Personal Insights

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Using AI in ABAP development

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My development setup

I typically use vscode for writing ABAP code in a standalone setup, editing just local files and committing those to git, this works on low-end laptops and tablets just fine.

I guess its also possible to use the ABAP remote file system extension from Marcello Urbani, but I've not tested it.

The beginnings

I first tried GitHub Copilot back in the summer of 2021, it did give some suggestions, but had many syntax errors, so I switched it off again after a few hours of playing around.
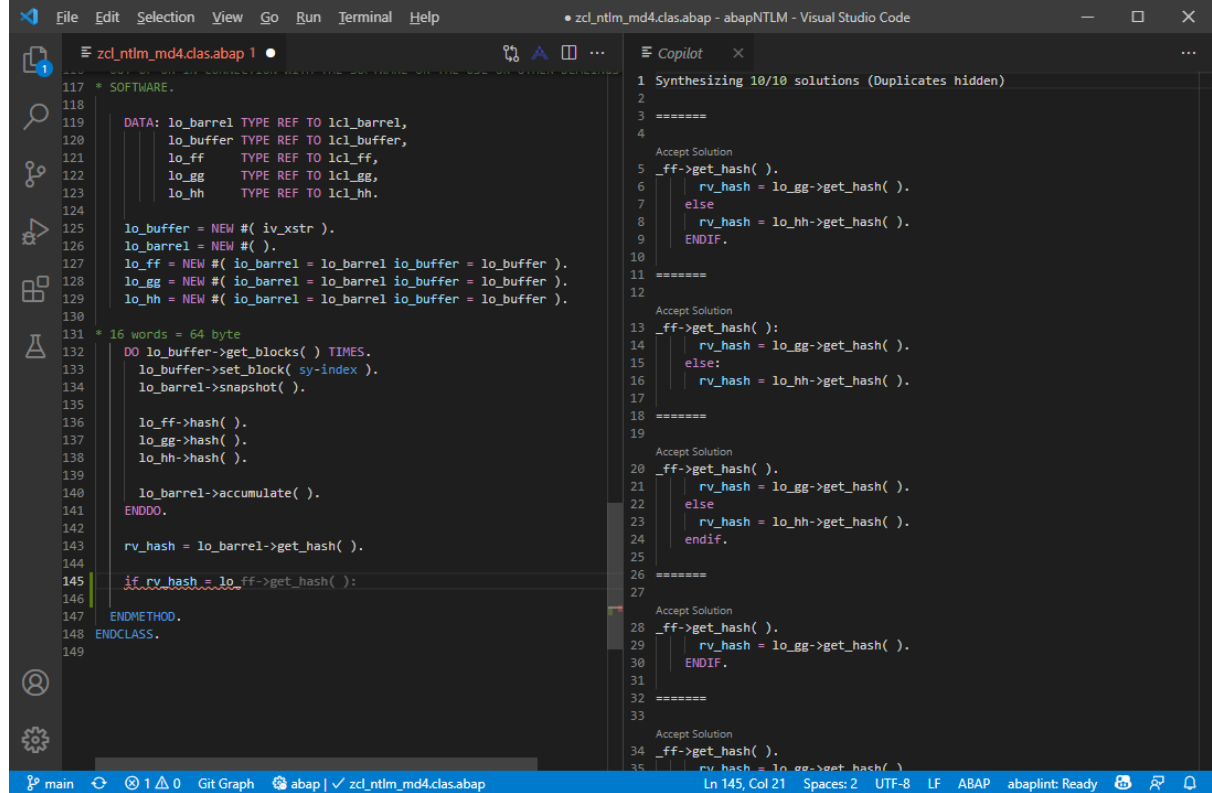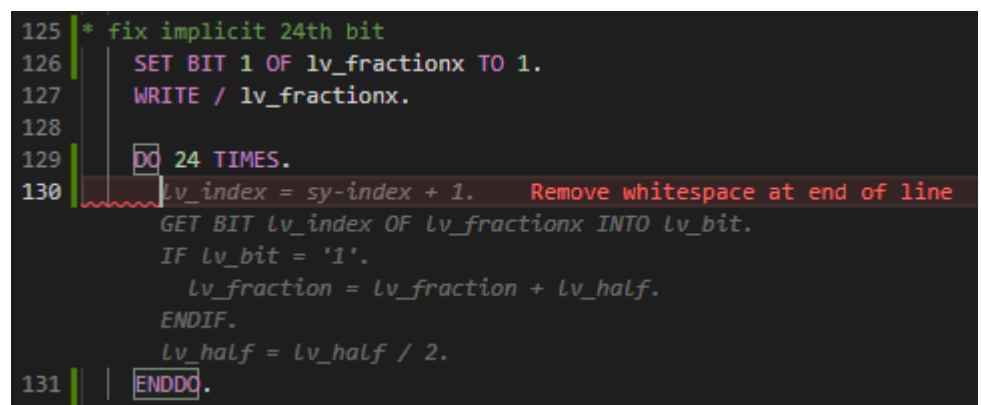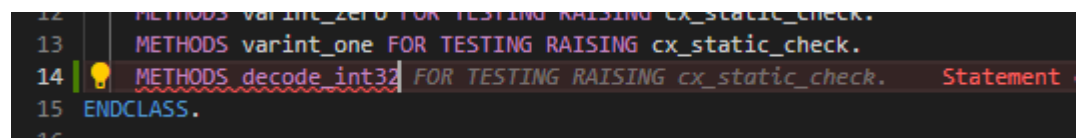
Now, Today!

Now I've been consistently using Copilot for the last month or so. And it has become part of my development flow, helping me to type less.

Its not perfect, but very useful especially when doing scaffolding or code that is very symmetric.

I've collected some of the good examples below,

Working as typeahead intellisense,

```
416
417  💡    while strlen( lv_bits ) > 0.      Statement does
                DATA(lv_bit) = lv_bits(1).
                IF lv_bit = '1'.
                  rv_int = rv_int + lv_shift.
                ENDIF.
                lv_shift = lv_shift * 2.
                lv_bits = lv_bits+1.
418
```

And scaffolding unit test methods,


```
164  METHOD encode_int32_negative_six.
165
166      mo_cut->encode_int32( -6 ).      Remove whitespace

             cl_abap_unit_assert=>assert_equals(
                exp = 'FAFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF01'
                act = mo_cut->get( ) ).
167
168  ENDMETHOD.
169
```

The process

I think, AI should not save and activate objects directly in the ABAP system. Instead changes should happen locally, so the developer can verify the changes. After verification the changes can be committed to git.

This triggers the normal quality assurance process in the pull request, kicking off static static analysis, automated unit testing and manual peer review.

After the peer review is done, the changes can be pulled to the central ABAP development system.

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