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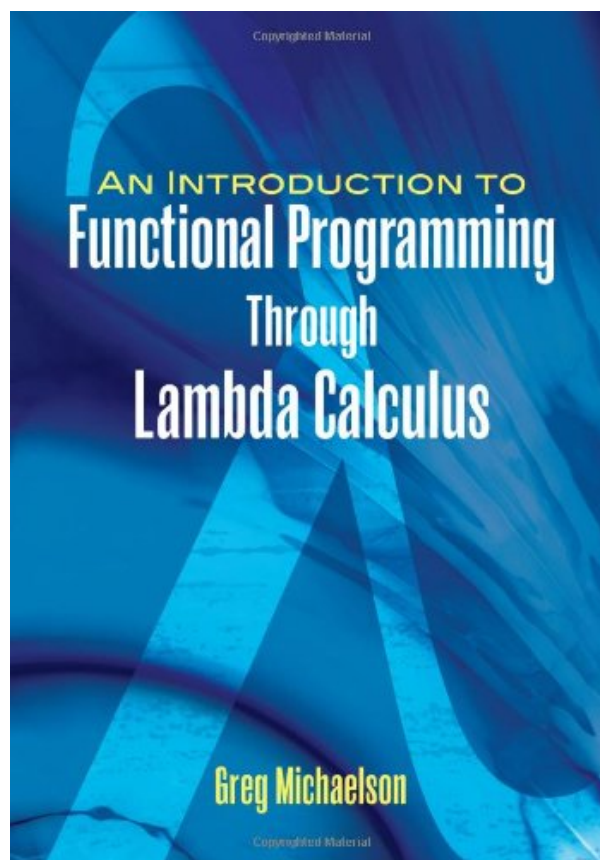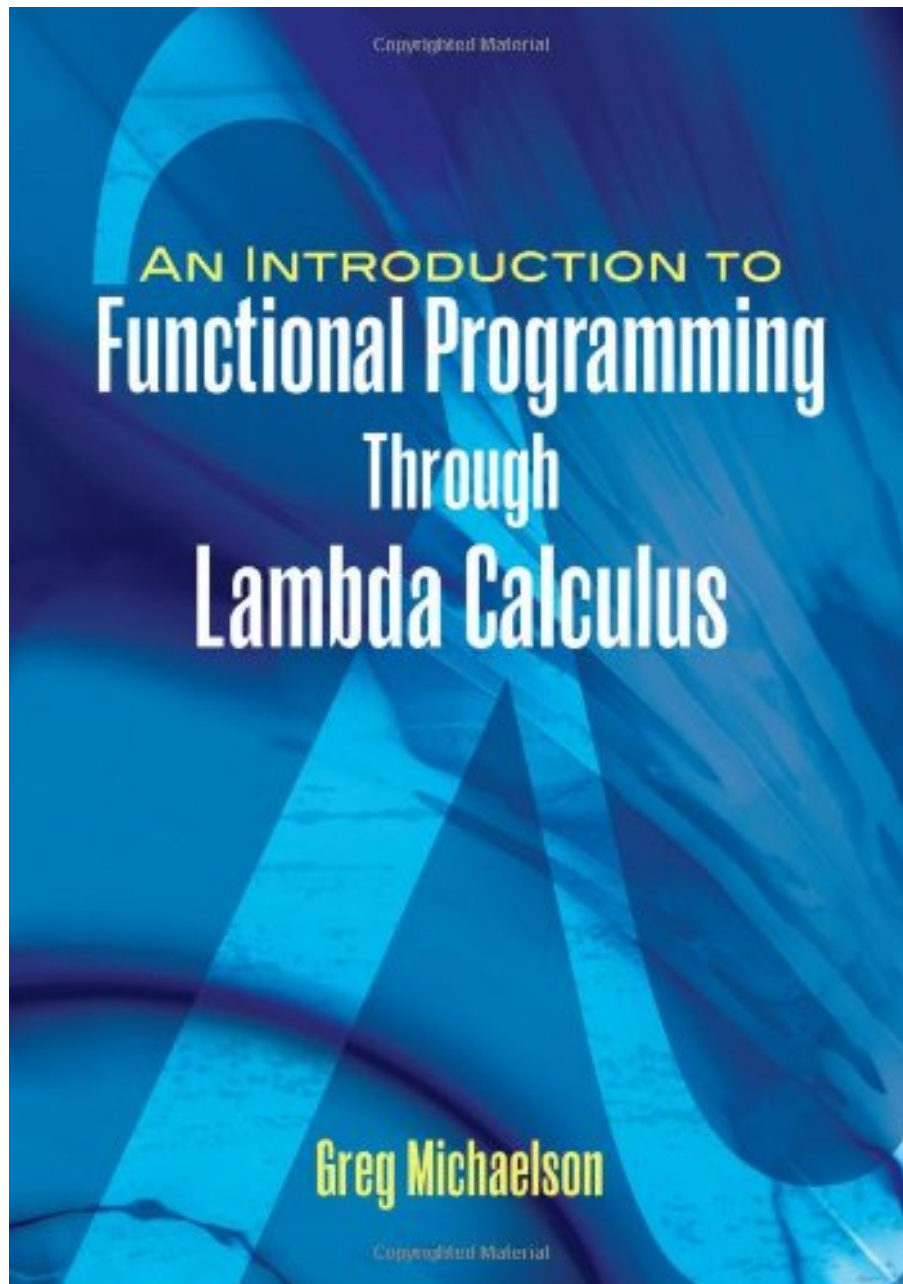

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Functional programming is rooted in lambda calculus, which constitutes the world's smallest programming language. This well-respected text offers an accessible introduction to functional programming concepts and techniques for students of mathematics and computer science. The treatment is as nontechnical as possible, and it assumes no prior knowledge of mathematics or functional programming. Cogent examples illuminate the central ideas, and numerous exercises appear throughout the text, offering reinforcement of key concepts. All problems feature complete solutions.

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About the Author
Gregory Michaelson is a Professor of Computer Science and Mathematics at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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38 of 40 people found the following review helpful.
A great resource for understanding lambda calculus
By Norman Richards
I found the first half of this book on lambda calculus to be really helpful. The explanations and problems (solutions provided) made it easy to follow. As the book progresses, the author slowly transforms lambda calculus notation into something resembling ML. At first I was less interested in the "introduction to functional programming" part than the "through lambda calculus" part, so I didn't get as much value from the later chapters initially. Later, when I was learning SML, the value of the latter chapters came through. However, even if your only goal is the same as mine was, to gain an understanding of lambda calculus, I still highly recommend this book. It's the best introduction I've found so far

47 of 51 people found the following review helpful.
Gentlest Possible introduction to Lambda Calculus
By wooks
Very easy to understand. Has the added bonus of solutions to all the questions. Unlike Hankins book you really can teach yourself Lambda Calculus with this. If you see a copy available grab it.

Hard to start, but hard to put down.
By Ryan McNamara
I've been trying to dive into functional programming, so I bought this book. The first chapter or so was a bit off in my opinion. The author should have covered why lambda calculus was invented and done a better job of giving a general overview. However, after looking up a few things online and getting a handle on it, this turned out to be a really amazing book. The author essentially teaches you how to build an entire programming language from first principles. It's quite a journey, actually. And in the process you actually understand how functional programming works. Knowing only beginner python I was able to follow along quite easily and if anything the author went into too much detail. So I found the pacing to be wonderful and because you understand everything that went on previously, the next part really isn't much of a leap. Many confusing functional programming peculiarities like partially applied functions, prefix notation, it's heavy use of recursion (and how it is applied) is a piece of cake. The book concludes with looking at two real programming languages, both of which are still extremely relevant today, and comparing it to the stuff we've been inventing with lambda calculus. The two example languages are Standard ML (which Haskell is largely derived from, for instance) and Common Lisp (which is the other major functional family of languages around today if you ignore prolog).

So even though this is an old book, there's not a whole lot about it that's dated. If anything, it's dated in a very good way: it doesn't use academic language or assume you know a lot of programming concepts (many of which hadn't even been invented, so maybe that's part of it) or anything like that. It's easy to follow along with and lambda calculus is actually kind of fun. It's such a trivially simple method of calculating, but with thought you can create some very high-level math and programming ideas and see how they play out.

By the way, no math knowledge is required to understand this book. Honestly, all you really need to know is the basic concept of addition and multiplication since the author will be implementing addition and multiplication functions. Other than that, there's no reason an absolute beginning to math or programming couldn't pick up this book. You might have to read the second chapter a second time after you get the hang of it.

I want to give it five stars, but it was hard getting going like I mentioned. However, you can easily overcome that by finding and introductory article online or something. Nothing's perfect, but I'm very glad I bought this book.

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