

Subject: Proposed Improvements for Stack Overflow

Dear Mr. Cole:

I am writing regarding suggestions for the improvement and accessibility of Stack Overflow. As a software developer, I personally find this site immensely useful, and I know that this is an experience shared by many other programmers of all sorts. Stack Overflow has not reached where it is today by accident; it is due to the careful planning and foresight of the site's vision and structure. However, as Stack Overflow itself has acknowledged, the site can fall short in providing an open and welcoming space for beginner programmers and marginalized communities. I respectfully submit these ideas in the hope that, as product manager, you might take them into consideration and enable Stack Overflow to provide a more welcoming space for all.

Attached are several slides detailing two concrete improvements I believe will improve Stack Overflow. Firstly, the ability for users to hide responses and comments would benefit them greatly. The volume of responses to a single question can grow overwhelming and require a great deal of scrolling to simply traverse the information and context present. Hiding information would allow users to focus only what is useful to them. Importantly, this would mean users can individually decide what is useful and need not oppose others for posting information they believe to be extraneous, easing the pressure and nervousness felt by new contributors to the site. Some might believe that only information relevant to all should be posted, and thus the hide feature is unnecessary. I would remind them that, as Stack Overflow is a point of reference for a diverse set of programmers, there are diverse ideas about what observations and information is relevant. This ability to retain information that is helpful to anyone, not just everyone, makes Stack Overflow a stronger reference point than ever.

Secondly, contributors and viewers would benefit from "tracks" of responses, separated by level of detail. The "detailed" section of the proposed change would likely fulfill a similar role to Stack Overflow's response section at present, thanks to the incredible detail most popular answers have, so, at worst, nothing should be lost. But, if other levels of detail are filled with lesser-detailed, what is the purpose of having them? Because of the wide swath of people who use Stack Overflow, of all programming levels, the ability to make answers more friendly to relatively newer programmers would be a welcome addition. Rather than parsing through large amounts of dense information, users can find more direct, simplified answers in these other channels. Programmers who do not comprehend the full depth of a specific topic can still contribute to the Stack Overflow community.

As the attached improvements are additive, they will not detract from the current Stack Overflow experience, but instead will add to it and provide space for all, not just seasoned developers, to feel like they are contributing to and receiving from the robust community that has revolved around Stack Overflow. I understand you will likely have thoughts of your own concerning this issue, and I would appreciate if we could discuss these improvements further, with your expertise and vision for Stack Overflow. I can be reached at 302-750-3364 or by email at [fickes.b@husky.neu.edu](mailto:fickes.b@husky.neu.edu).

Thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours in respect and sincerity,  
Benjamin Fickes