

*This is optional reading, but if you are thinking you may not have the background for the course, please do read on for additional perspective from Dan on recommended background...*

In one of the Course-Introduction videos, I spend several minutes describing assumed background, including showing an extended example in Java even though programming in Java is not required before (or during!) this course. This may have the unintended consequence of "scaring away" people who would enjoy and do well in this course, so let me try to give some additional perspective. In the end, every person has a unique background and it is frustrating to describe in general terms for everyone what you may or may not need to take this course, but I would like to do my best and I hope if you're reading this and have programmed before that you give the course a try.

The main point I was trying to make is that this course is not an introductory programming course. There are some great MOOCs and other online resources that teach programming assuming you have never programmed before. This course complements those by assuming you have already taken 1-2 programming courses or learned programming in other ways. Perhaps some of you are taking this course now after those other courses. Welcome!

There are many different introductory courses and they cover different things, so I wanted to list some particular topics I am assuming you have seen. For any one of them, other online resources or help on the discussion forums may help fill a gap. Some students have done well despite not having some of the recommended background. As you may have guessed, this MOOC is based on a course I have taught many times at my university. On campus, I can assume students have taken a particular set of two introductory courses, so my list of topics I hope you have seen is based heavily on those courses.

It may be unreasonably intimidating that I wrote Java code quickly in the video. You do not need to have understood everything I was writing as quickly as I was writing it, especially since the course will not use Java. You should also know in all the videos that I was well-prepared before I started recording. The "secret" is I had a copy of the code I was going to write on my screen and I had just looked it over -- in real life, I usually can't program that fast. Also, once you have seen a bunch of videos where I program during the video like this, you will be used to it. I have had interesting conversations with former students who originally thought the introductory videos were intimidating and remembered them that way. Then a few weeks later, the students watched the videos again and could not figure out why they remembered them that way.

Overall, I want to encourage everyone to try out the course while giving a sense of the recommended background. If you're still unsure, there is no harm in trying the first homework. The Section 1 materials will have everything you need to do the homework. All the homeworks are intended to be challenging and fulfilling, but they are not designed to require you to know things that are not covered in the course material.

I want everyone to feel welcome in the course and to get everything out of it that they can. The beginning of a course can feel intimidating to almost everyone despite what it might seem like on the discussion forums. So, again, welcome!