CANADA LEARNING CODE

MENTOR HANDBOOK

Updated June 2024

Welcome

First of all, we'd just like to say a big THANK YOU for taking the time to volunteer with us!

You help make these workshops possible and we couldn't be offering these types of learning opportunities without you. It means a lot to our learners to have a comfortable, inclusive and welcoming environment to learn and your role - showing up to mentor - is critical to achieving this.

This document aims to outline guidelines for mentoring learners and providing support to our lead instructors to help create a warm, friendly and inclusive learning environment for everybody.

Who We Are

Our Vision

We envision a prosperous Canada in which all people have the skills and confidence to harness the power of technology to create a better and more inclusive future.

Mission

We enable communities across Canada to help meet their local learners' social, economic and educational needs by providing computer science resources, training and support.

Our North Star

To create meaningful technology learning experiences for people in Canada

Our Experiences

Workshops	Workshops are the most frequently offered experience. They range between 2 and 6 hours and provide learners with a beginner introduction to one subject built around one hands-on project. E.g. How to build a one-page website with HTML & CSS or how to create a brand for your business with Digital Tools for Branding. Workshops are usually led by one or two instructors, and mentors at a ratio of 4 students:1 mentor.
Meetups	Meetups are more casual than workshops and take a variety of forms. They usually don't last longer than 3 hours and they enable learners to more casually engage with interesting subjects related to tech and code. A meetup could be a short 1 hr presentation by an instructor or a special guest, a panel discussion on a subject, or simply an open hack time event where learners can come together to code on their own projects with the support of mentors.

Our Code of Conduct

Before mentoring at any of our experiences, we ask that mentors review and agree to embody our Code of Conduct while mentoring at our experiences.

Code of Conduct

What makes this organization so special, is our community. This Code of Conduct is built on the understanding and commitment that we can and we should uphold ourselves to the highest standards that are designed to strengthen community trust and confidence in our work and the experiences we deliver and participate in.

The principles set out in the Code of Conduct guide the work we do. This code applies equally to employees, contractors, Chapter Leads, instructors, mentors, volunteers and anyone that participates in our community. As you read through the code you will see that it does not provide all the answers; instead it acts as a reference point for questions, and reminds us how our core values can be applied in various situations.

This code of conduct applies to all spaces managed by Canada Learning Code. This includes all in-person and online spaces such as workshops, meetups and Facebook communities.

General Mentoring Tips

The Role

As a mentor, your role is so important to help provide individualized support for our learners, help them gain exposure to the industry, feel safe and comfortable learning news things and have fun.

At each experience, there will always be a lead instructor there to deliver the curriculum and your role as a mentor is to help answer specific questions, provide support and ensure everyone is on track.

We think that teaching something new to someone is as exciting as it gets.

Get excited
Be inspiring
Have an open-mind
Be confident
Be resourceful
Stay positive

Supporting the Instructor

As a mentor, we ask that you support the Instructor throughout the workshop. Although there are many different ways of doing the same thing, try to always teach what the Instructor is teaching. If a learner is not feeling challenged, it is your opportunity to take the learner to a more difficult level! Ask the lead for extra challenges they could show them, or come up with your own.

Day Of Tips

When you first arrive:

Usually there is one mentor per table of 2-4 learners. Introduce yourself to your table and check to see if the learners have all the software and slides downloaded and are powered up and connected to wifi.

While the instructor is teaching/talking:

Speak quietly if helping while the instructor is talking (common feedback from learners is that it is distracting). You may need to crouch down and/or try not to block the projector. If the issue can't be fixed quickly & quietly and requires additional explanation, tell the learner you will come back during the next exercise.

Opinions are always welcome but make sure to support the lead instructor and the content. Raise your hand before speaking to avoid interrupting or speak to the instructor during a break/exercise if there is an issue, question or opinion that you'd like the class to be aware of.

During exercise time:

Not all learners are comfortable initiating/asking questions. You may have to approach them or make yourself physically available by staying within speaking distance.

Give the learners time to figure things out but you can use non-verbal cues like catching their eye and smiling or just say something like "how's everything going here?" That will help to make learners feel open to asking for help.

We want it to be a social environment for everybody but avoid having prolonged chats with other mentors during exercise time as the learners will be reluctant to interrupt conversations to ask for help.

Learner's Technology Skills

Many learners are still learning how to type, navigate a computer, and troubleshoot technology. We try to keep a hands-off approach as often as possible. Guide a learner by pointing to the screen and verbalizing your instructions.

If a learner is struggling and becoming frustrated, offer to show the answer, but tell them to watch closely. You can even delete the answer (or go back a step) and have them repeat what you did with you guiding.

When Technology fails

If a computer isn't working the way it should and a learner is feeling frustrated, acknowledge that this is common. Try to troubleshoot the problem together (i.e. ask what they would do if this happened at home. Would they quit and reopen the program? Restart the computer?). If the problem does not solve itself, try using Google as a resource! It is important to show the learner how to be resourceful for the future. As a last resort, ask the Instructor or Chapter Lead to help you.

Behavioural Issues & Extremes

If at any time you feel uncomfortable or like you are being treated unfairly, please report your concerns to a Canada Learning Code Team Member. We want everyone to be having fun and learning together, mentors and instructors included.

If a learner is being extremely disruptive, negative or like a bully, and isn't responding to redirection to the task from you, please get a lead to help out and learn from how they respond to the situation.

If a learner discloses anything regarding the compromise of their own safety to you, (abuse, self-harm, etc.) Please report directly to a Canada Learning Code Team Member as soon as possible.

Understanding Our Learners

The aim of our workshops are to be beginner friendly. However, within the category “beginner” there is still a wide range of knowledge and experience. Most learners fall into one of three categories:

Group 1: Little to basic computer knowledge

Many learners at this level are usually not used to using keyboard shortcuts, so when suggesting help, make sure to provide an additional option in addition to keyboard shortcuts so the learner can choose an option more comfortable for them. We want to encourage general computer proficiency but also ensure the teaching style is in line with their current level of knowledge. For example, say something like:

“*To create a new file, you can use* ***cmd/ctrl + N*** *OR* ***File > New****.*”

See below for more specific tasks learners may need assistance with.

- Opening zip files. On PCs, remind learners to *extract all*.
- Downloading software.
- Refreshing the browser
    - some learners are not aware of the reload button and will load the HTML file every time a change is made resulting in many tabs open
    - many of the workshops include a “setting up your workflow” exercise to help ensure they stick to reloading the same browser tab to avoid confusion
- Learners my need practice getting used to switching between applications (e.g. text editor and browser). One option is to arrange/resize the apps in such a way that both apps can be easily selected rather than minimized or moved. Example below:

Group 2: No coding experience but proficient in general computer skills

Learners at this level are the “middle” group that the instructor will be tailoring their pacing of the content to.

Most of the focus will be on helping them with the specific course content related issues. They will be more open to incorporating keyboard shortcuts into their workflow (or already use some) but may still be unfamiliar with code specific keys, like the angled & curly brackets, since those symbols are not commonly used outside of coding languages.

You may need to still look out for some issues related to general computer use as Group 1.

Group 3: Some coding knowledge or has attended a previous workshop

Learners at this level may need some extra tasks to keep them engaged as they may finish the exercises early.

Try not to stray away from the flow of the course content but you can suggest extra tasks that build on the current concept. For example, if the rest of the class is working on adding basic links to their projects, you can show them how to make links open in a window or email link. It's still on topic but gives the learner a little extra to keep them busy and engaged.

Other suggestions:

- show some text editor tricks
- show some extra resources (stack overflow, etc)

Tips for all groups:

- Show them how to increase/decrease the font-size of the text editor (cmd/ctrl + or -)
- Syntax errors - check obvious stuff first (file saved, spelling mistakes, missing semicolons/brackets/etc)
- get learners to write one or two lines of code at a time (rather than copy and paste a whole block of code), then check their work, to help reduce errors

When helping with troubleshooting, try asking directed questions that will help the learner come to their own conclusions. Examples below:

- What comes next?
- Let's take a look at line x - do you see anything missing from there?
- Here we closed the "p" tag with a forward slash, what should we do with the "h1" tag? (help them recognize patterns by pointing to examples)
- Use hints rather than giving answers - For example, say something like :

  "How would you 'float' something to the left with CSS?"

  rather than

  "Use float:left;"

  You're still basically giving them the answer but try framing it in a way that helps them feel like they are coming to the conclusion on their own.

The workshops also aim to create confidence in technology and many of our learners are interested in coding in a general sense and may not want to pursue a career in programming. So avoid overly technical explanations unless the learners ask for more info.

Also keep in mind that our workshops and lesson plans are organized into step-by-step, project based instructions so it's important to support the content strategy to ensure the learners stay on track.

Next Steps

We recommend that you arrive to the experience you're mentoring about 20-30 mins beforehand to settle in and to help welcome learners. And remember to HAVE FUN!

Thank you so much for volunteering your time and showing support for Canada Learning Code. We couldn't do this without you!

If you have any feedback after your experience - we'd appreciate hearing from you at feedback@canadalearningcode.ca!