

CIS 3190 A3: Cobol Handout

My experience working with Cobol was not so great, it was hard to learn in comparison to previous languages like Ada and Fortran. I needed a lot of hand holding on this assignment, whether it be from resources or getting a friend to explain the algorithm that we were reengineering. However, I needed to continuously refer to aid was to look up how you wrote particular things in Cobol syntax.

One of the biggest challenges I faced doing this assignment was the language itself, I looked at the language and dreaded to start the assignment because of how the code looked so different and archaic than what I was used to. Though, I eventually sucked it up and tried to do this assignment, only to hit more errors than I ever had before. I started with the code that the professor provided and every little change I made crashed the program and provided far too many errors than I could handle. I needed someone to sit down with me print out the code and explain Cobol to me line by line and even then I was lost.

For the most part once I understood the algorithm but interpreting the Cobol code and understanding the code was hard for me to grasp. Learning the difference from Cobol syntax and what I'm used to (C) was the only time consuming part. This language is very old and because of that I take simple things like printing in C for granted. Writing to stdio (or whatever the Cobol equivalent is) was a lot harder, as you needed to specify the program to write text in the next line instead of that being implied as it is in other languages.

It took a bit of testing but I finally got it to work to some extent, however comments may break my code. Adding file manipulation was pretty easy to implement as I just looked at the practice assignments in the course and used similar methods. After that I had to redo the calculations so that it would output proper answers. Even then only some of the answers would be wrong.

After I was done, I tested the program and tried to see if I could incorporate other methods to get this assignment to fully work. However, I ran out of time to solve the question and I ended up submitting an unfinished product. I should have taken the professors advice and just started the moment A2 was due so that I could have banged my head against the wall learning this language earlier. Needless to say I probably don't plan on doing any of the Cobol related options for A4 at this time.

Questions:

1. Given your knowledge of programming, was Cobol easy to learn?

I found Cobol's ease of learning to be hard. Thought at first glance it look like a much more elegant version of Fortran but the syntax is way more complicated. I didn't have any sample code of Cobol so I was stumped on understanding how to write in Cobol but after reading the provided resources and this handy C to Cobol comparison website I STILL DIDN'T UNDERSTAND Cobol. Cobol is a much older language used when libraries weren't as abundant and convenient and so it is a lot more tedious and complicated to do simple things in Cobol.

2. What structures made Cobol challenging to program in?

The fact that Cobol used numbers to jump to them or how variables were declared. I couldn't understand a word of what was being said when I first read the sample code.

3. What did you dislike the most about Cobol?

What I disliked about Cobol was the language itself, I don't understand why companies would still use this. The syntax was painstakingly long to write out and over complicated things that newer languages have so easily.