Visual Basic is a third-generation event-driven programming language and integrated development environment (IDE) from Microsoft for its Component Object Model (COM) programming model first released in 1991 and declared legacy during 2008. Microsoft intended Visual Basic to be relatively easy to learn and use. Visual Basic was derived from BASIC, a user-friendly programming language designed for beginners, and it enables the rapid application development (RAD) of graphical user interface (GUI) applications, access to databases using Data Access Objects, Remote Data Objects, or ActiveX Data Objects, and creation of ActiveX controls and objects.

A programmer can create an application using the components provided by the Visual Basic program itself. Over time the community of programmers developed third-party components. Programs written in Visual Basic can also use the Windows API, which requires external function declarations.

The final release was version 6 in 1998 (now known simply as Visual Basic). On April 8, 2008, Microsoft stopped supporting Visual Basic 6.0 IDE. The Microsoft Visual Basic team still maintains compatibility for Visual Basic 6.0 applications on Windows Vista, Windows Server 2008 including R2, Windows 7, Windows 8, Windows 8.1, Windows Server 2012 and Windows 10 through its "It Just Works" program. In 2014, some software developers still preferred Visual Basic 6.0 over its successor, Visual Basic .NET. In 2014 some developers lobbied for a new version of Visual Basic 6.0. In 2016, Visual Basic 6.0 won the technical impact award at The 19th Annual D.I.C.E. Awards. A dialect of Visual Basic, Visual Basic for Applications (VBA), is used as a macro or scripting language within several 1990s

Project 'basic Thunder' was initiated in 1990. Thunder persisted through to the last release of Visual Basic in the name of the primary internal function, "ThunderRTMain".

Visual Basic 1.0 (May 1991) was released for Windows at the Comdex/Windows World trade show in Atlanta, Georgia.

Visual Basic 1.0 for DOS was released in September 1992. The language itself was not quite compatible with Visual Basic for Windows, as it was actually the next version of Microsoft's DOS-based BASIC compilers, QuickBASIC and BASIC Professional Development System. The interface used a text user interface, using extended ASCII characters to simulate the appearance of a GUI.

Visual Basic 2.0 was released in November 1992. The programming environment was easier to use, and its speed was improved. Notably, forms became instantiable objects, thus laying the foundational concepts of class modules as were later offered in VB4.

Visual Basic 3.0 was released in the summer of 1993 and came in Standard and Professional versions. VB3 included version 1.1 of the Microsoft Jet Database Engine that could read and write Jet (or Access) 1.x databases.

Visual Basic 4.0 (August 1995) was the first version that could create 32-bit as well as 16-bit Windows programs. It has three editions; Standard, Professional, and Enterprise. It also introduced the ability to write non-GUI classes in Visual Basic. Incompatibilities between different releases of VB4 caused installation and operation problems. While previous versions of Visual Basic had used VBX controls, Visual Basic now used OLE controls (with files names ending in .OCX) instead. These were later to be named ActiveX controls.

With version 5.0 (February 1997), Microsoft released Visual Basic exclusively for 32-bit versions of Windows. Programmers who preferred to write 16-bit programs were able to import programs written in Visual Basic 4.0 to Visual Basic 5.0, and Visual Basic 5.0 programs can easily be converted with Visual Basic 4.0. Visual Basic 5.0 also introduced the ability to create custom user controls, as well as the ability to compile to native Windows executable code, speeding up calculation-intensive code execution. A free, downloadable Control Creation Edition was also released for creation of ActiveX controls. It was also used as an introductory form of Visual Basic: a regular .exe project could be created and run in the IDE, but not compiled.

Visual Basic 6.0 (Mid-1998) improved in a number of areas including the ability to create web-based applications.

2000s

Visual Basic 6.0 extended support ended in March 2008; however, primary components of the Visual Basic 6 development environment run in all 32-bit versions of Windows up to and including 8.1.

Mainstream Support for Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0 ended on March 31, 2005. Extended support ended in March 2008. In response, the Visual Basic user community expressed its concern and lobbied users to sign a petition to keep the product alive, to no Microsoft applications, including Microsoft Office.