

Book Reviews

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Swift for Programmers

Paul Deitel and Harvey Deitel
Pearson Education, 2015, 374 pages
ISBN 978-0-13-402136-2

After decades, Apple has finally updated their systems development language, moving away from Objective-C to Swift. Like Google, Apple has decided to create their own new language from scratch. *Swift for Programmers* is a book for professional developers. The Deitels also produce college textbooks, and the academic style shows through. This is a good thing, a contrast to a number of professional books that spend time on humor and a friendly narrative. The authors here treat each section concisely and completely, and if they had puffed it up with a feel-good voice, it would have both obscured the content and increased the page count significantly. Instead, the tone is spare, and the focus is on the material and not on the authorial voice.

Because this is a book for professionals, the Deitels get right down to work. The audience is developers who are already familiar with similar languages and may already be iOS and OS X developers. The authors begin with installing the Xcode 6 development environment and proceed to build up all of the standard language constructs. They close with a pair of examples using the Xcode development workspace and iOS app development environments. The coverage is spare but complete and includes references to a number of free and commercial resources to learn more.

Deitel is a full media training company. In addition to books on programming and programming languages, they offer video and on-site training. If the quality and thoroughness of *Swift for Programmers* is any indication, their other offerings could well be worth consideration should you need more than self-learning texts.

I'm not an iOS or OS X user or developer but I got a good sense from *Swift for Programmers* what developing for Apple might be like. It looks like a much more inviting place than the last time I looked, which, I admit, was long before OS X.

Learning Python with Raspberry Pi

Alex Bradbury and Ben Everard
John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2014, 269 pages
ISBN 978-1-118-71705-8

Learning Python is a book to engage beginners. I always wonder about the effectiveness of books like this. While the contents and topics are presented in an appealing way, it's been a very long time since I was the proper audience for them.

With that out of the way, I like the use of the Raspberry Pi or Arduino as platforms for learning. Bradbury and Everard explain very well in the initial chapters how having a Pi to play on provides the freedom to make mistakes that readers will not feel if they are working on a machine that they also use for daily tasks. Mistakes and restarts, and the confidence to make them, are critical both to learning and to real commercial work with computer systems. This really is the Pi's purpose, and the authors put it to good use.

The first chapter covers setting up the Pi, logging into LXDE, and starting to use the Python IDE and the Linux CLI. The next two chapters give a very brief introduction to Python 3. I would have liked to see references to other, more detailed sources for people who want to go into more depth before moving on. The focus is on minimal language features without any real attempt to teach the computer science concepts. Presented inline, these might be daunting to a new learner, but some of the later examples display some rather complex code. Understanding these examples might be easier with the extra depth. In any case, the reader will need a fair amount of self-motivation to explore all of the options offered here.

In the later chapters, Bradbury and Everard range widely, as do many books like this for the Pi. There are chapters on Web/Net programming, graphics with OpenGL, writing games, and manipulating a Minecraft session. There's also a chapter on CLI scripting and another on testing and debugging, which might have been better placed early in the book. Each of these chapters is well written and self-contained, allowing readers to skip around as they follow their fancy.

The Raspberry Pi Foundation has a number of established development and learning communities. I'd love to see these include a set of fora, one for each book, to welcome each book's readers. The biggest problem with using books like this is getting readers access to people to help them over the bumps and keep them motivated. The Pi site does have a page for this book, and there are a number of comments and reviews, including replies from the authors. Quite a few of the comments are from enthusiastic teens and their parents. This would seem to be the right kind of reader for *Learning Python*.