

E-COURSE REVIEWS

Java was developed by Sun Microsystems to provide a platform-independent and object-oriented development environment. The e-learning industry is familiar with Java, and most publishers with IT catalogs have Java offerings. The language has many independent areas of study, such as certification, enterprise technology, and programming task management. This article focuses on introductory Java 2 courseware.

Highly Recommended

★★★★ *Introduction to Java 2 Series*: 30 hours, US\$875 for 6 months of course access. Publisher: DigitalThink

The *Introduction to Java 2 Series* is exceptional, offering clearly defined sections, multiplatform downloads of material, and step-by-step installation instructions for components. The writing is organized and coherent. Actual in-course code is used minimally, but is made up for through code-intensive exercises graded by tutors.

The quality of DigitalThink's interactive features, such as forums and live chat, depends on the number of other users and their responsiveness. Some courses have active message boards, but most are sparse and have near-empty threads. Although there's a glossary, there's no comprehensive syntactical reference. Smart users will buy the optional book. Overall, DigitalThink approaches Java training with balanced subject coverage and strong in-course resources.

Recommended

★★★★1/2 *Introduction to Java*: 60 to 120 hours, US\$1,490 for 6 months of course access. Publisher: Columbia Interactive

Columbia Interactive takes a real-world spin on learning programming. Set up to emulate the experience of an entry-level Java programmer, the course presents 16 tasks of varying difficulty, each requiring six steps to complete. Interaction with in-course tutors is necessary to complete most steps.

This course is for self-motivated and resourceful learners. Columbia states that no prior programming experience is needed, but it may be too difficult for introductory programmers. The assignments, delivered through email from fictional colleagues, are complex and involve multiple segments.

★★★ *Java 2 Programming, Part 1*: 20 hours, US\$98 for 6 months course access. Publisher: Instruction Set

Java 2 Programming, Part 1 is a series of six courses. What sets it apart is the excellent writing and broad sub-

ject coverage that grounds the discussion of Java features to other languages such as COBRA.

The content is a mix of tables, text, and code samples augmented by interactive mouse-over applets. Each course concludes with a performance-based activity section that uses sample code and previously taught concepts to create a working project.

Adequate

★★★1/2 *Java 2 Series*: 20 hours, US\$124.95 per course or corporate pricing. Publisher: SmartForce

The *Java 2 Series* is a mixed bag. The text is choppy, the interface is sluggish, and the resource package consists mainly of links to Sun's Website. Content is broken up into a hierarchical system of headers and subjects, which gives this series the feel of an augmented slide show.

Not Recommended

★★ *Java 2 Programming Series*: 30 to 40 hours, US\$149.95 per course or corporate pricing. Publisher: NETg

These courses use fictional companies with a range of characters and annotated code. The drawbacks are significant. The series fails to offer multiplatform support, links to Web resources, or downloadable code. The text is murky and chopped up, graphics are confusing, writing is mechanical, and narration is uninspired.

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At a Glance

Introduction to Java 2 Series (DigitalThink): Excellent platform. Good writing, resources, and code.

Introduction to Java (Columbia Interactive): Excellent resources. Good writing and code. Poor platform.

Java 2 Programming, Part 1 (Instruction Set): Good platform, writing, and code. Poor resources.

Java 2 Series (SmartForce): Good platform and code. Poor writing and resources.

Java 2 Programming Series (NETg): Adequate writing and code. Poor platform and resources.