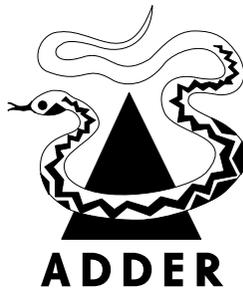


# **The BASIC ROM User Guide**

**for the BBC microcomputer  
and Acorn Electron**

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# Introduction

Many books have been written explaining how to program in BBC BASIC, or how to program in 6502 machine code. Most people therefore know BASIC or machine code without really understanding what BASIC itself is up to. This book fills in that gap by providing a complete description of BASIC as a *system*.

Although BASIC is a very large machine code program, it is essentially very simple, as it is very *structured*: once you can see the overall structure of the system, it is very easy to delve deeper and deeper into its workings, to find out exactly what is happening. This book explains that overall structure: program storage, variable storage, expression evaluation, etc., right down to the mechanisms used by a FOR..NEXT loop or a procedure call. Armed with this knowledge, and the disassembler in chapter 6, you can probe right down to the machine code level of BASIC.

Understanding the operation of a large machine code program such as BBC BASIC has many advantages: not only does it point the way for writing large machine code programs yourself, but it also allows you to write your BASIC programs much more efficiently. Once you know what BASIC has to do to interpret a program, it is possible to write faster programs if you need to, by using resident integer variables wherever possible, using PROCs and FNs rather than GOSUBs, and so on.

The second part of this book describes how to add routines on to BASIC to expand the capabilities of your machine, mainly by trapping the errors that it generates. Adding new commands, overlaying procedures, etc., are all covered, together with how to get back into BASIC to continue afterwards. The examples also show you how to use some of the ROM routines to save space and time in you own machine code programs.

The example programs are complete in that you can type them in and run them, and many of them are useful utilities. However, they also indicate the possibilities available to the adventurous programmer – don't be afraid to chop them about, and use them as a basis to put your own ideas into practice. Chapter 10 provides a comprehensive listing of the BASIC ROM entry points (for both BASIC1 and BASIC2), so that you can experiment with other ideas for new utilities.

Of course, using ROM routines directly will mean that your programs might not work on the Tube, Econet, or with a different BASIC; in fact, the BASIC ROM may not even be 'paged in' when you try to use it. For experimenting with your own machine, however, this doesn't really matter. Commercial programs should never use any of these ROM routines; the program might find itself running in a situation you did not allow for. For such programs, or any others which are not restricted to a particular system configuration, only the officially documented facilities should be used.

Note that all Electrons, and the later BBC microcomputers, have BASIC2: the earlier BBC microcomputers have BASIC1. If you are not sure which version of BASIC is in your machine, typing **REPORT** after BASIC has just started up (after a **BREAK** or **\*BASIC**), will print the copyright message. If the date is 1981, BASIC1 is fitted; if it is 1982, you have BASIC2. American machines, or those with a second processor, may have US BASIC or HIBASIC: the ROM routines will not be in the same place for these ROMs.

Armed with this book, and plenty of coffee, you should have many happy nights programming. Have fun!