Good Commit Messages

Let's take a quick stroll down Stickler Lane and ask the question:

> *How do I write a good commit message? And why should I care?*

These are *fantastic* questions! I can't stress enough how important it is to spend some time writing a *good* commit message.

Now, what makes a "good" commit message? That's a great question and has been written about a number of times. Here are some important things to think about when crafting a good commit message:

Do

- do keep the message short (less than 60-ish characters)
- do explain *what* the commit does (not *how* or *why*!)

Do not

- do not explain *why* the changes are made (more on this below)
- do not explain *how* the changes are made (that's what `git log -p` is for!)
- do not use the word "and"
  - if you have to use "and", your commit message is probably doing too many changes - break the changes into separate commits
  - e.g. "make the background color pink *and* increase the size of the sidebar"

The best way that I've found to come up with a commit message is to finish this phrase, "This commit will...". However, you finish that phrase, use *that* as your commit message.

Above all, ***be consistent*** in how you write your commit messages!

QUESTION 1 OF 3

Reviewing the guidelines on what makes a good commit message, is the following commit message good?

"Update the footer to copyright information"

- [x] Yes
- [ ] No

SUBMIT

QUESTION 2 OF 3

Is the following a good commit message?

"Add a

tag to the body"

- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

SUBMIT

QUESTION 3 OF 3

Is the following a good commit message?

"Add changes to app.js"

- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

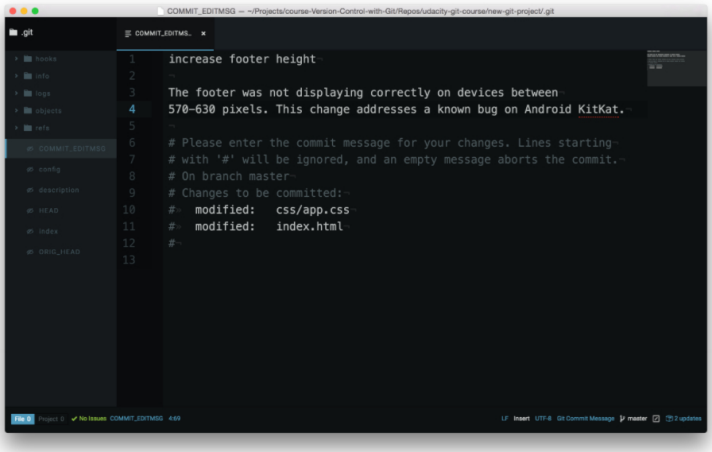
SUBMIT

Explain the *Why*

If you need to explain *why* a commit needs to be made, you can!

When you're writing the commit message, the first line is the message itself. After the message, leave a blank line, and then type out the body or explanation including details about why the commit is needed (e.g. URL links).

Here's what a commit message edit screen might look like:



Code editor showing the commit message edit window. A message has been typed, followed by a blank line, followed by the body of the commit.

This details section of a commit message _is_ included in the `git log`. To see a commit message with a body, check out the Blog project repo and look at commit `8a11b3f`.

Only the message (the first line) is included in `git log --oneline`, though!

Udacity's Commit Style Requirements

As I've mentioned, there are a number of ways to write commit messages. If you're working on a team, they might already have a predetermined way of writing commit messages. Here at Udacity, we have our own standard for commit messages. You can check it out on our Git Commit Message Style Guide.

If you haven't chosen a commit message style, feel free to use ours. But if you're working on an existing project, use their existing style; it's much more important to be consistent with your actual team than to be consistent with us!

Git Diff Up Next!

In the next section, we'll look at a new tool (with a familiar output!). This tool will tell us what changes we've made to files *before* the files have been committed!

NEXT