My expedition through Grade 11 Computer Science

As I entered the first day of class… frightened simply because I reached late to class on the first day; my first impression, which was bad. I walked in as all of the students awkwardly looked at me. It was even worse because I was a year younger than all of the students; and I still am. I didn’t know what to do at that moment, so I franticly grabbed a chair and sat down… as the students still looked at me.

When it was the second day of school (yes this time I arrived on time), things seemed to be a bit more eased off… Mr. Brown continued with the course information, and I was actually looking forward to coding in the class. Our first assignment was completing the course on *codecademy.com*. This course covers up the basics of a website, the HTML and CSS. We were given about two weeks to complete the online course. This helped me a lot, I literally learned the basics of HTML and CSS in two weeks… considering I didn’t know anything when I entered the class. This was a great way to start off the year, with a very unique and interactive online course.

After the two weeks, our teacher, Mr. Brown checked the course for completion. Literally everyone in my class got 100%, because it was either you did the course or not. Considering the fact we had two weeks to do it, everyone had completed the course. I felt like two weeks was enough time to complete the course… and it took me about a week and half to complete the full course. But next time I should finish the course even earlier so I can have more time to work ahead and learn new things about HTML and CSS. After that, Mr. Brown told us about something unique. That was when our class had to think of some type of distinctive project, which we work on… pretty much throughout the course. He told us that the codecademy things will be basic guidelines for our start up, but we will need to learn the rest of the stuff on our own; using online resources, and of course his help if needed. So we were given about three days to discuss on what our project should be.

After three days of discussion, the whole class agreed to a project, which was making an announcements app. An app for the school, where teachers post an announcement, and students view it. A user-friendly app which is helpful for the whole school. The project was finalized for my grade 11 computer science class. I felt very odd, considering that I haven’t actually received this type of project before. I’ve had many older friends saying “I coded this app the in computer science class.” During those times, I would simply smile and reply with “I want to do that sometime.” And now there it was, at that time, I had a tingly feeling in my stomach as I was eagerly looking forward to doing this project.

So our class first started off with the designs of the app. There will be a login page, an edit page to add announcements, and a page to view the announcements. So I made the designs on Photoshop. After another week, I was done my design for the app. Once again, Mr. Brown came around to grade our designs. This time, it wasn’t a pass or fail, but he actually graded them according to: color scheme, parts of the app (settings gear, submit buttons) and how it looked overall. Since that part was done, we moved into the real part of the website… the legitimate coding.

I first started off with separating each page into its own HTML file, and then made one CSS for all of the pages. I first made a basic layout for the login page… a login box, and a login button. Then I made a header, which consisted of the North Park logo, a view button and an edit button. Although the problem was that none of these buttons actually had a function to execute… if you click on the button, nothing would happen, the site would just refresh. This is when I learned a new type of language, which is known as JavaScript. JavaScript enables a user to actually click the button, so it would execute a function. The view and edit button were linked to other pages, so they didn’t require any JavaScript. My first piece of JavaScript was for the login username-password function.

This was probably my biggest challenge. UNDERSTANDING JAVASCRIPT. I didn’t understand it whatsoever. It was like, I could make the icing sugar of a cake, but didn’t know how to make the main part of it. As I mentioned previously, I didn’t know what to do… I was literally stuck. Yes, I can get the code from someone else, but I wouldn’t actually understand what was going on. So I tried to understand more and more… learning variables, if statements, else statements, functions…etc. In general, I was a confused student and was eager to know the solution. This was my biggest “aha” moment. After many days of help from classmates, Mr. Brown and many online resources, I finally understood the point and different functions of JavaScript, most importantly how to make the login of my login page to work. It had a very big impact on me, I was literally stuck on this one thing for about 7-8 class days. It felt like I was the only one, who didn’t know what was going on. It took time, but as always, hard work pays off. I understood how to make the login for my page to work.

After this was working on the main part of the app, making and viewing announcements. This part was pure JavaScript, from making different announcements to viewing them. Of course it was hard, it was tough, but using the help of my peers, and Mr. Brown teaches us parts of this, I could complete it. This was challenging to many other students, although to me, I found it easier than the login situation. Finally, I worked on the final touch ups of my website; making it look good, which means working on the CSS. Turns out to be, part of my design and most of my color scheme changed compared to my original design. After all of the hard work, perseverance, and focus, I finally completed the course’s main project, the announcement app. I felt extremely accomplished… thinking about some of my older friends, and now I can proudly tell my younger friends “I coded this app the in computer science class.”

In conclusion, this was a different type of learning experience. The teacher didn’t simultaneously stay on our backs, he eased off and helped us when needed. He provided us with many great resources which can help us on our projects. Every day, I entered the class with a positive attitude, an attitude where I was always looking forward to do something and learn something new. It wasn’t coding all days, for example, we had Friday’s for Ted Talks, and we received two non-programming assignments. It was a well-balanced course, with a lot of new learning experiences and a completely new learning environment. It was a great teaching style for a subject like this and I’m looking forward to grade 12 computer science.