

LEARNING TO PROGRAM WITH VISUAL BASIC AND .NET GADGETEER

A guide to accompany the Fez Cerberus Tinker Kit

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FOREWORD

Computer programming can be fun! This book on Visual Basic and .NET Gadgeteer shows how. Aimed at high school students and first-time programmers, the authors use a combination of hardware and software to make programming come alive - audibly, visually, and tangibly. Using small hardware components - a standalone processor, simple sensors and actuators - students build their own little computers in hardware and then program them to do fun things, such as play music (Chapter 3), blink lights (Chapter 6), or draw pictures (Chapter 10). By the end of the book, students have learned all the basics of programming: variables, basic data types, arrays, conditionals, iteration, procedures, and functions. More importantly, they learn a fundamental “computational thinking” concept - modularity. From the very first exercise, students become engaged through the tactile experience of assembling hardware components together to build real devices which they program through standard interfaces, protocols, and built-in libraries. Without a lot of fuss, the authors teach these concepts using the widely-adopted Visual Studio software development tool, exposing students to a modern programming environment that supports the engineering cycle of design, build, test, and debug. At the same time, students naturally assimilate a better understanding of how electronic devices work and how they are made, valuable skills in our increasingly digital lives.

Jeannette M. Wing
Corporate Vice President, Microsoft Research
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First and foremost we would like to thank our colleagues Clare Morgan and Nicolas Villar: Clare has been instrumental in facilitating school outreach and supporting the team; Nicolas is the original inventor of the platform without whom we would have no .NET Gadgeteer. We have worked with a number of Gadgeteer hardware manufacturers during this project, but we would particularly like to call out GHI Electronics who were excited to explore how Gadgeteer could be used in the classroom from the outset of our work and who tailored a kit of Gadgeteer parts to support the learning points and exercises we wanted to cover. We are extremely grateful to the young people who have spent dedicated time working through the book, testing the exercises, and giving us their invaluable feedback, including: Ellen Curran, Thomas Denney, David and Jonathan Goh, Armin Grosche, Maeve McLaughlin, Alistair Sentance, and Alfie Sharp. Finally, we owe a great deal to the hundreds of students and educators who have embraced Gadgeteer in their classrooms over the past two years. In a world where it is all too easy to become a consumer of digital technologies, we hope that this book will inspire a new generation of digital creators!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction	7
Objectives of this book	8
Modules used in this book	8
How to use this book	10
Chapter 2. Getting started with .NET Gadgeteer	11
Assembling the hardware.....	11
Starting a project in .NET Gadgeteer	11
The Gadgeteer Designer in Visual Studio	13
Chapter 3. Playing tunes.....	17
Overview	17
Programming in Visual Studio.....	17
Tutorial: Playing a tune.....	18
Exercises.....	22
Summary	22
Chapter 4. Clicker.....	23
Overview	23
New concepts: What is a variable?.....	23
Tutorial: Building a clicker	24
Exercises.....	28
Summary	28
Chapter 5. Stop watch.....	29
Overview	29
New concepts: If ... Then ... Else... statement	29
Tutorial: Building a stop watch	29
Exercises.....	33
Summary	34
Chapter 6. Traffic lights.....	35
Overview	35
New Concepts: More on If statements and the Select...Case statement.....	35
Tutorial: Traffic lights.....	36
Exercises.....	40
Summary	40
Chapter 7. Counting in binary.....	41
Overview	41

New concepts: Binary numbers.....	41
New concepts: The For loop in Visual Basic.....	42
Tutorial: Counting in binary.....	43
Exercises.....	48
Summary	48
Chapter 8. Burglar alarm.....	49
Overview	49
Tutorial 1: Creating a burglar alarm.....	49
Exercises.....	51
New concepts: Saving to the SD card.....	51
Tutorial 2: Keeping a record of an intrusion	52
Exercises (Continued).....	55
Summary	55
Chapter 9. Morse code.....	57
Overview	57
New concepts: Reading from a file in Visual Basic.....	57
New concepts: Creating a function in Visual Basic.....	57
Tutorial: Morse code.....	58
Tutorial: Reading a word from a file and translating to Morse code.....	60
Exercises.....	64
Summary	64
Chapter 10. Drawing.....	65
Overview	65
Tutorial 1: House draw	65
New concepts: Arrays in Visual Basic.....	67
New concepts: Passing parameters into procedures and functions – By Val and By Ref.....	69
Tutorial 2: Graph draw	69
Exercises.....	72
Summary	73
Chapter 11. Reaction game.....	75
Overview	75
New concepts: Working with random values	75
New concepts: Logical operators.....	76
Tutorial: Building the reaction timer game	76
Exercises.....	83
Summary	83
Chapter 12. Build your own module.....	85

Overview	85
Tutorial 1: Make a noise!.....	85
Tutorial 2: Use the joystick to control the pitch and duration.....	88
Exercises.....	89
Summary	90
Appendix A . Where to buy .NET Gadgeteer	91
Appendix B . Installing the “FEZ Cerberus Tinker Kit”	92
Appendix C . Getting to know Visual Studio.....	94
The Solution Explorer Window.....	94
The Toolbox window	94
The Designer window	95
The Output window.....	95
IntelliSense in Visual Studio.....	96
Appendix D . Updating the firmware	98
Checking the firmware version.....	98
Updating the FEZ Cerberus Firmware using the FEZ Config Tool (recommended).....	100
Updating the FEZ Cerberus TinyBooter manually	103
Updating the FEZ Cerberus TinyCLR manually.....	105
Appendix E . How to debug Visual Basic in Visual Studio	107
Printing debug messages.....	107
Setting a breakpoint	107
The conditional breakpoint	109
Walking through your code.....	110
Debugging tips	112
Appendix F . Coping with Out-of-Memory exceptions.....	114
Appendix G . Troubleshooting: Visual Studio will not deploy.....	115
Appendix H . List of current socket types	120
Appendix I . Operators in Visual Basic.....	123
Appendix J . Typical Lux values.....	124
Appendix K . Resources available online	125

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