



THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO

# COMPUTER SCIENCE @ HARVARD

VERSION 9

CS.HARVARD.EDU

**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 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](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
- CS109: Data Science
- CS121: Introduction to the Theory of 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 the Theory of Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS171: Visualization
- CS179: Design of Usable Interactive Systems
- CS182: Intelligent Machines: Reasoning, Actions, & 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
- CS125: Algorithms and Complexity
- CS127: Introduction to Cryptography
- CS143: Computer Networks
- CS144r: Network Design Projects
- CS152: Programming Languages
- 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
- 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 the Theory of 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 the Theory of Computation
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS141: Computing Hardware
- CS146: Computer Architecture
- CS181: Machine Learning
- CS186: Economics and Computation
- 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
- CS125: Algorithms and Complexity
- CS161: Operating Systems

### For those interested in data

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

### For those interested in economics

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to the Theory of Computation
- CS182: Intelligent Machines: Reasoning, Actions, & 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 the Theory of 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

- 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
- CS124: Data Structures and Algorithms
- CS165: Data Systems

### For those interested in math

- CS51: Introduction to Computer Science II
- CS121: Introduction to the Theory of 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, & 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, & 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
- CS152: Programming Languages

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

Take six technical electives instead of four and have a concentration GPA in the top half of your class. 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.



### Should I activate Advanced Standing and get a fourth-year master’s degree in CS?

Maybe! If you are eligible for Advanced Standing and think you could handle eight (mostly) 200-level CS courses, it’s a great opportunity. Your bachelor’s degree doesn’t even need to be in CS, so long as you can still satisfy the prerequisites for the 200-level courses. See **Other Academic Opportunities** in the *Handbook for Students*.

### Can I do a joint concentration between CS and another field?

Yes, but you probably shouldn’t. Joint concentrations are really for students who want to write a thesis on some research problem in the intersection of two fields. If you simply want to study both fields, it’s generally best to get a secondary or simply take courses in CS or the other field.

### Is CS part of Mind, Brain, and Behavior?

Yes! See **Computer Science** under **Fields of Concentration** in the *Handbook for Students*.

### Does a grade of SAT in CS50 count toward concentration or secondary credit?

If you intend to concentrate in or do a secondary in CS, you should take CS50 for a letter grade. But should you decide to concentrate in or do a secondary in CS only after taking CS50, a SAT in CS50 would count for concentration or secondary credit.



Figure 2: Fields in which alumni since 1984 can now be found.

### Should I concentrate or minor in CS even if I don't want to work in tech?

Yes! CS empowers you to solve problems in all sorts of domains. Here's where alumni since 1984 can be found:

ACME Labs • AECOM • AT&T • AXA Equitable • Abercrombie and Fitch • Addison-Wesley Publishing Co • Administration for Children & Families • Adobe Systems • Adult Cardiovascular Consultants, P.A. • Advanced Research Projects Agency - Energy U.S. Department of Energy • Agilex Technologies, Inc. • Air Force Research Laboratory • Airbnb.com • Alberto Campari Knoepfler, Architect • Amazon.com • American Express • Amgen Inc. • Ancestry.com • Angelynn Grant Design • Angle Assoc • AppNexus, Inc • Apple Inc. • Apple, Inc. • Arbor Scientia • Argosy Partners • Associates International, Inc. • Atco Plastics Inc • Athens University of Economics • Autodesk, Inc. • BBN • BBW Technologies • BC Partners • BMO Capital Markets • Babcock & Wilcox Alliance Research Center • Bain Capital Sankaty Advisors • Banaras

Hindu University • Bank of America • Bay Imaging Consultants • Bechtel Limited • Bell Laboratories • Bellcore • BlackBerry • Blue Mountain Capital Management • Boeing Satellite Systems • Bogazici University • Boston Common • Boston Public Schools • Bradley Woods & Co. Ltd. • Brickhouse Freight • Bridgewater Associates • Bridgewood Design • Brooktrout Technology • Bungie, LLC • C A McNary and Associates • C S Draper Laboratory • CBCS • CISCO Systems Foundation • CTB/McGraw-Hill • Cambridge Innovation Center • Canadian Consulate General • Cancer Services of New Mexico • Cane & Boniface, PC • Canon Inc. • Capital One • Center Mfg Co • Charles Schwab • Chelmsford Public Schools • Chevron Corporation • Chrysler/JTE • Cisco Systems • Citibank • Citigroup • Citigroup Inc. • City Gas Pte Ltd • Code.org • Cohera Medical, Inc. • College of Engineering • Comcast • CommonMind LLC • Cornell University • Craig Taylor Equipment • Create Inc • Ctr. for Sustainability and Global Environment University of Wisconsin-Madison • D. E. Shaw & Co. • DAVA Oncology • Dalberg Global Development Advisors • Damtp Center for Mathematical Sciences • Davidson



Photograph by Joseph Ong

### 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:

- Architecture
- Artificial Intelligence
- Computational and Data Science
- Computational Neuroscience
- Graphics, Vision, and Interaction
- Information and Society
- Programming Languages
- Systems, Networks, and Databases
- 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, 78% of the students who took CS50 in Fall 2013 had never taken a CS course before. Only 16% had taken one, and only 6% had taken two or more, per Figure 3.

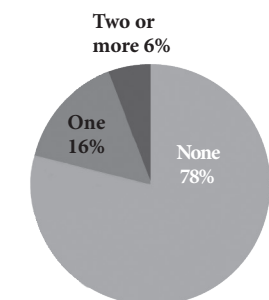


Figure 3: CS50 is most students' very first course in CS. 78% of the students who took CS50 in Fall 2013 had never taken a CS course before, 16% had taken one, and 6% had taken two or more.

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• **GitHub, Inc.** • **Goldman, Sachs & Co.** • Good Shepherd Medical Center • **Google, Inc.** • Greater Greater Washington • **Hanover Insurance Company** • Hartman, Blackstock & Moore • **Harvard Club in Beijing** • Harvard College Office of Admissions & Financial Aid • **Harvard-Smithsonian CFA** • Hasbro, Inc. • **Healthpoint Group** • Hermes Fund Managers Limited • **Hewlett-Packard Co** • Highland Capital • **Hong Kong Univ. of Science & Tech. Dept. of Electronic & Computer Engineering** • Hughes Aircraft Co • **Hulu** • Hunton & Williams • **IBM** • IBM Center for Advanced Learning • **IBM Research** • IBM Research Division • **ING** • Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai • **Illustrator** • Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited • **Industrial Light & Magic** • Inflection, LLC • **Ing. Angelo Giuseppe** • Institute for Quantum Computing University of Waterloo • **Integrant Consulting** • Intel Corporation • **InterMed Advisors, Inc.** • Interactive Game Products • **JP Morgan Chase** • Jackson Memorial Hospital • **Jawbone** • Johns Hopkins University • **K & S**



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.

