

Hackathon Guidelines

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Guidelines for a successful hackathon.

TANGIBLE END PRODUCT. The purpose of a hackathon is to produce something that is finished and immediately usable. When developing software, this condition is easy to verify: the written code should run on computers and should satisfy the intended users. For other domains, 'user satisfaction' may be the tool for defining the goal. For instance, when developing a course, the syllabus is the product, which should immediately pass an academic committee and get positive evaluation from student judges.

The required end result distinguishes hackathon from brainstorming.

TIME IS CRUCIAL. Mostly we do not have time, even for things we would like to do. What is done at a hackathon can possibly be done by individuals separately with intermittent communication, but over a long period of time and most likely never. A hackathon is an opportunity to get things done with no distractions, just focusing on the problem itself. The length of the required time period spreads from a couple of hours to a couple of days. Productive work requires time but humans can sustain the effort for only a limited time.

The approach "Let's have some ideas now and we will work out the details later." is doomed to fail, since it goes against the very idea of a hackathon.

COOPERATION OVER COMPETITION. The assumption is that a single person can accomplish anything, given enough time for studying other fields, for learning from mistakes and the possibility of restarting from scratch. However, working in a team saves time, plus it is more fun. Competing with other teams might boost the process, but if that is the only source of motivation then the task is probably not selected properly. It is better to think of the hackathon as us against the problem, time, the universe, etc..

Certainly, there is no room for competition within a team.

TOOLS ARE IMPORTANT. Beyond the proven traditional knowledge representation/manipulation tools (pen & paper, books), digital technologies are also defining parts of a hackathon. What is obviously needed for coding (a computer, big monitors, version control, collaborative editors, etc.), is actually needed for any other project. The disruptive nature of information technologies is driven by their extreme efficiency in dealing with knowledge, and that is exactly what makes hackathons possible at all.

No time for learning new tooling. Use battle-tested devices, practise beforehand if needed.

IN SHORT,

1. Have your tools ready!
2. Dedicate your time!
3. Love your team!

In particular: Digital Studies Hackathon

THE GOAL IS THE DESIGN NEW COURSES for our crazy-fast technology-driven reality. The speed of change forces us to constantly re-evaluate our values. The challenge is to produce educational material that is aware of the students' present world and more importantly it senses their future, while at the same time it also reflects upon the past of the educators – innovation that avoids reinventing the wheel. How to do this in an environment where most of the changes are quite disruptive? Well, that's the hackathon for you.

SPACE IS SHARED. Since we have people involved in several projects, we will have dynamic teams and thus there will be a continuous migration of team members. To facilitate this, there will be no spatial separation of teams.

TIME IS LIMITED. To be more precise, two sessions, 2 hours for the morning, and 3 hours for the afternoon. In order to get everyone up to speed there will be short TED-style talks in the beginning.

THE DELIVERABLE: A GLORIFIED ELEVATOR PITCH. Due to the temporal dimension of a full-blown academic course (a semester), at the end of the day we only have time to 'sell' the course. This involves convincing students that the course is interesting and worth taking, assuring curriculum designers and future employers that it gives the right set of skills. In 10 minutes, followed by another 10 minute Q&A session.