# VDE*

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VDE is a good all-round text-based generic word processor. It has most of the facilities of other word processors plus some they lack; it is fast because it runs entirely in memory and it can double as a program editor. It will run on a single disc machine and under CP/M 2.2 but I am assuming that most users will have CP/M 3. If there is the demand, I will do a short piece on using VDE under CP/M 2.2.

It has no graphics capabilities and it does not know anything about your computer, only the CP/M interface, but it does know that CP/M allows you to customise your computer and it relies on you using these facilities to get the best out of it.

For example, it has no facility to print pound signs; it expects you to use `LANGUAGE 3` on your Amstrad and set the dip switches on your printer to print UK English (ISO language 3) in order to obtain pound signs.

## Installation

You can install virtually every feature of VDE you want to suit your taste but, unlike many word processors, it saves this information in separate files. The word processing features you choose are stored in the main file but there are separate files for the keyboard and printer. This means that once someone has created a keyboard or printer file, it can be used by anyone else. The VDE distribution disc (PD disc 10) is already set up for the CPC and comes with several examples of other people's keyboard and printer files. I supplied some more at one stage but I am not sure whether they were added to the WACCI distribution disc.

To install an already created keyboard or printer file, you simply enter:

```
VINST266 VDE266 myfile.VDK <RETURN>
```

(for a keyboard file — `myfile.VDP` for a printer file).

When the installation screen appears, press `S` and it will be installed. If you want to revise the file or if the file you specify does not exist, press `K` or `P` to go into the installation dialogues.

Unless you have the relevant printer manual, it is probably better not to try and install your own files. Rely on those that are provided until you have found your way round the program.

## Manuals and help

VDE was ten years ahead of most distributors in providing an on-line manual both for the program and for the installation. Both are worth printing out and reading because there are

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so many facilities in VDE that can save you time if you know they are there. There is also a quick reference sheet plus online help using `CONTROL-J`.
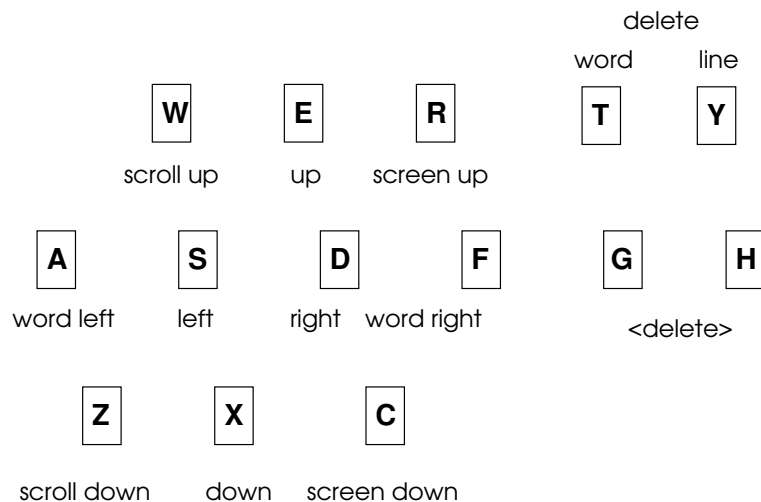
## Using VDE

However, you can get started with relatively few instructions. If you load VDE, it should present a full screen with a status line at the top.

This tells you

```
DU:FILENAME.EXT [M Pg n Ln n Cl nn INS vt hy
```

where `D` is the disc, `U` is the User number, `M` is the file mode, `Pg` is Page, `Ln` is Line, `Cl` is Column, `INS` shows that Insert mode is on, `vt` means variable tabs are available and `hy` means hyphen help is on.

VDE can use two classic keyboard arrangements, WordStar and CP/M; most people choose WordStar which is based on the ESDX diamond. These represent UP, LEFT, RIGHT, DOWN. The keys around them represent extensions of these four directions:



So pressing `CONTROL` with one of these keys obtains the cursor movement which we associate with the arrow keys. Many people use `SETKEYS` to program their arrow keys to carry out these functions rather than relying on the ESDX diamond. Because VDE is generic, it does not assume you have arrow keys; it just assumes a typewriter keyboard plus `ESC` and `CONTROL`. Similarly, simple deletions are carried out by using `CONTROL` with one of the cluster of keys to the right.

As with the arrow keys, you can use `SETKEYS` to ensure that `CLR` and `DEL` work properly with VDE.

Finally, as with many CP/M programs, `CONTROL-V` toggles between insert and overwrite mode.

Knowing these keys will be more than enough to get you creating your masterpiece in VDE. Unless you are using a version set up for programming, you will find that it word-wraps at the end of the line and everything behaves as you would expect a good word processor should. One feature rare in CP/M word processors is the ability to open a window in the bottom half of the screen where you can view one part of the file while working on another in the top half.

All this happens in memory; to save your work or print it out, you need to use a two letter combination beginning `CONTROL-K`. These commands are similar to but not the same as the WordStar commands. For example, `CONTROL-KS` Saves and continues, `CONTROL-KX` saves and eXits but `CONTROL-KD` saves and asks you for the name of a new file to load. `CONTROL-KQ` Quits without saving but VDE is canny enough to ask `Are you sure?` if it knows you have made changes since the last save.

## File modes

You can save a VDE file in one of three formats — ASCII, Non-document or WordStar. ASCII is VDE's native format and, unless you are a WordStar user, will be most people's preferred format. Non-document is the format you need to use VDE as a text editor when programming. You specify the format by adding `[A`, `[N` or `[W` after the filename.

If you are disciplined about the way you use filenames, you can install VDE to recognise each type automatically — for example, by using .ASC for ASCII files, .DOC for WordStar files and .TXT for Non-document files. But you are not bound by this; for example, if you want to edit PROFILE.SUB in VDE, simply add `[N` and it will treat it as a Non-document file.

`CONTROL-KP` prints the file after asking for your options, when you can add headers and page numbers or print selected pages. If you have a block marked, `CONTROL-KPB<RETURN>` prints that block only.

You can do all the normal cut and paste operations using the WordStar style block operation commands.

There are two other major groups of two letter commands — `CONTROL-Q` and `CONTROL-O`.

`CONTROL-Q` commands are best thought of as quick commands. So `CONTROL-QS` takes you quickly to the left margin and `CONTROL-QC` takes you quickly to the end of the file. Among this group are `CONTROL-QF` — the Find command — and `CONTROL-QA` — the find And replace command. Each of these have options and produce dialogues in the top right hand corner of the screen; so they are probably better left until you have read the manual.

`CONTROL-O` commands affect the On-screen appearance, and sometimes the printout. So, for example, `CONTROL-OL` allows you to change the Left margin, CONTROL-OR allows you to change the Right margin, `CONTROL-OC` Centres the text and `CONTROL-OF` prints the line Flush right.

To see and print out a summary of many VDE commands, load VDE and then enter

    CONTROL-KL VDE266.QRF <RETURN>

Then

    CONTROL-KP <RETURN>

to print it out.

Finally, in this whirlwind introduction, VDE was one of the first programs to have its own macro language allowing you to automate certain actions in the way that spreadsheets first did. Anyone who wants to do a complicated find and replace will find this facility invaluable.

For example, you can use this with Find and Replace to remove or replace unwanted characters in a foreign file format. I have put Microsoft Works, Microsoft Word and Acorn files

through VDE to recover the text. If you have a PC, Word 97 will do something similar; if you haven't, VDE is the best program I have found for doing this. As Microsoft puts spoiling code into its files to prevent non-Microsoft programs from accessing them, it is sometimes necessary to remove the first 100 bytes of the file where this code lies in order to read them. Advice on how to do this is available through the helpline.

## Block operations

Block operations (cut and paste) are available in every shape and form except column mode. You mark the start of the Block with `CONTROL-KB` and the end of the blocK with `CONTROL-KK`; you can then moVe it with `CONTROL-KV`, Copy it with `CONTROL-KC,` Write (i.e. save) it to disc with `CONTROL-KW` and delete it with `CONTROL-KY`.

If you want to bring a file into a VDE document, you use `CONTROL-KR` (for Read) and VDE asks you for the filename.

You can use these facilities to look through one file while working on another. Use `CONTROL-KB` and `CONTROL-KK` to insert the block markers into your current document. Then, with the cursor between the two block markers, enter `CONTROL-KR` followed by the name of the file you want to examine. When you have finished looking at it, enter `CONTROL-KY` to delete the block and you are back to where you were. You can even print it out with `CONTROL-KPB` or alter it and save it with `CONTROL-KW` before deleting it if you want. Obviously, the combined size of both documents must not be over 50K, or around 12 pages, the realistic limit for a VDE document.

## Place markers

If you want to remember a place in a file, you can set a place marker with `CONTROL-PZ` and find it with `CONTROL-QP`. If you set more than one place marker, VDE cycles through them in turn.

If you want to rename a file or change its file mode, you can use `CONTROL-KN`. You may not find that everything changes on-screen immediately to suit the new mode but if you page forward or back or use `CONTROL-OZ` you will find that the screen adapts to the new mode fairly quickly as the old mode is overwritten. (If you want to change from WordStar to ASCII or Non-document mode, it is better to use the `[z]` switch in `PIP` as this guarantees to remove all the extra bits inserted by WordStar).

## Find and replace

If you want to find and replace the hard carriage returns in a Non-document file, you can use `CONTROL-QA CONTROL-PM <RETURN> <space> <RETURN>` to replace them with spaces. Note that the VDE manual is slightly misleading about this point by printing `^M` as shorthand for `CONTROL-PM`.

Among the options for use with Find and Find and Replace are:

`/i/`      ignore case

`/b/`      search backwards

These must precede whatever you are searching for. You can also use the underline over zero on the 6128 as a wildcard in the search string.

If you want to find and replace every occurrence of something, you can enter an asterisk (`*`) at the first occurrence and VDE will do them all. Otherwise you respond with `Y` or `N` at each occurrence. If you have found the first occurrence of something you are not replacing and you want to go on to the next, you enter `CONTROL-L`.

## Layout

VDE comes, like all word processors with certain defaults which you can change using the installation program but what if you want to change something in the middle of a document?

Most aspects of the layout can be changed with a command starting `CONTROL-O`; so `CONTROL-OL` and `CONTROL-OR` allow you to change the left and right margins respectively; `CONTROL-OX` allows you to go outside the margins, `CONTROL-OS` changes the line spacing and `CONTROL-OP` changes the page length. Though VDE does not insert a line across the screen when you start a new page, it does show the page number and line number you are on at the top of the screen. So you can insert extra lines to make sure a paragraph does not print across two pages if you want.

You can use `CONTROL-OR` and `CONTROL-OP` to change the right margin and page length to print in landscape format (or even A3 if your printer will take it). If you are using a Hewlett-Packard, which prints landscape by turning everything sideways on an A4 page, you will need a separate printer file to send the sideways command to the printer. But, once you have installed that, a page length of 40 and a right margin of 96 at 10 cpi should work fine. If you use 12 cpi you can go up to 112 quite safely but not all printers can print 12 cpi in landscape mode; so check your printer and printer file before trying this. There are also variations in the ways different printers (even from the same manufacturer) interpret the page length and margin commands; so you may need to experiment with different settings before you find the one that suits your printer best.

If you are using VDE to develop something in landscape format, you will find the commands `ESC-<LEFT ARROW>` and `ESC-<RIGHT ARROW>` which shift the screen left and right very useful — assuming you have used `SETKEYS` to make the arrow keys work properly! If you are doing a lot of speed typing — for which VDE is generally very good because it is memory resident — it is worth using `CONTROL-O<UP ARROW>` from time to time to make the display move up a whole screen. This means you don't have the delay at the end of each line as the screen scrolls up a line when you are typing at the bottom of the screen.

## Printer commands

Unless you have defined one of the 'spare' printer commands in your printer file to let you do it, you cannot change the font or typesize in a VDE document. But, provided your printer can produce them, you can use bold, doublestrike, italic and underline (or underscore, as the Americans call it) by entering `CONTROL-P` followed by `B`, `D`, `Y` or `S` where you want it to begin and the same command where you want it to end (these commands are called 'toggles' because they reverse whatever was the case).

The four 'spare' printer commands in VDE are `CONTROL-PQ`, `-PW`, `-PE` and `-PR` which you can define in your printer file in order to customise VDE to your particular needs. For this,

you need to know the hexadecimal printer codes which your printer needs for each separate command. You enter the number of hexadecimal pairs in the code followed by the hexadecimal pairs without any spaces between them.

If you find your display is littered with printer codes and you want to see how a table, for example, will line up, entering **CONTROL-OD** will make the codes disappear and entering it again will restore them. It is better to note where you need to make changes and restore the printer codes before making the changes as changes made without knowing where the codes are can produce unexpected results.

Among the options you can select when printing out are:

**B** to print the current marked block

**P** to pause after each page

**""** to print page numbers in the top right hand corner

**"<text>"** to print a header in front of the page number

**\***$n$ to print $n$ times

**@**$n$ to start printing at page $n$

Most word processors end printing by sending a formfeed to eject the page and VDE is no exception in this respect. However, you can disable this by using the page length command **CONTROL-OP**. Setting the page length to 0 suppresses page numbers and formfeeds allowing you either to use continuous paper without page breaks or to print several short items on the same page without the printer ejecting the paper at the end of each one. Obviously, if you do this, you have to use the printer's formfeed button to eject the document.

VDE lacks the desktop publishing facilities of Brunword and the sophisticated printer controls of Protext and Newword but it has several tricks up its sleeve that other word processors lack including a powerful macro language which I have not touched on. If you want a flexible, typewriter substitute that you can customise to your needs and preferences or a fully-featured text-editor in which to develop your programs, VDE is hard to beat. No other 'free' word processor comes close and VDE is one of the select band of CP/M programs which have a PC version and so everything you learn about it can be transferred to a PC version if you decide to move in that direction.

I have prepared a version of VDE which includes a suitable SUBMIT file, KEYS.VDE to make the arrow, delete and copy keys work and assign macros to the numeric keypad, MACRO.VDK to execute these macros and printer files for EPSON 9-pin, IBM Proprinter, Hewlett-Packard and daisywheel printers.

Each of these printer files is set up to make Bold and Underline (or underScore) operate correctly in VDE and has a sample file illustrating their other features and how they look.

Anyone who would like all or just one of the files off the disc is invited to 'phone me via the helpline and leave their name and address if they get the answerphone.