What is the single most influential book every programmer should read? [closed]

Asked 16 years, 4 months ago Modified 12 years, 10 months ago

Viewed 1.1m times

1434

votes

As it currently stands, this question is not a good fit for our Q&A format. We expect answers to be supported by facts, references, or expertise, but this question will likely solicit debate, arguments, polling, or extended discussion. If you feel that this question can be improved and possibly reopened, visit the help center for guidance.

Closed 12 years ago.

Locked. This question and its answers are locked because the question is off-topic but has historical significance. It is not currently accepting new answers or interactions.

If you could go back in time and tell yourself to read a specific book at the beginning of your career as a developer, which book would it be?

I expect this list to be varied and to cover a wide range of things.

To search: Use the search box in the upper-right corner. To search the answers of the current question, use `inquestion:this`. For example:

```
inquestion:this "Code Complete"
```

resources

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edited Sep 26, 2011 at 15:39

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18 revs, 13 users 34%
Robert Harvey

8 Browsing this thread make me realize how ugly most programming related books are. Very good thread though! – Carl Bergquist Aug 5, 2009 at 12:09

23 Interesting this is, while the title reads "What is the single most influential book *every* programmer should read?", there are quite a few books suggested that deal with language specific topics. By definition, and by question as it was put, the books suggested here should deal with language agnostic topics, which proves most programmers have yet to learn how to read. – Rook Oct 2, 2009 at 19:54

19 If I could go back in time and tell myself to read something, it better be a newspaper or sports fact book that I carried with me. Anything else is a waste of good time travel. :-) – jmucchiello Nov 8, 2009 at 9:38

32 You know, if I wasn't worried about getting down voted a WHOLE lot I would trollishly go and suggest Twilight. "Its ALSO about people who are pale and avoid the sun!" – Jacob Bellamy Feb 12, 2010 at 0:20

3 Can someone cleanup answers by deleting repeated entries on books? Most of them area already down voted. – rao Mar 16, 2010 at 5:44

Comments disabled on deleted / locked posts / reviews |

214 Answers

Sorted by: Highest score (default)

Prev 1 … 4 5 6 7 8 Next

1 vote

If you write code in C then Expert C Programming is an eye opener. It has answers to all the things you wondered why it works this way. Peter Van Der Linden has a great writing style and makes arcane concepts very readable. A must read for all C developers

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answered Oct 18, 2008 at 15:55

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HeretoLearn

1
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Fortran IV with Watfor and Watfiv by Cress, Dirkson and Graham.

This book taught me my first programming language that I programmed onto punch cards at the time. After 3 years, the book was all tatters because I had used it so much.

alt text http://g-ecx.images-amazon.com/images/G/01/ciu/4b/83/245d9833e7a03768eaf63110._AA240_.L.jpg

Fortran was a great language! It had a super optimizer and produced very fast code. It is still very popular in Great Britain and FTN95 is now a very full-featured and capable compiler. I sometimes wish I could have continued to use it, but Delphi is a more than adequate replacement.

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answered Oct 30, 2008 at 4:23

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lkessler

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Graphics Programming in Windows is difficult to fault.

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answered Nov 14, 2008 at 15:12

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Kramii

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Etudes for Programmers by Charles Wetherell, More Programming Pearls (Jon Bently),

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answered Dec 6, 2008 at 0:18

community wiki
Stephen

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The Scelbi-Byte Primer

I pored over the source code listings in this book many times until, one day, I suddenly grokked 8080 assembly language programming.

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answered Dec 18, 2008 at 18:34

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Ferruccio

1

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- Game Architecture and Design: Learn the Best Practices for Game Design and Programming

Even though i've never programmed a game this book helped me understand a lot of things in a fun way.

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answered Jan 5, 2009 at 17:14

community wiki
Slayer SA

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- Professional JSP 2nd Edition

I bough this when I was a complete newbie and took me from only knowing that Java existed to a reliable team member in a short time

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answered Jan 5, 2009 at 17:16

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Slayer SA

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Still a worthwhile classic is the Interface Hall of Shame. This website detailed a huge assortment of interface design faux pas that is quite entertaining. The original iarchitect.com no longer exists, but others have re-established the HOS on their own websites.

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answered Jan 13, 2009 at 17:50

community wiki
Chris Gallucci

1
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Object Oriented Design Heuristics is a great read. I couldn't put it down.

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answered Jan 14, 2009 at 21:35

community wiki
BillD

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I'll add a couple that I haven't seen here that are influential for me:

- Yourdon and Constantine, "Structured Design". Everything you need to know about software design is in here, if you're willing to dig for it a little.
- Leonard Koren, "Wabi-Sabi: for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers". A pragmatic philosophy balancing beauty and pragmatism.

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answered Jan 14, 2009 at 21:46

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Kent Beck

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How to Solve It: A new aspect of mathematical method

Although not directly related to computer programming but it does teach you the art of problem solving and that's what computer programming is all about.

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answered Feb 18, 2009 at 18:32

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Sameer

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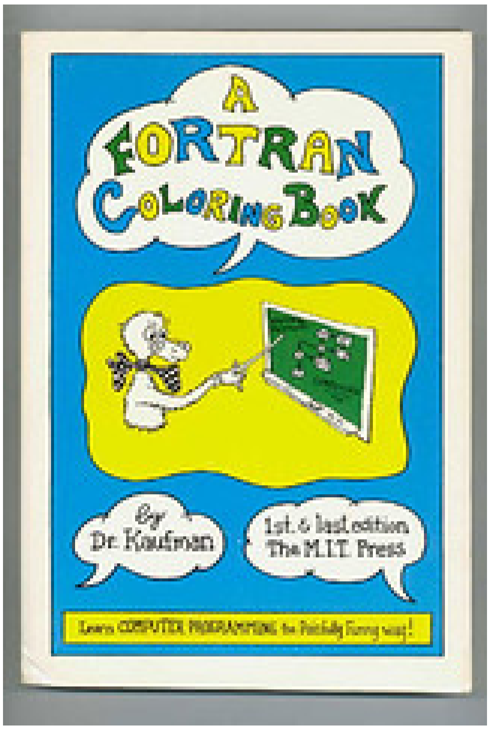
"The Fortran Coloring Book" by Dr. Roger Kaufman (1978, ISBN:0262610264)

What a silly concept - more basic than even a "Dummies" book! But it works for any language (with a few fortran specific examples of course), explaining the basic concepts of logic, variables, i/o, etc. in a very understandable and "Painfully Funny" way.

It's enough to get a ten year old interested in programming...



(Found cover photo on a Flickr user account)

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edited Feb 8, 2017 at 14:08

community wiki
3 revs
Doug L.

I think I still have a copy of that! ;) – TrueWill Sep 18, 2009 at 3:21

1
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An introduction to GW Basic. With out it I never would have learned how to program and any other books wouldn't have done me any good.

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answered Apr 27, 2009 at 13:04

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Jared

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Algorithms in C++ was invaluable to me in learning Big O notation and the ins and outs of the various sort algorithms. This was published before Sedgewick decided he could make more money by dividing it into 5 different books.

C++ FAQs is an amazing book that really shows you what you should and shouldn't be doing in C++. The backward compatibility of C++ leaves a lot of landmines about and this book helps one carefully avoid them while at the same time being a good introduction into OO design and intent.

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answered May 26, 2009 at 23:33

community wiki
Jherico

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It seems most people have already touched on the some very good books. One which really helped me out was Effective C#: 50 Ways to Improve your C#. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention The Tao of Pooh. Philosophy books can be good for the soul, and the code.

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answered Oct 22, 2009 at 11:00

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cloggins

-1: Duplicate post of one higher voted. Please be so kind as to delete to make this thread cleaner. Even if the one with the higher votes is newer, please take one for the team to tidy this messy question and let the answers as a whole gain the value they should have – Ruben Bartelink Jan 30, 2010 at 0:36

1
vote

One I didn't already see on here was **xUnit Test Patterns: Refactoring Test Code** by Gerard Meszaros. This book really helped me see unit testing from a fresh perspective.

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answered Nov 6, 2009 at 21:42

community wiki
Stacy Vicknair

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I'm late to this question but apparently still have something unique to offer... *Software Engineering Economics* by Barry Boehm which, to summarize, says that if you want to really improve software productivity get better people since better tools, hardware, languages, methods, etc. will all have a marginal impact. Only better people drive up productivity by significant amounts. I emphasize, this is **better** engineers, not more engineers!

Not the kind of book you'd take to bed with you, like you might do with *Coders At Work* but the kind of book that drives home a lesson that our industry has struggled mightily to take to heart. Witness off-shoring, a false economy that Boehm's model predicts will have only a marginal positive effect, if any at all. Check it out.

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answered Nov 8, 2009 at 8:48

community wiki
pajato0

1
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Essential reading for any mentor/team leader/manager or anyone who reports to the aforementioned.

alt text http://ecx.images-amazon.com/images/I/316N6QYW32L._BO2,204,203,200_PIsitb-sticker-arrow-click,TopRight,35,-76_AA240_SH20_OU01_.jpg

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answered Nov 23, 2009 at 18:08

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Upperstage

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This is a must read book for every programmer: Database system concepts by Abraham Silberschatz.

alt text http://images.barnesandnoble.com/images/14870000/14878097.JPG

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answered Dec 14, 2009 at 15:59

community wiki
z-index

Have it sitting on my desk now from over 7 years ago when I was a budding CS student :) – user195488 Jan 11, 2010 at 20:21

1
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This is a very rich and useful compilation, however, I am a bit surprised I have not encountered Andrew S. Tanenbaum among the authors. IMO he is one of the best CS professors, and his genius has to do mainly with his extraordinary ability in making rather difficult material accessible to the CS undergraduates. His books (Modern Operating Systems, or Computer Networks might ring a bell) did a wonderful job in providing me with a solid foundation in CS while doing my BS and I highly recommend them. Some other interesting stuff on Tanenbaum, proving his skills go beyond teaching: author of an OS called MINIX - Linus had his fare share of inspiration from it when implementing Linux; Amoeba - distributed OS; Turtle - free anonymous p2p network.

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edited Dec 16, 2009 at 11:06

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2 revs
user231947

4 Wall of text. What is your recommendation? – Andriy Drozdyuk
Feb 4, 2010 at 18:39

1
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The Art of Game Design - A Book of Lenses by Jesse Schell

> Jesse Schell has taught Game Design and led research projects at Carnegie Mellon’s Entertainment Technology Center since 2002.

Nuff said.

The Art of Game Design - A Book of Lenses
http://i50.tinypic.com/iekw0l.jpg

PS: Sorry If I am double posting, I couldn't find this book in the answers - either because the title was not exact or there was no image. Let me know and I'll delete it if so.

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answered Feb 4, 2010 at 18:36

community wiki
Andriy Drozdyuk

1 vote

[Mr Bunny's Guide to ActiveX](#)

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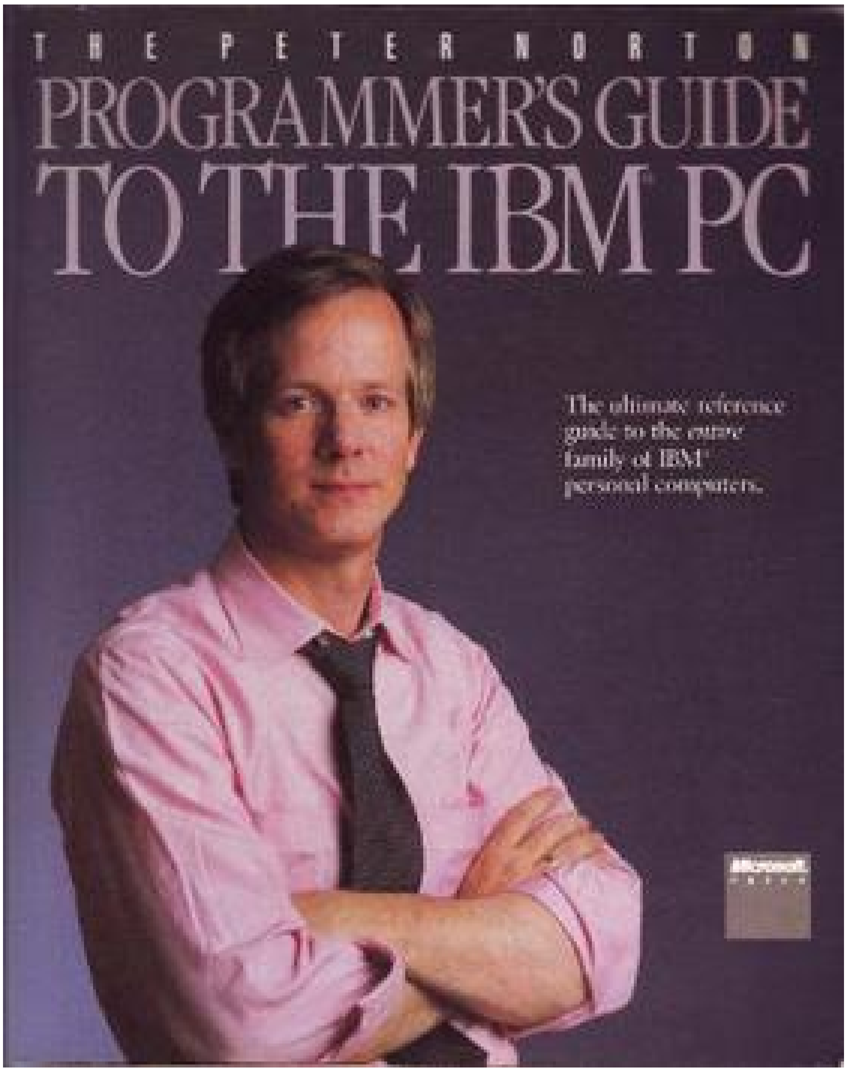
answered Feb 8, 2010 at 16:53

community wiki
Paul Mitchell

+1 You're no anonymous yet another Paul Mitchell who wont put detail in his profile! (No actual +1 as have used up votes on this thread on way to page 8!) – Ruben Bartelink Mar 27, 2010 at 14:09

1

vote


THE PETER NORTON
PROGRAMMER'S GUIDE TO THE IBM PC
The ultimate reference guide to the entire family of IBM personal computers.
Microsoft Press

Programmer's Guide to the IBM PC. The Pink Shirt book.

...well, **someone** had to say it.

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edited Feb 8, 2017 at 14:21

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2 revs
Marc Bollinger

IIRC, I had that. Lots of low level groveling in MS-DOS and BIOS. – Arthur Kalliokoski Mar 16, 2010 at 4:19

1

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You.Next(): Move Your Software Development Career to the Leadership Track ~ Michael C. Finley (Author), Honza Fedák (Author) link text

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answered Mar 3, 2010 at 21:13

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Mark Schultheiss

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Maverick!: The Success Story Behind the World's Most Unusual Workplace

alt text http://ecx.images-amazon.com/images/I/410TX7YN94L._SL500_AA300_.jpg

Will make you realise what a workplace should be like.

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answered May 6, 2010 at 7:59

community wiki

Jonathan

1

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Inside the C++ object model by Stanley Lippman

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edited Sep 2, 2011 at 6:50

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2 revs, 2 users 57%
gt124

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Refactoring

Patterns of Enterprise Application Architecture

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answered Aug 21, 2008 at 20:10

community wiki
Johnno Nolan

0

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Code Craft

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answered Aug 21, 2008 at 20:54

community wiki
JosephStyons

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I have a couple of (rather old) blog posts on this subject

- http://www.spindriftpages.net/blog/dave/2005/11/17/c-books/
- http://www.spindriftpages.net/blog/dave/2005/06/06/good-oo-books/

- http://www.spindriftpages.net/blog/dave/2005/05/11/really-great-it-books/
- Although a good book I found Code Complete to be rather a dull read (a controversial view I admit).
- I like Jeffery Richter and the books Joel Spolksy has written
- The Eric Meyer CSS books are really good too

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answered Aug 21, 2008 at 21:10

community wiki
David Hayes

0

votes

SQL for smarties

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answered Aug 21, 2008 at 21:26

community wiki
Stu

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