Motivation And Mindset

Foundations Course

Introduction

Learning to code is incredibly rewarding but can also be difficult and frustrating. Like any skill worth knowing, it takes time to acquire, and it can't be learned in a weekend or even a month. With that said, we believe anyone can learn how to program as long as they are willing to put in the time and effort.

So before we get into the meat of the curriculum, we're going to go over the following to help you get the most out of The Odin Project: the things that will help you succeed in your goal of learning to code and the pitfalls that you should try to avoid.

Motivation

Take a moment to think about why you have decided to learn programming.

- Do you want to have a fulfilling career that pays well?
- Are you excited by the creative outlet programming provides?
- Are you determined to develop the skills and abilities to build any app you can think of?
- Do you want to start your own company by turning an app idea into reality?

Your motivation could be a combination of these reasons or something else entirely. Whatever it is, hold on tightly to your motivation - this will be what pulls you through to the end of this journey, giving you a definitive goal to aim towards.

To give your motivation a bit of a boost, you can read about the success of others in our discord odin-success-stories channel.

Growth Mindset

Your mindset is very important when teaching yourself *any* new skills, not just programming. Your mindset will have more of an impact on your chances of success than just about anything else.

Someone with the **fixed mindset** believes if they don't get something on their first attempt, they never will. They believe that they simply aren't smart enough to be able to do or understand some things.

However, there is a wide body of research showing that intelligence is not fixed but can instead be developed. Someone with the **growth mindset** believes they can get better at anything with effort and persistence.

What does this mean for you? It means you can learn new skills and develop new talents with **persistence and grit**.

There will be many times throughout The Odin Project that you will get stuck on a concept or a programming problem and may find yourself questioning your ability to learn programming. When you find yourself in this position, remind yourself that you may not get it *yet* but that with persistence and grit you will. Struggling with something is growth. It doesn't matter how long you struggle with a concept or project; all that matters is that you have the grit and tenacity to see it through. That's how real learning happens.

While you're working through the curriculum, embrace the struggles you encounter with difficult concepts and complex projects. Be sure to celebrate your persistence at overcoming those struggles!

When you find yourself questioning your abilities, reflect on the successes you have already achieved while learning to program: the projects you have completed and the concepts you once didn't understand but now do. This is all the proof you need that you can do it.

To learn more about the growth mindset, check out these resources:

- Believe you can get better
- Grit
- You can learn anything

The Learning Process

Learning concepts and then practicing them will help you to more fully understand how things work and fit together. Projects are the ultimate method for ensuring that your theoretical understanding aligns with how the programming concepts and techniques actually operate.

When learning, your mind will consistently switch between focus mode and diffuse mode. **Focus mode** occurs when you are consciously focusing on learning, reading, watching videos, or working on a project. **Diffuse mode** occurs subconsciously, at times when you are not actively learning, such as when you're doing the dishes, exercising, or sleeping. In this state, your mind goes about the business of connecting what you have been learning to the other things you know. This is where breakthroughs happen.

It's important to know that your mind goes through these two states when learning because you can utilize this to make your learning more efficient.

When stuck on a concept or project, taking a break to refresh and let your subconscious work on making connections more often than not yields a solution to your problem. The trick is to put effort into solving the problem first and then take a break.

In short, understand it, practice it, and finally teach it.

Teaching what you know to others is a great way to solidify what you have learned and can often reveal holes in your knowledge that you wouldn't have identified otherwise.

You can practice this method of learning by helping others in our community.

- To learn more about the best ways to learn, learning how to learn on Coursera is highly recommended.
- The Ruby Rogues have a podcast on How to Learn, which should be motivational and useful to you, so check it out for some useful thoughts on learning.

What to Do When You're Stuck

You will inevitably get stuck at some point in the curriculum, perhaps due to a concept that you are having difficulty understanding or perhaps due to something not working correctly in a project. Whatever it is, use the following tools to get unstuck:

- Google it: You can be certain someone else out there has encountered the same problem as you at some point. A quick Google search can often lead to a solution.
- Take a break: Allow your diffuse learning state to work on the problem.

- Ask for help in our chat: Come prepared with your research. People will be more willing to help you when they can see you have already put effort into trying to figure out the solution on your own.

Managing Your Study Time

You will have more success with Odin by putting **consistent** time into it rather than working on it once a week. Building a habit of studying every day at a specific time and with a specific goal will ensure that you make consistent progress.

It may take you longer than others to grasp concepts, or it may take you less time. This doesn't mean you're smarter or dumber than others, it means you've had differing life experiences that may or may not have prepared you for learning this stuff. Someone who grew up around an engineer may have some advantages over someone who didn't, but it doesn't mean you can't learn those skills.

The Odin Project isn't like college or university, it is self paced and allows you to get a really solid grasp of concepts before moving on. In school, you're forced to keep up or you will fail. The difference here is that coming into The Odin Project, you're not expected to have much knowledge; there are no prerequisites. We've had people be successful coming through here who only knew how to check their email with a computer. We've also seen success from computer science degree holders. Treating The Odin Project like a static timeline is understandable, but is a sign of misplaced expectations. You simply don't know what you don't know yet, and that's OK! There are no due-dates on things in The Odin Project so you can spend the time to do it right and discuss the topics.

Deadlines cause un-needed stress. Since The Odin Project is a free and open platform, you are not beholden to a deadline. Creating your own deadlines is a

good way to rush concepts that should not be rushed. This course is very research based, meaning you will have to do research to complete tasks and projects. There's no telling if you can find the article or post that helps you in the right way, quickly to meet your deadlines, but I bet you learned a TON along the way that you can use in the future. People that do this kind of research and strive to write better solutions tend to become better developers in the future. There's no knowing how long it could take you to learn how to query stuff to find your answers. There are no solid guidelines on that. If you're doing The Odin Project because you need a high paying job *right-now*, you're not going to become a solid developer within the timeframe you have set. Stress and anxiety absolutely do not help you learn either. Relax and just enjoy the ride.

Long story short: Don't worry, just go learn!

Pitfalls to Avoid

The following are some of the pitfalls that beginners often encounter when learning how to program. Try your best to avoid these.

Procrastination

Procrastination will be your biggest enemy when trying to make progress.

Solution: The Pomodoro Technique is a way of managing your time in order to stay focused. The idea is to set a timer for 25 minutes and to work on a task until the timer goes off. If you get distracted or interrupted during the 25 minutes, start the 25 minutes of work over again. Once you've successfully focused on work for 25 minutes, take a 5 minute break. When your break is over, repeat the 25 minutes of work and 5 minute break. After you've completed four 25 minute blocks of work, take a longer 15-30 minute break.

The Pomodoro technique is great for avoiding procrastination as it forces you to work without distractions. Since the work time only lasts 25 minutes before

taking a break, it's not overwhelming, making it harder to rationalize procrastination.

To learn more about the Pomodoro Technique, read this great article.

If you want to try it out, TomatoTimer is an easy-to-use Pomodoro timer.

Not Taking Breaks

As you get into the material, you may feel compelled to continuously study for long periods of time. It might seem like you are getting more work done at first, but this often leads to burnout, which consequently results in lower productivity.

It may seem counterintuitive, but you will actually get more done if you regularly step back to recharge your brain and body. Studies show that performance increases after breaks of all durations: from extended vacations down to microbreaks of 30 seconds. John Trougakos, Associate Professor of Management at the University of Toronto, says that mental concentration is similar to a muscle. Our focus becomes fatigued after sustained use and needs a rest period to recover, just like a bodybuilder resting between sets at the gym.

Solution: Use the previously mentioned Pomodoro Technique to time how often and how long to take your well-deserved breaks. Feel free to play around and experiment with different frequencies and durations of breaks.

What to do during your break:

- listen to music
- journal
- doodle
- meditate

- play a quick game
- go for a short walk outside

Read this article for more information on breaks & productivity.

Digital Distractions

Digital distractions are email and Facebook notifications and time-wasting websites, such as social media. These distractions break your focus and make procrastination tempting. Therefore, they should be avoided during study time.

Solution: Turn off notifications and add a blocker to your internet to limit your time on distracting sites.

Physical Distractions

Physical distractions are distractions from your environment, like a TV in the background or other people talking. These distractions can be just as damaging to your focus as digital distractions.

Solution: Find a quiet place to study where you can go to focus in your home. If that's not an option, you can use noise cancelling headphones to block out noisy distractions in your environment.

Rabbit Holes

Because we cover so much material on The Odin Project and link to so many high quality courses and tools, it is easy for students to get pulled into rabbit holes by spending time trying to learn all there is to know about a subject that they aren't ready for or won't benefit them much. **We have put a lot of effort into structuring the curriculum** so that all of the important things that you need to know about web development are covered exactly when you need to know them.

Solution: Stick to the path laid out as much as possible. Try to limit time spent going down rabbit holes as these sidetracks can really ruin your momentum.

Comparing Yourself to Others

Students often compare themselves to others who are farther along in their coding journey or have more experience. This is a recipe for depression and frustration.

Solution: Only compare yourself to your past self. Have your abilities and knowledge improved from where you were last week, last month, or last year? Be proud of the progress that you've made!

Conclusion

Learning any new skill is a journey full of speed bumps and obstacles to be overcome. We hope that the principles laid out here will put you in a much better position to succeed and get the most out of The Odin Project.

Without further ado, let's jump into learning web development!

Additional Resources

This section contains helpful links to related content. It isn't required, so consider it supplemental.

- Managing inspiration and motivation
- Learning to code when it gets dark
- Improve your typing skills with Keybr.com Use this keyboard trainer if you find your typing speed is holding you back. We recommend spending 5 mins every day after you start your PC.

- Practice typing with Monkeytype! A minimalistic, customizable typing website. Test yourself in various modes, track your progress and improve your typing speed. It has a great community and frequently receives new features. Even though it has so many features, the experience is still very polished.
- Why Procrastinators Procrastinate Learn about the Instant Gratification Monkey, Rational Decision Maker, Panic Monster, and how to navigate the Dark Playground.

View Course

Login to track progress

Next Lesson

Improve this lesson on GitHub

Have a question?

Chat with our friendly Odin community in our Discord chatrooms!

Open Discord