Personally I think the best route for you to take is the following:

1. [Work through the Force.com Fundamentals Book](http://wiki.apexdevnet.com/page/Force_Platform_Fundamentals)
2. Next [work through the Visualforce Developers Guide](http://www.salesforce.com/us/developer/docs/pages/salesforce_pages_developers_guide.pdf) — IMO this is a **MUST** for every developer creating Visualforce pages... you'll be amazed at how much you can achieve without a single SOQL query or Apex controller
3. Once you've got Visualforce nailed down, then start [learning about Apex via the Apex Workbook](http://www.salesforce.com/us/developer/docs/apex_workbook/apex_workbook.pdf). This will explain some of the fundamental concepts of working with the platform, specifically around limits etc.

If you work through the above you'll no doubt pick up some SOQL along the way, and it's not a particularly complicated query language to get to grips with. Once you've done all this you'll have all the basics covered and then you can pick and choose which areas to focus on specifically, i.e. custom apps, mobile apps etc.

I'm a long-time Salesforce admin who has no programming background and is starting to dabble in code. Echoing a previous commenter, make sure you have a solid understand of Salesforce as a platform and everything you can and cannot do with the declarative (non-code/point-and-click) tools before you even touch code. Build out some apps, build complex business logic, etc. If you've been an admin/developer on Salesforce for a while, you probably already have that. If not, I'd look into resources for the 401-Developer exam--if you have your head around all of those concepts, then you're ready to touch code.

When you are ready to dig into code, I highly recommend: [Hands-On: Introduction to Force.com Code (Apex) for Non-Developers](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ul17dsrMoaU&list=PLPn3FNQ1JX350nDSweWai_dci4tJKKvf5&index=1)

I took this class in person at Dreamforce, and it was great. Above is the link to the YouTube video of the class. You might have to do some digging to find the exercise files, but working along with the class was a good starter for wrapping my head around the basics. (For people with existing developer experience just not Apex, particularly Java, there's a parallel course called Hands-On: Introduction to Force.com Code (Apex) for Developers]

I've also found this to be a good, basic resource: [SFCD99: Finally, Apex coding lessons for point-and-click admins!](http://www.sfdc99.com/)