

Your First Pairing Session

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First: **relax**. You got this.

Pairing is nothing more than two people helping each other on a task. You've probably "accidentally" paired with a colleague when facing a tricky bug or new area of the codebase.

That said, it's common to be a bit nervous in the beginning. Thus, the biggest enemy of your first pairing session is usually nerves.

Here are some tips to keep things low-stress.

Try it with someone nice

Ideally, your first session will take place with an experienced pair. But it's even more important that they be kind.

Optimise for nice.

Do it when you're fresh

Shoot for first thing in the morning, when caffeine and motivation levels are high.

Take extra care to avoid immediately after lunch or very late in the day.

Get the ergonomics right

- Sit directly next to each other, with the monitor equidistant between you.
- Plug in one keyboard per person.
- Bump up the text size a little.
- Use an editor/IDE that you both know reasonably well.

Pick an easy task

Once you've got some experience under your belt, you'll find that pairing truly shines when the problems get harder.

But for this first session, try to pair on something that doesn't feel intimidating. Something you're already pretty sure you know how to accomplish is good.

Maybe don't call it pairing

The word "pairing" carries some baggage with it.

If the idea intimidates you or your partner, consider not even using the p-word.

Try "can I get a second set of eyes on this?"

Try mob programming ("mobbing")

Some folks find mob programming less intimidating than a two-person pairing session.

Here's what you do:

1. Get a group of three or more devs together.
2. Put some code up on a TV or very large monitor.
3. One person drives while the group navigates.
4. Switch drivers very frequently. Every ten minutes is good.
5. Marvel at the quality of code you produced, how much you learned from each other, and how much fun it was.

Timebox it

It's a good idea to start with shorter sessions. 45-60 minutes is about right.

Pairing requires above-average focus and communication, which can wear you out surprisingly quickly.

With time, your stamina will grow, but keep your sessions short at first.

Wait to draw conclusions

After your first session, you'll begin to form an opinion about pair programming.

Try to avoid this.

Pairing partners vary widely in quality and compatibility. Try to pair with five different people before you decide if pairing is right for you.

Use a template

Want some further guidance on your first session?

Check out our [pairing session template](#) for ideas.