**Imperial Visualisations**

****

*Suite Guide*

Welcome to the Imperial Visualisations developer team! It’s expected that a new developer has no previous experience in any web-based language; all we expect is knowledge of code and the enthusiasm to learn. This document will take you through what you need to think about when creating a new visualisation and the key things to consider when starting to make improvements on existing ones.

**Finding the overall goal**

When creating or improving a visualisation, the most important thing is to have clarity on what the visualisation is trying to achieve. Spend some time thinking about the key realisations you want your user to have, and how to place them in a well-ordered manner such that the learning process is as clear as possible. Think about what the user already knows, what knowledge do you assume? Do they need refreshing on some of the key concepts that'll be used later?

The title of a visualisation is very important. Be clear on actually what the content of a visualisation is. So, for example, instead of having “Fourier series” as a title, something like “Deconstruction and reconstruction of functions through Fourier series” would be much better.

**Sub goals/learning steps**

Early in the creation of a visualisation it’s important to think of what the key learning steps you want the user to have are. Think about how many steps you want to make, currently visualisations have between 4 and 6 pages, typically with one ‘learning step’ per page. For the content you will be demonstrating you may feel this is about right, but it’s possible that this is either too many or too few. Perhaps you only need 2 or 3 pages to fully explain the topic, or for complicated topics that build up through a lot, 9 or 10 pages might be a better idea.

A good way to list these steps and to decide how many to have is to write down sub-titles that you think each page deserves, where this sub-title describes what that page’s learning step will be in just two or three words. This makes it more obvious to the user the main result they need to take from that page as well as making the visualisation easier to navigate if they need to come back to anything. It also helps you keep track of the structure of the learning journey when creating a visualisation.

When creating a visualisation its important to consider the style of page Imperial Visualisations uses. Currently the left third of the page is a scrollable page which will explain the content, so any theory or derivations would go here. The middle and right third of the page will then be dedicated to the interactive part of the visualisation, anything that can be clicked, dragged or played with goes here. If this isn’t clear check out the Fourier series visualisation, this is a working model for the style we’re going for.

Note that you don’t want the user to have to scroll on the right-hand side of the page. The idea is that the user scrolls on the left-hand side of the page reading the content/explanations, and when they’ve reached a section where the next visualisation is more relevant, the right-hand side updates and shows new interactive material which they’ll go on and use. Done properly this gives the learning journey very good structure, as interactive material is revealed to them as they build up their knowledge of the topic at hand.

*Khan academy* and *Coursera* are great places to look for well thought out learning journeys, check these out!

**Link with navigation**

We’ll see!

**Creating new code**

When considering the experience that the user of a visualisation has, it’s inevitable that at some point you’ll need to create new content. When doing this, make sure to spend plenty of time thinking about what you’re actually trying to tell the user, talk with others who are working on it and make sure that the content you’re putting across is correct, makes sense and is worthwhile to the visualisation. It’s too easy to have an idea and get going straight away without properly considering what you’re trying to tell the user.

Once you’re happy with the content you’re trying to make, think about all the maths that you’ll need to do along with it. Make some sketches and write down everything relevant that’s going on. Be clear on what parameters a user will be inputting. Perhaps a user will be giving coordinates (x1,y1) and they’ll have an output (x2,y2), keeping in mind which variables are specified (and so known) and exactly what you want out. Sounds obvious but it’s easy to get lost! When working out the maths be careful with special cases that arise when you divide any two things. For example, if you wanted arctan(y1/x1) to find an angle, you’d need to create the special case for if x1=0, as JavaScript would have a problem with dividing by zero, even though you might not always consider this a problem. Algebraically we’d just expect pi/2, so for this you’d have to create the special case to return pi/2 for when x1 = 0.

When the functionality team later starts looking at our JS code, we want to make their life as easy as possible. Most importantly is to have the code structured into blocks that are **maths**, **interaction** and **calling**. We want this structure as it allows people who perhaps don’t understand the mathematics/theory we’re using to optimize the code without worry. It should work under the lines of “I have a set of functions I’ve defined that when I input the users input, I get the numerical values I need out” before doing any plotting. The interaction code is then everything that’s needed to get the JavaScript and HTML files to talk to one another, it finds takes the user input (which is found through HTML), inputs it into the maths block and takes the output and puts it into any plots you want to have. Finally the calling section updates everything you need, so if the user has for examples changed the value of some slider, the calling section of the code will respond to this change and call a single function which does everything you need it to in order to update the plots.

Having the code ready in this general structure makes the work of those optimizing the code and checking for redundancies much easier as it’s obvious from the beginning what everything is doing, and provided you’ve done the maths correctly, it allows those who don’t know the subject to do optimisation.