

“To **#comment** or not?”

A data-driven look at conflicting attitudes towards commenting and documentation.

**DEVOPS
DAYS**



the conference that brings
development and operations together



@veronica_hanus #devopsdays

AFTER DEBUGGING FOR 10 HOURS...



Don't Repeat
Yourself! Keep
it D.R.Y.!

Undocumented
code is
unusable!



Comments as a learner's first documentation

Purpose of comments:

- **Summary**: authorship, purpose
- **Describe** functions
- **Clarify** “tricky code”/unclear decisions

Allowing:

- **Easier stand-alone doc-writing!**
- **A “notepad”**
- **Tell why!**

the wall is currently open closed

Hours today (Saturday, April 13th, 2019) ?

There are no hours posted at this time, check back soon!

```

24 def is_wall_open(): # just tells if "open" is lit up
25     # target open with selector
26     status_element = soup.select("#status .open .name")[0]['class']
27     # search for class find or findall (BS4) find attr
28     # specify what class to return (check type), check contents of string
29     # returns <span class="name dim">open</span>
30     #status_element.attrs
31     #class_status_element = status_element['class']
32     #print(class_status_element) # 'u' means unicode, not string
33     #return class_status_element
34     # should I escape the u or just love that it's there?
35     # oh, it's a list. thank god.
36     # use in for Boolean
37     return "dim" not in status_element
    
```

Best practices we can (usually) get behind

Always!

Docstrings should
have inputs, outputs,
transformation

Outdated comments
== lies

Too much is too much

Maybe?

Code is the “how”,
comments are the “why”

Don't Waste Everyone's
Time (WET)

Line-by-line show lack of
understanding

@veronica_hanus

fb.com/programmingjokes/
NERD 4 LIFE .studio



Carter Wickstrom

@carterwickstrom

Follow



90% of all code comments:



8:14 AM - 3 Jul 2018

2,775 Retweets 7,102 Likes



@veronica_hanus

**“JUST CODE
BETTER”**

Thanks, people of the Internet!

Getting answers is hard!

When are comments “too much”, and when are they not enough? [closed]



This has been discussed to death.

23

I'll just point you to [Jeff Atwood's wonderful post](#)

[Subtext] HEY Newbie! Your struggle BORES ME &
shows you are a bad programmer!
KTHXBYE



Diane

@DianeCodedIt

Follow



[#100DaysOfCode](#) Day 64: I dont really know wtf I've done tonight. I committed a lot of stuff to git.

Something, something Javascript. Oh! And a twitch chatbot courtesy of [@dev_coffee](#) tutorial 😊

[#CodeNewbie](#)

1:50 AM - 9 Feb 2019

10 Retweets 42 Likes



Comments can:

- Label
- Questions
- Notes
- Outline
- Storage
- References
- Support overwhelmed learners

@veronica_hanus

1



@veronica_hanus

Conflicting results & looking deeper



Veronica Hanus @PyTennessee #P...

@veronica_hanus

Thinking abt how a new programmer's commenting style evolves as they become more proficient / begin to look at other people's code.

As you were getting started (whether w/ tutorials or in class), did you create a comment for every/every other line?

[#CodeNewbie](#) [#100DaysOfCode](#)

44% Yes comments >= codelines

56% No, DRY from day 1

9 votes • Final results

10:35 AM - 25 May 2018

2 Retweets 1 Like



Short answer:

- Current/recent use: Comment uncertainty, Function-level comments, Clarification, Unused code, Other
- When comments added: Scoping & planning, As functions written, Pairing, As I learn people don't understand, Clean-up
- How long programming?
- How long professionally?
- Path to programming?

Agree/Disagree:

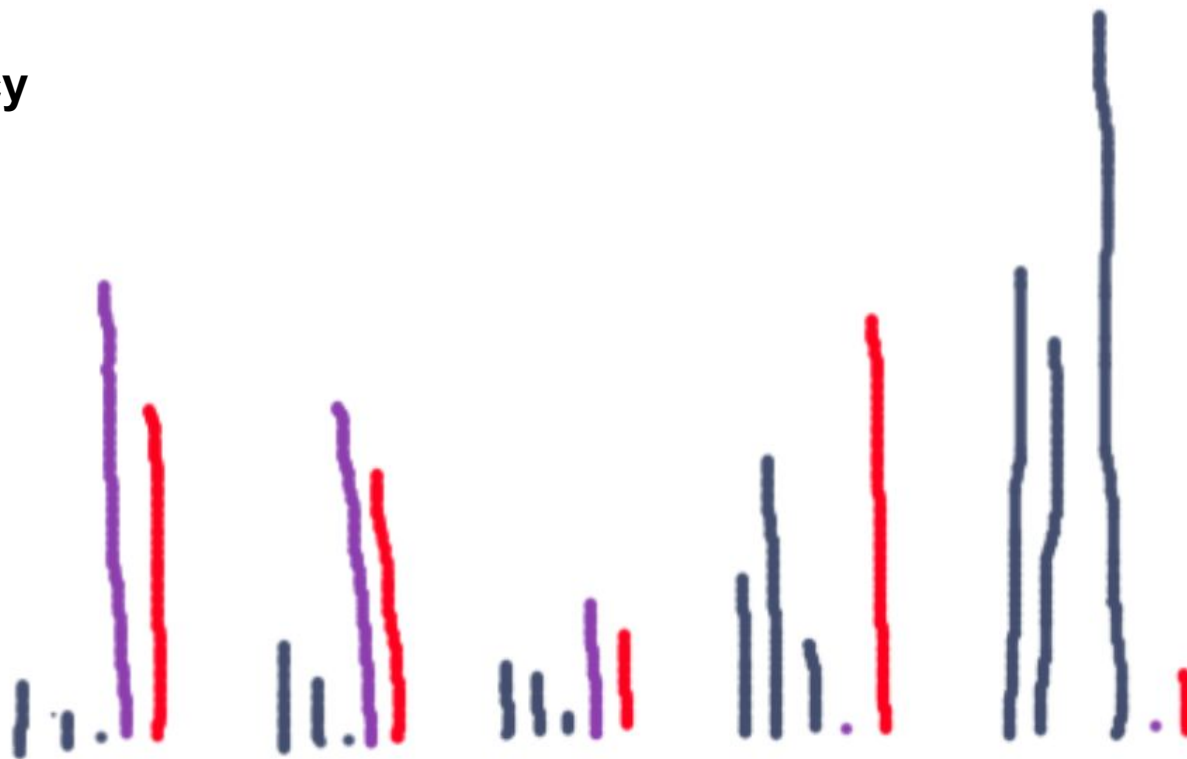
- Comments:
 - Help me remember what my code does
 - Clarify my thinking
 - Help me learn
 - Save time
 - Delete before projects is shared
- Uncomfortable writing
- Yes to function-level, no in-line
- Clear code is self-documenting

@veronica_hanus

Higher
frequency

NO

YES



@veronica_hanus

comments clutter code

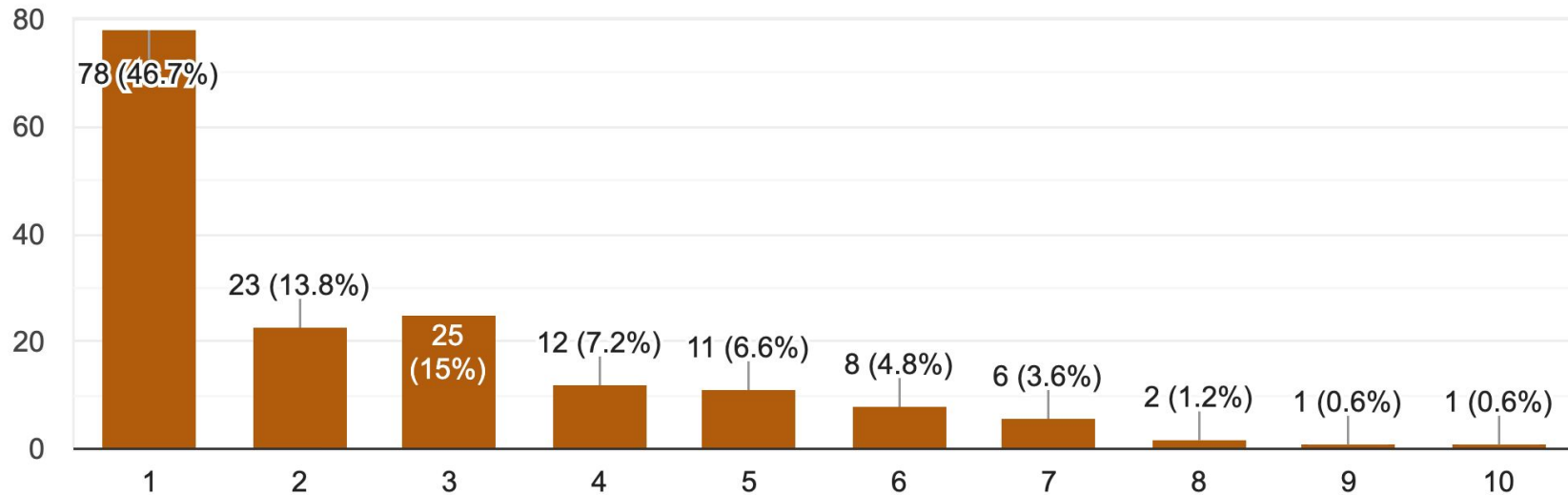
I used to really want comments, but I've found really well written code doesn't really need it. Docstrings help generate API documentation, though, so I'm coming around.

I didn't write comments as much when I first started off because I wasn't confident that what I would say would be useful, but that's not true! When I realized that wasn't true, I started to write more.

I used to comment code unused code. My lack of versioning skills I guess.

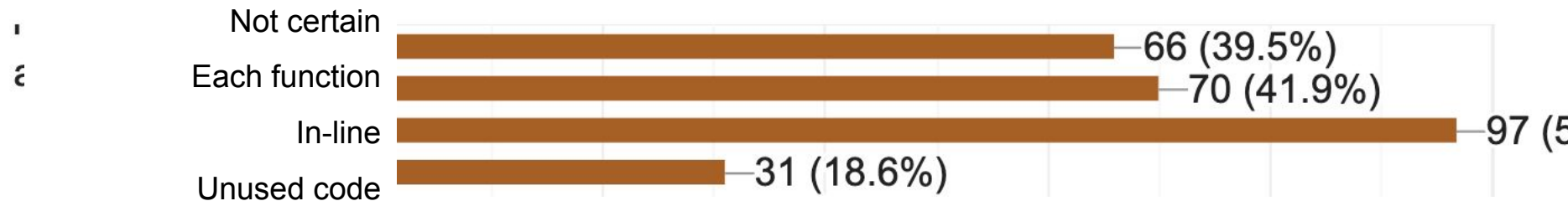
Comments are helpful to an individual contributor building a project, but should be deleted before the project is shared

167 responses



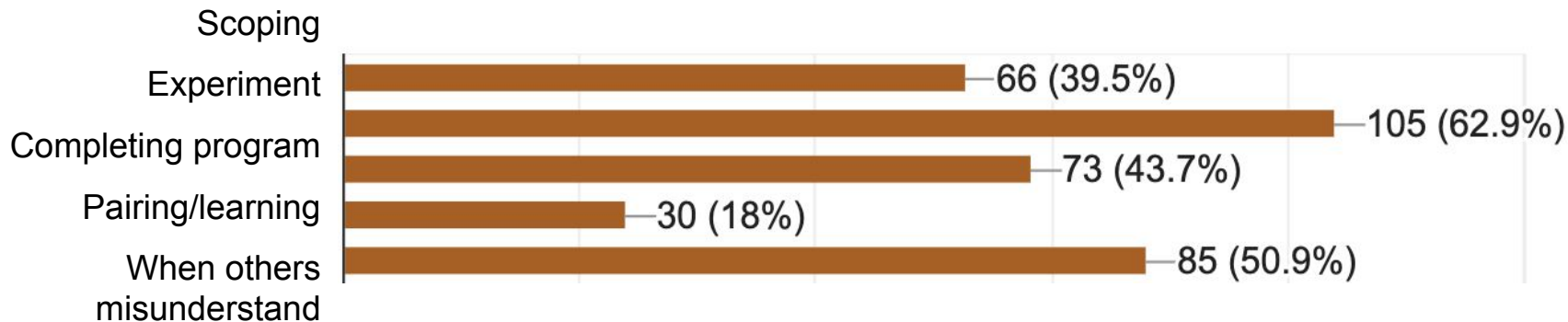
What best describes your current/recent use of comments?

167 responses



When do you add comments?

167 responses



“A global patchwork of Github & Gitlab repositories don’t just contain software -- they contain our shared understanding & collaboration around common interests & problem solving.”

Jono Bacon in his forward to “The Business Value of Developer Relations”

Comments teach
us about
ourselves.

What can we do?

- Remember **our overwhelmed learner**
- Advise **current them**, not future them!
- Suggest **a deep dive & reading others' code?**

What can we say? What do they need?

- Someone is learning their attitudes toward documentation ***from you***

Rethink comments

- Comments == docs?
- Comments teach us about ourselves



Phil Cohen

@philltopia

Follow



going to start a tumblr for "great ASCII art diagrams found in code"

```
// The objects in memory have a relationship like:
//
// ```text
//     SimplePyBuf<T>
//     +-----+
//     | Py_buffer |
//     | +-----+ |
//     | | *buf -- points to --> |
//     | | len |
//     | +-----+ |
//     +-----+
//
// Rust-managed | Python-managed
//
// Raw Data      Python object
// +-----+     +-----+
// |           |     |
// |           |     |
// |           |     |
// |           |     |
// +-----+     +-----+
//
// <-- owns -- _ |
```

11:40 AM - 25 Apr 2018

6 Likes



I **tweet** at @veronica_hanus


Non-tweeters 🙌 me@veronicahanus.com




Survey: <http://bit.ly/comment-use>

Video & Slides 

<http://veronicahanus.com/talks>

🙌🙌 **Write the comments you wish you had!**

 **Each of you** for coming,
DevOpsDays Chicago team for
the opportunity, & **the ~170**
internet-folk who have shared
their “comments on comments” <3

 *Your company recruiting a*
DevRel or Dev Advocate? 
 @veronica_hanus 