Getting formal instruction in web development is extremely helpful in learning what is necessary to succeed, and is likely why the boot camp model has grown more and more popular. That being said, there are a myriad of online educational tools that, if taken proper advantage of, can really be helpful in getting a grasp of new languages and best practices.

Not every online tool is created equal, and I want to talk about a few that I've used. Some tools I looked to on my own, others I was pointed to by schools pre-interview, and others are part of the Launch Academy pre-work canon that I'm nearing the end of.

First off: Codeacademy.com. This is the first online teaching tool that I used. Dev Bootcamp pointed me to it before I interviewed with them. They recommended I complete the ruby tutorial, but I also completed some quick start, HTML and CSS courses. The first thing to note about Codeacademy is that it's free. This is great for someone who just wants to test the waters and see what coding is about without any financial investment. There are even some little courses that allow you to create a web page within 20 minutes to show you, in a way, how easy it can be to start learning these increasingly valuable skills.

Another small, yet for me enjoyable feature, is the progress tracking. Just signing in allows you to get a consecutive day streak and there are medals for completing learning sections and modules. I found this to be rather fun (I'm easily amused) but also motivating. Because it's free it can be easy to stop taking advantage but these little progress carrots are effective incentives.

Codeacademy gives the user a bar on the right that has some lessons and or instructions. A text editor takes up the majority of the page, and there is a small output screen in the top right corner. The reason I point this out is that it shows that the code you're composing is the most important thing. Also, the output box can be really helpful. It updates a webpage in real time and allows ruby programs to be run through it.

The challenges can vary from simple to extremely difficult, and while there is a hint function, there is no solve. As someone who can too easily be tempted by a, "Look at solution" button, not having that option forced me to look to other sources for help and made it seem that everything I completed, I did on my own.

Ultimately, Codeacademy is the best.

The next online tool I used was Tree House at teamtreehouse.com. This is a pay for use tool that costs $25 (maybe $50 I can't really remember). This cost was covered for me by LaunchAcademy but it's important to note. Tree House is super slick presentation wise. You can see all your progress in the many skill tracks it provides, and the video production is really high quality.

However, it is the video part that made me dislike Tree House. I know there are many different learning styles and perhaps this tool is for visual learners or auditory learners, but I found Tree House to move too slowly while not necessitating enough user input. The user input consists of answering small quizzes every once in a while, and on rare occasions, doing a small code challenge. Following along with the videos is also kind of a pain. I wanted to write everything that I was told to build a website yet found myself constantly pausing the video and replaying sections. I really just felt that I could learn better from a book, as it's much easier to circle back and look at material already covered than with the video format. I did learn some things in Tree House that I didn't learn anywhere else, but overall I felt it was too time consuming relative to the value.

Lastly I'll talk about RubyMonk. There were other online tools that I used that were more specialized, namely Git Immersion, and they were all relatively useful. Git Immersion sticks out as a great Git intro and by far the best way to get a grasp on how to use Git and Github. So RubyMonk. I can think of a three word phrase that I would use but two of the words are inappropriate. (Hint: F this S). RubyMonk believes that you can deign solutions organically. While in a very few cases this was true, overall it just felt like there were way too many holes in what they were teaching you. I was already familiar with many of the skills being taught, and even still it was difficult to get the correct answer. Furthermore, there is a way too tempting "show solution" button that is in many ways, the only way to progress. Now, I don't want to complain too much because I'm sure this Zen approach is useful for some. But really, on some of the problems it won't tell you what you need to do until you run your code. In the errors it will tell you need certain names like Chewbacca to be input rather than the name you chose. Why is this? I don't know, but I don't like it.  Lastly, in the quiz section, some of the solutions use really useful looking methods that were never talked about. I would love to learn about these but had to go to other sources to figure out how and why they worked. Anyway, that's RubyMonk. I'd say give it a try, and if you can complete the Ruby Primer without getting frustrated, you should probably try to find a career in web development.

This is an extremely brief overview of only an extremely small percentage of what's available. My rankings are Codeacademy, Tree House then RubyMonk.

Google searching should not be overlooked as a tool, and is probably the most common tool I use to solve any problem I'm presented with. One site that appears quite often is stackoverflow.com and they have great question and answer content.

I would recommend trying as many online tools as possible to find what works for you. Even the ones I didn't like were full of useful information. It's really amazing, although perhaps not surprising, how much you can learn about development online and even a passing interest can lead you to a new career, or at the least, a new skill.