codecademy
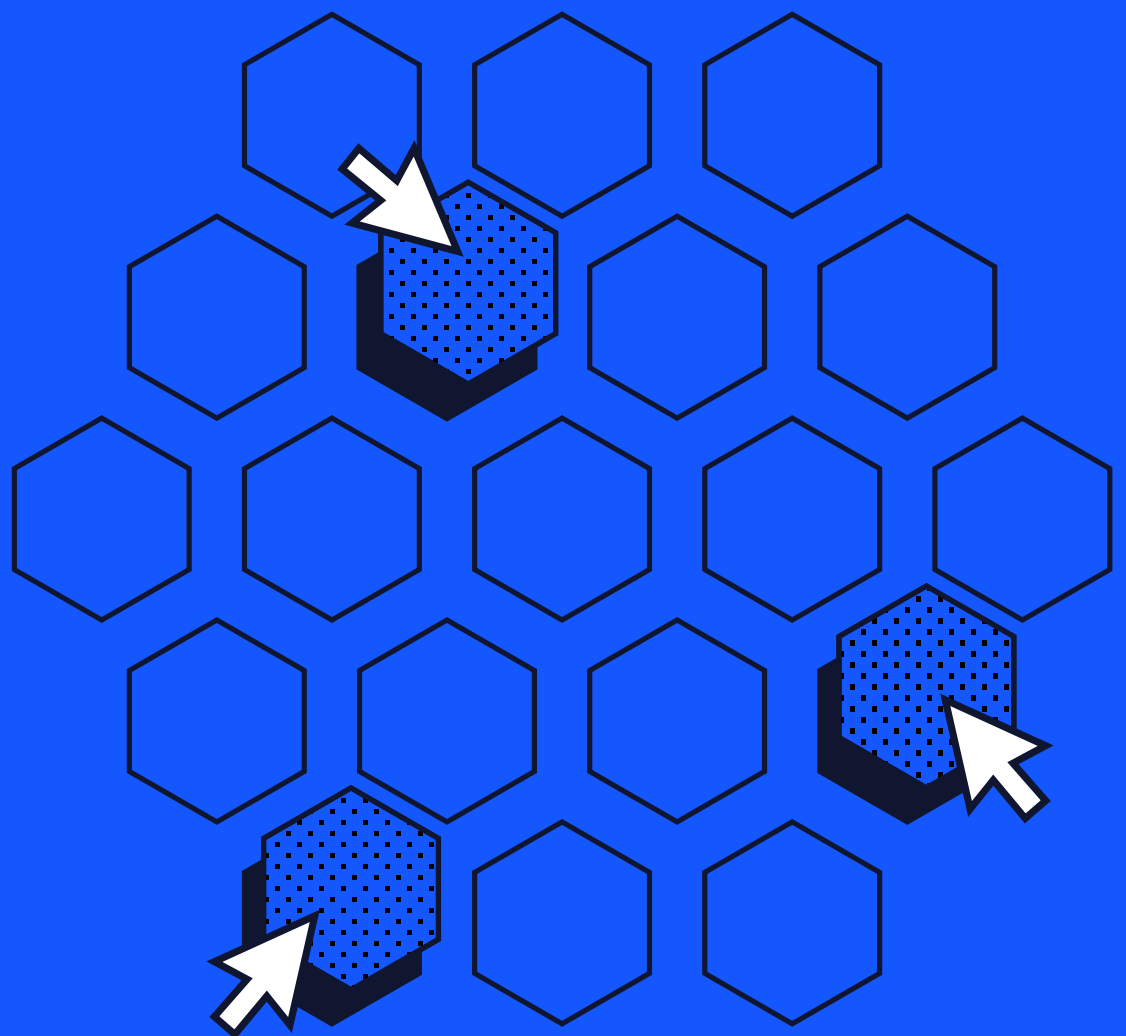
Breaking the barriers between technical and non-tech teams

How learning Python boosted collaboration and analytical skills for this team at The Motley Fool

The Motley Fool.

Every Wednesday at 5:00, a group of employees at The Motley Fool, a financial and investing advice company, comes together to review the latest Python topics they're learning through Codecademy.

They're a team of non-developers who wanted the ability to better communicate with the developers they collaborate with. They also saw the opportunity to make more informed decisions in their day-to-day work by growing their analytical skills.

So far, the team is making great strides. Here's how they got started and why they saw Codecademy as the best way to learn technical skills.

Why learn a new programming language?

The team at The Motley Fool is currently learning Python, but what motivated them to learn a new skill in the first place — and why Python? Johnnie Weathersby, Senior Business Intelligence (BI) Data Analyst/Architect and the Codecademy for Teams account manager, knows that in a digital world, it's important to keep up with the fast pace of change. He tells us:

" **I have a terrible fear of falling behind and I know that Python is one of those skill sets that everyone is starting to pick up and code with. I saw that it was one of the most sought-after skills in 2020. I also wanted to be conversant so I could talk to our devs and expand my own capabilities for analysis.**
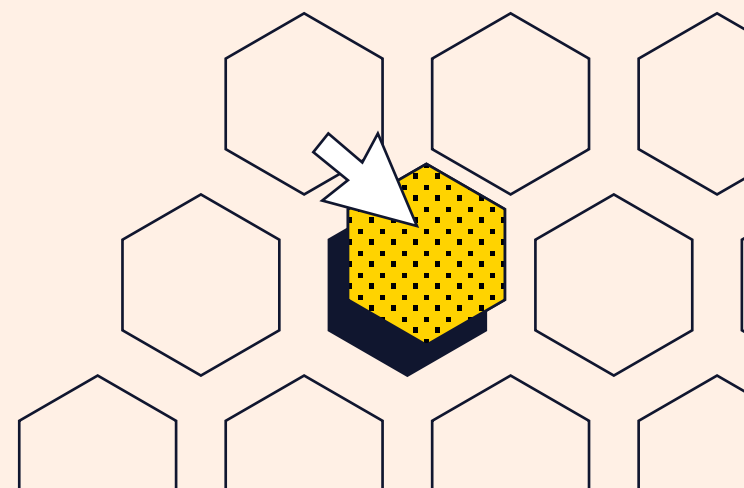
Gary Taylor, Senior BI Analyst, feels that the more you know, the better. He says:

> **For me, it was expanding my toolbox. When you look at the toolset that gets used in data science a lot, Python is way up there. Your critical data analysis tools — like Django, NumPy, or pandas — are all derived from Python.**

Robin Coulantes, who works in Finance, simply wanted to learn a new skill. She shares:

> **I had no Python, coding, or data back-ground. I wanted to see if I could apply it to my job and see if I like doing Python.**

Although each person had their own motivation for learning Python, everyone shared the desire to learn in an interactive, hands-on way, which led Johnnie to Codecademy for Teams.

Choosing Codecademy
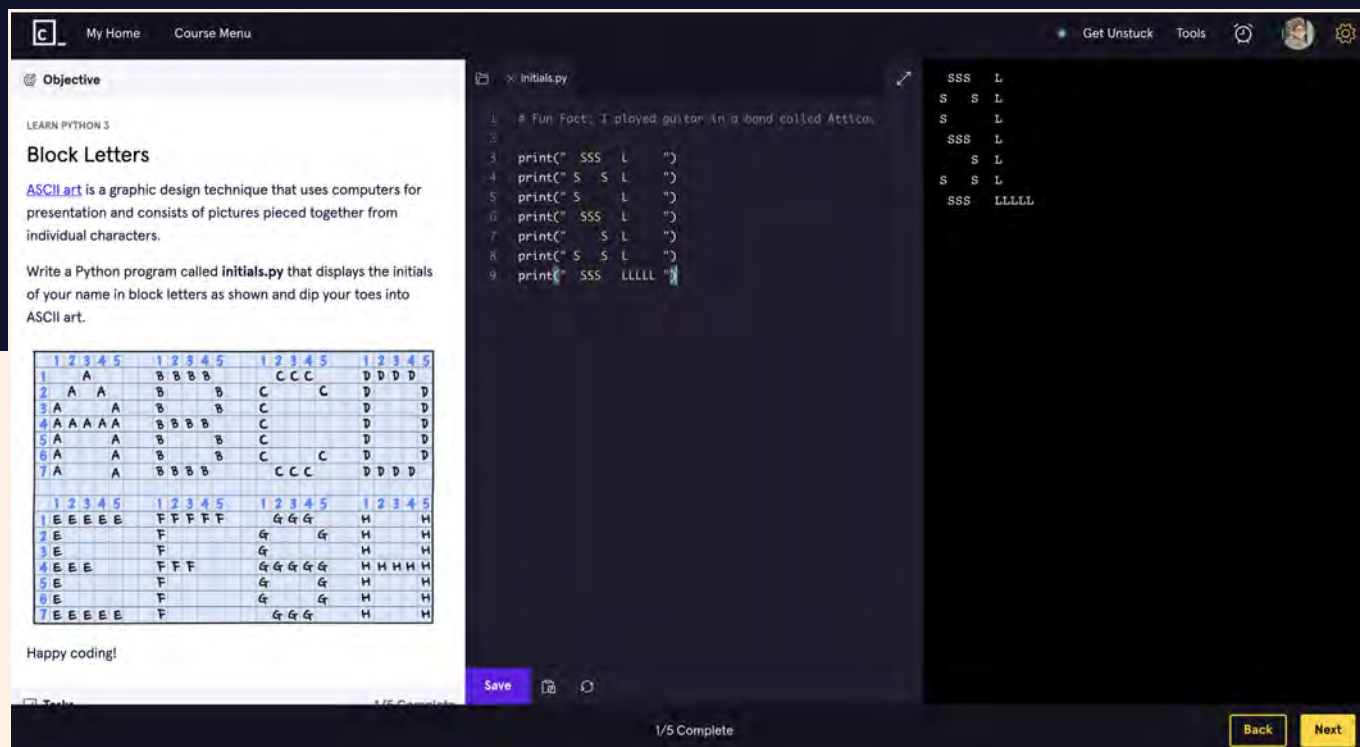
Prior to signing up for Codecademy, the team experimented with learning Python through other platforms, but their experience fell short. Other platforms taught only through presentations — they lacked the interactive, hands-on learning that Codecademy offers. In fact, the ability to code in an interface was the biggest selling point for the team. Hannah Westberg, BI Analyst, shares:

"

We could actually read something and then practice it right away and get feedback on it. The other platforms were more theoretical and expected you to go figure out how to do things in your own code editor.

The team also preferred Codecademy because the course material had the breadth and depth they were looking for, while other platforms had gaps in their curriculum. They also appreciated how the courses were organized to offer step-by-step guidance. Johnnie explains:

> " **I like the structured approach. I like knowing that you're working towards an end project and having the modules and syllabus clearly laid out. That organization is really helpful in picking up a coding language.**

The Motley Fool encourages their people to learn and dedicates budget for personal development, so Johnnie proposed Codecademy for Teams to Tom Connor, People Team Manager. He was immediately on board. As the company's former VP of Software Development, Tom understood exactly why the other learning platforms didn't quite hit the mark. He shares:

**" I know from the past that for learning technical skills, more specific training tends to be the best. I like that Codecademy offers more boutique learning.**

Once Johnnie got budget approval for Codecademy for Teams, he decided to take things a step further. Rather than hand out licenses and have people learn on their own, he organized cohorts as a way to boost every learner's chance of success.
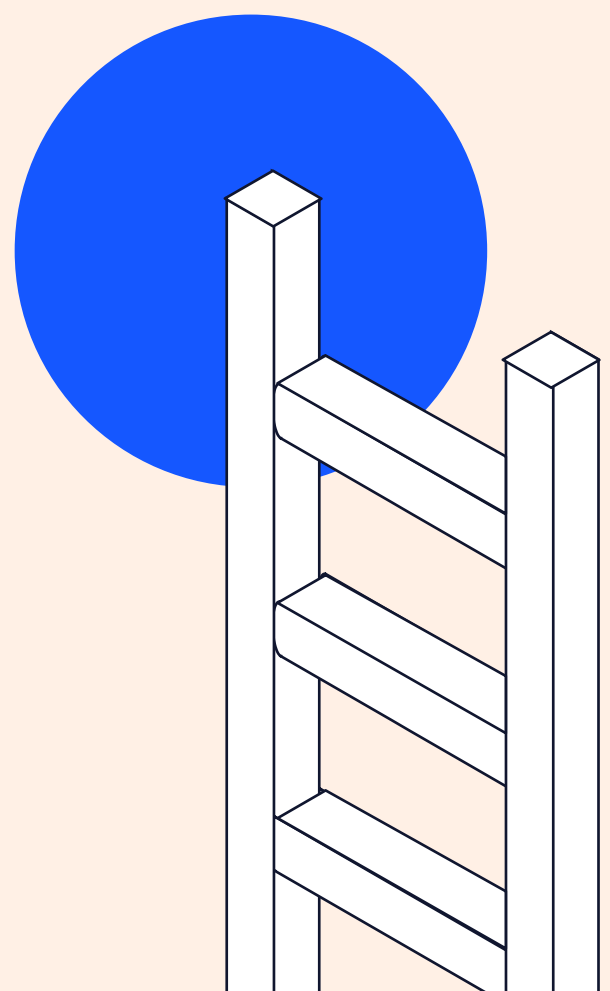
Learning Python as a team
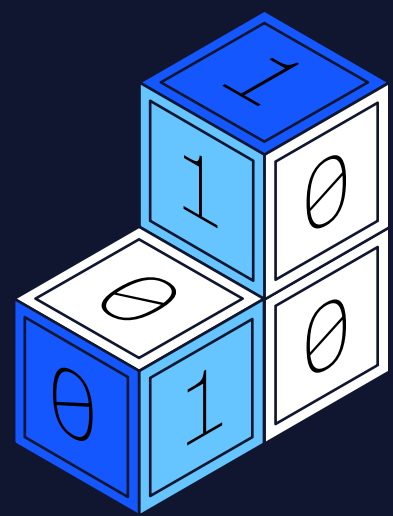
Johnnie started by taking the syllabus for the Codecademy Python course and assigning weekly review meetings for each segment, taking care to allot more time around holidays and for challenging topics.

During each meeting, the group goes through the assigned lesson, including some of the sample projects. People share tips and are encouraged to walk others through how they solved a problem.

Python Syntax — 33%

The first step in this path will be learning about Python 3 syntax. This is the set of rules that allows us to execute a Python file.

Cheatsheet | Practice Pack

| ✓ | Lesson | **Hello World** |
| ✓ | Quiz | Hello World |
| ⊗ | Project | Receipts for Lovely Loveseats |

Johnnie also recruited some of the company's developers to get involved. They act as mentors to learners and join the weekly meetings to help answer questions and give feedback.

The meetings help learners set a pace for working through the material while providing a sense of accountability, which has been the biggest benefit of participating in a cohort for Gary:

" The nice thing about doing it in a group is there's some accountability. You don't want to let the group down. You don't want to show up being the guy that doesn't know what's going on or didn't finish that day. The group was a strong motivator.

Outside of the weekly meetings, there's ongoing support through the team's dedicated "Python Homies" Slack channel of nearly 50 people, which includes a mix of learners and developers. This is where learners can ask questions, access meeting recaps, and — perhaps most importantly — get the encouragement to push through to the finish line.
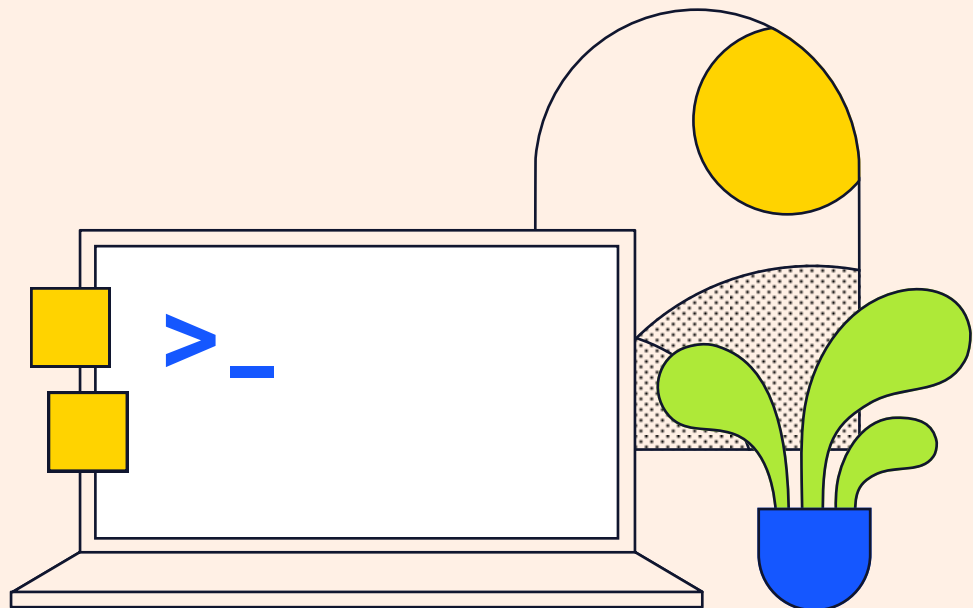
For Johnnie, the connection and engagement that's transpired among this larger group has been the most exciting result of the cohort approach. He tells us:

" Our devs know a lot and they love talking about what they do and teaching people. This has given them a great opportunity to share what they know and for them to interact with us.

I love seeing the community that has built up around this group of people.
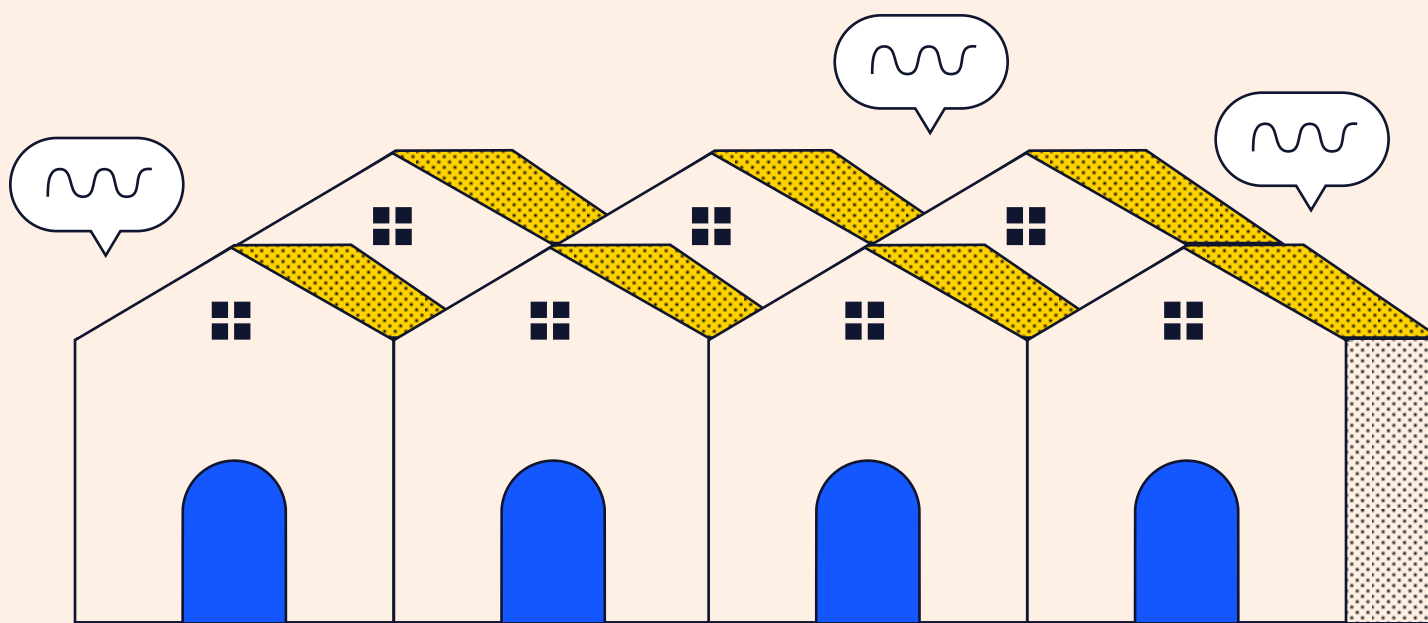
So what happens when a cohort finishes a course? Some learners move on to a different language in Codecademy, some go through the course again for reinforcement, and others apply the knowledge to independent or work projects. The possibilities are endless.

The benefits of learning Python

... and the benefits of simply learning

Learning with a team and through an interactive platform like Codecademy has been the winning combination for those who struggled to absorb Python before. Hannah tells us:

" **I tried to learn Python off and on for a couple of years. This is the first time I feel like I've made some breakthroughs.**

Johnnie had a similar experience and is already starting to benefit from making sense of Python:

> " **This has been the first time I've been able to successfully retain Python. I can remember the syntax now, I can remember the functions now. It hammered it into my head better than other times I tried to learn it with videos or books. I'm more confident and I feel more understanding of our devs. I can have better, more contextual conversations with them now.**

While some of the team will apply the concepts they learned right away — Gary and Hannah are tackling pandas, next — others, like Robin, are benefitting just from going through the learning process. She says:

> " **It was just nice to learn a new skill. I got the basics of it and I'm going to do another round of it because it is so new to me.**
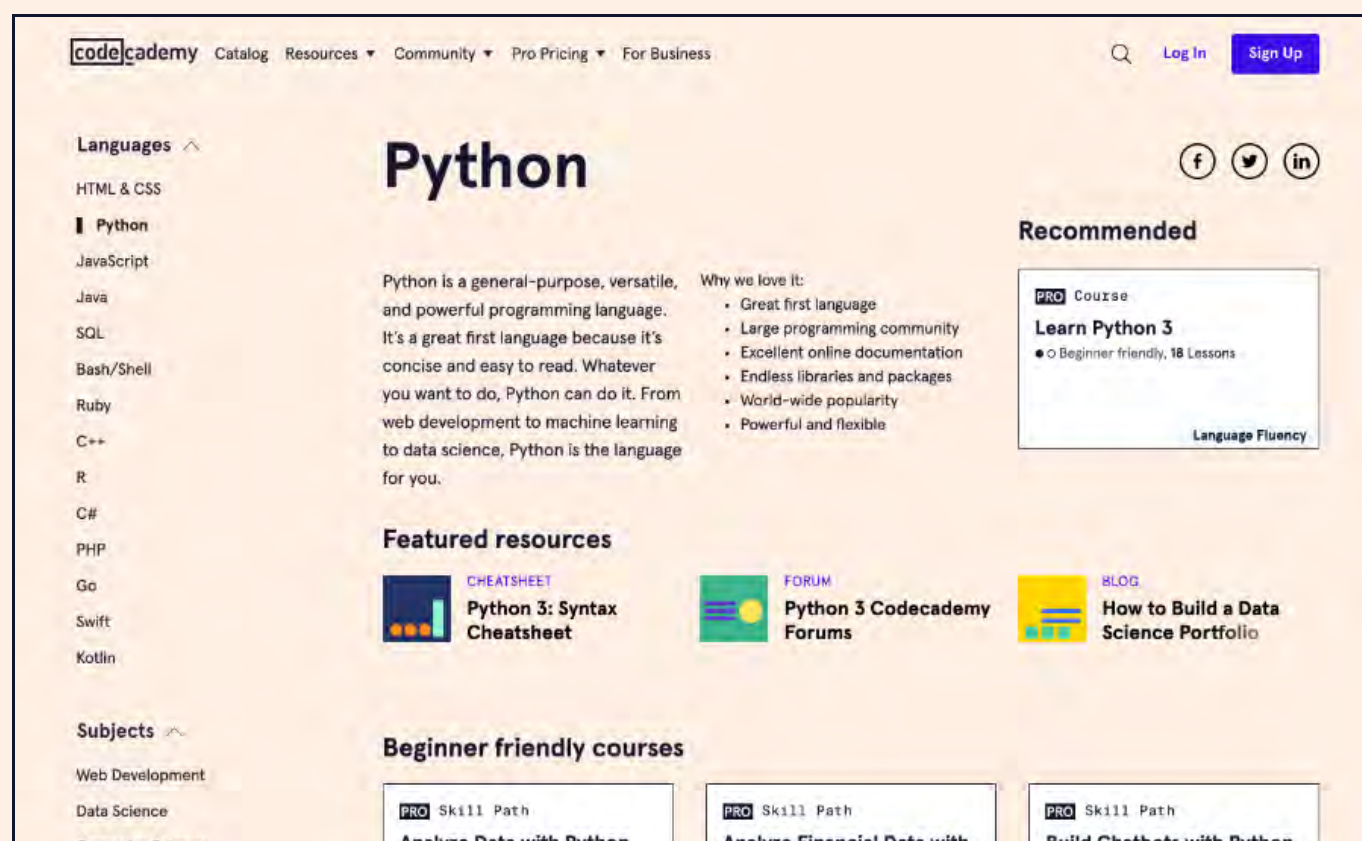
There's a perceived risk in learning something new — what if I don't get it right? — but the experience itself has given the team at The Motley Fool permission to fail. The cohort structure provides encouragement and the opportunity to re-join the next round if you fall off. It's a valuable lesson in resilience. On top of that, the Codecademy platform provides a safe space to experiment, as Johnnie describes:

" It's OK to go in there and try different things out. Nobody is gonna die, no businesses are gonna lose money. If you mess up, Codecademy lets you go back and try again. There's no negative reinforcement in Codecademy.
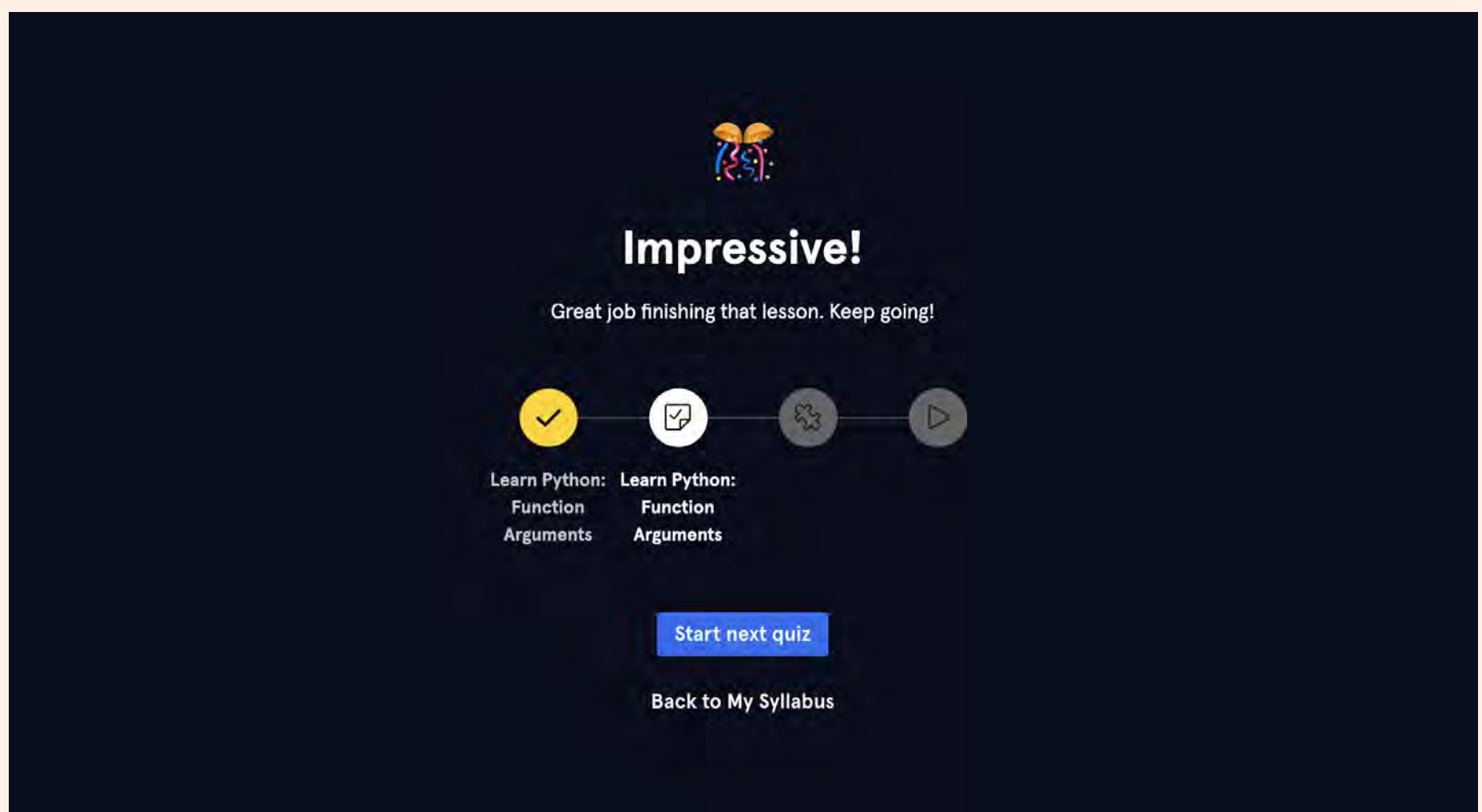
Codecademy: A match for their mission
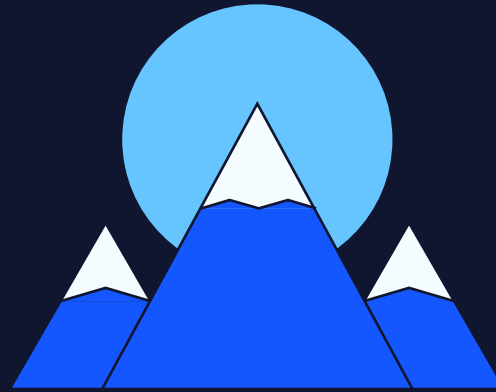
The Motley Fool's purpose is to make the world smarter, happier, and richer by showing people how enjoyable, and financially rewarding, it can be when you invest in the stock market. This also drives how they treat their employees. Tom says:

"

At the Fool, we believe people should have the freedom to follow their passion every day in roles they love.

This isn't just an idea they pay lip service to. By providing the opportunity to upskill with Codecademy, The Motley Fool shows that they support their employees in growing smarter, happier, and richer, too.

codecademy

Learn together with Codecademy

Ready to unlock your team's potential, like The Motley Fool? Give Codecademy for Teams a try. Our online learning platform offers interactive, self-paced training that equips your employees with the latest technical skills. Let your team try it first with our **free 14-day trial.**

Start your team's trial