

Code Generation with Anthropic Claude-1.5-Sonnet and Aider-chat

History

I started in 1980 on IBM mainframes, punchcards and vary awkward editors. It was terrible. I lived through two fundamental, breakthrough changes in software development and now there is a third upheaval.

1. 80's-90's

- Unix, MSDOS, Windows, Mac OS .
- 10x productivity increase

2. 1999

- I used to have a wall of programming reference books. We had web search but it was terrible.
- Then Google came along. Little by little my bookshelf dwinded. Online resources that you could find took off. There is no need for paper books
- 10x productively

3. AI Coding

- This is the most exciting one yet. I just sorry I will only participate in the beginning stages.
- 10x, 20x .. 100x ?

Lets get into the live coding

1. Clone starter repo from github

```
>git clone https://github.com/dmh2000/ai-gen.git
>git status
>git branch snc
>git switch snc
```

2. Setup Conda Virtual Environment

Conda is a command line utility that lets you set up 'virtual environments' that include specific software dependencies that you can for a particular application. It's mostly used with Python. If you are developing with python, you probably should be using conda or its big brother Anaconda.

It's not the same as docker. Its not a container. It just setups up a separate directory with the dev tools needed for a particular project. Then it points the environment at that directory. It gives you a repeatable dev tool environment that can be duplicated.

- <https://docs.conda.io/projects/conda/en/latest/user-guide/install/linux.html>

```
# conda create -n <venv-name> python=3
conda init
conda create -n aider python=3
conda activate aider
# install aider-chat
pip install aider-chat
```

3. Load VCAN Module

Linux 'virtual CAN' creates a local CAN bus that can be used to test offline software using a CAN bus

- CAN is a bus architecture
- There are not addresses, only messages
- each message has an id
- various clients can send and/or receive messages
- CAN has a cool way of prioritizing messages by message id in hardware
- the 'ip' command is used for creating virtual network interfaces
- virtual CAN support 'vcan' has to be built into the Linux kernel
- Linux has a package 'can-utils' that helps test and exercise CAN bus usage
- <https://linuxconfig.org/configuring-virtual-network-interfaces-in-linux>
- <https://www.pragmaticlinux.com/2021/10/how-to-create-a-virtual-can-interface-on-linux/>

```
#!/bin/sh

# check that the virtual CAN interface is loaded and ready
# ifconfig vcan0
# Load the kernel module.
sudo modprobe vcan
# Create the virtual CAN interface.
sudo ip link add dev vcan0 type vcan
# Bring the virtual CAN interface online.
sudo ip link set up vcan0
# Check its ok
sudo ip link show vcan0
ifconfig vcan0
```

4. Configure Initial Directory Structure

Set up an initial directory framework. Something simple.

```
#!/bin/bash

# install aider-chat
# pip install aider-chat
aider --version

# setup directory structure
mkdir c
mkdir can
mkdir g
cd g && go mod init can
mkdir ts
tree
```

5. LLM and Aider

This exercise is using the Anthropic Claude-1.5-Sonnet LLM for code generation. It's not free but its cheapish. I scores as top 1 or 2 in current code generation benchmarks. Although everything is moving fast in the AI world.

Aider is a command line tool that connects to the LLM and supports a continuous conversation. It can be used with most of the big-name LLM's with the proper setup. Aider connects to Claude via the Anthropic API. But you don't need any knowledge of how that works. It's pretty much the same as using a browser-based interface to an LLM but it eliminates the copy/paste steps.

One feature of Aider that other command line interfaces (Maestro) don't have is that **Aider uses or creates a local git repo and it commits all the changes it makes. This gives you a history of what happened, and you can /undo commits if you don't like the result.** If you don't already have a git repo it will ask if it can create one. Be sure to work on a branch, not main.

Anthropic setup

Go to Anthropic.com on your browser. Click the button under 'Build With Claude/Get Started Now'. It will prompt you to login or create an account. Once you have an account you can request an API key. DO NOT commit an API key to a git repo, that can expose it to others. Store is safely some other way.

- create \$HOME/.env file and add the Anthropic API key there. Aider will find it.

```
ANTHROPIC_API_KEY=sk-ant-api03-xyz
```

Start Aider

```
aider
# Loaded /home/dmh2000/.env (api keys. DO NOT ADD TO GIT!)
# Aider v0.46.1
# Models: claude-3-5-sonnet-20240620 with diff edit format, weak model
claude-3-haiku-20240307
```

Start 'Coding' with the aider conversation

One feature/bug? is that if you have the LLM generate something, and then send the same prompt again, it might generate something different. The following prompts are something that worked for me, but we might run into something different that we would accept or fix.

create a library source for interfacing to VCAN

using the C language, implement functions to access a CAN bus using network sockets. The file should include functions that open, write, read and close a CAN socket. Write the file to can/can.c

ERROR fix : struct ifreq ifr not defined

Took a couple of minutes to look this up. For Linux it needs an additional include file. Not Obvious.

add the file 'linux/if.h to can/can.c

create the include file for can

create a file can/can.h that exports the functions from can/can.c

MANUAL FIX

I didn't like having to include the system file can.h in client code because it can limit portability. So manually modify it to have its own definition of can_frame.

using the updated file can/can.h as a model, modify can/can.c to match the function prototypes defined there

build the library

create a Makefile in can that compiles can/can.c and builds a static library

check the Makefile works

- cd can
- Make

WARNING type mismatch

```
canlib.c:71:16: warning: comparison of integer expressions of different
signedness: 'int' and 'long unsigned int' [-Wsign-compare]
   71 |         if (nbytes < sizeof(struct can_frame))
      |             ^
```

there is a type mismatch at can.c line 72. add a cast to nbytes to fix this

Rerun the Makefile

- make (should build without warnings)

create a can bus client in directory 'c'.

in directory 'c' create a file named sender.c. create a main function that opens a can socket. add a 32 bit signed integer variable named 'count' initialized to 0. add a loop that sends the contents of the variable count to the can bus socket at 10 Hz. increment count by 1 on each loop iteration

build the client

add a makefile to directory c that compiles c/sender.c and includes the library libcan.a from directory can

Test the Makefile

WARNING 'usleep undefined'

Turns out that usleep is deprecated. use nanosleep instead. nanosleep requires a newer version of POSIX source than the default for gcc.

in file sender.c change the call to usleep to use nanosleep. add an argument to c/Makefile CFLAGS to define the macro `_POSIX_C_SOURCE=200000`

Other fixes

in file sender.c include string.h to fix undefined memcpy

See if 'sender' runs

```
./sender
```

In separate shell check that it is outputting messages

```
candump vcan0
```

Manually update .gitignore to exclude build artifacts

IN DIRECTORY 'g'

create go file

create a main.go file in directory 'g' and add an empty main function

add code to receive can messages

in the file g/main.go, add code to receive from a can socket using the library can/can.h. use can id 0x123. use 'cgo' for this

get rid of unsafe pointers

in g/main.go, instead of using an unsafe pointer to the can frame data, assume the value received is a 32 bit signed integer. convert the bytes to a 32 bit signed integer using shifts and adds.

Should Be WORKING!

Claude-Dev

Claude-Dev runs as a VS Code extension and can do similar things as Aider. I prefer the separate Aider command line. Claude-Dev excels at refactoring larger code bases. So lets do some of that.

improve the code in this project

- add comments to can/can.h, can/can.c, sender.c and g/main.go
- error handling

Conclusion

Answers to the Questions/help

Answers to the Questions

- does it save time?
 - yes it helps by generating boilerplate
- does it work first time?
 - sometimes
- can it fix errors
 - yes but not consistently
 - it helps if the dev knows what is going on
- does it require manual intervention

- yes
- sometimes it is just easier to edit the code than prompt
- aider always re-reads the affected files so it sees any manual changes

References

- [AI Code King](#)
 - very good up to date AI coding tool evaluations and usage
- [Aider](#)
 - what I use for composing a project
- [Claude-Dev](#)
 - I use this for code review and refactoring
- [Github Copilot](#)
 - what I use for code completion. \$10 a month. Does seem to upload your code.
 - [alternatives that don't retain your code.](#)
- [Anthropic Claude-3.5-Sonnet](#)
 - The LLM I use. Seems to be the best for coding, beats most benchmarks. API rate is input \$3/input token, \$15/output token. Subscription not required