

What a front of the front end developer brings to your team

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What will I talk about today?

- What is a front of the front end developer, and how is it different from a back of the front end developer?
- Why front of the front end skills matter in today's web development world
- How to convince your team that a front of the front end developer belongs on your team
- How front of the front end developers can work with other members of a team to build a great website

Some definitions...

**What is a front of the
front end developer,
anyway?**

A front of the front end developer..

- Keeps up to date with CSS
- Focuses on semantic HTML
- Writes presentational Javascript such as show/hide toggles and animations
- Things of accessibility from start to end
- Knows when to use CSS instead of Javascript to solve a problem

**Now, what is a back of
the front end developer?**

A back of the front end developer...

- Focuses on Javascript frameworks such as React or Vue
- Is more knowledgeable in build tool setup using Webpack or Vite
- Writes and implements APIs for others on the team to consume

**Well, what about full
stack developers?**

A full stack developer...

- Can handle the responsibilities of both a front of the front end developer AND a back of the front end developer!
- Is equally proficient at both back and front end technologies
- Is a magical unicorn that can do it all



Not so fast...

In my experience, “full-stack developers”
always translates to “programmers who can do
frontend code because they have to and it’s
‘easy’.” - Brad Frost, “[Full-Stack Developers](#)”

Why front of the front end skills matter

Important skills we offer

- Modern CSS
- Semantic HTML
- Accessibility knowledge
- Presentational Javascript

CSS

- Front of the front end developers keep up with the latest and greatest in CSS, leading to more performant code and smaller file sizes:
 - Modern CSS such as `text-wrap: balance` ([Codepen](#))
 - Logical properties are a more concise way to write directional styles in CSS
 - Uses Flexbox and CSS Grid when building layouts
 - Implements basic transitions and animations using CSS when possible
 - ... and more!

Semantic HTML

- Front of the front end developers know what HTML element to use in each scenario
 - When to use a button vs a link
 - Details and summary elements
 - Popover API
 - The dialog element

Accessibility

- Front of the front end developers know the best ways to ensure accessibility when building a site:
 - Building a button using the button element instead of a div with ARIA roles and a Javascript onclick ([Codepen](#))
 - Knowing when to use or not use ARIA in general
 - Building color palettes that follow color contrast guidelines
 - Tests sites using multiple accessibility tools and manual testing such as keyboard navigation and screen readers

Presentational Javascript

- Front of the front end developers know how to write presentational Javascript to enhance a site:
 - Writing vanilla Javascript toggles to show/hide navigation dropdowns
 - Using the web animations API to implement transitions and animations that can't be done using CSS... yet!
 - Implementing tooltips and modals (also ensuring all of these are accessible, of course!)

To summarize: front of the front end developers add a LOT to a team. Our skills matter to the success of a project.

How to convince your team that our skills matter

The importance of our skillset

- Our knowledge of accessibility and semantic HTML
- In depth knowledge of new CSS techniques can save developers time and can easily add a more immersive experience
- Collaboration with many members of a team to build a successful site

Accessibility and semantic HTML

- The [WHO estimates](#) that 15% of the world population (1.3 billion) live with some form of disability, so it's important to build sites that people with visual, auditory, vestibular disorders, and others can use the sites we build.
- The [WebAIM Million from 2024](#) notes that 95.9% of home pages had detected WCAG 2 failures, most from color contrast issues.
 - ARIA usage has increased 15% just in the past year, and home pages with ARIA averaged 32% more detected errors than pages without.

Why is this important?

Why accessibility is important

- People with disabilities use the web as much as people without disabilities, so they shouldn't be left out of the website experience. The web is for everyone so it should be built for everyone.
- Not making your site accessible can have a legal impact. Lawsuits against inaccessible websites have been increasing in recent years. This shouldn't be the main reason to make your site accessible, but it's important.¹

1. [“What is digital accessibility?”](#), web.dev

Why accessibility is important

- A front of the front end developer would work to eliminate accessibility issues such as color contrast, empty links, missing form input labels, and other issues as much as possible.
- A front of the front end developer would also know when to use ARIA and when to use semantic HTML to build a component, avoiding extraneous ARIA which might cause more accessibility problems than help.

Upcoming CSS techniques

- Using anchor positioning and popover API to create dropdown navigation ([Codepen](#))
- `interpolate-size` instead of the Web Animations API to animate the `<details>` element ([Codepen](#))
- Relative color syntax, an easier way to implement colors in your design system using less code ([Codepen](#))
- `margin-trim` ([Codepen](#))
- View transitions and scroll driven animations
- `<scope>` can reduce duplicate code and help avoid style leaks to different components

Why is this important?

Upcoming CSS techniques

- Knowing how to write CSS using the latest technologies can save coding time and reduce the size of your CSS files
- Utilizing new CSS techniques for animation and transitions can make your site stand out, driving more traffic to your site
- New color techniques can help build design system colors faster, saving time when setting up your color system

Collaboration with your team

- Front of the front end developers have skillsets that complement other members of their team: Designers, back of the front end devs, and back end devs:
 - Some front of the front end developers also have experience in design, so they can assist designers in building Figma prototypes
 - Some may have back of the front end development experience, so they can step in and help with Javascript framework tweaks
 - Some may have backend development experience in a language such as PHP or Java, so they can help implement the front end design in a way that makes the most sense with the back end paradigm

Why is this important?

**Well, we'll get into
that...**

**How front of the front
end developers
collaborate with others**

How FEDs work with others

- The most important job of a front of the front end developer? Collaboration!
Front of the front end developers work well with:
 - Designers
 - Back of the front end developers
 - Back end developers
 - Project managers

Collaboration with designers

- Front of the front end developers collaborate effectively with designers in particular. Having a front of the front end developer work alongside a designer at the start of the project helps the development process later on, with the front end developer catching any discrepancies in the design that might not be possible or doable within a tight deadline.
- On the flip side, designers can bring new ideas to a front of the front end developer, assisting with transitions or animations that would make the website stand out.

Collaboration with back of the front end developers

- Front of the front end developers and back of the front end developers also work well together. Back of the front end developers can focus on setting up tooling, writing and configuring APIs, and writing the business logic, while the front of the front end developer makes sure the HTML the Javascript framework generates is semantic and accessible as well as writing any styles and adding any presentational Javascript that's needed.

Collaboration with back end developers

- Front of the front end developers collaborate effectively with back end developers as well. In a system such as Drupal, back end developers can build modules and write custom functions for front of the front end developers to pull in and implement in Twig templates.
- On the other hand, front of the front end developers can write the CSS needed in a custom module, leaving back end developers to focus on writing the PHP code needed for modules and other parts of the site.

Collaboration with project managers

- Front of the front end developers collaborate effectively with project managers because they can help with ticket creation, defining the definition of done by ensuring accessibility testing and visual regression testing satisfy the defined criteria.
- Front of the front end developers can also get involved with the project early on if possible, helping with the discovery process before they're brought onto the project.

In conclusion: front of the front end developers can be useful at every part of the project, beginning to end, and collaborate effectively with every member of the team.

Wrapping up...

Wrapping up

Front of the front end developers are an important part of every team:

- We have a unique skillset that integrates with the skillsets of other members of the team including CSS, HTML, and accessibility
- We bring value to your team by keeping up with the latest CSS, focusing on accessibility best practices, and writing semantic HTML for each area of the site
- We can effectively collaborate with other members of the team to build a great website, including designers, back of the front end developers, back end developers, and project managers

Further reading

- <https://benmyers.dev/blog/dont-use-aria-label-on-static-text-elements/>
- <https://blog.logrocket.com/styling-html-modern-css/>
- <https://css-tricks.com/the-great-divide/>
- <https://bradfrost.com/blog/post/front-of-the-front-end-and-back-of-the-front-end-web-development/>
- <https://css-tricks.com/what-makes-a-good-front-end-developer/>
- <https://alistapart.com/article/owning-the-role-of-the-front-end-developer/>
- <https://blog.jim-nielsen.com/2023/meaning-in-web-tech-stack-ordering/>
- <https://frontendmasters.com/blog/what-you-need-to-know-about-modern-css-spring-2024-edition/>
- <https://zellwk.com/blog/good-frontend-developer/>
- <https://web.dev/learn/accessibility/why/>
- <https://thinkdobecreate.com/articles/a-call-for-consensus-on-html-semantics/>



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Tada!

