How do I rock with C++?
by Brad Rippe

Programming is like learning a whole new person when you first start a relationship. Are we compatible? Do we understand each other? Can we resolve issues in an easy and productive manner without destroying the relationship? Now imagine your new relationship with someone from another country where you don’t speak the language. You have to think in terms of her language and initially this isn’t going to be easy. But with time and just like young Luke Skywalker, you too may learn the ways of a C++ Jedi.

Here’s the bad news. Unlike Luke, the force won’t help you with C++ or any other programming language for that matter. As far as the language goes (I’m not going to lie to you), programming takes time, dedication, creativity, and the ability to view things in a light that not everyone sees or understands. Simply reading a book won’t help you here. You’re going to have to spend late nights, just you and your compiler, debating your instructions to the computer with the compiler. I might add that your compiler will win most of the debates at this point. So, you’re going to have to be a good listener, and hear what she’s telling you, even though you don’t speak the language yet. Dinner and a movie aren’t going to persuade her to be a little more understanding of your buggy code. Nope! Not even flowers will help here.

Then how is this relationship going to work, you ask? Well you’re going to have to spend a lot of time and attention to your new companion. At times she’s going to beat around the bush and won’t tell you exactly what’s bothering her. It will be your job to understand the some times encrypted messages you’ll receive, even though it seems that you’ve shown up with flowers, candy, and the best of intentions and nothing could go wrong, right? There is going to be a lot of repetition. It takes time and then a little more time to understand some of the complexities of the new language. Even when you think you have a full understanding of a concept, you may find that your initial view of how it works wasn’t entirely accurate.

Programming is hard work, time consuming and, at times, frustrating. However, on the other hand, it can be extremely rewarding. Imagine that you have designed some of the core algorithms for Google’s Search Engine, the next mySpace, or the software that runs and monitors every Porsche 911 Turbo. Every time you see someone driving by in that car, you know that you’re one of the few that understands what is making their car function and what provides them with much pleasure. Even better, imagine you’re one of the core developers of the most widely used software that allows surgeons the ability to do their jobs and help so many others. What you imagine has no limits. Now that’s power!

So as you read this and prepare yourself for this new relationship, you have to keep in mind, this isn’t your typical process of learning, read the book, memorize, and take a test. As I mentioned, you can’t
read the book and do the exercises and expect to master the language. You’re going to have to
experiment, arrange, and rearrange code to really appreciate the power of such a language. Simply
getting by isn’t how I will approach this process and not how I’ll expect you to either. You’re going to
have to get your hands dirty, get under the hood, pull the transmission out, rip the radiator off, knock it
of its blocks and pull it all back together.

How do you rock at C++? It takes time, patience, dedication, and hard work. Even then, there’s really no
guarantee that you will rock, but there never are any guarantees. However, with passion, desire, and a
lot of hard work, it’s almost undeniable. This is where you take over, and take a little control of your
new found acquaintance. You’ve already started a change, and I’d like to be the one to tell you what
amazing things you’re going to create and the new software people are going to experience because of
you, but only you know that and only time will tell. Remember this is the beginning of you’re
experience. There’s no time like the present! So, get to it!