



HARVARD
School of Engineering
and Applied Sciences

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO

COMPUTER SCIENCE @ HARVARD

VERSION 7

WWW.CS.HARVARD.EDU



DESIGNED BY CS50

*Haven't taken CS50 yet?
Visit cs50.net for FAQs.*



Photograph by Eliza Grinnell

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 numbered 50 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 Math 21a and Math 21b. Plus take any of 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 for examples.

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Photograph by Titus Jahng

Can I do research in CS?

Yes! Many CS courses offer opportunities for research, particularly 200-level courses. And you can take CS91r to work one-on-one with faculty. Students and faculty do research in all sorts of areas, including, but not limited to:

- Artificial Intelligence and Computational Linguistics
- Computation and Economics
- Graphics, Visualization, and Imaging
- Human-Computer Interaction
- Information, Systems, and Networks
- Intelligent Systems and Computer Vision
- Languages, Compilers, and Operating Systems
- Multi-Agent Systems
- Privacy and Security
- Theory of Computation

Will everyone in CS know more than me?

No! Contrary to popular belief, not every Computer Scientist has been programming since childhood! In fact, 73% of the students who took CS50 in Fall 2012 had never taken a CS course before. Only 20% had taken one, and only 7% had taken two or more, per **Figure 3**.

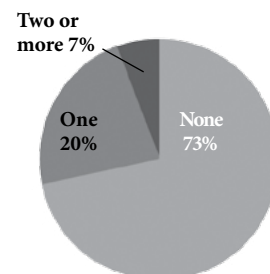


Figure 3: CS50 is most students' very first course in CS. 73% of the students who took CS50 in Fall 2012 had never taken a CS course before; 20% had taken one; and 7% had taken two or more.

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
- CS109: Data Science
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS171: Visualization
- 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
- CS105: Privacy and Technology
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS171: Visualization
- CS179: Design of Usable Interactive Systems
- CS182: Intelligent Machines: Reasoning, Actions, and Plans

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
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS127: Introduction to Cryptography
- CS143: Computer Networks
- CS144r: Network Design Projects
- CS152: Programming Languages
- CS161: Operating Systems
- CS165: Information Management

For budding theorists writing theses

- Math 25a: Honors Linear Algebra and Real Analysis I
- Math 25b: Honors Linear Algebra and Real Analysis II
- AM106: Applied Algebra
- 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 Formal Systems and Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS127: Introduction to Cryptography
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS152: Programming Languages
- CS175: Computer Graphics

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 Formal Systems and Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS146: Computer Architecture
- CS181: Intelligent Machines: Perception, Learning, and Uncertainty
- CS187: Computational Linguistics
- CS189r: Autonomous Multi-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
- CS171: Visualization
- CS179: Design of Usable Interactive Systems

For “those more comfortable”

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS161: Operating Systems

For those interested in data

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS109: Data Science
- CS165: Information Management
- CS171: Visualization

For those interested in economics

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS182: Intelligent Machines: Reasoning, Actions, and Plans
- CS186: Economics and Computation

For those interested in efficiency

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- 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

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS61: Systems Programming and Machine Organization
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- 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
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS165: Information Management

For those interested in math

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS127: Introduction to Cryptography

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
- CS182: Intelligent Machines: Reasoning, Actions, and Plans
- CS189r: Autonomous Multi-Robot Systems

For those interested in speech recognition

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS182: Intelligent Machines: Reasoning, Actions, and Plans
- CS187: Computational Linguistics

For those interested in software development

- CS50: Introduction to Computer Science I
- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS164: Software Engineering

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.

