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JavaScript cheat sheet

A pocket guide to the official words, and the first bits of syntax.

What it is

A scripting or programming language that lets you implement complex features on web pages — timely updates, interactive maps, animated graphics, and more.[1]

MDN's JavaScript landing page also calls it "a lightweight interpreted (or just-in-time compiled) programming language with first-class functions."[2]

Where it runs

Most often for dynamic client-side scripts on web pages. Also often on the server, with a runtime such as Node.js, Deno, or Bun.[3]

The standard

The standardized language is called ECMAScript, specified under ECMA-262, and described as a living standard.[3] MDN also names the ECMAScript Internationalization API, ECMA-402.[2]

Interpreted, with a burst of speed

The browser receives JavaScript as text and runs it from that. Most modern interpreters also use just-in-time compiling while the script is running. It is still considered interpreted, because that compilation happens at run time, not ahead of time.[1]

Variables, in short

A variable is a container for a value — a number in a sum, or a string in a sentence — not the value itself.[4]

```
let myName;
myName = "Chris";
let myDog = "Rover";
```

Declare a variable with `let`, then give it a value, or do both at once.[4]

```
const count = 1;
const bird = { species: "Kestrel" };
bird.species = "Striated Caracara";
```

Declare a constant with `const`. You must give it a value at once, and you can't point the name at a new value. You can still change the contents of an object that it names.[4]

MDN's course principle: use `const` when you can, and `let` when you have to. You may also see `var`, the original keyword, whose design MDN calls confusing and error-prone.[4]

JavaScript is a "dynamically typed language": you don't specify a data type when you declare a variable. A value in quotes is a string, even if the characters are digits. End instructions with a semicolon (`;`) — a single line may work without one; several lines together probably won't.[4]

A short glossary

Term	Plain-English meaning
`ECMAScript`	The standardized JavaScript language, specified under ECMA-262, a living standard.[3]
`Client-side`	Code that runs on the user's computer, in the browser.[1]
`Server-side`	Code that runs on the server; the results are then shown in the browser. JavaScript can do this, for example in Node.js.[1]
`Just-in-time compiling`	The engine compiles JavaScript to a faster format while the script is running.[1]
`Dynamic typing`	You don't specify a data type when you declare a variable. The type comes from the value you give it.[4]
`const / let`	`const` names a value that will not be replaced; `let` is for a name you may reassign.[4]

Quick quiz

1. Should you write `const count;` and give it a value later?
2. Is `let myNumber = "500";` a number or a string?
3. What is the standardized name for JavaScript, and which standard specifies it?

Answers. 1. No — a constant must be initialized when you declare it.[4] 2. A string, because the value is in quotes.[4] 3. ECMAScript, specified under ECMA-262.[3]

Sources, checked 17 November 2026. 1. MDN Learn: What is JavaScript? https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Learn_web_development/Core/Scripting/What_is_JavaScript 2. MDN: JavaScript https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/JavaScript 3. MDN Glossary: JavaScript https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Glossary/JavaScript 4. MDN Learn: Variables https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Learn_web_development/Core/Scripting/Variables

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