If you are new to the p-system this book will be a great help. A number of the examples will open a few new vistas to experienced users. Overall, this is a readable book which does exactly what it proposes - gives the reader an introduction to the UCSD p-system.

PERSONAL COMPUTING WITH THE UCSD p-SYSTEM
by Mark Overgaard & Stan Stringfellow
Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983, 448 pgs., $16.95

The book is divided into three parts. The first is an introduction to the most useful and most used aspects of the p-system. General information on computer diskettes and hard disks is discussed, and sufficient background is provided to allow you to grasp the interconnections between the various pieces of hardware and software.

The tutorial style takes you logically through the steps you need whether using a purchased application program, writing your own program, or using the system as a word processor. This part of the book is not comprehensive. It gives you a very practical method to get the above type of tasks done and references sections in the second part of the book for in-depth coverage.

In the second part of the book, the operating system, editor and filer each has a chapter. In addition to a comprehensive overview, each command available from that level is listed alphabetically and covered completely. The major advantages of these descriptions over those in the manuals that come with your computer are a more readable style and many more examples. The examples are straightforward and generally independent of a particular language. Where the examples are language dependent, separate sections for Pascal and FORTRAN are presented.

The third part covers modules, p-system programming tools, debugger tools, and generally gives you a better feel for program development. This part is only about 30 pages in length and is not done with the detail and helpfulness of the first two parts. It reads much more like the usual manual. This is unfortunate since the topics are quite important.

Both authors are associated with SofTech, the group which markets the p-system. They have a number of ways of doing things which save a lot of effort. For example, my present computer, a Sage II, has 640K Bytes available on diskettes. It is surprising how many different files you can store in this amount of space, but removing old files can be a chore since you can't see all the file names at once. It is really tiresome typing out each complete file name. The authors suggest using wildcards. Going to the Filer and using the Remove command with the ('?') wildcard will step through each file on the diskette and ask if it should be removed. Responding with a "y" or a "n" will respectively leave or remove the file. This is easier and faster. Other tidbits discussed include the ability to transfer output or files from the console to your printer or to a diskette from the middle of a program. This and many other helpful procedures are outlined.

To sum up, the first book is simpler and a good introduction; the second is more advanced and perhaps a bit more difficult, but covers more. Both are better written and much easier to use than any other manuals I've seen.

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