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ASK ADVISOR

Visual FoxPro 3.0

Q: I can't use some single letters as the name of an object. For example, I can create an object with name 'a', but I can't use this object:

```
a = CREATEOBJECT("commandbutton")
? a.enabled    && Error : "Variable 'ENABLED' is not found"
```

Some testing shows that I have this problem with object names A through J and M. Is this a bug?

–Pablo Almunia Sanz (via CompuServe)

A: I suspect this will be one of the most frequently asked questions about Visual FoxPro. This is a case where the marriage between FoxPro's Xbase heritage and its new object-orientation is a little rocky.

Going back to the days when there were 10 work areas (instead of the 32,767 of Visual FoxPro!), the letters A through J have been reserved for alternate aliases for those 10 work areas. That is, another way to refer to work area 1 is as A. You'll often see older code like this:

```
SELECT A
USE SomeTable
```

Similarly, the letter M has been reserved for referencing memory variables, to distinguish them from fields, as in:

```
m.01dWorkArea=SELECT()
```

Along about FoxPro 1, we were also given the ability to separate an alias from a field name with a period (as in alias.field), instead of the fake arrow we'd been using (alias->field).

The work areas didn't conflict with memory variables because we didn't use either the "arrow" or the period after a variable name.

Along comes Visual FoxPro with its OOP notation and the period is even more overloaded than it used to be. Now it's also used to separate objects from properties and methods. Suddenly, there's the potential for conflict. When you write:

```
a.enabled
```

FoxPro thinks you mean the field Enabled of the table open in work area A. Although it's more likely you mean the Enabled property of object A, for backward compatibility, the other meaning has to take precedence.

The moral of the story: don't use letters A-J or M as object names. Better yet, stay away from single letter variables entirely and you'll avoid the issue.

-Tamar