



**MDN** MOZILLA  
DEVELOPER  
NETWORK

Learning Area Survey 2014  
— Results —

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## About this survey

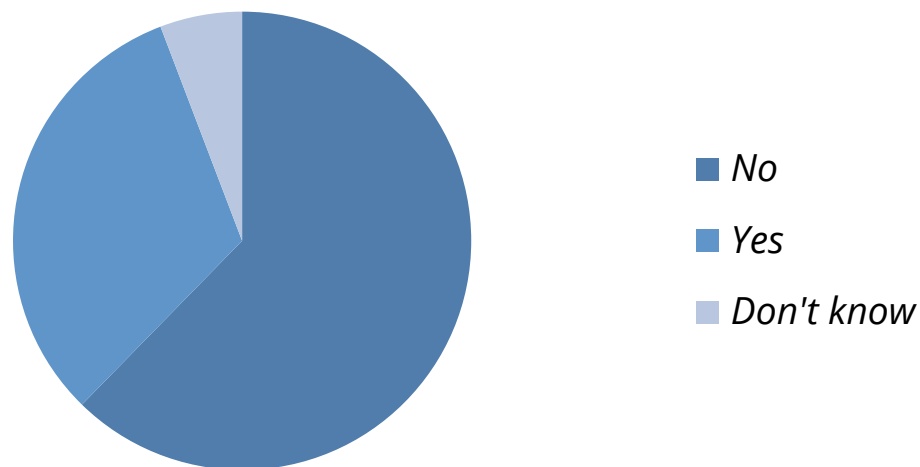
This survey is part of the Learning Area project run in 2014 on MDN. The goal of this project is to make MDN a friendly place for people who want to learn about web technologies.

The survey was run in January and February 2014 and gets 70 participants.

## About MDN

At first glance, we asked about MDN for beginners.

### Do you think MDN is currently well made for beginners?



62% of the people think MDN is not well made for beginner, where 32% think the opposite and 6% don't know.

## What's missing?

We asked for inputs about what's missing, here are the most important feedback and some associated verbatim:

### MDN lacks of organization for beginners

- *"a Prerequisites section in the articles will help beginners blaze their own path thru the site."*
- *"the pre-requisite are quite high and \*not mentioned\*."*

- *"there are too many entries for beginners"*
- *"an organized structure that moves from one tutorial to the next for HTML, CSS, or JS would be great"*
- *"It's not clear where to start."*
- *"you lack first-level welcome and basic directions"*
- *"beginners need a more step-by-step path to understand how all the different parts of web development fit together"*
- *"There is no direction of 'Start here'"*
- *"the documentation resources are missing a hierarchy"*
- *"we don't know where to start"*
- *"[Needs] Easy path to follow on each topics"*
- *"It is very confusing for a beginner to look for where to start"*
- *"More step by step approach"*

### **MDN Needs a glossary and explanation of basic concepts**

- *"Some sort of a FAQ or a QA site for developers will also help."*
- *"Wording in articles is often complex: we miss glossaries and definition of basic concepts"*
- *"Have sections describing common problems to be solved"*
- *"Many definitions are weak"*
- *"I suggest we create an 'introduction to' section that covers the basis of everything web development."*
- *"A basic definition with diagram of how web works and where different languages and platforms are used should be mentioned first."*
- *"There should be something for those who don't know about the basics of basic languages"*

### **MDN needs to improve examples (interactive, videos, etc.)**

- *"a 'try it' feature [...] or links to examples on codepen/jsfiddle"*
- *"it should be interactive like code.org"*
- *"More examples would be great. Plus some screencasts."*
- *"il manque [...] un espace pour « pratiquer »" (It miss a space to "try")*
- *"More step-by-step code examples"*
- *"some step by step examples"*
- *"allow video tutorial"*
- *"interactive demo [...], it's very useful for test and try the example code."*

## MDN's existing content needs to be updated and adapted

- *"most of the tutorials are very dated"*
- *"The way in which the resources are written are not beginner-friendly."*
- *"The formatting of reference documentation could be improved."*
- *"many articles are not focused."*
- *"Too much information at the hands of beginners."*
- *"HTML elements descriptions specially adapted for beginners"*

## MDN Needs a "from zero" guide

- *"Guides to walk a person thru the journey"*
- *"a guide to start from zero"*
- *"Clear instructions on how to start Web development"*

## MDN's content should focus on task rather than technologies

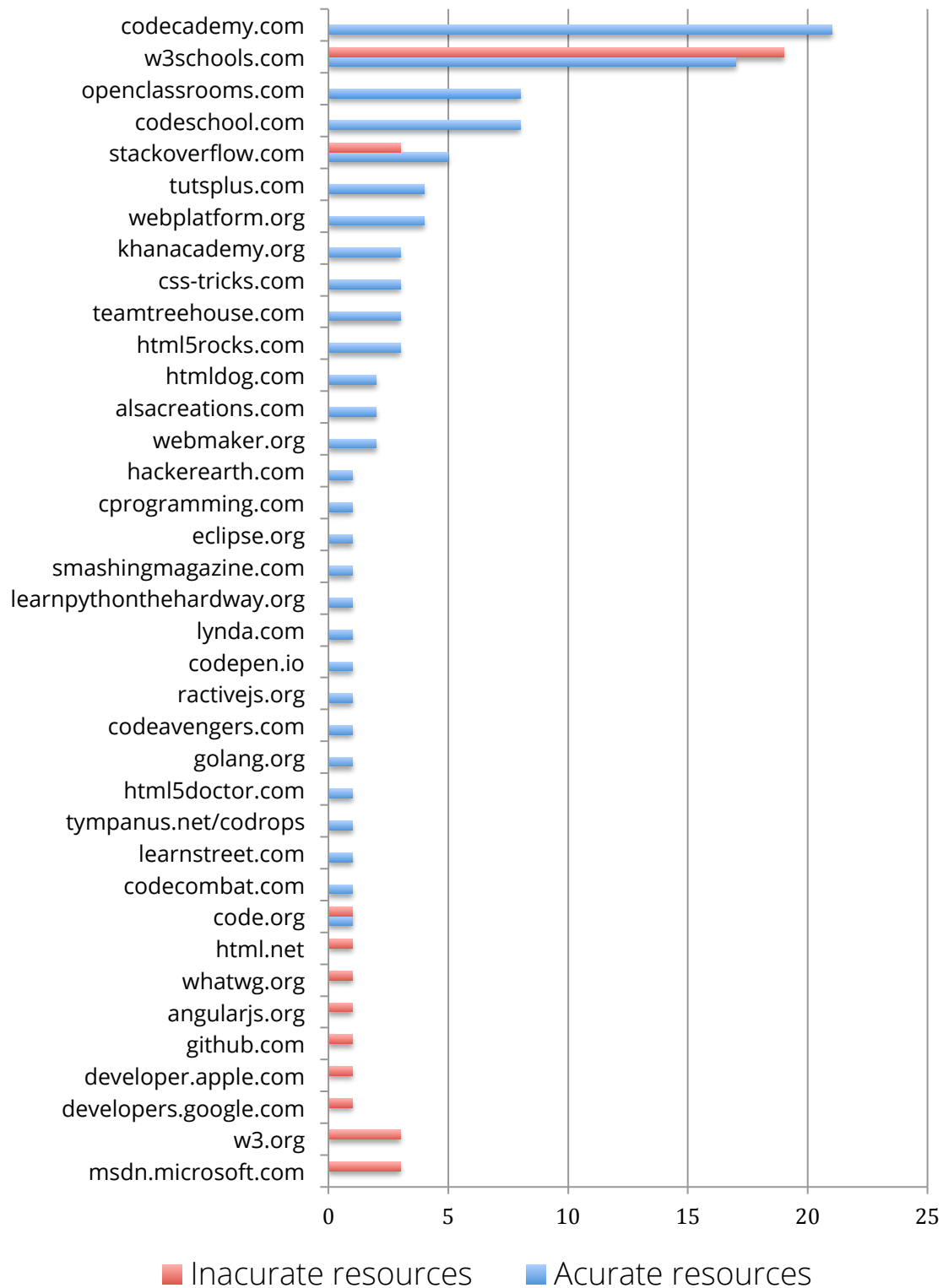
- *"Beginners often look for answer instead of articles."*
- *"how to assemble [APIs and language features] into something useful."*
- *"which language is the most useful to be learnt for me (Why?) and what for"*

## Misc.

- *"Everything is made/explained for Linux/Mac users. [...] Windows [...] is a Nightmare to setup."*
- *"a curated set of links"*
- *"make the home page more beginner friendly"*
- *"It's hard to understand translated articles, MDN should have articles that are mainly written in those languages by local experts"*

## About other web sites

We asked for a list of third party resources in order to figure what is thoughtful for beginners and what is not. *Note: answer spotting MDN were not taken into account.*



## Controversial resources

It worth noting that among all the resources provide by the responders, they have given two, which seams very controversial.

### W3Schools

*W3Schools* is in majority considered a bad resource for beginner, essentially because of its misleading content. It is considered outdated and promoting bad practices.

However, the way *W3Schools* is handling its structure and learning tools has quite some traction. The entire wording is clearly made for beginners with easy strait-to-the-point English, trying to avoid any jargon. The content structure is easy to understand and to follow right from the homepage to the whole sub content. And last but not least, its live editable examples are definitely a top-notch feature for beginners.

### StackOverflow

As a place to ask any question, *StackOverflow* is mostly considered a good resource for beginners who need efficient and immediately usable answers to their questions.

However, as the answers are essentially made by average and expert developers, they lack of context to understand the reason and requirements underneath. So it can mislead beginner and unintentionally promote bad practice.

## Common blessing

*Codecademy* reach a clear consensus as the best resource to learn and was suggest by 30% of the responders. The various feedbacks regarding that resource and the others spot the following points to be the most important things for a good learning web sites:

- Progressive, clearly structured courses
- Possibility to fiddle with live editable examples
- Interactive exercises
- Video contents
- Possibility to ask questions

## Common issues

On the other hand, there are some flows that must be avoided at all cost. The points of attention raised in that survey was:

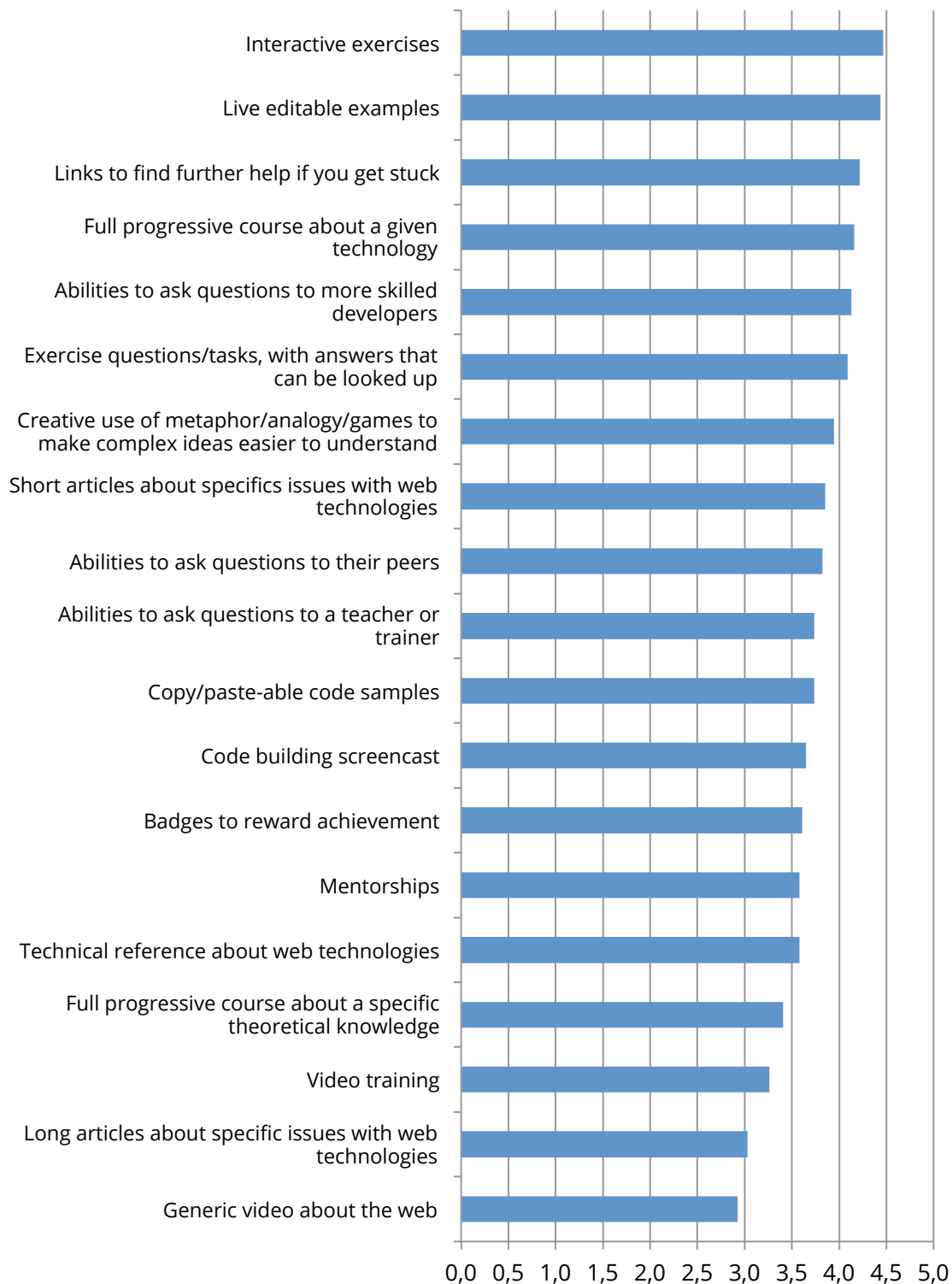
- Avoid out dated content
- Even if learning requires simplification, never promote bad practices
- Do not provide solution without explaining why it's a good solution
- Avoid unsorted, bloated content
- Avoid to be over technical



## Learning features

As we are considering some features to improve MDN, the responders were asked to rate them from 1 (not important for beginners) to 5 (absolutely needed for beginners).

### Most rated features



## Other features to consider

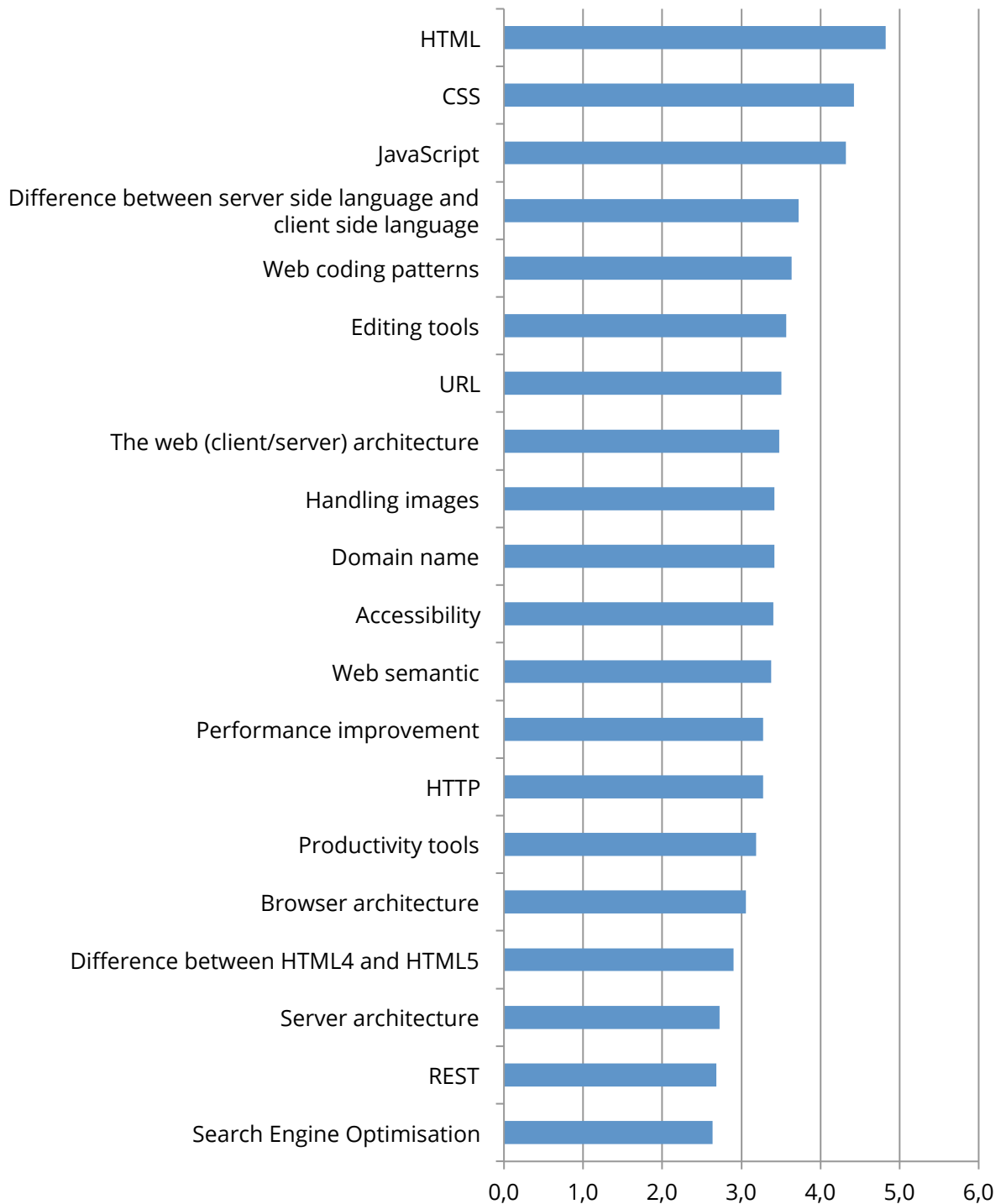
When asked, the responders also suggest that we consider the following features:

- Gamification: Badges, Skills progression, etc.
- “How-To” and practical tutorials to solve real world issues
- MCQs and testing questions with detailed and explained answers
- Content racking/vote by users
- Organizing teaching/learning events

## Knowledge

We also asked the responders to rate some knowledge regarding the web from 1 (not important) to 5 (should be learn first).

### Suggested order of learning



## Other knowledge to consider

When asked, the responders also suggest the following knowledge that worth learning early (if not first):

- Network (TCP/IP)
- Third party “useful” library
- CSS Preprocessors
- Some server side languages (Ruby, Python, PHP, Java, etc.)
- Other standards (DOM, WebGL, etc.)
- How to work without an HTTP server
- Specificity of mobile development
- Responsive design
- How to push a web site online.

## Point of difficulties

Responders were asked what were the hard parts they faced while learning the web technologies themselves. Those are points we must keep in mind while building our content for beginners:

- The amount of technologies and tools to learn
- Contradictory and outdated information
- The lack of straight forward process to build a web site
- Misleading practices
- Cross browser issues
- The rate new technologies and concepts rise into the platform
- Overwhelming deep technical concepts
- English (for non native English speakers)

## About responders

In order to better understand the answers we asked a few questions about the responders.

To the question “*When did you start learning the web?*” we get two kinds of answers: a date or an age. The answers indicate that the population of responders was well balanced between season web developers (since 1995) to real beginners (since 2013), and that the most part were quite young (before 25) when they started learning.

## How did they learn the web?

They used various ways to learn:

- From books
- Through online resources
- By building a web site
- Mostly by themselves for the older ones,
- but some at schools or through online course for the younger
- Use of “view source” and from peers

But ultimately, their main way to learn was by “*getting their hand dirty*”. It appears that the structuration of the learning of the web is very recent and still need to be improved.

## What were their motivations to learn the web?

**Note:** *Even if we tried to spread the survey at large, it worth considering that the answers to that question can be quite tainted by the way Mozilla is considering the web as many of the responders are Mozillans.*

- To communicate ideas
- To share information
- For professional reasons (Earning a living, running a business, etc.)
- To build something (web site, web app, game, etc.)
- Curiosity
- To have some fun
- Because it’s the tool of the future
- To express themselves
- To help some friends
- To understand how it works