

COS 301 Fall 2011 Prelim 2
Take-home Essay Question (10 points)
Due Tuesday Nov 22 in Class

Cite references if you use them. This essay question is an exercise in advancing an argument so it is quite appropriate to answer without citing references.

Pay particular attention to writing well-structured paragraphs with a clear topic sentence and supporting material.

[1] stated:

“At Dartmouth College in 1964, educator John G. Kemeny and computer scientist Thomas E. Kurtz invented Basic, a simple but mighty programming language intended to democratize computing and bring it to the entire undergraduate population. With Basic even schoolkids—the young Bill Gates among them— could begin to write their own programs.”

Basic remains well and alive today in spite of numerous remarks such as the famous remark by Edsger Dijkstra:

“It is practically impossible to teach good programming style to students that have had prior exposure to BASIC; as potential programmers they are mentally mutilated beyond hope of regeneration.”

It has been characterized in the Mother Tongues computer language chart as the “Rodney Dangerfield of programming languages” (can’t get no respect!).

Answer **one only** of A, B, C:

- A. Argue for or against BASIC as a useful first programming language.
- B. Argue for or against “the democratization of computing.”
- C. Argue that another language such as Logo or Alice is better designed than Basic and can be more effective than Basic for teaching programming.

[1] M. Campbell-Kelly. "Origin of computing," Scientific American, Sept 2009, p.67.