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Preface

The creation of this book has provided me, Mike McGrath, a welcome opportunity to update my previous books on Visual Basic programming with the latest techniques. The examples are created in the latest Visual Studio Community edition development suite, and the book's screenshots illustrate the actual results produced by compiling and executing the listed code.

Conventions in this book

In order to clarify the code listed in the steps given in each example, I have adopted certain colorization conventions that simulate the default syntax highlighting of the Visual Studio code editor. Visual Basic keywords are colored blue; Visual Basic objects are light blue; string values are red; comments are green; and all other code is black – like this:

```
' Create an XmlDocument object from a specified XML file.
```

```
Dim doc As New System.Xml.XmlDocument  
doc.Load( "C:\Users\Mike\Documents\Books.xml" )
```

Additionally, in order to identify each source code item described in the steps, a colored icon and name appears in the margin alongside the steps:



Visual Basic Project



VBA Word Macro



VBA Excel Macro



VBScript File

Grabbing the source code

For convenience I have placed source code files from the examples featured in this book into a single ZIP archive. You can obtain the complete archive by following these easy steps:

- 1 Browse to www.ineasysteps.com then navigate to [Free Resources](#) and choose the [Downloads](#) section
- 2 Find [Visual Basic in easy steps, 6th Edition](#) in the list, then click on the hyperlink entitled [All Code Examples](#) to download the archive
- 3 Now, extract the archive contents to any convenient location on your computer

I sincerely hope you enjoy discovering the powerful, expressive possibilities of Visual Basic programming and have as much fun with it as I did in writing this book.

1

Getting started

Welcome to the exciting world of Visual Basic programming. This chapter introduces the Visual Studio Integrated Development Environment (IDE) and shows you how to create a real Windows application.

- 8** Introducing Visual Basic
- 10** Installing Visual Studio
- 12** Exploring the IDE
- 14** Starting a new project
- 16** Adding a visual control
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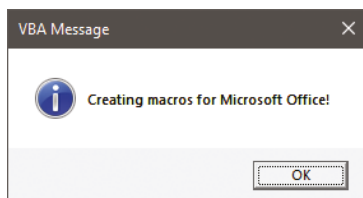
Introducing Visual Basic

In choosing to start programming with Visual Basic you have made an excellent choice – the Visual Basic programming language offers the easiest way to write programs for Windows. This means you can easily create your own programs to give maximum control over your computer and automate your work to be more productive. Also, programming with Visual Basic is fun!

Like other programming languages, Visual Basic comprises a number of significant “keywords” and a set of syntax rules. Beginners often find its syntax simpler than other programming languages, making Visual Basic a popular first choice to learn.

Although writing programs can be complex, Visual Basic makes it easy to get started. You can choose how far to go. Another advantage of Visual Basic is that it works with Microsoft Office applications and with the Windows Script Host within the Windows operating system – so the possibilities are immense...

- **Visual Basic (VB)** – quite simply the best programming language for the novice or hobbyist to begin creating their own standalone Windows applications, fast.
- **Visual Basic for Applications (VBA)** – an implementation of Visual Basic that is built into Microsoft Office applications. It runs within a host rather than as a standalone application.
- **Visual Basic Script (VBScript)** – a derivative of Visual Basic that can be used for Windows scripting.



...cont'd

The evolution of Visual Basic

- Visual Basic 1.0 released in May 1991 at the Comdex trade show in Atlanta, Georgia, USA.
- Visual Basic 2.0 released in November 1992 – introducing an easier and faster programming environment.
- Visual Basic 3.0 released in the summer of 1993 – introducing the Microsoft Jet Database Engine for database programs.
- Visual Basic 4.0 released in August 1995 – introducing support for controls based on the Component Object Model (COM).
- Visual Basic 5.0 released in February 1997 – introducing the ability to create custom user controls.
- Visual Basic 6.0 released in the summer of 1998 – introducing the ability to create web-based programs. This hugely popular edition is the final version based on COM and is often referred to today as “Classic Visual Basic”.
- Visual Basic 7.0 (also known as Visual Basic .NET) released in 2002 – introducing a very different object-oriented language based upon the Microsoft .NET framework. This controversial edition broke backward-compatibility with previous versions, causing a rift in the developer community.
- Visual Basic 8.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2005).
- Visual Basic 9.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2008).
- Visual Basic 10.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2010).
- Visual Basic 11.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2012).
- Visual Basic 12.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2013).
(Version numbering of Visual Basic skipped 13 to keep in line with the version numbering of Visual Studio itself.)
- Visual Basic 14.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2015).
- Visual Basic 15.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2017).
- Visual Basic 16.0 (a.k.a. Visual Basic 2019).

All examples in this book are created for Visual Basic 16.0 although many of the core language features are common to previous versions of the Visual Basic programming language.



Visual Basic derives from an earlier simple language called BASIC, an acronym – **B**eginners **A**ll-purpose **S**ymbolic **I**nstruction **C**ode.

The “Visual” part was added later as many tasks can now be accomplished visually, without actually writing any code.



Visual Studio is used to develop computer programs, web apps, mobile apps, and more.

Installing Visual Studio

In order to create Windows applications with the Visual Basic programming language you will first need to install a Visual Studio Integrated Development Environment (IDE).

Microsoft Visual Studio is the professional development tool that provides a fully Integrated Development Environment for Visual Basic, Visual C++, and Visual C#. Within its IDE, code can be written in C++, C#, or the Visual Basic programming language to create Windows applications.

Visual Studio Community edition is a streamlined version of Visual Studio specially created for those people learning programming. It has a simplified user interface and omits advanced features of the professional edition to avoid confusion. Within its IDE, code can be written in the Visual Basic programming language to create Windows applications.

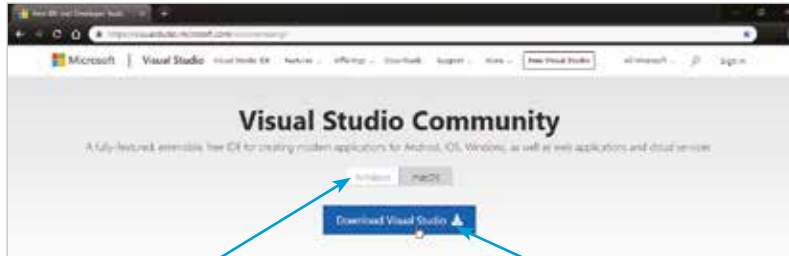
Both Visual Studio and Visual Studio Community provide a Visual Basic IDE for Visual Basic programming. Unlike the fully-featured Visual Studio product, the Visual Studio Community edition is completely free and can be installed on any system meeting the following minimum requirements:

Component	Requirement
Operating system	Windows 10 (version 1703 or higher) Windows Server 2019 Windows 8.1 (with update 2919355) Windows 7 Service Pack 1 Windows Server 2012 R2
CPU (processor)	1.8 GHz or faster
RAM (memory)	2 GB (8 GB recommended)
HDD (hard drive)	Up to 210 GB available space
Video Card	Minimum resolution of 1280 x 720 Optimum resolution of 1366 x 768

The Visual Studio Community edition is used throughout this book to demonstrate programming with the Visual Basic language, but the examples can also be recreated in Visual Studio. Follow the steps opposite to install Visual Studio Community edition.

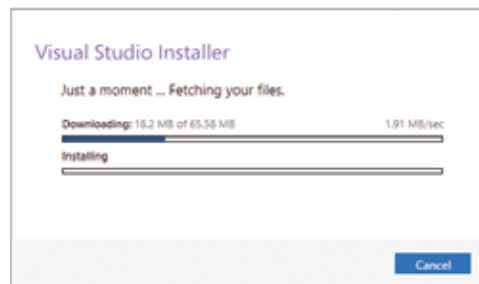
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- 1 Open your web browser and navigate to the Visual Studio Community download page – at the time of writing this can be found at visualstudio.microsoft.com/vs/community

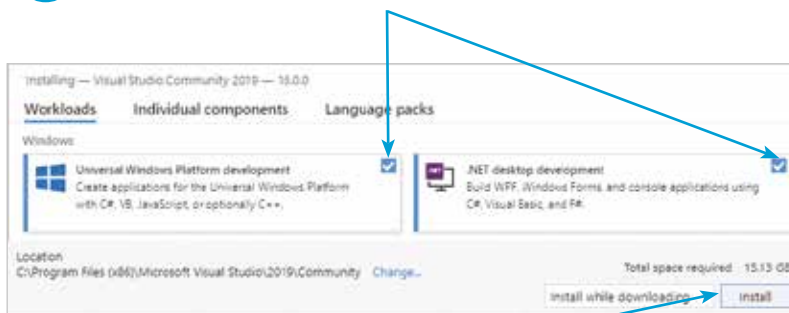


- 2 Click a button to select your operating system – **Windows** or **macOS**
- 3 Now, click on the **Download** button to grab the installer

- 4 Open your **Downloads** folder, then click on the installer file icon to fetch some setup files



- 5 Choose the two **VB** options as the type of installation



- 6 Click the **Install** button to begin the download and installation process



Installation of Visual Studio is handled by an installer application. You can re-run the installer at a later date to add or remove features.



Choosing a different destination folder may require other paths to be adjusted later – it's simpler to just accept the suggested default.

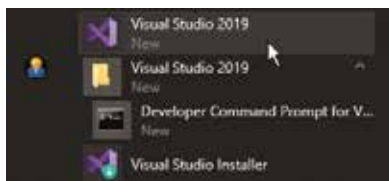




The first time Visual Studio starts it takes a few minutes as it performs configuration routines.

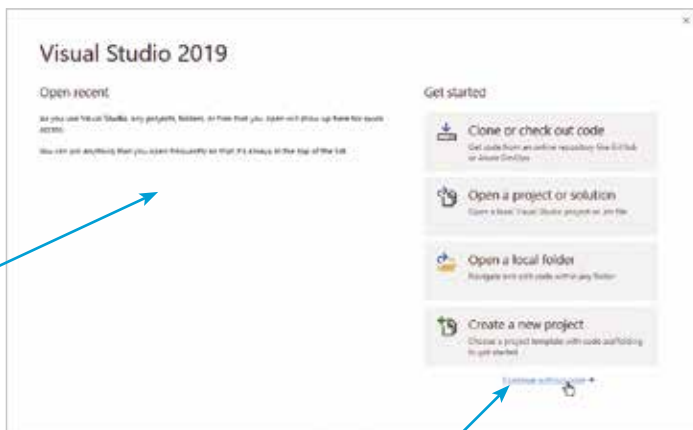
Exploring the IDE

- 1 Go to your Apps menu, then select the Visual Studio 2019 menu item added there by the installer:



- 2 Sign in with your Microsoft account, or register an account then sign in, to continue

- 3 See a default **Start Page** appear where recent projects will be listed alongside several “Get started” options



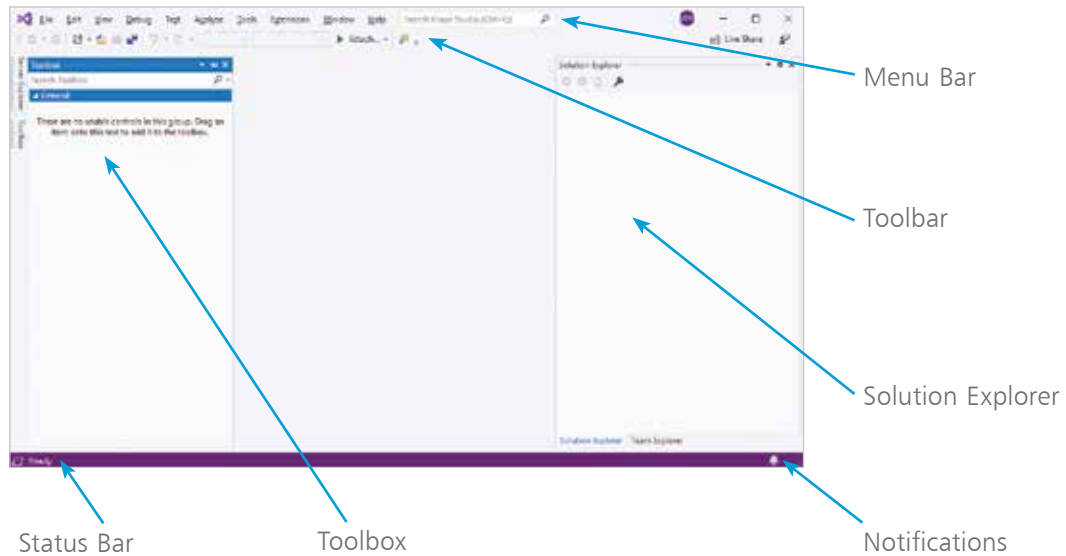
- 4 For now, just click the link to **Continue without code** to launch the Visual Studio application

In the future your recent projects will be listed here so you can easily reopen them.

The Visual Studio Integrated Development Environment (IDE) appears, from which you have instant access to everything needed to produce complete Windows applications – from here you can create exciting visual interfaces, enter code, compile and execute applications, debug errors, and much more.



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Visual Studio IDE components

The Visual Studio IDE initially provides these standard features:

- **Menu Bar** – where you can select actions to perform on all your project files and to access Help. When a project is open, extra menus of Project, and Build, are shown in addition to the default menu selection of File, Edit, View, Debug, Test, Analyze, Tools, Extensions, Window, and Help.
- **Toolbar** – where you can perform the most popular menu actions with just a single click on its associated shortcut icon.
- **Toolbox** – where you can select visual elements to add to a project. Click the Toolbox side bar button to see its contents. When a project is open, “controls” such as Button, Label, CheckBox, RadioButton, and TextBox are shown here.
- **Solution Explorer** – where you can see at a glance all the files and resource components contained within an open project.
- **Status Bar** – where you can read the state of the current activity being undertaken. When building an application a “Build started” message is displayed here, changing to a “Build succeeded” or “Build failed” message upon completion.



To change the color, choose the **Tools, Options** menu then select **Environment, General, Color Theme**.



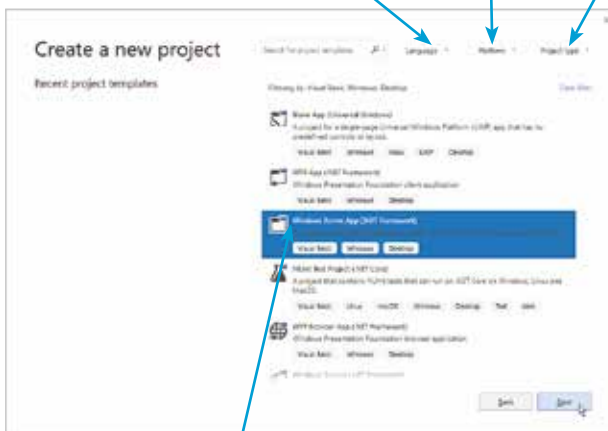
GettingStarted

Starting a new project

- 1 On the Menu Bar, click **File, New, Project** to open the “Create a new project” dialog



- 2 Next, you must choose “Language”, “Platform”, and “Project type” – select **Visual Basic, Windows, Desktop**

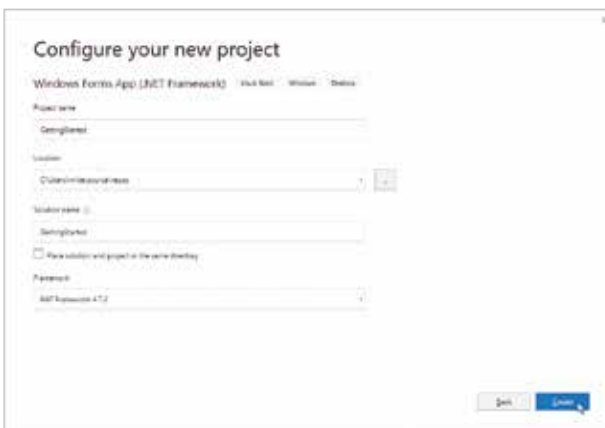


- 3 Now, select the **Windows Forms App** option

- 4 Click the **Next** button to open the “Configure your new project” dialog



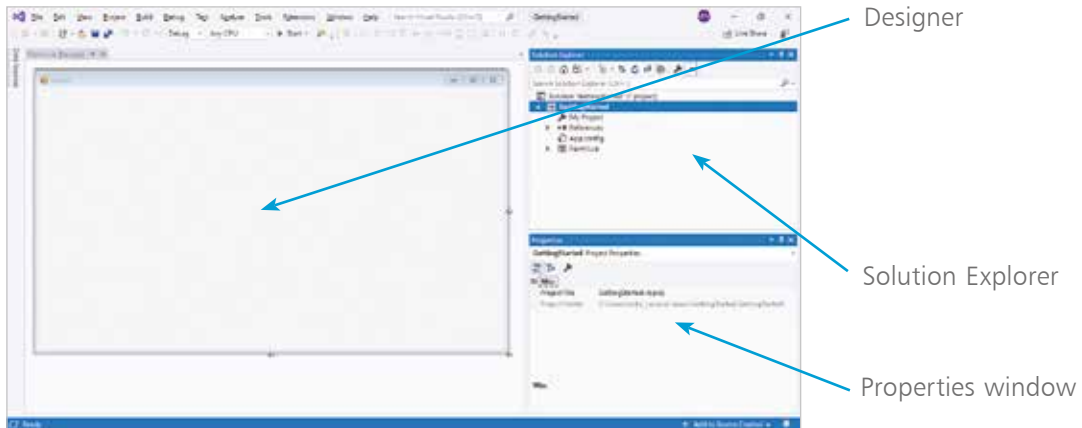
Leave the **Create directory for solution** option checked to create a folder named as the project name, and located by default in a **C:\Users\username\source\repos** directory.



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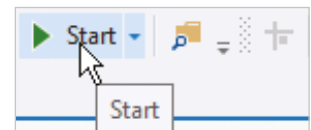
- 5 Enter a name of your choice in the **Project name** field – in this case, the project name will be “GettingStarted”
- 6 Click on the **Create** button to create the new project

Visual Studio now creates your new project and loads it into the IDE. A tabbed **Designer** window appears displaying a default empty Form. You can select the **View, Solution Explorer** menu to open a Solution Explorer window that reveals all files in your project, and you can select the **View, Properties Window** menu to open a **Properties** window listing all properties of your Form.




The **Designer** is where you create visual interfaces for your applications, and the **Properties** window contains details of the item that is currently selected in the Designer window.

The Visual Studio IDE has now gathered all the resources needed to build a default Windows application – click the **Start** button on the Toolbar to launch this application. The application simply creates a basic window – you can move it, minimize it, maximize it, resize it, and quit the application by closing it. It may not do much, but you have already created a real Windows program!



Alternatively, you can run applications using the **Debug, Start Debugging** menu options.



The **Toolbox** will automatically hide when you click on another part of the IDE, but it can be fixed in place so it will never hide, using the  pin button on the Toolbox bar.



If no controls are visible in the Toolbox, right-click on the Toolbox then choose **Show All** to reveal the categories.

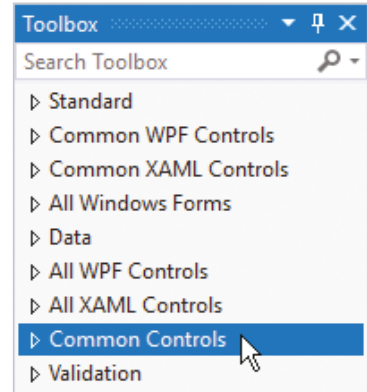


Any pinned Window in the IDE can be dragged from its usual location to any position you prefer. Drag it back to the initial location to re-dock it.

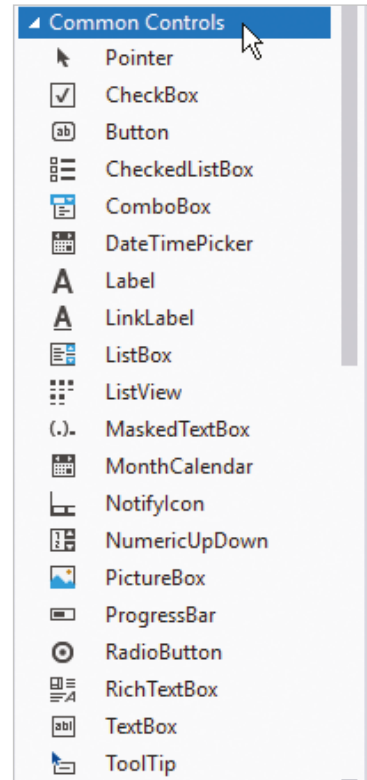
Adding a visual control

The **Toolbox** in the Visual Studio IDE contains a wide range of visual controls that are the building blocks of your applications. Using the project created on page 15, follow these steps to start using the Toolbox now:

- 1 Click **View, Designer** to see the Designer window
- 2 Next, click **View, Toolbox** on the Menu Bar, or click the Toolbox side bar button, to display the Toolbox categories



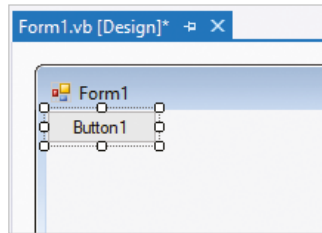
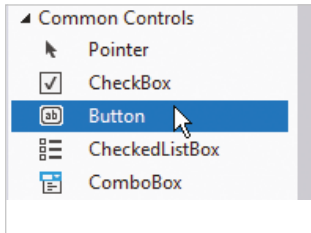
- 3 Now, click on the expansion arrow beside the **Common Controls** category heading to expand the list of visual controls. Usefully, each control name appears beside an icon depicting that control as a reminder. You can click on the **Common Controls** category heading again to collapse the list, then expand other categories to explore the range of controls available to build your application interfaces



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4

Click and drag the **Button** item from the Common Controls categories in the Toolbox onto the Form in the Designer window, or double-click the Button item, to add a Button control to the Form

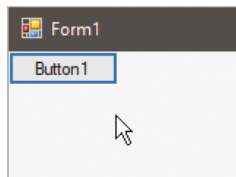


A **Button** is one of the most useful interface controls – your program determines what happens when the user clicks it.

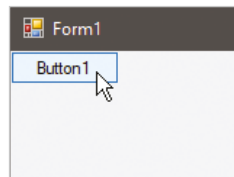
The Button control appears in the Designer window surrounded by “handles” that can be dragged to resize the button’s width and height. Click the ► **Start** button to run the application and try out your button.



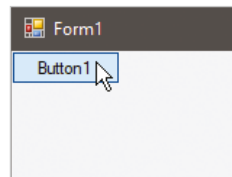
The Button control behaves in a familiar Windows application manner, with “states” that visually react to the cursor:



Default State



Hover State



Down State



This **Button** control performs no function when it’s clicked – until you add some code.



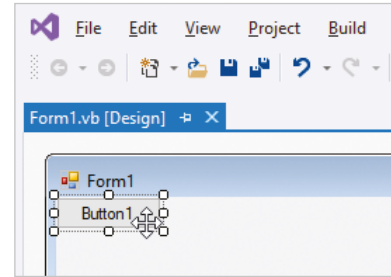
Switch easily between the **Code** window and **Designer** window by clicking on the appropriate window tab.

Adding functional code

The Visual Studio IDE automatically generates code, in the background, to incorporate the visual controls you add to your program interface. Additional code can be added manually, using the IDE's integral **Code** editor window, to determine how your program should respond to interface events – such as when the user clicks a button.

Using the project created on page 17, follow these steps to start using the Visual Studio **Code** editor now:

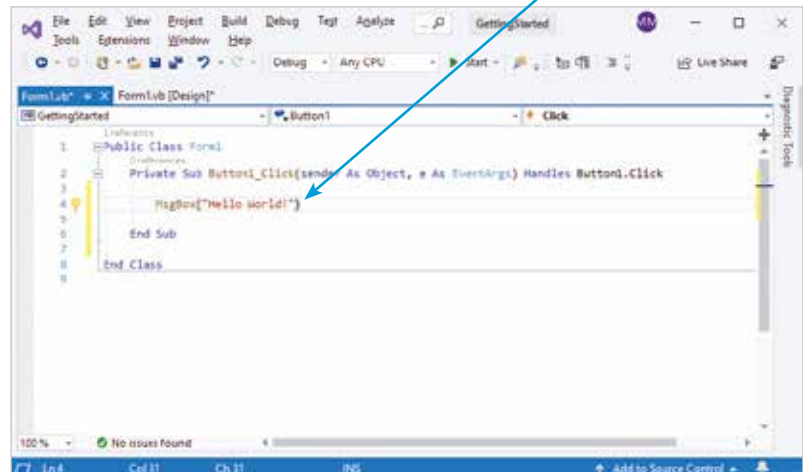
- 1 Double-click on the **Button** control you have added to the default Form in the Designer window. A new tabbed text window opens in the IDE – this is the **Code** editor window



- 2 The cursor is automatically placed at precisely the right point in the code at which to add an instruction to determine what the program should do when this button is clicked. Type this instruction into the **Code** editor **MsgBox("Hello World!")**

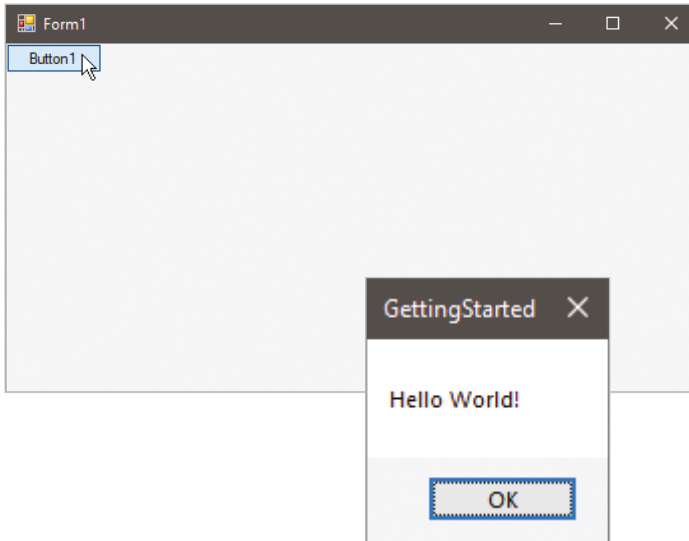


This **Solution Explorer** and **Properties** windows are closed here for clarity. You can reopen them at any time from the **View** menu.



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- 3 Click the **Start** button to run the application and test the code you have just written to handle the event that occurs when the button is clicked



Use the **View** menu on the Menu Bar to open the **Code** editor, Form **Designer**, or any other window you require at any time.

- 4 Push the **OK** button to close the dialog box, then click the **X** button on the Form window, or click the **Stop Debugging** button on the Menu Bar, to stop the program



Each time the button in this application is pressed, the program reads the line of code you added manually to produce a dialog box containing the specified message. The action of pressing the button creates a **Click** event that refers to the associated “event-handler” section of code you added to see how to respond.

In fact, most Windows software works by responding to events in this way. For instance, when you press a key in a word processor a character appears in the document – the **KeyPress** event calls upon its event-handler code to update the text in response.

The process of providing intelligent responses to events in your programs is the very cornerstone of creating Windows applications with Visual Basic.

Saving projects

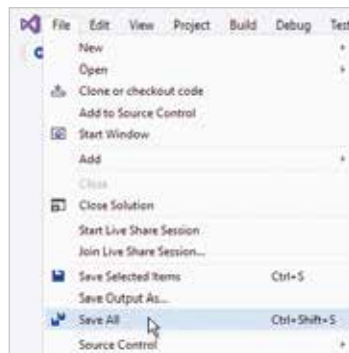
Even the simplest Visual Basic project comprises multiple files that must each be saved on your system to store the project.

Follow these steps to save the current project to disk:



You can click **File, Close Solution** on the Menu Bar to close an open project – a dialog will prompt you to save any changes before closing.

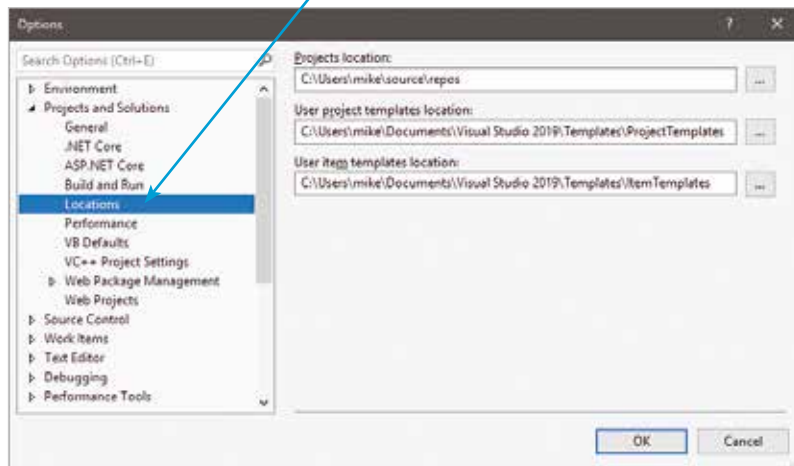
- 1 Click the **Save All** button on the Toolbar, or click **File, Save All** on the Menu Bar, or press **Ctrl + Shift + S**



- 2 Your project is now saved at its default save location
- 3 To discover or change the save location, click **Tools** on the Menu Bar, then select the **Options** item – to open the **Options** dialog
- 4 Expand **Projects and Solutions** in the left-hand pane, then choose the **Locations** option to reveal **Projects location**



Find the **Debug** folder in your saved project directory containing the application's executable (**.exe**) file – you can double-click this to run your program like other Windows applications.



Summary

- A project template selected in the **Create a new project** dialog is used to begin a new Windows application project.
- A unique name should be entered into the **Configure your new project** dialog when you create a new Visual Basic project.
- The Form **Designer** window of the Visual Studio IDE is where you create the visual interface for your program.
- Visual controls are added from the **Toolbox** to create the interface layout you want for your program.
- A control can be dragged from the **Toolbox** and dropped onto the Form, or added to the Form with a double-click.
- The **Visual Studio IDE** automatically generates code in the background as you develop your program visually.
- The **Code** editor window of the Visual Studio IDE is where you manually add extra code to your program.
- Double-click on any control in the Form **Designer** to open the **Code** editor window at that control's event-handler code.
- The **Start** button on the Visual Studio Toolbar can be used to run the current project application.
- Pressing a button control in a running application creates a **Click** event within the program.
- Code added to a button's **Click** event-handler determines how your program will respond whenever its Click event occurs.
- Providing intelligent responses to events in your programs is the cornerstone of programming with Visual Basic.
- Remember to explicitly save your working project using the **Save All** button on the Toolbar to avoid accidental loss.
- Select the solution file with the **.sln** extension in your chosen saved project directory to reopen that project.