The projects at App Academy definitely provided a good portfolio for future employers. There is a wide range of technical knowledge needed to construct these projects, from frontend to backend frameworks to architectural design and maximizing efficiency. Throughout my interviews, I was asked to talk about my projects many times and even had to dig into the code to explain individual parts. You can find out a little more below about the three final projects at App Academy and my experiences throughout. By hand constructing all these projects, we become experts with all facets of the product. Own your code!

Full Stack Project:

When it comes to deciding on full stack projects, we select three websites that we want to “clone” and our group leader makes the decision for us. My choices were AirBnb, Soundcloud, and 500px and the main factor as to why I decided on these three were primarily because these web applications allow me to enrich the content (photos or music) for a better overall experience on the user end. I was ultimately assigned AirBnb and could not be more grateful that my first choice was given to me.

We spend pretty much all of weeks 8 and 9 on this project. Every single day involved showing up at 9am and jumping right into the project until the end of the day. I can confidently say this was my favorite part of the curriculum because of the freedom to work independently all while putting together all of our learnings into one project. Throughout these two weeks I definitely got a much better understanding of every single concept I had picked up from weeks 1-7 and I can understand why this full stack project is so fundamental in the curriculum.

When it comes to time management, you are your own boss. There will be a direct correlation between effort and how rich your project is. Two weeks may seem like a long time but it goes by incredibly fast and we came to realize that even the most minor of bugs could set our timeline back a good amount. This was also a great opportunity for us to get better with using Github as we definitely wanted a way to manage the project more efficiently throughout the two weeks. Either that or learn the hard way with using Github by resetting your entire project to an earlier stage (s/o to Yong Lin).

Google will absolutely be your best friend for two weeks. And of course, you have the option of asking the TAs for help. But I came to realize that the TAs can only help so much seeing that they just are not able to dedicate too much time to find a bug in a project they had never previously worked on. It’s best to develop a habit of pushing through roadblocks on your own anyways. We eventually host our projects on Heroku and also purchase domain names as well. And at the end of the second week, the projects are submitted for grading by the TAs in a fairly thorough, though somewhat subjective, evaluation.

JavaScript Project:

And on we move towards our JavaScript projects where we spend about a week on. The main idea of this project is to further advance our knowledge of JavaScript in the frontend. This could mean the use of JavaScript libraries or even Vanilla JavaScript. I chose to use jQuery as well as HTML Canvas in my Tetris game. Once again, you are on your own and the structure is virtually similar to that of the FSP.

Picking an idea was probably the hardest part of the project for me. It was stressed that we should choose a project that was doable within the given timeframe but being the judge of what is considered doable was incredibly hard. After putting some thought into it, I decided to make a game that is played on an interface which features a Gameboy visual as well as classic Tetris theme music. My idea behind this decision is based on my thinking that recruiters will land on my game and immediately feel at home because of the nostalgic effect it produces. My theory seemed to come true later on during my job search as I definitely received some positive remarks on my Tetris game from recruiters. At the end of the day, be creative because this project is your chance to do just that!

Flex/Group Project:

The flex project is a group project and the idea is simple: work on something you are interested in that promotes new learning. I teamed up with three other buddies. We decided to do a full stack web application but wanted to explore new frameworks so our frontend consisted of React Native for mobile development and the backend was built using Python and Django.

Once again, deciding on an idea was an issue during the early stages of the project. We probably shifted ideas at least 10 times. The whiteboard was filled with pictures, arrows, bullet points, and so much code. Without diving into too much detail, we ultimately decided to build an app with the emphasis of “solving a real world problem”. We split the team of four into groups of two, with each group handling one “end” of the application. I worked alongside Yong and on the Django backend.

Because we had no prior knowledge of Python and Django, we had to find tutorials online to familiarize ourselves on this language and framework. Django Girls, as funny as it sounds, proved to be a valuable resource as it definitely provided us with a good foundation for constructing our own backend API endpoint. Our counterparts purchased tutorials on Udemy to understand React Native.

Quite honestly, my main takeaway from this project is the importance of team collaboration. It is absolutely undervalued how important communication is especially when the collective team is split into subgroups manhandling the frontend and backend individually. We decided that we had to get together about once a day to go over action items, bugs to fix, what to expect from each other, etc. This project definitely gave me a lot of talking points going into my job search because I was exposed to the many facets of web development.