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CART 253-AA

Post Reflection: My experience taking this course

I want to preface this reflection by noting that it's being written by a DART student rather than a CART student—someone with almost no prior programming experience. I've done some web development over the years, but the differences between HTML/CSS and JavaScript are so large that they're difficult to even compare. I'm used to working with markup languages, where you simply tell an element what to do and it creates what you want. For example, if you want something to change when clicked, you just use an `:active` pseudo-class and define the styles you want.

JavaScript, however, is far more complex. Instead of declaring behavior directly on the element, you have to define the element in your script, set up a mouse-click function, and then add conditional logic—like checking distances paired with an `if` statement—to make sure the interaction only triggers when the click happens inside the right area. It's quite a bit more work compared to markup, and it took me a long time to start understanding it, especially given my inexperience.

Because of this, I struggled through roughly half of the semester trying to grasp how the language worked and how everything functioned together.

My first assignment (the art jam) reflects the struggles I was facing at the time, as I didn't do well or put in as much effort as I would have liked. It's still difficult to convey just how confused I was, but I think it was the underlying theory that challenged me the most. I didn't fully understand what defining a variable actually did, or even how functions... functioned. My confusion was so overwhelming that I had almost no idea what I was doing during any of the small in-class challenges.

For a while, I thought that only custom functions could be drawn within the `draw()` function. So imagine my surprise when I looked up resources for a challenge or assignment and saw others writing code directly inside `draw()` itself, which only added to my confusion. This became a major issue for me. Whenever I searched for help or even asked AI for guidance, I would get different answers that all achieved the same result in completely different ways. Since I knew very little about the underlying theory or how the language actually worked, seeing so many different approaches only made things more confusing.

This was especially challenging because—as stated prior—my only prior experience was with HTML/CSS—a language that doesn't offer anywhere near the same flexibility as JavaScript. In markup, if you want to achieve something, there's usually one very specific way to do it, with little room for error but also very limited freedom. In contrast, JavaScript gives you a lot more flexibility, but with that comes a steeper learning curve and a much larger margin for error.

Ultimately, the hardest part was overcoming that hurdle and shifting my mindset to understand that there are many different ways to achieve the same result—and that this flexibility is both a challenge and a strength of programming.

The turning point for me was the mod jam. That's where I finally began to grasp the fundamentals of p5.js. Syntax and formatting were still my enemies, and sometimes still are, but the understanding I have now compared to before is drastically different. I can recognize issues when they come up, debug my own code, and think through ways to make something work the way I want. And if I can't, I know that I can simply ask for help.

There are still concepts that confuse me, like arrays, though I understand them far more now than I did earlier in the semester. Overall, I think my growth and progression throughout the course are clearly reflected in the three jam-themed assignments I completed over the semester.

Despite my prior statements, not everything is crystal-clear yet. I know I'll need to work more with code to deepen my understanding, and I still struggle quite a bit. Being a digital designer, my experience with p5.js has opened new gateways into what I'm able to create. I've used JavaScript many times before in web development, but that was mostly through other resources or AI. Most of it was copy-and-paste with almost no understanding of how anything actually worked, with but a hopeful prayer that it would function properly.

This course has drastically changed that for me. I now find it much easier to read—and more importantly, understand the code I use and will use in future projects. It

has also allowed me to start coding my own small games that I can continue developing over time—one day in the future.

To be frank, I've never liked coding, and I don't think I ever truly will. That being said, knowing how to code is still crucial for understanding how to implement and work with visuals, and I had a lot of fun creating the pixel art and animations for my variation jam. Due to time constraints, I wasn't able to fully implement everything I wanted visually, but I am still proud of what I have accomplished, and can finetune more of the visuals and code at a later date to be used as a portfolio piece.

I am eventually hoping to be able to push myself more and more towards all aspects of game design, including coding. It may not be something that I look forward to—or like all that much—but it has allowed me to push myself a lot more than I have in a long while.

Despite my inexperience, despite my confusion, despite the struggle I endured throughout most of the semester, I managed to overcome what seemed to me like the impossible. I thought I'd finish this course with an even more profound disdain for coding as a whole. Yet—I persevered, and came out the other end with a bigger appreciation for it. It may not be my favourite thing, nor do I see myself as a dedicated 'creative coder' as the reflection instructions state, but it is a tool I will be able to yield—and more importantly—understand, in order to reach greater heights and achieve goals that I previously thought unobtainable in the future.

Small Thank you

This is not part of the reflection, but I wanted to thank both Pippin and Sabine for making this course fun and approachable despite the difficulty for complete beginners such as myself. Even small things such as the use of jokes or emojis within the course content, or having all 3 projects having the suffix of “jam” (implying fun) really aids in the approachability of the subject matter— which is quite daunting otherwise.