Hackathon Design Mini-Workshop

Rachel Simone Weil

@partytimeHXLNT • raweil@microsoft.com

Hackathon Design Mini-Workshop

- Getting the most out of the hackathon
- Coming up with great ideas
- Choosing technologies
- Getting unstuck

Getting the most out of the hackathon

- Think about what you want to get out of this weekend. (Hint: It’s probably not a prize.)
- Make new friends.
- Ask lots of questions.
- Stay fed, watered, and rested.
- Check in on how your teammates are doing.

Questions you might ask throughout the hackathon:

- What are we going to do?
- How are we going to do it?
- Oh no. We can’t do this. This is bad. How are we going to fix this?
- What have we done?

Questions you might ask throughout the hackathon:

- What are we going to do?
- *OK, is that actually a good idea? What's the point? Why are we doing this?*
- How are we going to do it?
- Oh no. We can't do this. This is bad. How are we going to fix this?
- *Are there tutorials and source code available online? Did we ask sponsors or mentors for help?*
- What have we done?
- *What are our plans to keep working and/or share our project?*

Coming up with great ideas

“All creative work builds on what came before. Nothing is completely original.

[…]

Some people find this idea depressing, but it fills me with hope. As the French writer Andre Gide put it, ‘Everything that needs to be said has already been said. But, since no one was listening, everything must be said again.’” –Austin Kleon, *Steal Like an Artist*

Coming up with great ideas

Don’t worry about “great” ideas. Here are some better adjectives:

- “Small”
- “Weird”
- “Personal”

Choosing technologies

Be sure that you’re not spending all your hackathon time reinventing solutions to problems that have already been solved.

Some free stuff I’ve used in my own projects: Bootstrap (responsive website design), Font Awesome (web icons), Google Fonts (typography), various JS frameworks

Azure for scheduled tasks, APIs, databases, web space

Version control?

Getting unstuck

My rule of thumb: If you’ve spent more than 45 minutes on a problem *without progress,* it’s time to try a different approach!

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Is my problem clearly defined?
- Can I break the problem down into smaller, testable parts?
- Has someone already done this (and posted a tutorial online)?
- Can I ask someone for help?