There is, at present, not exactly a shortage of books on Visual Basic. I have several in my personal library, used as references for my own programming work, and, at times, in the introductory programming classes which we provide for pre-service and in-service teachers.

This book will now take a prominent position on my shelves. I'll use it the next time I need to lead a programming class. The strength of the book lies in its organisation and depth; it's not a huge book, but it covers Visual Basic in a most comprehensive manner, using a series of twenty programming examples.

The examples feature the use of sketches, used in design phase to lay out VB controls on screen; N-S diagrams for the code contained in those controls which trap events; snap shots of property boxes for the most crucial controls; listings of actual VB code; and screen captures of the final running example. Very well done. If you're not a fan of N-S diagrams you need not be worried - they're not a major feature.

The examples start with the use of simple controls, such as text boxes, labels, and command buttons, and progress to cover scroll bars, grid controls, and file and directory list boxes. Use of sequential and random files is covered, as is print formatting. Procedures, functions, global, local, static, arrays (even control arrays) - you name it, I think you'll find it in this book. The only topic missing from my own wish-list would be that of how to use multiple forms within a single VB project.

Programming with Visual Basic is meant to be an introductory text, but I think those who might use it would be well advised to know that it assumes the user to be competent with Windows. I have found the lack of fundamental GUI (graphical user interface) skills to be a common impediment in our classes; this book doesn't waste time with explaining how to drag and drop, how to use browse buttons to find files on disk, how to expand controls by dragging on their sides, etc - in this sense it is definitely not working at an introductory level.

Quite a number of the example projects use graphics, and it is frequently the case that the user is directed to create the graphics using Paintbrush (or Paint). For example, the sample project which has to do with using random numbers requires six bitmap images, corresponding to the possible outcomes of rolling a die. I think some students would find this a nice additional challenge, but I'm quite sure a number would find it to be very time consuming. There is said to be a companion floppy disk available with the book; this didn't come with my evaluation copy, but I'd be inclined to recommend it as it's supposed to contain all the bitmap images required, as well as some of the more complex forms seen in the examples.

If anything, the book might be said to be a bit too concise. A teacher is likely to find, I think, that the strongest students will be well served by this book, but the rest will often have need to see parts of the examples worked out. Perhaps I am wrong here; the students we get in our undergraduate classes in Education are probably quite different to those a high school teacher would find in a programming unit. At any rate the book features a number of revision questions and problems at the end of each section which seem likely to challenge all students, and capable of giving the teacher a ready indication of how well students are grasping the material.

I recommend this book, and intend to make it the main text in my own programming units.