

The best web programming languages for development

Many technologies have emerged to facilitate browser-based development. Here, we look at those technologies in an effort to identify the best web programming languages of today.

You want to build a website or web app. So, what are the best web programming languages available, and why are they the best?

It's a weighty question, and I'd like to emphasize -- strongly and upfront -- there is no universal answer. What one developer considers the best web programming language may be trash in the eyes of another.

Let me also make clear that, when I talk about the best "web programming languages," I am not focused on markup and stylesheet languages, like [HTML and CSS](#). They are essential to know if you do web development, but they're also not programming languages.

With those caveats out of the way, let's take a look at which programming languages -- generally speaking, at least -- are [good fits for web development](#).

PHP

When [PHP](#) debuted in the mid-1990s, many devotees called it the best web programming language around, because it revolutionized how you could develop internet software. PHP made it practical for the first time to build dynamic websites and so transformed the web from a collection of mostly static content into an interactive medium.

Two decades after PHP's first release, its popularity has waned somewhat. A strong anti-PHP coalition exists today. The complaints center on PHP's poor design and the fact that simple tasks require a lot of code.

Yet, say what you will about PHP, the fact remains it's still by far the most widely used, though probably not the best language, for web development. For that reason alone, PHP is a must-know language for web developers.

Java

[Java](#) was designed as an all-purpose programming language. It was never intended for web applications in particular -- anymore than it was conceived for writing, say, a [smartwatch app](#). But while Java wasn't created with the sole purpose of browser-based development in mind, many still consider it one of the best web programming languages to learn and use.

In other words, Java is a language an [average developer already knows](#). If you need to build a web app and don't want your developers (or the people who will have to maintain your code in the future) to learn a new language to do it, Java might fit the bill well.

Go

If you're looking for a general-purpose programming language that is easier on web apps than Java, [Golang](#) -- better known as just Go -- may be what you're looking for.

Introduced in 2009, Go is a flexible, extensible language with a [strong community behind it](#). It makes it easy for developers to build applications that take advantage of parallel processing. That gives Go an advantage if you use it to build high-performance web apps. Go is not as widely popular as Java, but its following will likely increase over time.

Go can, therefore, be a great choice if you want an up-to-date programming solution that works well for web applications, as well as other types of apps.

Ruby on Rails

You can't discuss general-purpose programming languages useful for web development without a [mention of](#) Ruby on Rails. For developers who [program with Ruby](#), a general-purpose language, Ruby on Rails provides an easy way to build server-side web applications.

There's a fair amount of debate swirling about whether Ruby and Ruby on Rails are dying. Advocates of the framework, though, will enthusiastically argue that this is still one of the best web programming languages to build apps quickly. Folks have been predicting Ruby's demise for several years now, and while Ruby is not as popular as it once was, it is unlikely to disappear.

In fact, in March 2018, the [Tiobe index](#), which tracks the popularity of programming languages, reported Ruby had returned to its top 10 list. If Ruby is back in vogue, Ruby on Rails skills are a valuable asset.

Python

Python is a scripting language that developers can use in a broad variety of contexts. While Python wasn't designed specifically for web development, frameworks like Django make it easy to use it as the basis for web programming. You could also use plain old Python for writing web apps, too, if you wanted.

Whether Python and Django are the best web programming languages in a technical sense is an impossible question to answer objectively.

One argument, however, you can make in [favor of](#) Python -- but can't make for most other languages on this list -- is that it lends itself to so many use cases. In other words, if you learn Python in order to use it for web development, you also learn a language you can use for everything from [system administration](#) to mobile development.

JavaScript (and Node.js)

JavaScript is also a must-have language for web app development. That's true not only because JavaScript dominates the world of client-side programming

languages for websites, but also because it can be extended to server-side environments using [Node.js](#).

JavaScript and Node.js are not quite as extensible as Python. You probably wouldn't use Node.js for system administration, for example -- although it has been done. But put together, these two languages cover pretty much any kind of web-related programming use case you might face.

Conclusion

Lest I face the wrath of those whose favorite languages did not make this list, let me emphasize again: Your mileage may vary. There is no single best programming language for the web, and the list above is certainly not an exhaustive list of web programming languages.