HOW SOFTWARE WORKS · BEGINNER · 12 MIN READ

Browser DevTools: see what your app is really doing

The panels that solve most problems: Elements to inspect and try styles, Console for errors, Network for every request and response, Application for what your app stores, and Lighthouse for speed.

Pass the check (4 of 5) online to earn the “DevTools Detective” badge:
https://digitalbuilders757.com/university/study/browser-devtools-for-builders

Open the toolbox

Every desktop browser has developer tools. In Chrome or Edge, right-click anything and choose Inspect, or press F12 (Ctrl+Shift+I, or Cmd+Option+I on a Mac).

Changes you make there happen only on your screen and vanish when you reload, so it's a safe place to experiment.

Elements and Console

Elements shows the page's HTML and the CSS applied to whatever you select. Change a colour or a margin there to try a fix before asking your AI helper to make it real.

Console shows JavaScript errors in red, with the file and line, and the console.log messages from your code. Copy the exact error into your AI helper.

Network: every request, with its answer

- The Network panel lists every file and API call the page makes while DevTools is open. Reload to capture the whole page load.
- The Status column shows the HTTP status: 200 fine, 404 not found, 401 not signed in, 403 not allowed, 500 a server error.
- Click a request to see its Headers, the Payload your page sent, and the Response that came back.
- Filter by Fetch/XHR to see just your API calls, and use throttling to feel your app on a slow phone connection.
- Screenshots of the Network panel can show tokens and personal data. Crop or blur them before you share.

Application: what your app remembers

The Application panel shows local storage, cookies and other storage for the site. If your app forgets something, or acts strangely for one person, look here; deleting an entry gives you a fresh start. (The Study Library keeps your progress in local storage, so you can find it there.)

Never paste cookie values or tokens into a chat or a screenshot: they can sign someone in as you.

Lighthouse for speed and accessibility

The Lighthouse panel audits a page for performance, accessibility and more, and suggests fixes. Start speed work there rather than in the Network panel, and measure again after each change.

Key terms

Developer tools (Inspect)
Browser tools that show a page's HTML and CSS and let you experiment live; changes aren't saved.

Browser console
The developer-tools panel (Inspect, then Console) that shows a page's errors and logs.

Network panel
The DevTools panel listing every request a page makes, with its status, what was sent and what came back.

HTTP status code
A number a server sends back: 200 OK, 401 not signed in, 403 not allowed, 404 not found, 500 server error.

Local storage
A small store in the browser where a site keeps data on your device, like your study progress.

Cookie
A small piece of data a site stores in your browser and sends back with requests, often to keep you signed in.

Lighthouse
A free tool in Chrome's developer tools that scores a page's speed, accessibility and more, with fixes.

HTTP method
The verb of a web request: GET reads, POST creates, PATCH or PUT updates, DELETE removes.

Try it: Take the tour

1. Open a site you built (or this page), press F12, and find Elements, Console and Network.
2. Reload with Network open. Find the biggest file and the slowest request.
3. Click one request and read its Status, Headers and Response.
4. In Elements, change a heading's colour, then reload and watch it vanish.
5. In Application, open local storage for this site and find the Study Library's saved progress.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

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5 questions. Circle one answer for each; 4 or more correct passes. Answers are at the back.

1. You change a button's colour in Elements and it looks perfect. What happens when you reload?

A. Everyone now sees the new colour, because you saved it live
B. The site breaks until you undo the change
C. The change is emailed to the site's developer
D. It goes back: DevTools changes are only on your screen

2. Your form's Submit button seems to do nothing. Where can you see whether a request was sent and what came back?

A. The Network panel
B. The Elements panel, under the form's HTML
C. The page source, from View Source
D. The Lighthouse report for the page

3. In the Network panel, a request to /api/notes shows status 401. What does that tell you?

A. The page has 401 errors in its JavaScript
B. The request wasn't signed in, or its sign-in was missing or expired
C. The notes were found and returned successfully
D. The server took 401 milliseconds to answer

4. Where can you see what a site has stored in your browser, like saved progress?

A. The Console, by typing the site's address
B. The Network panel's throttling menu
C. The Application panel's storage section
D. The Elements panel, inside the <head> tag

5. You want help with a bug, and your Network screenshot shows an Authorization header. What do you do?

A. Share it as is, since tokens only work on your own computer
B. Share it, because tokens expire within seconds anyway
C. Post the full header text so the helper can test it
D. Crop or blur the token before sharing

Official sites

Chrome DevTools: Inspect network activity: https://developer.chrome.com/docs/devtools/network

Chrome DevTools: Network panel overview: https://developer.chrome.com/docs/devtools/network/overview

Last reviewed 2026-11-25. AI tools change fast; check each tool's own site for current features, plans and prices.

ANSWER KEY

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1. D: It goes back: DevTools changes are only on your screen
DevTools edits the copy of the page in your browser. Make the real change in your code.

2. A: The Network panel
If no request appears, the page never sent one. If one appears, its status and response show what went wrong.

3. B: The request wasn't signed in, or its sign-in was missing or expired
401 means the server doesn't know who's asking. Check the session or the token the request sends.

4. C: The Application panel's storage section
Local storage, cookies and other site storage are listed in the Application panel.

5. D: Crop or blur the token before sharing
A token can act as you until it expires. Remove it from anything you share; if it leaked, sign out to end the session.