

CEN 5016: Software Engineering

Fall 2025



University of
Central Florida

Dr. Kevin Moran

Week 1- Class 2: Software Archeology & Anthropology





- Let me know if you are not on Ed Discussions
- Assignment 1, Getting started with Git, GitHub, and Typescript is posted
 - Due Tuesday, August 26th at 11:59 pm
 - Use Megathread on Ed Discussions to ask questions
- Course Entrance Survey
 - Please complete by Friday at 11:59 pm

Goals for Today



- Understand and scope the task of taking on and understanding a new and complex piece of existing software
- Appreciate the importance of configuring an effective IDE
- Contrast different types of code execution environments including local, remote, application, and libraries
- Enumerate both static and dynamic strategies for understanding and modifying a new codebase

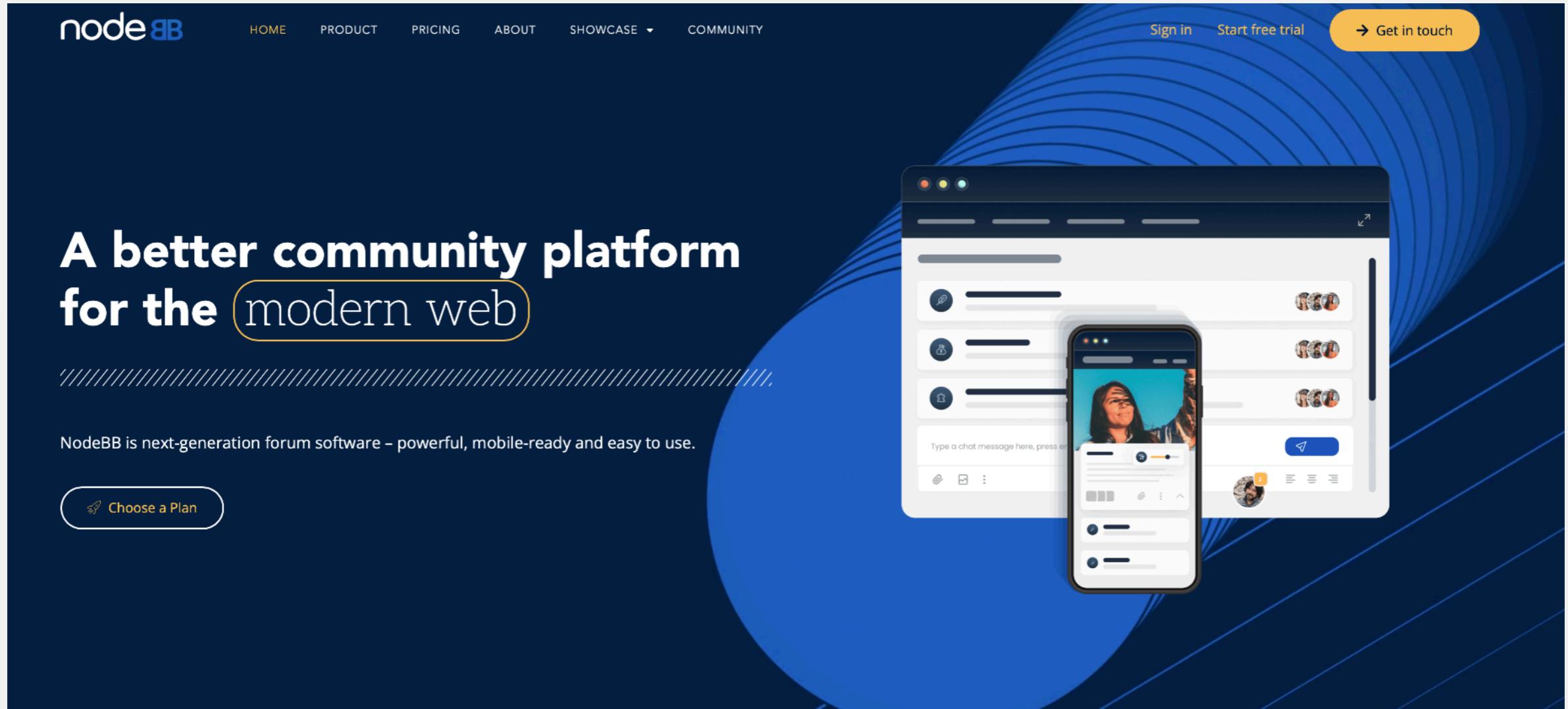
Software Archeology & Anthropology



Context: Big Ole Pile of Code



- Chances are that you will need to work with existing code at some point in your career...



The screenshot shows the NodeBB website homepage. The header includes the logo 'nodeBB' and navigation links for HOME, PRODUCT, PRICING, ABOUT, SHOWCASE, and COMMUNITY. On the right, there are buttons for 'Sign in', 'Start free trial', and 'Get in touch'. The main content features a large blue circular graphic with a white smartphone icon in the center. The phone screen displays a forum interface with a list of posts and a chat window. To the left of the graphic, the text 'A better community platform for the modern web' is displayed, with 'modern web' in a yellow-outlined box. Below this, a subtext states 'NodeBB is next-generation forum software – powerful, mobile-ready and easy to use.' and a 'Choose a Plan' button.

The Challenge?

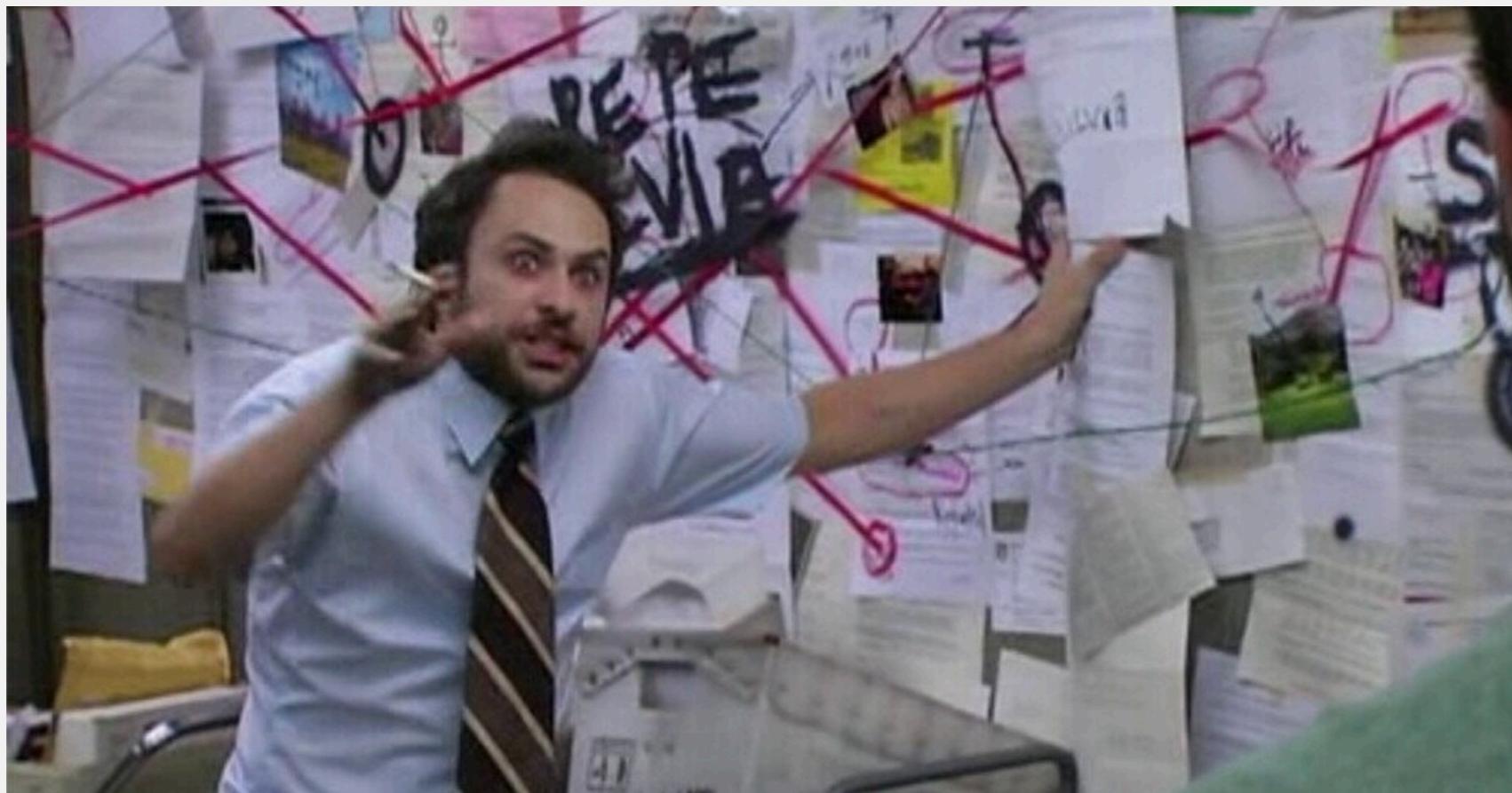


The Challenge?



You will never understand the entire system!

So Then: How do I tackle this Codebase?



High-Level Strategies



- Leverage your previous experiences (languages, technologies, patterns)
- Consult Documentation, white papers
- Talk to experts, code owners
- Follow best practices to build a working model of a system

Bad News: There are not many Helpful Resources



- *Working Effectively with Legacy Code.*

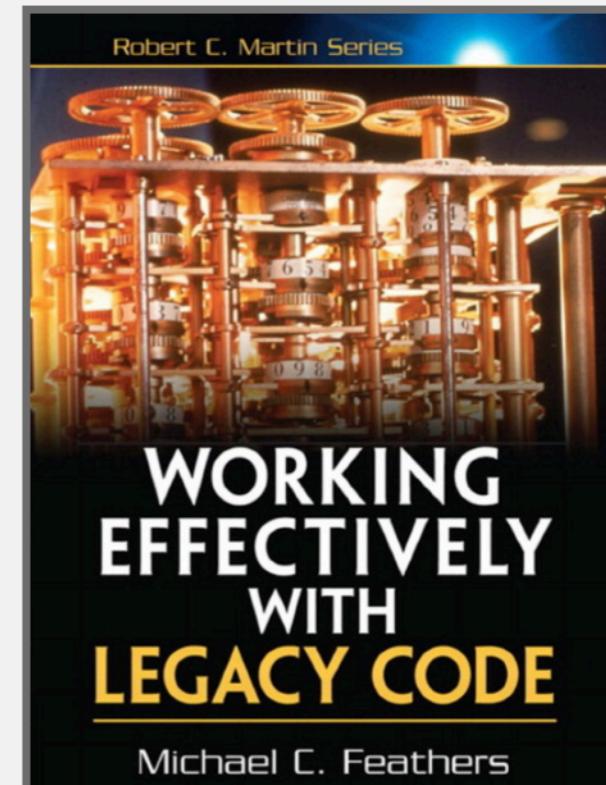
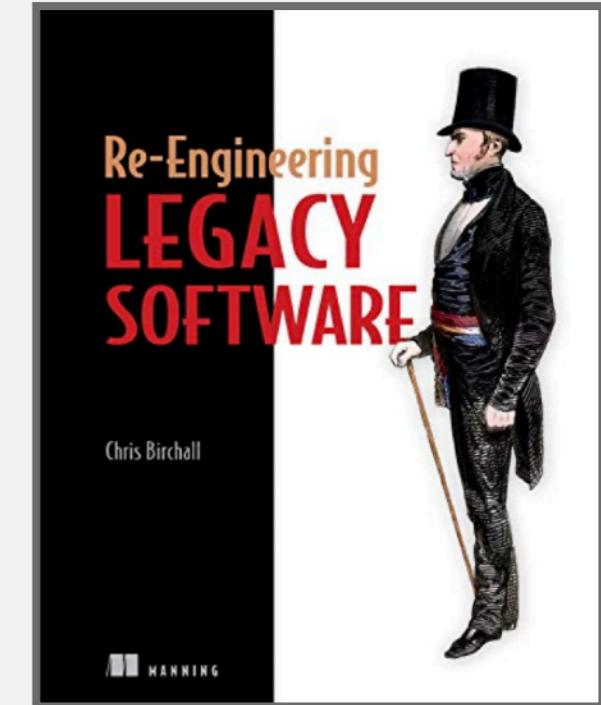
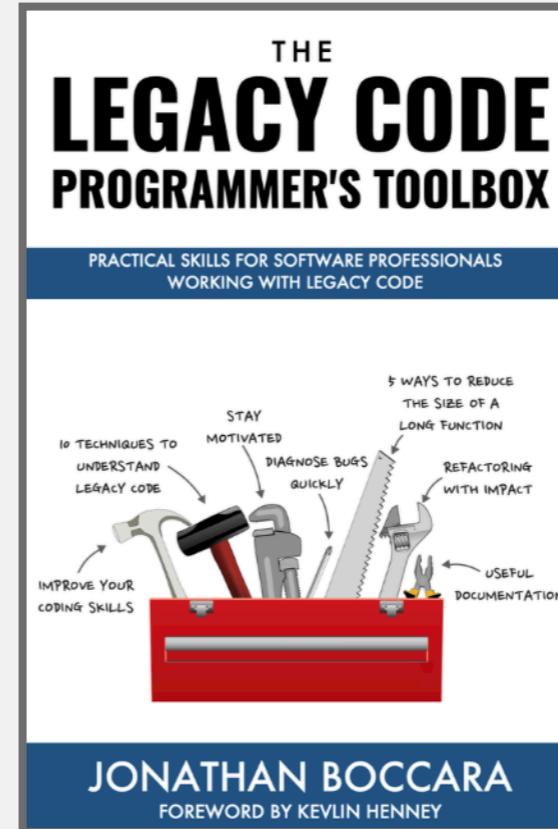
Michael C. Feathers. 2004.

- *Re-Engineering Legacy Software.*

Chris Birchall. 2016.

- *The Legacy Code Programmer's Toolbox.*

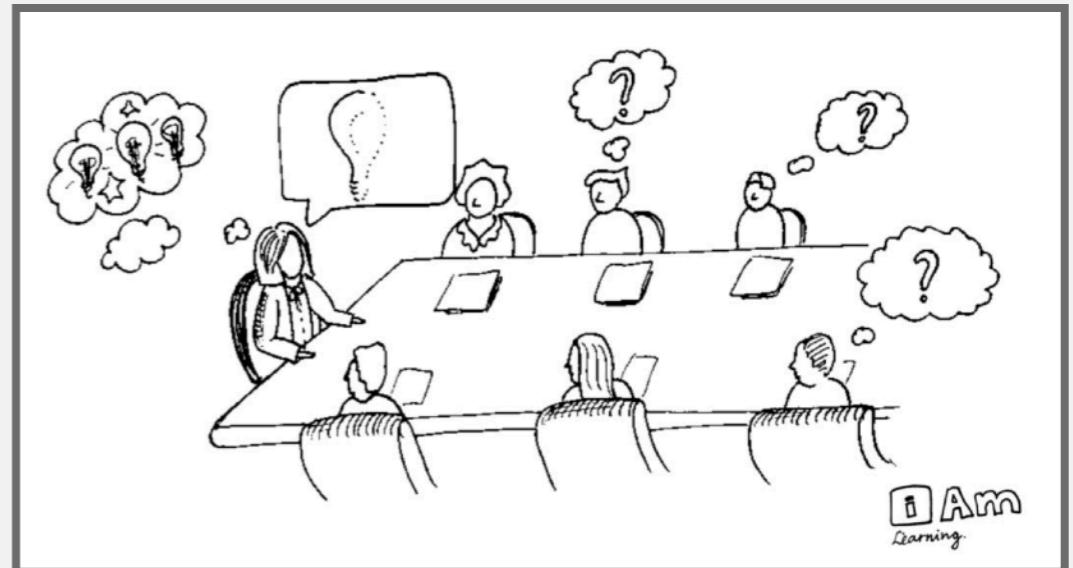
Jonathan Boccara. 2019.



Why? Because of Tacit Knowledge



- *Tacit knowledge* or *implicit knowledge*—as opposed to formalized, codified or explicit knowledge—is knowledge that is difficult to express or extract; therefore it is more difficult to transfer to others by means of writing it down or verbalizing it.



Why? Because of Tacit Knowledge



Maintaining Mental Models: A Study of Developer Work Habits

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ABSTRACT

To understand developers' typical tools, activities, and practices and their satisfaction with each, we conducted two surveys and eleven interviews. We found that many problems arose because developers were forced to invest great effort recovering implicit knowledge by exploring code and interrupting teammates and this knowledge was only saved in their memory. Contrary to expectations that email and IM prevent expensive task switches caused by face-to-face interruptions, we found that face-to-face communication enjoys many advantages. Contrary to expectations that documentation makes understanding design rationale easy, we found that current design documents are inadequate. Contrary to expectations that code duplication involves the copy and paste of code snippets, developers reported several types of duplication. We use data to characterize these and other problems and draw implications for the design of tools for their solution.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

D2.7 [Distribution, Maintenance, and Enhancement]: Documentation; D2.9 [Management]: Programming teams; D.2.6 [Programming Environments]: Integrated environments.

General Terms

Design, Documentation, Experimentation, Human Factors

Keywords

Code duplication, communication, interruptions, code ownership, debugging, agile software development

developers, but require an investment of time and knowledge about what future developers will need to learn. Conventions, factoring, and patterns minimize documentation burdens by providing general answers but constrain possible solutions and themselves become more to learn. For many types of information, the simplest solution is frequently to ask a teammate for the answer [2], yet the teammate is interrupted, must change tasks, and forgets goals, decisions, and interpretations relevant to the interrupted task. Modern development environments compute facts from code (e.g. callers of a method, writers to a field, methods overriding a method, average execution time) or other artifacts and require neither interruption nor investment in error prone documentation maintenance, but require a tool vendor or researcher to have anticipated the developer's situation and needs. And computing many types of information may require the developer's assistance.

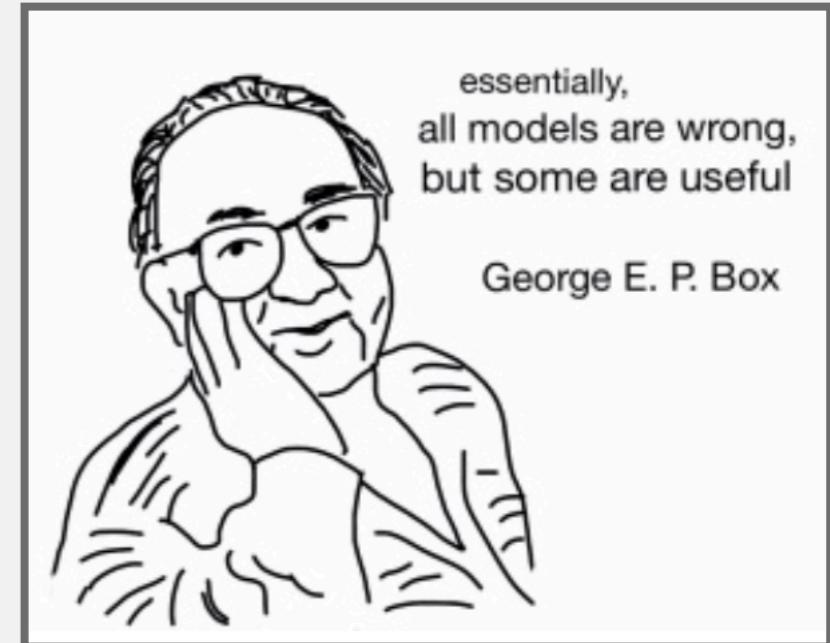
We performed a series of investigations of developers. The central theme that emerged was the developers' reliance on implicit code knowledge. Developers go to great lengths to create and maintain a mental model of the code, and knowledge is shared between developers through face-to-face communication and the code itself. Developers avoid using explicit, written repositories of code-related knowledge in design documents or email when possible, preferring to explore the code directly and, when that fails, talk with their teammates. Exploring code is made difficult by tool limitations and difficulties traversing relationships. Using the social network as the second line of inquiry causes interruptions and lost work, but those costs are offset by other benefits. Implicit knowledge retention is made possible by a

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Today: How to tackle Codebases



- **Goal:** Develop and test a working model or set of working hypotheses about how (some part of) a system works
- **Working model:** an understanding of the pieces of the system (components), and the way they interact (connections)
- **Focus:** Observation, probes, and hypothesis testing
 - Helpful tools and techniques!



Demo: Android Application



Steps to Understand a New Codebase

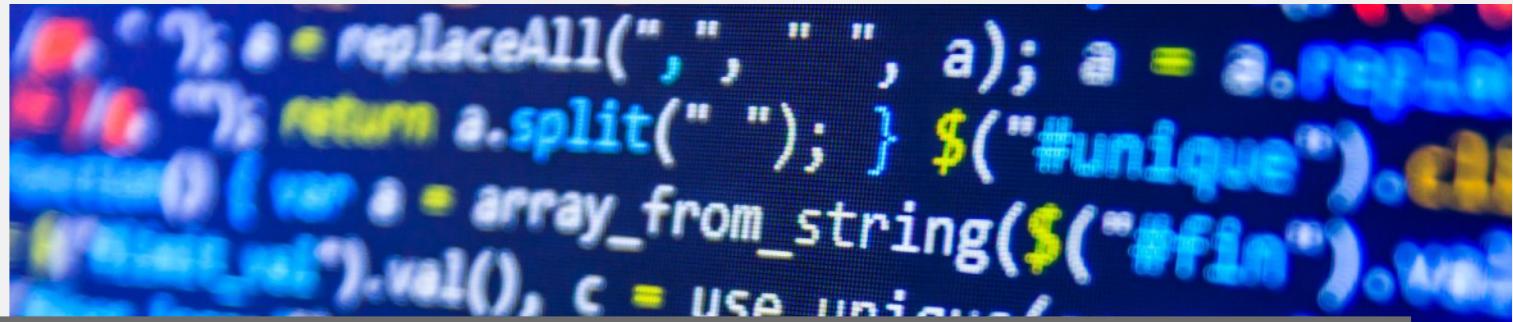


- Look at README.md
- Clone the repo.
- Build the codebase.
- Figure out how to make it run.
- What do you want to mess with?
 - Clone and own
- Traceability - Attach a debugger
 - View Source
 - Find the logs.
 - Search for constants (strings, colors, weird integers (#DEADBEEF))

Observation: Software is Full of Patterns



- File structure
- System architecture
- Code structure
- Names
- ...





On the Naturalness of Software

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Abstract—Natural languages like English are rich, complex, and powerful. The highly creative and graceful use of languages like English and Tamil, by masters like Shakespeare and Avvaiyar, can certainly delight and inspire. But in practice, given cognitive constraints and the exigencies of daily life, most human utterances are far simpler and much more repetitive and predictable. In fact, these utterances can be very usefully modeled using modern statistical methods. This fact has led to the phenomenal success of statistical approaches to speech recognition, natural language translation, question-answering, and text mining and comprehension.

We begin with the conjecture that most software is also natural, in the sense that it is created by humans at work, with all the attendant constraints and limitations—and thus, like natural language, it is also likely to be repetitive and predictable. We then proceed to ask whether a) code can be usefully modeled by statistical language models and b) such models can be leveraged to support software engineers. Using the widely adopted n-gram model, we provide empirical evidence supportive of a positive answer to both these questions. We show that code is also very repetitive, and in fact even more so than natural languages. As an example use of the model, we have developed a simple code completion engine for Java that, despite its simplicity, already improves Eclipse’s built-in completion capability. We conclude the paper by laying out a vision for future research in this area.

Keywords—language models; n-gram; natural language processing; code completion; and code suggestion

Programming languages, in theory, are complex, full of subtle idiosyncrasies, and often difficult to learn. In practice, they are used by humans to express complex ideas, and are often used in repetitive and predictable ways. This paper explores the hypothesis that software is natural, in the sense that it is created by humans at work, with all the attendant constraints and limitations—and thus, like natural language, it is also likely to be repetitive and predictable. We then proceed to ask whether a) code can be usefully modeled by statistical language models and b) such models can be leveraged to support software engineers. Using the widely adopted n-gram model, we provide empirical evidence supportive of a positive answer to both these questions. We show that code is also very repetitive, and in fact even more so than natural languages. As an example use of the model, we have developed a simple code completion engine for Java that, despite its simplicity, already improves Eclipse’s built-in completion capability. We conclude the paper by laying out a vision for future research in this area.

Our central hypothesis is that the same argument applies to software:

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Observation: Software is Massively Redundant



- There is always something to copy/use as a starting point!



Observation: Code Must Run to Do Stuff!



Observation: If Code Runs, it Must have a Beginning...



Observation: If Code Runs, it Must Exist



```
0x08048414 <+16>;    jg    DWORD PTR [ebp+0x8],0x1
0x08048416 <+18>;    mov   0x804843c <main+56>
0x08048419 <+21>;    mov   eax,DWORD PTR [ebp+0xc]
0x0804841b <+23>;    mov   ecx,DWORD PTR [eax]
0x08048420 <+28>;    mov   edx,0x8048520
0x08048425 <+33>;    mov   eax,ds:0x8049648
0x08048429 <+37>;    mov   DWORD PTR [esp+0x8],ecx
0x0804842d <+41>;    mov   DWORD PTR [esp+0x4],edx
0x08048430 <+44>;    mov   DWORD PTR [esp],eax
0x08048435 <+49>;    call  0x8048338 <fprintf@plt>
0x0804843a <+54>;    mov   eax,0x1
0x0804843c <+56>;    jmp   0x8048459 <main+85>
0x0804843f <+59>;    mov   eax,DWORD PTR [ebp+0xc]
0x08048442 <+62>;    add   eax,0x4
0x08048444 <+64>;    mov   eax,DWORD PTR [eax]
0x08048448 <+68>;    mov   DWORD PTR [esp+0x4],eax
0x0804844c <+72>;    lea   eax,[esp+0x10]
0x0804844f <+75>;    mov   DWORD PTR [esp],eax
0x08048454 <+78>;    call  0x8048338 <fprintf@plt>
```

The Beginning: Entry Points



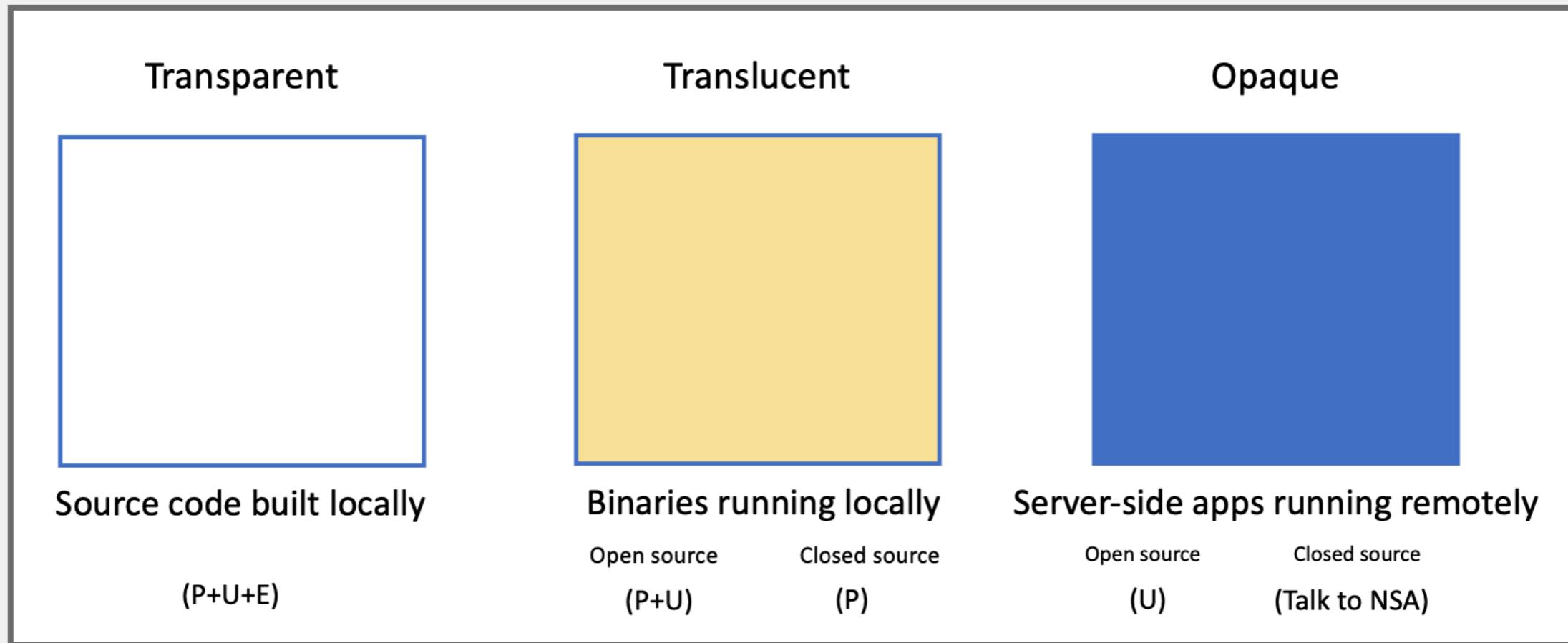
- Locally installed programs: run cmd, OS launch, I/O events, etc.
- Local applications in dev: build + run, test, deploy (e.g., docker)
- Web apps server-side: Browser sends HTTP request (GET/POST)
- Web apps client-side: Browser runs JavaScript, event handlers

Code Must Exist: But Where?



- Locally installed programs: run cmd, OS launch, I/O events, etc.
 - Binaries (machine code) on your computer
- Local applications in dev: build + run, test, deploy (e.g., docker)
 - Source code in repository (+ dependencies)
- Web apps server-side: Browser sends HTTP request (e.g., GET, POST)
 - Code runs remotely (you can only observe outputs)
- Web apps client-side: Browser runs JavaScript, event handlers
 - Source code is downloaded and run locally (see: browser dev tools!)

Can Running Code be Probed/Understood/Edited?



Creating a Model of Unfamiliar Code

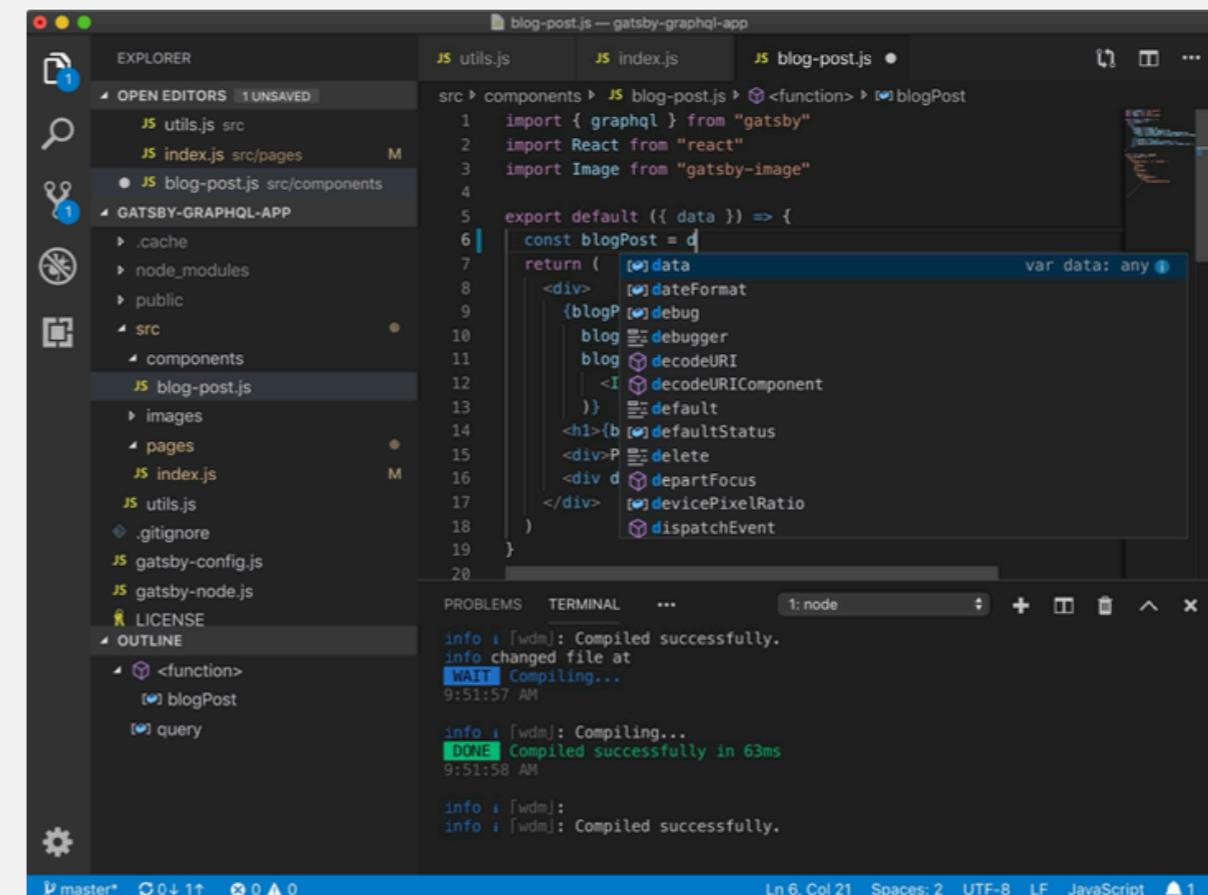
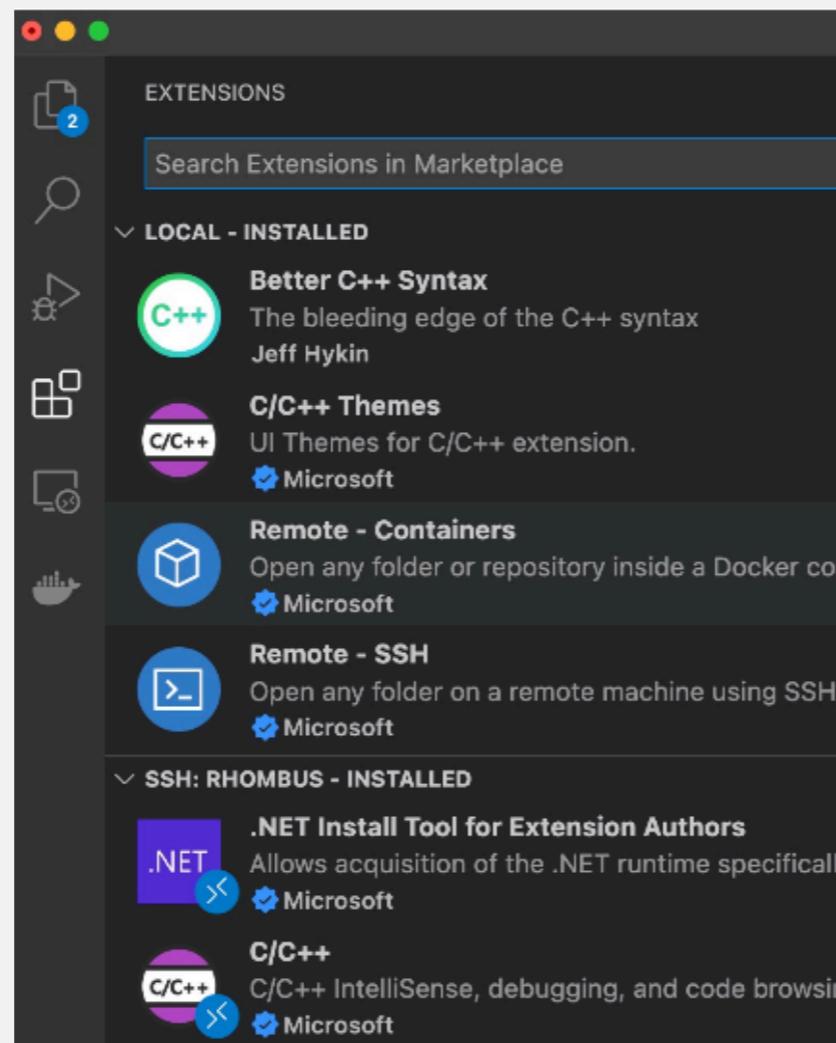
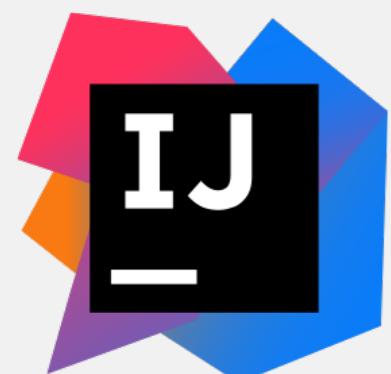


Information Gathering



- Basic needs:
 - Code/file search and navigation
 - Code editing (probes)
 - Execution of code, tests
 - Observation of output (observation)
- At the command line: grep and find! (Google for tutorials)
- Many choices here on tools! Depends on circumstance.
 - grep/find/etc.
 - Knowing Unix tools is invaluable
 - A decent IDE
 - Debugger
 - Test frameworks + coverage reports
 - Google (or your favorite web search engine)
 - ChatGPT or LaMA

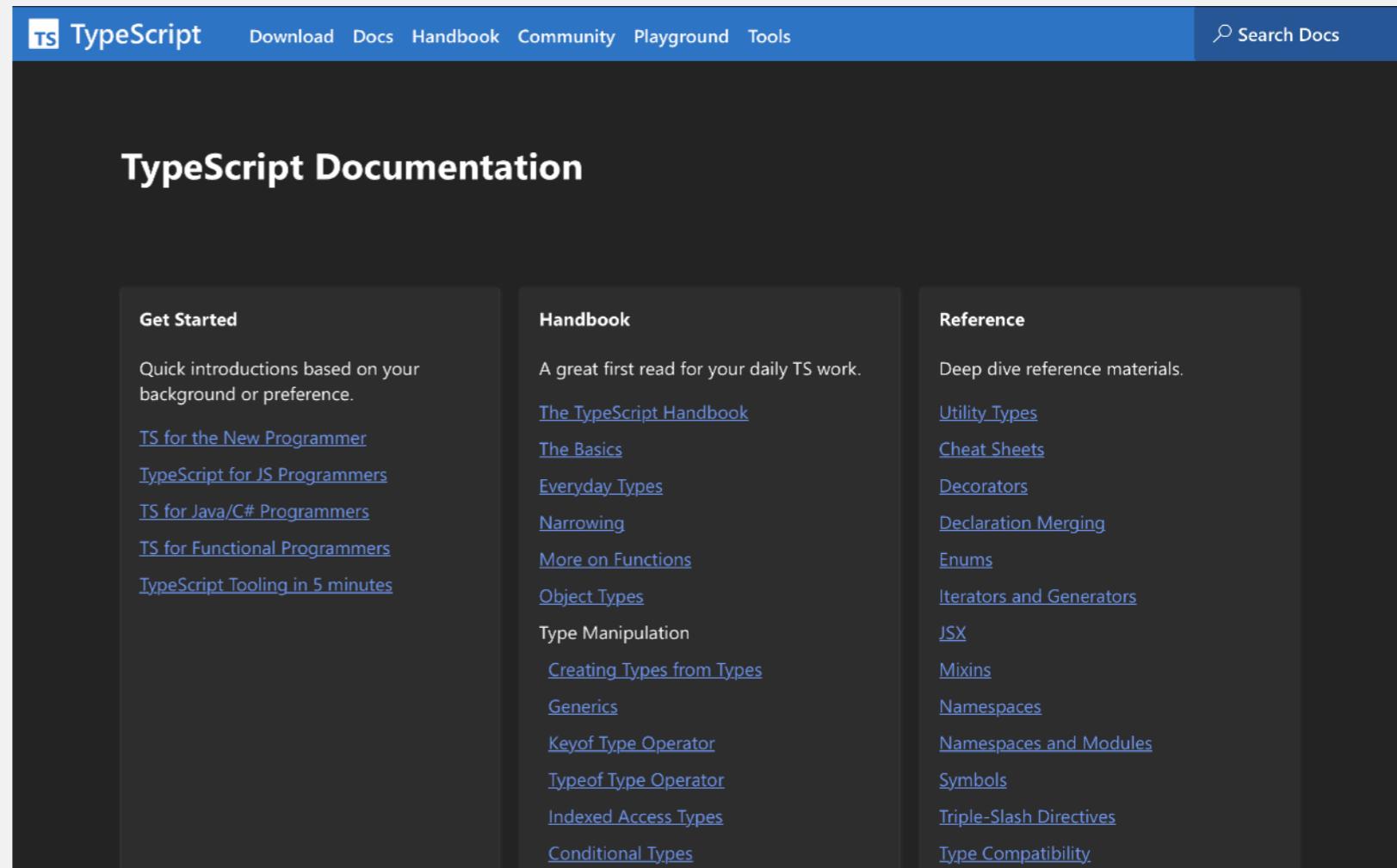
Static Information Gathering: Use an IDE!



Consider Documentation and Tutorials Judiciously



- Great for discovering entry points!
- Can teach you about general structure, architecture (more on this later in the semester)
- Often out of date.
- As you gain experience, you will recognize more of these, and you will immediately know something about how the program works
- Also: discussion boards; issue trackers



The screenshot shows the TypeScript Documentation homepage. The header includes the TypeScript logo, navigation links for Download, Docs, Handbook, Community, Playground, and Tools, and a search bar labeled "Search Docs". The main title "TypeScript Documentation" is centered above three columns of links. The left column, "Get Started", contains links to "TS for the New Programmer", "TypeScript for JS Programmers", "TS for Java/C# Programmers", "TS for Functional Programmers", and "TypeScript Tooling in 5 minutes". The middle column, "Handbook", contains links to "The TypeScript Handbook", "The Basics", "Everyday Types", "Narrowing", "More on Functions", "Object Types", "Type Manipulation", "Creating Types from Types", "Generics", "Keyof Type Operator", "Typeof Type Operator", "Indexed Access Types", and "Conditional Types". The right column, "Reference", contains links to "Utility Types", "Cheat Sheets", "Decorators", "Declaration Merging", "Enums", "Iterators and Generators", "JSX", "Mixins", "Namespaces", "Namespaces and Modules", "Symbols", "Triple-Slash Directives", and "Type Compatibility".

Discussion Boards and Issue Trackers



- Software is written by people.
- How can we talk to them?
- Fortunately, they probably aren't dead.
- So, you can report problems on GitHub.
- Or, ask them questions on StackOverflow.

The screenshot shows the Stack Overflow search results page for the query "typescript on mac". The search bar at the top contains the query. The sidebar on the left includes links for Home, Questions, Tags, Users, Companies, COLLECTIVES, Explore Collectives, LABS, Discussions, and TEAMS. The main content area is titled "Search Results" and displays 500 results. The first result is a question titled "Cannot use JSX unless the '--jsx' flag is provided", with an AI summary box above it. Other results include "Can't install Typescript on mac [duplicate]" and "npm install doesn't install typescript (on mac)". The right sidebar features a "Hot Network Questions" list with various programming-related topics.

Question Title	Answers	Views	Asked	Answered
Cannot use JSX unless the '--jsx' flag is provided	858 votes	4k views	Nov 23, 2020	Mahmoud 10.2k
Can't install Typescript on mac [duplicate]	1 vote	4k views	Jan 25, 2017	Menelaos Kotsollaris 5,896
npm install doesn't install typescript (on mac)	1 vote	607 views	Apr 22, 2022	Nils Martel 73

Dynamic Information Gathering



- Build it.
- Run it.
- Change it.
- Run it again.
- How did the behavior change?



Probes: Observe, Control, or “Lightly” Manipulate Execution



- `print("this code is running!")`

- Structured logging

- Debuggers

- Breakpoint, eval, step through / step over

- (Some tools even support remote debugging)

- Delete debugging

- Chrome Developer Tools

The screenshot shows the Visual Studio Code interface during a debug session. The code editor displays `Owner.java` with a breakpoint set on line 85. The 'VARIABLES' panel shows a local variable `Owner@251` with properties: `telephone: "6085551024"`, `address: "110 W. Liberty St."`, `city: "Madison"`, `firstName: "George"`, `id: null`, `lastName: "Franklin"`, `pets: null`, and `telephone: "6085551024"`. A context menu is open over the `telephone` field, with the 'Break When Value Changes' option highlighted. The 'CALL STACK' panel shows multiple threads, with the thread at index 5 labeled 'PAUSED ON DATA BREAKPOINT' and the method `Owner.setTelephone(String)` highlighted. The 'BREAKPOINTS' panel at the bottom shows two breakpoints: one for `Owner.telephone : String` and another for `OwnerController.java`. Yellow arrows point from the text labels in the list to the corresponding elements in the debugger interface.

Step 0: Sanity Check Basic Model + Hypotheses



- *Confirm that you can build and run the code.*
 - Ideally both using the tests provided, and by hand.
- *Confirm that the code you are running is the code you built*
- *Confirm that you can make an externally visible change*
- *How? Where? Starting points:*
 - Run an existing test, change it
 - Write a new test
 - Change the code, write or rerun a test that should notice the change
- *Ask someone for help*

Document and Share Your Findings!



- Update README and docs
 - Or better: use a Developer Wiki
 - Use Mermaid for diagrams
- Screencast on Twitch
- Collaborate with others
- Include negative results, too!

