

Thoughts on teaching OO concepts to COBOL programmers

Source: <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/Cobol/comp.lang.cobol/2008-04/msg00149.html>

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 - *Date:* Fri, 11 Apr 2008 01:02:32 -0400
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I've recently found myself tasked with teaching a few dozen IBM mainframe COBOL programmers the concepts of object oriented programming. No specific language syntax, just the concepts. These lucky few dinos will find themselves mixing their COBOL back-ends with standard Java apps, J2EE apps, C# apps, or Ruby apps.

My specific goal is not to teach any language specific thing (though I might use Java for the examples and kill the J2SE, J2EE and C# syntax with a single invocation of the `stone.throw()` method). My purpose is to teach the simple "what is an object", "what is inheritance", "what is an interface", "what is encapsulation", et al, so that they have the proper frame of mind to accept the language specific training that will be offered.

I was hoping that some of you that have COBOL experience AND Object Oriented experience might share your thoughts on what was helpful in the learning process. Of course, that includes what was not helpful as well. We often learn more from our mistakes than our successes.

For example: I've ruled out the traditional "shape" example to explain polymorphism -- you know, the one where you have a "shape" base class with a virtual "draw()" method -- and a "square", "triangle" and "circle" subclass. I ruled it out because some practicing COBOL programmers (for decades even) have never put a graphic onto a screen, only text.

(So my simple example went from "shapes" to the "animal" class with the `speak()` method -- you know the dog subclass says "bark" and the pig subclass says "oink" and the sheep subclass says "baa means no".)

But I would really appreciate hearing about your experiences going from COBOL to any OO style of programming. What were your pitfalls, what was helpful, etc.

One thing I would really love is if you have good textbook recommendations. If "The Idiots Guide to OO for Cobol Dummies" was the best thing since sliced bread, please let me know, I might go buy a few cases and make the author a slightly happier person.

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Thanks in advance to all who respond. Either via newsgroup or to zberger at knology.net. I really appreciate your thoughts.

Regards,

Joe Zitzelberger