf club members and their handicaps, or help in designing interiors. These are fairly typical of the uses to which home computers are put. More generally, the uses can be classified as handling numbers, handling words, storing information and displaying information in a way that suits the user.



Computers seem to be getting smaller and cheaper. When and where is this process likely to stop?

Computers are getting smaller as technology continues to advance. The electronic components inside are getting smaller, but the keyboard cannot drastically change its size. It must remain large enough to be used by our fingers. For this reason, computers are unlikely to become much smaller until the traditional keyboard is replaced by other ways of communicating with the

computer. With several computers costing less than £100, it is unlikely that prices can drop much below this level.



Is BASIC a difficult language to learn?

BASIC itself is not at all difficult to learn. By comparison with English, which after all is a language that we have all learnt, BASIC is a small language with rigid rules. This makes it much easier to learn than a foreign language. Although the elements of BASIC are easy to learn, it is not so easy to write very long and complicated programs.

When should I start learning BASIC?

The best time to start is when you need to. It may be that the computer can be made to do exactly what you want by running a program that you can buy. In that case, you don't need to learn BASIC at all. Unfortunately, programs you can buy do not always do exactly what you want. By learning a little BASIC you can sometimes adapt them to your needs. In the end, though, to make the

computer do all the things you want, so that it really is a personal computer, you need to start learning BASIC as soon as possible.

A monitor seems to be more expensive than a television. What extra do I get for the money?

You get a much clearer and crisper display on its screen. If you expect to spend any length of time using your computer, a lot of it will be spent looking at the screen, and you will be less likely to get a headache if it is clear and easy to read. Besides this, any graphic images you create with the computer will look better on a monitor.

How much electricity does a home computer use?

Less than a 60 watt light bulb.



The advertisements seem to tell me that I can use my computer to help with my children's education. Is this really true?

Yes. They can also help educate adults. The Department of Education and Science has done its best to ensure that every school in the country has a

computer, so they are bound to play an increasingly bigger role in education. The key to using them as a learning aid lies in having suitable software. There are many drill programs to teach multiplication tables and spelling, for example. This is not a particularly stimulating way to use the computer, however. A more imaginative educational use is through the LOGO language. LOGO allows children to learn by exploring a so-called microworld and by carrying out experiments to see what happens. Here, the child learns by actually programming the computer. For more on computing for children, see page 34.



Some computers, like the Spectrum, have rubber 'calculator-style' keyboards; others, like the Dragon, have 'typewriter-style' keyboards. What difference does this make? Very little, unless you are a trained typist, in which case you can type in your BASIC programs at great speed on a 'typewriter-style' keyboard, but not so rapidly on the other kind.