

Deploy Your Personal Website

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, students should be able to:

- **Fork a production-ready Vercel template through natural-language requests**, without ever cloning a repo with their own hands or running `git clone`.
- **Describe website content in plain English** — bio, projects, links, theme — and watch Cursor translate that description into clean, committed source changes.
- **Trigger a Vercel deploy by prompt**, read the deployment's build log when something goes wrong, and recover by describing the failure to the AI.

Core Topics

- How a Vercel template becomes your own site in one conversation.
- The “describe content in English, let AI write the MDX/TSX” pattern that powers weeks 2–6 of this course.
- The deploy-preview loop: every commit triggers a preview URL you can review before promoting to production.
- Why the first site deploy should be boring on purpose — we'll add the exciting AI bits next week.

Tools / Stack

Tool	Role this week
Cursor	The one chat window where everything happens.
Vercel MCP	AI creates the project, deploys, reads logs, sets env vars.
GitHub	Every commit pushes; Vercel rebuilds automatically.
Next.js 14	The framework the Magic Portfolio template ships on.
Tailwind CSS	Styling; AI edits classes when you describe visual changes.
Magic Portfolio	Vercel template we fork as the starting point.

Your personal site — cumulative features through this week:

Wk 1 · Dev toolkit installed — Cursor, Claude Code, Gemini CLI, MCPs, Typst skill

Wk 2 · **Personal website deployed to Vercel** ← NEW

Session Plan

Time	Activity
0 – 15 min	Recap & Check-in. Who got their first Vercel URL working in week 1? Show of hands. Anyone still stuck — 2 minutes pairing with a classmate.
15 – 40 min	Concept Teaching. The “template-first” pattern. Why forking a good template beats starting from scratch. How <code>next.js</code> templates are structured (content vs code). What the AI should touch (content files, config) and what it shouldn't (build plumbing).
40 – 75 min	Live Demo. Instructor asks Cursor one prompt: “Fork Magic Portfolio, make it about me, deploy it.” Class watches the whole flow — fork, clone, edit, commit, deploy — happen as a single conversation.
75 – 105 min	Hands-On Lab. Each student ships their own personal portfolio URL. Everyone picks a different accent colour so the classroom has variety to critique.
105 – 120 min	Q&A + Wrap. Show-and-tell: three students paste their live URLs and the class reacts.

Hands-On Lab

Task. By the end of class you should have a `yourname-portfolio-*.vercel.app` URL that features your photo, short bio, two real projects (or study projects), and your email — all on a responsive, dark-mode-capable site.

PROMPT Step 1 · Say to Cursor:

Please fork the Vercel template called **Magic Portfolio** (the Next.js one) into a new public GitHub repo on my account called `my-portfolio`. Clone it into this workspace, install dependencies with `pnpm`, and start the dev server. When the server is ready, open `http://localhost:3000` in my browser. Do not change any code yet — I just want to see the template running first.

VERIFY Step 2 · Verify:

- Browser opens `http://localhost:3000` and shows the Magic Portfolio demo site.
- A `my-portfolio` repo appears on your GitHub account.
- Your file-tree pane now has a `my-portfolio` folder with Next.js structure.

PROMPT Step 3 · Say to Cursor:

Now I want to make this site about me. Here's who I am — read this carefully and replace all the demo content (name, bio, “about” page, social links, photo credit) with my real details:

• Name: **[your full name]** • One-line bio: **[one sentence — e.g., “CS student at [university] learning to ship AI products.”]** • Longer bio: **[3–4 sentences — who you are, what you're interested in, what you're building this term]** • Email: **[your email]** • GitHub: **[your GitHub URL]** • LinkedIn (optional): **[your LinkedIn URL]** • Accent colour: **[pick one — e.g., “deep teal #0e7490” or “soft coral #fb7185”]**

Update the theme config to use my accent colour. Use any of the template's existing image placeholders — I'll swap real photos in a later step. Commit the change with a clear message.

VERIFY Step 4 · Verify:

- Your name, bio, and email now show up on the homepage and About page.
- The accent colour (buttons, links, hover states) matches what you asked for.
- `git log` shows a commit Cursor wrote with a sensible message.

PROMPT Step 5 · Say to Cursor:

The Projects section is still showing demo projects. Replace them with these two real projects of mine:

1. *[Project 1 name] — [one-sentence description]. Link: [URL or GitHub repo]. If you have a thumbnail image, place one from the existing placeholders.*
2. *[Project 2 name] — [one-sentence description]. Link: [URL or GitHub repo].*

If I only have one real project, make the second a study project from this course — for example, “Hello TECHNEST — my first AI-driven deploy” with the live URL from week 1. Commit and push.

VERIFY Step 6 · Verify:

- Projects section on your homepage shows your two projects with links that actually work.
- The commit is pushed to GitHub — check your repo in the browser.

PROMPT Step 7 · Say to Cursor:

Now deploy this to Vercel as a production site. Use the Vercel MCP. Link the project to my `my-portfolio` GitHub repo so every future push auto-deploys. When the deployment finishes, open the production URL in my browser and give me the URL to copy.

MANUAL Step 8 · Manual (human only):

If Vercel asks you to authorise its GitHub App on the repo (only happens the first time for a new repo), approve it in the browser window that pops up.

Why manual: GitHub's App-install consent screen requires a human click — no CLI can accept repo permissions for you.

VERIFY Step 9 · Verify:

- A production URL like `my-portfolio-*.vercel.app` opens in your browser.
- Your name, bio, accent colour, and projects all render correctly on the live site.
- Visit the URL on your phone — it should look fine on mobile too.

RECOVER Step 10 · If stuck, say to AI:

The production build failed with an error I don't understand. Can you read the Vercel build log through the MCP, find the root cause, fix whatever needs fixing in the source, commit and push again, and confirm the next deploy succeeds?

PROMPT Step 11 · Say to Cursor:

The site looks fine but a bit generic. Please do three small polish passes:

1. Increase the hero title weight and give it a tiny bit more letter-spacing so my name feels more confident.
2. Add a subtle fade-in animation on the project cards when the page loads — nothing fancy, just enough that the site feels alive.
3. Add an OG image / favicon using the same accent colour so when I share the URL in a chat, the preview looks intentional.

Commit each pass as a separate commit so I can read what changed.

VERIFY Step 12 · Verify:

- Refresh the live site and confirm each of the three polish passes shipped.
- Your repo now has three new commits with descriptive messages.
- Paste the URL into a Slack / WhatsApp / WeChat chat — the preview card should show your name and the accent colour.

TIP · Use real photos if you have them

If you have a headshot and two project screenshots on your laptop, drag them into Cursor's chat and say: **"Use these three images — headshot for the About page, screenshots for the two project cards. Compress them to reasonable web sizes before committing."** Cursor will place the files in `public/` and wire them into the right components.

Weekly Assignment

Build / Implement.

- Your live portfolio URL, featuring your real name, bio, two projects, and contact info.
- The URL must render correctly on both desktop and mobile.

Requirements.

- The repo must be on your GitHub.
- At least four commits, all authored by AI at your direction.
- The production URL must be served from Vercel (i.e., a `*.vercel.app` domain, or a custom domain pointing at Vercel).
- A screenshot of the Cursor conversation where you described your bio (step 3) — this proves you didn't hand-edit the source.

Submission. Post the URL + screenshot in the course Slack channel before the start of Week 3.

Resources

Docs

- Vercel template: Magic Portfolio
- Vercel CLI — project management
- Next.js 14 App Router — basics

Videos

- Instructor demo: "From template to live URL in 20 minutes"

Repos

- `vercel/templates/magic-portfolio`

| Real-World Application

Every engineer, designer, and founder you'll interview with in 2026 expects a personal site within the first five seconds of Googling your name. Your portfolio is not a **nice-to-have** — it's table stakes. The good news: it's also the single highest-ROI artefact you can build in two hours, and you're going to upgrade it every week for the rest of the term.

CAREER

After class: copy your live URL and add it to your LinkedIn headline and your GitHub profile README. Tag @TECHNEST on LinkedIn when you post — your instructor will reshare the first five students to do this.

| Challenges & Tips

- **“The template looks good but I want a totally different vibe.”** Ask Cursor **“Replace the current design with something inspired by [reference site].”** Let the AI propose, then iterate. Resist hand-editing CSS.
- **“Vercel says ‘Build error: module not found’.”** Paste the full error into Cursor (use the [RECOVER] pattern from Week 1). 90% of first-deploy errors are a missing package Vercel can't find — Cursor fixes them in one prompt.
- **“My photo looks stretched.”** Ask Cursor **“Crop my hero photo to a square and re-export at 600 × 600. Don't lose quality.”** Describe the outcome, not the CSS.
- **“Vercel shows ‘Unauthorized’ when I try to deploy.”** Your token from week 1 may have expired. In Cursor, say **“My Vercel MCP token is expired. Walk me through generating a new one and updating your config.”**
- **“The preview URL looks different from the production URL.”** Preview deploys and production deploys can use different env vars. Ask Cursor to diff them: **“Compare the env vars on my preview vs production deployment and list any differences.”**

STUCK? RESCUE

If nothing on your site updates after a new commit, ask: **“Is Vercel's GitHub integration still connected? Check the last deploy time and the webhook delivery log.”** If the webhook is broken, Cursor will walk you through re-linking.

| Instructor Notes (Internal)

- **Have three accent-colour palettes pre-staged in case of decision paralysis.** Students can waste 20 minutes on “what colour should my site be?” — offer three curated options (warm coral, cool teal, elegant charcoal) and let them pick quickly.

- **Demo the polish pass (step 11) live.** The wow moment isn't the first deploy (students have seen it in W1) – it's the “refine through conversation” moment. Make it visible.
- **Push students to use real content.** If they cop out with “Student 1 – Lorem Ipsum bio”, the site is useless. Five minutes upfront defining actual bio content pays off for the next seven weeks.
- **Watch for hand-editors.** The first student who opens a `.tsx` file and tries to type should be gently redirected: **“Describe what you want to change to Cursor and watch it happen – that's the whole course.”**
- **Photos are the 1 stuck point.** Students with no photos ready get stuck. Have a curated set of free stock placeholders on a shared link.

Student Feedback

Challenges Observed

Extra Information

Chan Meng

Full-Stack Engineer · AI Agent Builder · Minimalist

“Subtraction for life, addition for thought.”

AI AGENT BUILDER

AGENTIC SYSTEMS

LLM INTEGRATION

FEMTECH INNOVATOR

MINIMALIST CODE

UN CSW 69 SPEAKER



Chan builds **production-grade AI agents** at the intersection of **agentic systems**, **LLM integration**, and **women’s health**. Between China and New Zealand, she ships systems that go to work for real users at real companies — and she believes code, like life, becomes most powerful when you subtract what isn’t essential. A **Master of Applied Computing with Distinction** from Lincoln University, NZ (Dean’s List), she was featured at **UN Women CSW69** for her work on AI and gender equality.

Currently · Founding Engineer at **Gavigo** · Senior Full-Stack Engineer at **She Sharp** (NZ’s leading women-in-STEM nonprofit, 2,200+ members) · CTO of **FemTech Weekend** · Open Source Contributor to **CopilotKit** (24.6k★). For the full project portfolio and code, visit github.com/ChanMeng666.



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LINKEDIN

[chanmeng666](https://www.linkedin.com/in/chanmeng666)

PORTFOLIO

chanmeng.org

GITHUB

[ChanMeng666](https://github.com/ChanMeng666)

EMAIL

chanmeng.dev@gmail.com

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