



# Guide to Choosing a Bootcamp

## (And Paying for It)

Looking to make the switch into tech or expand your skills but don't know where to start? That's where we come in. Ascent's extensive *Guide to Choosing a Bootcamp* is filled with important tips and resources to help you narrow down your choice and start you on the path to a career you will love.

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As current and former students, we provide free resources to help you throughout your bootcamp journey, which may include links to third-party websites (where security and privacy policies may differ from Ascent's). [See our disclaimer.](#)

# 1 SET YOUR GOALS

Finding the right bootcamp program can feel overwhelming, especially with so many options available. Let's start with breaking down your goals and figuring out *exactly* what you want out of this experience.

## Get clear on what you want

When deciding on a program, it's important to go back to basics. Ask yourself the key things you want out of a coding bootcamp program, and it will make your next step much easier to navigate (trust us).

### What learning environment do you prefer?

Do you enjoy fast-paced, intense programs or more of a self-paced environment? Whether you like to work in a team or on your own, take the time to consider what type of learning environment you succeed best in.

### How long can I commit to a bootcamp?

Think about how long you'll be able to attend a bootcamp. Consider your lifestyle and how much money you may have saved up before committing to a coding bootcamp.

### What languages do I want to study?

Choosing a programming language you want to focus on can help you figure out your career after your graduate. However, bootcamps don't always teach the same languages. Some programs might focus on Python and JavaScript, while others may teach Ruby or C#. Once you pick a specific language, there are various frameworks (Angular, React, Vue) that are important to choose from. What's a framework? It's a set of tools in programming that provides ready-made components or solutions customized to speed up development.



If you have a specific career goal in mind, make sure to explore the different languages that can help you achieve that job. Here's a guide to the different programming languages and the potential job outcomes linked to each:



## Python

High-level, object-oriented, interpreted scripting language

### USED FOR

Web development, statistical data analysis, machine learning

### POTENTIAL CAREERS

Software engineers, back-end developers, programmers

### PRO

Easy to learn

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## Ruby + Ruby on Rails

General-purpose language used primarily with web development framework Ruby on Rails

### USED FOR

Web applications, security, system administration, robotics, networking

### POTENTIAL CAREERS

Software engineers, ethical hackers, data science engineers and developers

### PRO

Easy syntax

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## JavaScript

Began as a client-side scripting language and now runs everywhere from browsers to servers and devices; full-stack JavaScript is a dominant language in bootcamps and web development with both the client and server side written in JavaScript only

### USED FOR

Video games, widget development and analytics, front-end website

### POTENTIAL CAREERS

Software engineers and web developers

### PRO

Flexible; can use the same language for both front-end and back-end applications



## Try new things

Now that you know the different programming languages, it's time to explore and test out what you find interesting and exciting.

### Test different codes

Once you narrow down which language you want to learn more about, take the time to test it out. At [Codecademy](#), you can take free courses to discover more about different coding languages. They also have [Cheatsheets](#) for every programming language, which can be a great refresher during your bootcamp, or the perfect introduction to a new language before getting started.

### Explore free prep-courses

If your budget is tight and you feel like you need a little prep work before you invest in a bootcamp program, here's a great list of free [prep courses](#) you can check out:

#### ○ **UDEMY**

From learning the fundamentals of web design to understanding basic programming, Udemy has tons of free resources to help you get started on your journey. They also offer other training at an affordable cost if you're interested in investing a little more.

#### ○ **FULLSTACK**

If you're seriously considering attending a bootcamp and have written some code, Fullstack's self-paced Bootcamp Prep course is what you need. This course includes workshops, lectures, pair programming, coding challenges, and a culminating project. Fullstack offers three versions of this course: weeklong, monthlong, and self-paced. While the week and month prep courses have a set price, all three options teach the same curriculum, just with different paces and learning environments.

#### ○ **HACK REACTOR**

With high-quality courses and tons of JavaScript exercises designed by engineering professionals, this free prep course gives you access to the same material from their Premium Prep course.

#### ○ **COURSERA**

For more free coding courses, Coursera is another opportunity for you to learn some basic skills before jumping into your bootcamp program.

#### ○ **CODEACADEMY**

If you're still a little unsure about investing in a bootcamp program, Codecademy can help you explore the basics and build a career path.

#### QUICK TIP

Your bootcamp program might have a few free courses or lessons available online, so make sure to check!

# 2 FIND YOUR LEARNING STYLE

When searching for a potential bootcamp, coding languages aren't the only thing to consider. Narrowing down different formats and paces of specific programs, as well as skills you'll need along the way, can help you not only discover how you learn best but which bootcamp is a good fit for you and your lifestyle.

## What skills will I need?

Before joining a bootcamp, it's important to get a sense of the specific skills and mindset you'll need to succeed. Here are a few top skills to consider when entering a coding bootcamp:



### Problem-Solving

When writing code, there are plenty of things that can go wrong. Coding is all about solving problems, so it's crucial to know how to solve programs on your own and as part of a group. From fixing bugs to brainstorming ideas with your team, solving problems is an everyday occurrence in a bootcamp.



### Time Management

Bootcamp is no joke. Your schedule will be packed with tons of workshops, lectures, and studying material, all while you might be juggling a part-time or full-time job, a family, a social life - the list goes on. It's essential to stay organized and prioritize your daily tasks in order to manage your time effectively.



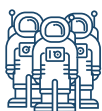
### Dedication

In order to graduate, you'll spend months in a bootcamp, so you should be able to fully commit to the program. These programs are called bootcamps for a reason! Persevering in challenging situations and thriving in fast-paced environments is key.



### Growth

In a coding bootcamp, you will fail on a daily basis. For example, when you attempt a coding challenge and it doesn't work, are you going to close your laptop or try something different? To be successful in a bootcamp, you need to develop a **growth mindset**, or the ability to see setbacks as an opportunity for growth. Get comfortable with making mistakes, it's where the best lessons are learned.



### Teamwork

While it depends on the bootcamp you attend, you'll often have to work in teams or group projects. Bootcamps tend to have a lot of independent work as well, but it's a valuable skill to learn how to work successfully in a team.

## What types of bootcamps are there?

Another important factor of choosing a coding bootcamp is considering what type of program to attend. There are several options out there, but which one works best for you? Let's run through the different programs and find out:

Immersive, Full-Time	Part-Time	Self-Paced, Online
<b>LENGTH</b> 2 - 7 months	<b>LENGTH</b> 6 - 9 months	<b>LENGTH</b> 6 - 18 months
<b>SCHEDULE</b> 40 - 80 hours per week	<b>SCHEDULE</b> Typically meet on weekends and nights  6 - 15 hours per week in class, and another 10 - 15 hours per week on outside work	<b>SCHEDULE</b> 10 - 20 hours per week
<b>FORMAT</b> Classroom or remote (depending on the specific program)*	<b>FORMAT</b> Classroom or remote (depending on the specific program)*	<b>FORMAT</b> Remote
<b>WHAT TO EXPECT</b> <p>Students must be prepared to limit both their full-time job and any outside activities for the intensive pace of this course</p> <p>Online or in-person (or a hybrid format)</p> <p>These bootcamps tend to teach everything from software development to UX design and data science</p> <p>They normally include career coaching and one-on-one mentor guidance</p>	<b>WHAT TO EXPECT</b> <p>Usually the best fit for students holding part-time or full-time jobs while going through the program</p> <p>The end goal for someone attending a part-time bootcamp is to land a new job or get a promotion at their current work, but for others, it might simply be to add a few new skills to their resume</p>	<b>WHAT TO EXPECT</b> <p>Students normally work on their projects and complete the course on their own schedule and meet with a mentor on a consistent basis every week</p> <p>This flexible format is a great match for those balancing work, family, or other important commitments</p>

\*Due to COVID-19, almost all coding bootcamps moved online starting in 2020. Around March of 2021, some schools moved back to in-person or hybrid classrooms.

# 3 DO YOUR RESEARCH

Once you know more about what type of bootcamp program you want to attend, it's time to dig deeper. Make sure to research all aspects of that specific program - learn about the instructors, check reviews for the program, reach out to alumni networks. Ask questions and advocate for yourself: you deserve to have the best fit and experience that works for you.

## ○ Connect with alumni & instructors

When joining a coding bootcamp - online or in-person - you aren't just learning new skills, you're meeting an entirely new community of students, alumni, and instructors. It's so important to feel welcome and feel confident in a space you'll be working so intensively in. Take time to reach out to the program advisors so you can connect with a recent graduate or current student of the program. You can also **network** with alumni from the school you're interested in over [LinkedIn](#) - it's a great place to ask questions and have an open, honest discussion about their experience. This can be a great way to learn more about the program and explore if it's a good fit for you.

Not sure where to start? Here's a good list of questions to ask alumni or program advisors about your teachers or the overall program:

- *Who writes the curriculum, who teaches the classes? How up-to-date is the material?*
- *What is your average class size?*
- *What languages do you teach and why?*
- *How intensive is your program? How long is your program?*
- *What is the program's teaching style? Mentor-driven or project-based?*
- *Who are the instructors? How are they trained? How much industry experience do they have?*
- *How large is your alumni network? What alumni events do you host?*
- *Is your program more geared towards beginners or advanced students?*
- *How long does it take a typical student to pass your interview?*
- *Do you have workshops that students can attend? Can students audit or shadow a class or lecture?*
- *What is the gender ratio of your program?*
- *Do you have part-time programs?*
- *What is the difference between your online vs in-person courses?*
- *What does your career services support consist of?*
- *What happens if a student is falling behind?*
- *What is your graduation or completion rate? Do you report outcomes and are they independently audited?*
- *How long does it take the average student to get a job when they graduate? What is the average salary after graduating your program?*
- *What do you consider the learning style of the program?*
- *Why do you consider your program the best?*

## Check out career services

Usually, bootcamps will integrate career services into their programs. There are several bootcamps that offer career coaching and help with [interview prep](#), [resume](#) and cover letter reviews, building professional portfolios, and networking opportunities.

Some programs even assign students a mentor to guide them in their [job search](#), while others partner with different tech companies looking to hire new talent. When you're searching for bootcamps to attend, pay attention to which career support services each provides, and what you're specifically looking for.

## Research job outcomes

Before joining a bootcamp, make sure to read up on how students succeeded after graduating. Do your own research and look up factors like employment outcomes, starting salaries, and graduation rates from previous bootcamp grads.

Here are a few ways to verify a bootcamp's outcomes and find out the overall quality of the program:

### ○ READ STUDENT REVIEWS

Reviews from online platforms like [CourseReport](#) allow you to get a first-hand look at how alumni feel about their education, program, teachers, post-grad experience, etc.

### ○ CONNECT WITH GRADUATES

Reach out to recent grads of a bootcamp and ask them how they did after graduation. Good starter questions to ask might be; Did their school help them find a job? Did they find a job within a reasonable time frame after graduation? Did they graduate on time?

### ○ CHECK BOOTCAMP OUTCOMES

While bootcamps usually publish student success rates on their website, it's important to do your research thoroughly. Before enrolling in a program, review the outcomes on your school's website and ask to see any third-party audited outcomes.

### ○ LEARN ABOUT CIRR

If the bootcamp you're interested in doesn't report the outcomes on their website, they may publish them with the [Council on Integrity in Results Reporting \(CIRR\)](#). The CIRR posts outcomes from over 50 bootcamps as well as employment stats, graduation rates, and average salaries after graduation.

# 4 EXPLORE PAYMENT OPTIONS

Joining a bootcamp program is a big financial commitment, so it's crucial to understand all the options you have for financing. We know this can get confusing, so we're here to help with a list of the common ways to finance a bootcamp.

## ○ Check options with your school

While coding bootcamps and online courses may be less of a financial pressure than attending a four-year college, bootcamps can still be a significant investment. It's important to connect with your school and research the different options available to pay for your education:

### ○ PAY UPFRONT

This may not be an option for everyone, but some students can pay for their coding bootcamp in full at the program's start. Schools prefer this option and sometimes even offer tuition discounts for students who pay upfront. While there is a benefit to paying once and then focusing on your coursework going forward, it's not an accessible option for many students.

### ○ DEFERRED TUITION

This option allows students to pay their tuition after graduation, and repayment only begins once they've received a job offer that meets or exceeds a minimum income threshold. If a student doesn't graduate, they will be able to pay a lower sum. Some schools even forgive tuition completely if a student isn't able to find a job meeting the income threshold. Be sure to ask your school if they offer a tuition refund guarantee and what parameters you must meet to be eligible. Pairing deferred tuition with a job guarantee can act as a form of insurance for students apprehensive about landing a successful job after finishing their program.

### ○ INCOME SHARE AGREEMENTS

Income Share Agreements (also known as ISAs) are student financing contracts that function similar to Deferred Tuition, except that the total amount a student pays is a set percentage of their future earnings over a specified term (and typically with a maximum payment amount). The benefits of ISAs are that they align the incentives of the student and the school to help students land a high-paying job, and offer the downside protection of not owing anything if a student can't find a job, similar to Deferred Tuition. The drawback of an ISA is that, depending on income, the total cost of education can be higher than for Deferred Tuition or other payment options.

### ○ PAYMENT PLANS

Some bootcamps allow students to split their tuition cost into a few scheduled payments during their program. For example, a student might make three payments – one at the beginning of the course, one halfway through, and one towards the end of the course.



## Look into alternative ways to pay

Here are a few ways to finance your program outside of the options available with your school:

### SCHOLARSHIPS

There are many bootcamps that offer scholarships that pay for part of the cost of tuition, and some even cover the entire cost of tuition. While some have a specific type of student they aim to fund - [scholarships supporting women, underrepresented groups, POC](#) - others have open scholarships for any student. Check out our [Ascent Scholarships](#) for bootcamp students - it only takes a few minutes to enter for a chance to win money for your school or program.

### GI BILL

While there is no Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for coding bootcamps, the GI Bill is a government program designed to support veterans, giving them the money for buying a home, starting a business, or paying for their education. Since its legislation, the GI Bill has had significant changes, the most notable being that it is now available to students who enroll in a short-term coding bootcamp. To be eligible for up to 36 months of college or career training, veterans must have been discharged honorably, with a disability, or still be on active duty. If you're eligible, be sure to check out this [full list of bootcamps eligible for GI Bill funds](#).

### EMPLOYER BENEFITS

Some students can find help paying for their bootcamp through their current workplaces. Employer tuition reimbursement, which can also be called tuition assistance or employer-sponsored scholarships, helps to pay an employee's tuition. Some companies will help to pay for schooling when the employee is enrolled in programs that develop skills their company needs.

### PRIVATE LOANS

With federal loan funding unavailable, many students look to private loans to finance their coding bootcamps. Loans can help students who don't have the savings upfront pay their tuition. Make sure to do your research with interest rates, loan fees, and specific repayment terms before accepting any loan. We offer [bootcamp loans at Ascent](#) - our application takes less than five minutes and we'll give you an initial approval decision right away without impacting your credit score.



*It's a really rewarding career path to do something that you enjoy, that you care about, that you're passionate about - and to be able to be paid well for it.*

Mike M.

Software Engineering Manager & bootcamp graduate

# 5 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Coding bootcamps are intensive. You will learn and retain a lot of new information in a short period of time, which can make you feel like you need to be working overtime, at all times. But, to have the most positive learning experience, it's important to **take care** of both your mental and physical health.

## Battling imposter syndrome

Learning to code is not easy. While some people might have a natural talent and pick it up a little quicker than others, it still takes practice, guidance, and dedication. Feel like you'll never be good enough or that you have no experience? That's imposter syndrome.

### What is imposter syndrome?

**Imposter syndrome** is that voice in your head telling you you're not worthy of your success or accomplishments, or that you're not up for a challenge. It's a combination of self-doubt and fear of failure that tries to convince you you're not capable of learning something new. Here's how to kick that feeling:

#### ○ STOP COMPARING

It can be really easy to compare yourself to others during your learning process. But, it's important to keep in mind that everyone comes into a program with a different level of experience, so comparing not only distracts you from learning to the best of your ability, it keeps you in a vicious cycle of self-doubt.

#### ○ DITCH THE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

You won't be a perfect programmer overnight. So, until then, show yourself some kindness. Stay positive toward the learning process, and work on changing up how you speak to yourself. For example, instead of telling yourself you don't know enough about a certain project and you will fail, tell yourself you're capable of learning new things for this project and you will finish it.

#### ○ RECOGNIZE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Imposter syndrome can make you lose sight of how far you've come. Don't forget to look back to day one and realize how hard you've worked.





## Manage your mental & physical health



*Remind yourself that it's temporary and it's not your responsibility to meet everybody else's expectations. While you're in the camp, it's okay to adjust what you are expecting of yourself and rebalance your load at home. Lean on other people for help — it's always okay to do that and to do something for yourself.*

Caroline Ponzini,  
Backend Software Engineer

### **Get enough sleep**

Without enough sleep, it can be a challenge to focus. You spend all day filling your brain with new information, it's crucial to have time to sleep so you can absorb and process that learning to retain it throughout your bootcamp.

### **Take breaks**

Although you've heard this one a lot, it's the most important to remember. With a lot of work to finish throughout the day, you might feel pressure to get through as many lessons as you can without stopping. Being productive should never come before your own health. Make time to stand up, stretch, and schedule breaks to step away from your computer every once in a while. Whether that means taking your dog for a walk, petting your cat, or going to refill your water bottle, don't forget you deserve a break.

### **Forgive yourself**

There will be some days where you won't be the perfect student, and that's okay. You won't always work on weekends, you may even fail a test. You might decide to take 50 photos of your dog snoring in their bed instead of studying, and that's okay. We are human - forgive yourself for the times you've been less than perfect and keep going.

### **Get moving**

Being in a bootcamp can be stressful at times, and exercise is a great way to lower that stress. Whether it's scheduling a 15-minute walk during your lunch break or fitting in a quick run before starting the day, moving your body keeps you healthy - especially when you're sitting for long periods of time.

## Everyone wants you to do well (and be well)

While you might see programmers fueled by pizza and energy drinks in the movies or TV shows, success in a coding bootcamp (and beyond) is all about doing well and *feeling* well. Believe it or not, we want you to not only survive but thrive in your bootcamp (and so does your school).

Most coding bootcamps have a vested interest in seeing you succeed. They are designed to support you in a way that you can perform at your best without failing by providing you with the necessary resources when you need them. Don't be afraid to utilize them, and be proactive about it.

### Does your school play a role in helping to manage stress?

The answer is yes. Many schools are starting to offer mental health services for their students.

A great example is [Bloom Institute of Technology \(formerly Lambda School\)](#). They work with [Modern Health](#), a mental health benefits company, to provide their students with free access to meditation resources, an online wellness program, and the ability to book sessions with a therapist. Bloom Institute's founder Austen Allred was motivated to provide these services when seeing students openly discuss their issues with ADHD, OCD, PTSD, and other wellness concerns, in a school-wide Slack channel for mental health.

More and more schools are providing access to mental health resources and tools for their students to succeed. When researching a bootcamp program to attend, be sure to check what their mental health services might include. You deserve to be supported in the best way possible while on your new journey of learning to code.

## Ready to find your bootcamp? **Get started!**

If you've made it to the end of this guide, you've already demonstrated the dedication it takes to succeed in a bootcamp. It takes courage to reinvent your career or shift into a new role and guess what? We know you have what it takes to create a future you'll love.

# We want to hear from you

If this guide was helpful or you have any questions we can help answer, we want to hear from you!

Reach out to us at [bootcampfeedback@ascentfunding.com](mailto:bootcampfeedback@ascentfunding.com).

