



# An Introduction to APIs

By Brian Cooksey

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This book is available for free at [zapier.com/learn/apis](https://zapier.com/learn/apis), with interactive exercises and additional resources.

Have you ever wondered how Facebook is able to automatically display your Instagram photos? How about how Evernote syncs notes between your computer and smartphone? If so, then it's time to get excited!

In this course, we walk you through what it takes for companies to link their systems together. We start off easy, defining some of the tech lingo you may have heard before, but didn't fully understand. From there, each lesson introduces something new, slowly building up to the point where you are confident about what an API is and, for the brave, could actually take a stab at using one.

## **Who Is This Book For?**

If you are a non-technical person, you should feel right at home with the lesson structure. For software developers, the first lesson or two may feel like a mandatory new employee orientation, but stick with it – you'll get your fill of useful information, too.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

APIs (application programming interfaces) are a big part of the web. In 2013 there were over 10,000 APIs published by companies for open consumption [1](#). That is quadruple the number available in 2010 [2](#).

With so many companies investing in this new area of business, possessing a working understanding of APIs becomes increasingly relevant to careers in the software industry. Through this course, we hope to give you that knowledge by building up from the very basics. In this chapter, we start by looking at some fundamental concepts around APIs. We define what an API is, where it lives, and give a high level picture of how one is used.

## A Frame of Reference

When talking about APIs, a lot of the conversation focuses on abstract concepts. To anchor ourselves, let's start with something that is physical: the server. A server is nothing more than a big computer. It has all the same parts as the laptop or desktop you use for work, it's just faster and more powerful. Typically, servers don't have a monitor, keyboard, or mouse, which makes them look unapproachable. The reality is that IT folks connect to them remotely — think remote desktop-style — to work on them.

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