**08 – Branches, Commits and Upstreaming**

**Activities**

COMP190 – Tools and Techniques for Software Development

Dickinson College

**Name:**

Top of FormThis week’s topic focused on branches, commits and upstreaming changes. In class we saw a typical workflow for how branches are used to make changes to code and documentation. How those changes are committed to the branch. And then how those contributions can be contributed back to the upstream repository on GitHub.

While different projects will use different workflows, the one we saw in class and the one you will use through these activities is based on GitHub Flow and is quite common.

* See <https://guides.github.com/introduction/flow/> if you are interested in GitHub’s description of the GitHub Flow workflow.

These activities will build on A07 by having you apply the workflow to fix the issue that you claimed and then upstream your changes by making a pull request. In later activities you will see how your changes get merged into the upstream and how your work interacts with contributions that others are also making to the upstream.

**Current State:**

Figure 1 shows where you should be at the end of A07. You will have forked the upstream FarmData2 repository into your own GitHub account. You will then have cloned your fork into a local repository on your computer. Your local files at this point are a copy that reflects the current state of the upstream main branch. Let’s explore this state just a little before making the changes that address the issue that you have claimed.

Figure - Fork and Clone

1. The git log command provides a way to see information about the history of the project. It will display information about the most recent commits that have been made to the repository. By default, git log displays information about the 10 most recent commits. You can append a -1 or -5 to show only the most recent or most recent 5 commits.

a. Use the git log command to display the information about the two most recent commits. Give the command that you used and the output that it produced.

b. A line that begins with \* commit appears at the start of the information about each commit. That line also contains a long string of numbers and letters. That string is called the SHA (secure hashing algorithm) hash. It is a hexadecimal number that is computed from the changes contained in the commit and is the unique identifier for the commit. Following the SHA hash is information about the author, the date the commit was made and the commit messages that were used to describe the changes.

Use the output from part a to answer the following questions about the project history:

i. What is the SHA for the most recent commit.

ii. When was the most recent commit made?

iii. Who made the second most recent commit?

iv. What was the stated purpose of the second most recent commit?

**Create and Switch to Feature Branch:**

When you set out to make changes to the project you will do so by working on a feature branch. Figure 2 illustrates the process of creating and switching to a feature branch. The activities in this section will walk you through the process of creating a feature branch on which you will fix the issue that you claimed.

Figure - Create and Switch to Feature Branch

2. The git status command provides the current status of your local repo. Run it.

a. What is the output?

b. What do you think it means when it says “Y﻿our branch is up to date with 'origin/main'.”?

c. What do you think it means when it says “﻿nothing to commit, working tree clean”? Hint: recall that commits describe changes that have been made.

3. The git branch <name> command creates a new branch with the given name. When creating a branch you should give it a short but descriptive name (e.g. “FixTypoInReadme” instead of “FixIssue123”).

a. Create a new feature branch with a descriptive name that you will use to fix the issue that you claimed. What command did you use?

b. What output does git status produce now?

c. Examine your output in part b. Does creating a new branch change you to that branch? How could you tell?

4. The git branch command creates a branch (among other uses), but it doesn’t change your active branch. The git switch <name> command switches the current branch.

a. Give a command that will change your active branch to the new feature branch that you created.

b. What output does git status produce now?

c. Did your command from part a change your feature branch to be the active branch? How can you tell?

**Edit Local Files:**

You have created a feature branch and switched to that branch and you are now ready to fix the issue that you claimed. This state is illustrated in Figure 3. The local files started as a copy of the last commit on the main branch, but are shown as having been modified by being drawn in blue, as opposed to green as they are in main.

Figure - Editing Local Files on a Feature Branch

5. What is the number and title of the issue that you claimed?

6. Now it is time to make changes to your local files that fix the issue that you claimed.

a. In which file will you be making changes to address that issue? Hint: Look at the text of your issue in the issue tracker.

b. Using a text editor of your choice (nano, vi, gedit, etc) modify the file you identified in #5 so that the issue you claimed has been fixed. Be sure to save your changes.

If your issue asks you to correct a typo, simply change the indicated text and save the file. If your issue asks you to add a link, the syntax for that is as follows:

[Link text in square brackets](URL in parenthesis)

For example:

[Dickinson Home Page](<https://www.dickinson.edu>)

No Answer Required: Making the change to the file is all that is necessary for this question.

7. Use the git status command to answer the following questions:

a. What output does git status produce now?

b. What *two things* does git status tell you about the file that you edited?

**Stage Changes and Commit:**

As you saw in question #7 you now have modifications to your local files that have not been staged or committed to your local repository. This process of staging (i.e. adding the files to the stage) and then committing them to your local repository is illustrated in Figure 4. The activities in this section will first have you stage your changes and then commit them to your local repository.

Figure - Staging Changes and Committing

8. The git add <file> command stages the indicated file, designating it as part of the next commit. Give a command that will stage the file that you edited.

9. How does the output of git status change to reflect that the file is staged?

10. As you saw earlier when looking at the output of git log, each commit has a *commit message* that briefly describes the changes that are contained in the commit. These messages should be concise but meaningful without referring back to the issue. That is, some future reader of the git log should be able to get an idea of the changes you have made and why you made them by reading your commit messages.

For each of the following issues, rank the given commit messages from best to worst.

a. Issue: The creator used the word “bug” instead of “bugs”.

* Fixes issue #123
* Made the word bug plural (i.e. bugs)
* Fixed typo

b. Issue: The harvesting log should be able to track insect presence.

* Extended harvest logs
* Insect tracking added
* Added tracking for insects in harvesting logs

11. The git commit -m “<message>” commits the staged files to the currently active branch with the specified commit message. Give a command that will commit your staged changes to your local repository.

12. How has the output of the git status command changed? Why?

13. Give the output of a git log command that shows the three most recent commits. How has it changed since question 1? Why?

14. Switch to your main branch.

a. What command did you use?

b. Does the git log show the information about the commit you made now? Why or why not?

**Push Branch to Origin:**

You have now made the changes necessary to address an issue in the project and are ready to upstream those changes. In order to do that you need to get the changes you have made into GitHub so that the upstream maintainers can see and review them. As shown in Figure 5, this is done by *pushing* your feature branch to GitHub.

Figure - Push Feature Branch to Origin

15. The git branch -l (ell not one) command lists all of the branches in your local repository. What branches are in your local repository?

16. What branches appear in your origin repository on GitHub? Why is there a difference between the branches in your origin repo and your local repo?

*Getting a Personal Access Token:*

Before you will be able to push your feature branch to GitHub you will have to get a Personal Access Token (PAT) from GitHub. A PAT is like a password but has some security benefits. In particular you can have multiple different PATs. Each one can have different limits on what can be done with it and each one can be revoked without affecting the others.

17. Follow GitHub's instructions for creating a personal access token. (<https://docs.github.com/en/github/authenticating-to-github/keeping-your-account-and-data-secure/creating-a-personal-access-token>). When doing so be sure to:

* Set an expiration date that is after the end of the semester.
* Choose “repo” for the “scopes and permissions.”
* Be sure to copy and paste your PAT somewhere safe – maybe e-mail it to yourself? You will not be able to retrieve it again after you leave the page.

18. When interacting with GitHub using the git CLI you will be asked for your PAT anytime GitHub required authentication (e.g. when pushing a branch). Clearly you don’t want to try to type your PAT every time. Fortunately, you can configure git so that it will remember your PAT and automatically provide it to GitHub when required.

Make sure that you are in the directory for your FarmData2 repository and issue the following command:

git config --global credential.helper store

Give the output of the following command and inspect it to confirm that your added configuration was successful:

git config --global --list

*Pushing your Feature Branch:*

19.The git push <remote repo> <branch> command will push the specified branch of your local repo to the specified remote repo (i.e. GitHub). Note: you will need to paste your PAT as the password when it is requested.

a. Give a command that will push *your feature branch* from your local repo to your *origin* repo on GitHub.

b. What output does your command from part a generate?

c. What are two ways that you can confirm that your command was successful. Hint: One is in part b, and you’ll need a browser for the other!

**Make Pull Request:**

A pull request is the mechanism by which you ask the maintainers to consider merging your changes into the upstream main branch. As shown in Figure 6, a pull request is made from your origin repository, which contains your feature branch, to the upstream repository. With your feature branch successfully pushed to your origin repository you are now ready to make a pull request.

Figure - Making a Pull Request

20. There are a number of different ways to make a pull request in GitHub. In general, they are all equivalent and it won’t matter which one you use. The following steps will walk you through one of those ways.

a. When you first push a feature branch, GitHub assumes that you are likely to make a pull request for it. To make this easy it will automatically display a big green “Compare & pull request” button at the top of the page.



Click that button. You will use the page that appears to create your pull request.

b. A gray bar similar to the one shown below should appear at the top of the page.



This bar specifies what you are requesting to be pulled and where you are asking it to be merged.

i. Use the URL’s from the gray bar in your pull request to match the terms *head repository* and *base repository* to the appropriate terms below.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | |  |  |
|  | Your origin repository |  | |  |
|  | The upstream repository |  | |  |
|  |  | |  |  |

ii. Are the changes you are requesting to be merged in the head repository or in the base repository?

iii. Is this your pull request asking that your changes be merged into the *head repository* or into the *base repository*?

iv. What name is used in the gray bar for the branch that contains your changes to be merged?

v. What name is used in the gray bar for the branch of the upstream into which you are asking that your changes be merged?

21. To complete your pull request (PR) you will need to add the following details. It is not necessary to provide any answers here, your work will appear in your PR.

a. Give your PR a descriptive title – a similar idea to using meaningful commit messages.

b. Replace the <add description> in the body of the PR with a longer description of your changes.

c. If a PR fixes an issue then you can include a line in the body of the PR that says “Fixes #123” or “Closes #123” and when the PR is merged into main the issue will be closed automatically. Add a line to the body of the PR that will close the issue that you fixed.

d. Confirm that your PR can be merged automatically.

e. Click the green button to create the Pull Request.

Graphical user interface, text, application, chat or text message

Description automatically generated

22. Go to the upstream repository on GitHub and open the “Pull Requests” tab:



Find your Pull Request. Give the number, title and URL for your pull request here.

23. On your pull request page there will be “Files Changed” tab:



Open that tab. At the bottom of that page will be a “diff” that shows the changes that you have made. This “dif” shows both the upstream version of the code and your version of the code. It also indicates the changes you have made. The project maintainers will often use this “diff” to see the details of what you have changed. Use the “diff” to answer the following questions.

a. Is your code shown on the left or right?

b. How are the changes that you made indicated?

**Command Summary:**

It will take a while for this process and all of the commands to become a natural part of the way you work. Until that happens it is often useful to have a short concise cheat sheet of the command for accomplishing each task.

24. Complete the table below by filling in the right-hand column with the commands that accomplish the task listed on the left. Use the <…> notation appropriately to indicate parameters that need to be customized for each use. Note that the tasks listed are in approximately the same order as they appear in this activity.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | **Task to Complete** | **Git Commands** |  |
|  | Display recent commits to the active branch. |  |  |
|  | Create a new feature branch. |  |  |
|  | Change the active branch |  |  |
|  | Check the current state of your local repo. |  |  |
|  | Stage changed files to be committed to the repo. |  |  |
|  | Commit staged files with a message. |  |  |
|  | Push a feature branch to your origin. |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Optional:** To help us improve and scope these activities for future semesters please consider providing the following feedback.

a. Approximately how much time did you spend on this activity outside of class time?

b. Please comment on any particular challenges you faced in completing this activity.

**Acknowledgements:**

Some materials, questions and resources have been adapted from activities posted on foss2serve.org:

* <http://foss2serve.org/index.php/Git:_Git_Intro_Activity>
* <http://foss2serve.org/index.php/Git:_GitHub_Issues_and_Pull_Requests>
* <http://foss2serve.org/index.php/Git:_GitHub_Workflow_Activity>
* <http://foss2serve.org/index.php/Intro_to_GitHub_(Activity)>
* <http://foss2serve.org/index.php/Version_Control_(Activity)>
* <http://foss2serve.org/index.php/Work_Locally_with_Git_from_the_Command_Line_(Activity)>