TECH CORNER

TED ROCHE'S DOS TIP: ALIAS

Are you sick of typing "FORMAT DRIVE DF1: NAME NewData NOICONS" every time you want to format a disk? There's an easier way. The ALIAS command, new to Amiga DOS release 1.3, lets you create a pseudonym for any command recognized by the Amiga DOS Shell, or invent your own compound commands. The format for ALIAS is:

ALIAS <alias> <string>

where <alias> is the new command name, and <string> is any text recognized by AmigaDOS as a valid command. Typing ALIAS from the Shell will list those ALIASes already set up for you by Commodore. These ALIASes are created by the script file "Shell-Startup" in the S: subdirectory, which is executed each time a new shell is started. Your own ALIASes can be added to "Shell-Startup" by editing that file with a text editor such as ED. Alternatively, ALIASes can be added at any time from the Shell, but these will only be in effect for that Shell and will disappear when the Shell is closed.

Square brackets [] have a special meaning to the ALIAS command. When used within the <string> portion of the command, the Shell will replace the brackets with what you have typed on the command line. For example, for those misfortunates among us who work on those "other" operating systems (like me), you'll never have to try to remember if it's "DELETE," "ERASE," "SCRATCH" or "DEL" if you include the following in the S:Shell-Startup file on your Workbench disk:

ALIAS DEL DELETE []
ALIAS ERASE DELETE []
ALIAS SCRATCH DELETE []

Now typing DEL df1:foo.bar will DELETE the file, as will SCRATCH df1:foo.bar, and ERASE df1:foo.bar. And you can still use DELETE df1:foo.bar. You might want to try shortening other commands you use often: change MAKEDIR to MD, or FORMAT DRIVE DF1: NAME [] NOICONS to FMT.

While this is handy, you can do much more with ALIAS than just give commands a new name. More complex actions, involving piping or redirection or even the launching of new tasks can be shortened into a single ALIAS. For example, there are many times when I've wanted to start a text file printing and, while it prints, continue typing commands in the Shell. So I've added the line:

ALIAS Print Run Copy [] PRT:

to my S:Shell-Startup file. Now, I type PRINT README and can continue with my Shell session while my printer chugs away!

There are many other applications for the ALIAS command. Anything which can be typed as a single command line into the Shell can be ALIAS'ed into a simpler or shorter form. Please experiment and pass along your favorites!

STEVE RAINERI'S C SERIES (1)

This is the first in a series of articles on programming in the C language. Although I will address each topic from the point of view of programming on the Amiga, these points are valid in any environment you choose.

Let's dispel a couple of misconceptions about C right here. First, C is not a difficult language to learn. Although its symbolic operators may look different, once you get used to them they become second nature. It's just like learning a foreign language with a different alphabet from ours. I studied Russian, so I know how difficult that can be at first. A second and even more disturbing notion about C is that it is difficult to read. This stems from the fact that a lot of programmers write unreadable code. This is the fault of the programmer and not the language.

Good programming requires certain basic rules to be followed, whether one is writing a Million Dollar Program for a Government Agency, or just doing some weekend hacking. These rules also hold true for whatever language you decide to use for your project.

All programs should begin with a "Design" phase. You must decide exactly what you want the program to accomplish and choose some methods by which it might be implemented. For instance, if you're going to write a routine for some keyboard input, you must decide whether you will accept all keys and remove unwanted ones later, or prevent the use of any invalid keys, and you must choose a method for notifying the user of incorrect input. (This may seem like a lot of work for someone just doing a little hack