



**HARVARD**

John A. Paulson  
School of Engineering  
and Applied Sciences

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO

# **COMPUTER SCIENCE @ HARVARD**

VERSION 22

HARVARDCS.INFO

**DESIGNED BY CS50**

*Haven't taken CS50 yet?  
Visit [cs50.harvard.edu](https://cs50.harvard.edu) for FAQs.*



Photograph by Joseph Ong

## What is CS?

We like to say that CS teaches you how to think more methodically and how to solve problems more effectively. As such, its lessons are applicable well beyond the boundaries of CS itself.

But CS is also, more generally, the study of information. How do you represent it? With what methods (aka algorithms) can you process it?

Perhaps the most liberal answer, though, is that CS “has no exclusive domain of its own, and that its importance comes from the problems to which it is applied.” And therein lies the excitement. CS empowers you with tools and ideas that can be applied to practically any domain of interest to you, both in college and beyond.

## What is CS not?

Contrary to popular belief, CS is not really about programming, even though you do learn how to program. Programming languages are tools that computer scientists use or create in order to solve problems of interest to them.

### How can I get a secondary in CS?

Take any four courses out of CS50, CS51, CS61, or courses numbered 100 or higher. See page 9 for popular study cards. See **Computer Science** under **Secondary Fields** in the *Handbook for Students*.

### How do I concentrate in CS?

Take at least two of CS50, CS51, and CS61; take CS121 and another “theory” course; take four technical electives; and take both Math 21b and either Math 21a or Stat 110. Plus take any of Math M, Math 1a, Math 1b, and CS20 as needed. See page 8 for popular study cards. See **Computer Science** under **Fields of Concentration** in the *Handbook for Students*.

### Can I change my concentration to CS?

Yes, so long as you still have time to satisfy the requirements. Even David J. Malan '99, who now teaches CS50, didn't take his first CS course until his sophomore year, when he switched from Government to CS.

### Does CS require a thesis?

No, not for non-Honors or Honors, but for High Honors and Highest Honors, it's expected. See **Computer Science** under **Fields of Concentration** in the *Handbook for Students*.

### Is a thesis just a big program?

No, a thesis is a research paper. You might end up writing programs in order to evaluate your ideas, but those programs are ordinarily means to an end, not an end in themselves. Visit [cs.harvard.edu/thesis](https://cs.harvard.edu/thesis) for examples.

## Popular Study Cards for Concentrators

Plenty of other combinations are possible. Graduate-level (200-level) courses are also allowed!

### For late converts to CS

- Math 1a: Introduction to Calculus
- Math 1b: Calculus, Series, and Differential Equations
- AM21b: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- CS20: Discrete Mathematics for Computer Science
- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS109a: Introduction to Data Science
- CS109b: Advanced Topics in Data Science
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS126: Fairness, Privacy, and Validity in Data Science
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS179: Design of Usable Interactive Systems

### For those without prior college-level math, interested in human-computer interaction

- Math 1a: Introduction to Calculus
- Math 1b: Calculus, Series, and Differential Equations
- AM21a: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- AM21b: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- CS20: Discrete Mathematics for Computer Science
- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS96: System Design Projects
- CS105: Privacy and Technology
- CS108: Intelligent Systems: Design and Ethical Challenges
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS126: Fairness, Privacy, and Validity in Data Analysis
- CS171: Visualization
- CS179: Design of Usable Interactive Systems
- CS182: Artificial Intelligence

### For those with stronger math backgrounds, interested in hard-core systems

- AM21a: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- AM21b: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS96: System Design Projects
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS127: Introduction to Cryptography
- CS143: Computer Networks
- CS144r: Network Design Projects
- CS148: Design of VLSI Circuits and Systems
- CS153: Compilers
- CS161: Operating Systems
- CS165: Data Systems

### For budding theorists writing theses

- Math 25a: Honors Linear Algebra and Real Analysis I
- Math 25b: Honors Linear Algebra and Real Analysis II
- AM107: Graph Theory and Combinatorics
- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS91r: Supervised Reading and Research
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS127: Introduction to Cryptography
- CS134: Networks
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS152: Programming Languages
- CS175: Computer Graphics
- CS191: Classics of Computer Science

### For those interested in machine intelligence

- AM21a: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- AM21b: Mathematical Methods in the Sciences
- CS20: Discrete Mathematics for Computer Science
- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS136: Economics and Computation
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS146: Computer Architecture
- CS181: Machine Learning
- CS187: Computational Linguistics
- CS189: Autonomous Robot Systems

## Popular Study Cards for Secondaries

Plenty of other combinations are possible. Graduate-level (200-level) courses are also allowed!

### For “those less comfortable”

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS105: Privacy and Technology
- CS108: Intelligent Systems: Design and Ethical Challenges
- CS179: Design of Usable Interactive Systems

### For “those more comfortable”

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS161: Operating Systems

### For those interested in data

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS109a: Introduction to Data Science
- CS109b: Advanced Topics in Data Science
- CS126: Fairness, Privacy, and Validity in Data Analysis

### For those interested in economics

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS134: Networks
- CS136: Economics and Computation

### For those interested in efficiency

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms

### For those interested in graphics

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS171: Visualization
- CS175: Computer Graphics

### For those interested in hardware

- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS146: Computer Architecture
- CS148: Design of VLSI Circuits and Systems

### For those interested in life sciences

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS171: Visualization

### For those interested in business

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS105: Privacy and Technology
- CS127: Cryptography
- CS165: Data Systems

### For those interested in math

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS191: Classics of Computer Science

### For those interested in networks

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS143: Computer Networks
- CS144r: Networks Design Projects

### For those interested in programming languages

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS152: Programming Languages
- CS153: Compilers

### For those interested in robotics

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS181: Machine Learning
- CS189: Autonomous Robot Systems

### For those interested in speech recognition

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS182: Artificial Intelligence
- CS187: Computational Linguistics

### For those interested in software development

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS100: Software Engineering in the Arts and Humanities
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms

## How do I graduate with Honors in CS?

Take six technical electives instead of four and have a sufficiently high concentration GPA. See **Computer Science** under **Fields of Concentration** in the *Handbook for Students*.

## How do I graduate with High Honors in CS?

High Honors are decided by faculty vote. You must ordinarily write an “excellent thesis” to be considered. See **Computer Science** under **Fields of Concentration** in the *Handbook for Students*.

## How do I graduate with Highest Honors in CS?

Highest Honors are decided by faculty vote. You must ordinarily write an “outstanding thesis” to be considered. See **Computer Science** under **Fields of Concentration** in the *Handbook for Students*.

## Do any CS courses count for Gen Ed?

Yes! To satisfy Empirical & Mathematical Reasoning, take CS1, CS20, CS50, or CS171. (Note that CS1 does not count toward a concentration or secondary in CS.) To satisfy Culture & Belief, take CS105.

## Should I study CS even if I don’t want to be a programmer?

Yes! CS concentrators head off in all sorts of directions after graduation. See **Figure 1** for titles that alumni since 1984 now hold. See **Figure 2** for fields in which alumni since 1984 can now be found.

Figure 1: Titles that alumni since 1984 now hold.









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Photograph by Joseph Ong

## Life after 50

You can head off in all sorts of directions after CS50, but here are some popular routes. See **Computer Science** in the *Courses of Instruction* for prerequisites and <https://harvardcs.info> for further information.

