

The Rhetorics of Web Pages

You may be thinking that if all you are doing is writing blog entries, why do you need to think about rhetorical issues? And it is true that many blog templates offer you very little control over the look of your pages. Still, no matter how little control you may feel you have, you still can add hyperlinks, headers and subheaders, graphics and videos. Different genres of web writing offer different degrees of control over the rhetoric of your pages, but these issues are always present to one degree or another.

This section is not a how-to guide; you will not find step-by-step directions or software tutorials. There are plenty of other sources for such tutorials on the web. We encourage you to consider your overall strategy and purpose before getting down to specifics. Once you know the best ways to appeal to your audience, the rest is easy.

HYPERLINKS ARE THE “TUBES” OF THE INTERNET

While U. S. Senator Ted Stevens’ metaphor of the Internet as a [series of tubes](#) (2006) is inaccurate, we can reasonably think of hyperlinks as the paths (or if you want to get sci-fi geeky: wormholes) through which we travel across the World Wide Web. Click a link and almost instantaneously you will move to a new page within a web site or—seemingly magically—to some new website hosted half way around the globe. In fact, the importance of hyperlinks cannot be overstated; there is no web without hyperlinks connecting one text to another (or more often, one text to many).

Thus, understanding how to create effective hyperlinks is important because when you create hyperlinks, you are adding your pages to the network called the World Wide Web. The following sections will help you to effectively use hyperlinks in your web writing.

Click Here to Learn More about Hyperlinks

One of the most common mistakes that noobs make is using the “click here to . . .” hyperlink. Consider the following example:

As reported at Endgaget, the buzz this week on tech news sites is Apple’s “iPhone tracking software.” Using data from cell phone towers and wifi networks, iOS constantly stores the phone owners location in an unencrypted file on the phone. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Well, duh! Because Internet users know that that if they click links, the browser will take them to another web page, it’s redundant to say “click here.” That’s why the words are underlined and a different color than the rest of the text. Here’s a quick fix:

As reported at Endgaget, the buzz this week on tech news sites is Apple’s “iPhone tracking software.” Using data from cell phone towers and wifi networks, iOS constantly stores the phone owners location in an unencrypted file on the phone. [Learn more.](#)

We also recommend that you never set your links to open into new windows. Your readers can be confused by this action and often do not realize that the browser has opened a new window—they will try clicking on their back buttons, only to find they no longer work. Web-savvy users can always force content to open in a new window anyway, so it’s not like you’re eliminating the option for anyone who wants it. Sven Lennartz’s article [Should Links Open in New Windows?](#) from *Smashing Magazine* has an excellent discussion of this issue. For now, though, just remember to have your links open in the same window

Use Contextual Hyperlinks

Most people won’t click on a link unless you let them know why they should bother. Let’s consider the previous example of the post about the iPhone. Where you put the link can let the reader know whether you’re just citing it as a source. If you put it at the very end, it usually signifies either that it’s your main source of information and that users should click it to learn more.

For example, a company who puts a press release on the Web featuring a new product might add a “learn more” link at the end point-

ing to a product page on their website. The company wants you to read the press release first, then follow the link.

However, in many texts, we can better assist readers by putting the links in context, by linking to something meaningful in the text. Using contextual links, we can create effective transitions for the reader to the next web text, and we better connect the texts we write to those on other web pages. Here are two different revisions of the previous example that illustrate this concept:

[As reported at Endgaget](#), the buzz this week on tech news sites is Apple’s “iPhone tracking software.” Using data from cell phone towers and wifi networks, iOS constantly stores the phone owners location in an unencrypted file on the phone.

As reported at Endgaget, the buzz this week on tech news sites is Apple’s “[iPhone tracking software](#).” Using data from cell phone towers and wifi networks, iOS constantly stores the phone owners location in an unencrypted file on the phone.

In the first example, the link is emphasizing where you got the information and where readers should go to learn more about it. The second example emphasizes what the link is about. Since you mentioned Engadget earlier in the sentence, users will probably realize the link will go there. But it could also go to a Wikipedia definition or to a link on Apple’s apps store. In any case, the meaning of the two is slightly different. One provides direct indication of where the reader will go on the web (revision 1), and the other indicates to the reader what will be learned (revision 2). If you’re reporting news or items from another blog or website, it’s typical to put a link to the original source in the text.

Yes. There Are Punctuation Rules for Hyperlinks

Just as with other types of writing, punctuation has a role in creating hyperlinks:

Exclude ending punctuation from hyperlinks. When hyperlinking text that has punctuation immediately following it, we recommend that you do not include the punctuation in the hyperlink. Consider again this example from the previous page:

[As reported at Endgaget](#), the buzz this week on tech news sites is Apple’s “iPhone tracking software.” Using data from cell phone towers and wifi networks, iOS constantly stores the phone owners location in an unencrypted file on the phone.

See how the comma following Endgaget is not included in the hyperlink? Do the same thing if hyperlinking text at the end of a sentence followed by a period; don’t include the period in the hyperlink either.

Leave off quotes and italics from titles in hyperlinked text in prose. Another style rule that we recommend involves hyperlinked titles. Bloggers and other social media writers will often include the title of another post or web page in their writing, and then link that title to the original web page. When doing so, be sure to capitalize the title, but do not include quotations as you would in print with smaller works (e.g. a blog post title or news article) or italics with larger works (e.g., a website title). Here’s an example using a modified version of the Endgaget post:

As reported in [The iPhone Tracking Fiasco and What You Can Do About It](#), the buzz this week on tech news sites is Apple’s “iPhone tracking software.” Using data from cell phone towers and wifi networks, iOS constantly stores the phone owners location in an unencrypted file on the phone.

Yes. This is contrary to what writers do in print where quotations and italics are added to emphasize that the text is a title of a work, and whether it is a small or large work. In web writing, the formatting for the hyperlink will emphasize the title that you have already capitalized. The reader can click the link and immediately see what kind of work it is; adding quotes or italics adds unnecessary additional emphasis.

EXCEPTION: if you include a bibliography in your web writing, you should follow the conventions for punctuating titles in the citation format you adopt for your references, whether or not you chose to hyperlink the title of a reference that is also available online.

PAGE TITLES, HEADLINES, AND SUBHEADERS, OH MY!

The one thing you never want to see in your web pages—whether on your blog, your wiki, or your own website—are grey pages with nothing but text: no links, no headlines, no images.

People like to scan and skim on the web. This is no surprise. Readers have skimmed and scanned ever since newspapers started cramming their pages with information centuries ago. We are hunters and gatherers searching for information, as web content strategist Ginny Redish likes to say in her book, [Letting Go of the Words](#). We don't read, we hunt. If we do not think your page offers the information we want, we move on. Quickly.

Consider the times you have used a search engine to look for information on a particular topic. Type in your keywords. Google shows you 150,234 results. How do you choose what to read? The page title that is displayed to you in the search engine results influences you on whether or not to visit that web page. And then once you visit a web page from your search results, you will often skim the headings (when available) to find what you need. If the headings aren't yielding fruitful indications that you are in the right place, you may leave and try another search result—even though the information you seek was actually there.

Or think about the times you have jumped on your favorite news site (e.g., CNN, ESPN, Wired, etc.). Much like when reading newspapers, the first thing most readers do is skim the headlines looking for something to catch their interest. Readers do the same thing when they visit a blog that they haven't been to before. As [Copyblogger points out](#) at the beginning of his tutorial about writing headlines for the web,

Your headline is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective reader. Without a compelling promise that turns a browser into a reader, the rest of your words may as well not even exist. . . . On average, 8 out of 10 people will read headline copy, but only 2 out of 10 will read the rest.

Editors of professional news publications and serious bloggers know this, and they typically spend significant amounts of time coming up with the right headline to attract readers. Whether you are keeping your own weblog, creating an information page for a client, working on a wiki page, or building a personal portfolio website, you'll

need to take some time, too, to create page titles, headings, and sub-headers that invite your reader to explore and understand the content you have created.

Every Page Needs a Title

A recent Google search for the phrase “Untitled Document” yielded 47 million hits. What’s with that? Are untitled documents the latest Internet meme? Are they a viral YouTube sensation?

Nothing so exciting. When you encounter one of those 45 million web pages that has “Untitled Document” in a tab or a window, what you see is a lost opportunity: you are looking at a Web page with no page title.

A page title is the name of a page that is stored in the head tag. (See the section on HTML for more information about the head tag.) The page title does not appear anywhere in the actual web page, instead you will see it in the top of the browser window as in Figure 10. Many web authoring programs automatically insert “Untitled Document” as a placeholder title, and many users of that software do not bother to change that default. Too bad for us readers.

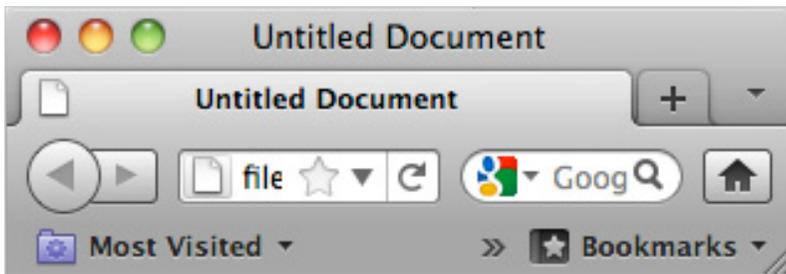


Figure 10. A Google search shows that there are millions of untitled web pages.

While your page title will appear atop the currently open window, page titles also appear in places that are totally apart from the actual web page you have written. For example, your page title appears in representations of your open page in the taskbar or dock; it appears in history and bookmark lists, and it is used in search results and RSS feeds. Because a page title has a life separate from the page it represents, you should write page titles that provide both context and topic so that

the page title can stand alone. What does a page title like “home” or “intro” tell you about a web page when viewed in an RSS feed? What about “Blog #1 or “Please Read”? Do you **really** have so much free time on your hands that you’re willing to click on one of these?

A good page title should announce the topic of your page and the name of your blog, wiki, or website. Earlier in this book in Figure 1, you saw a picture of a page from Steve Krause’s blog.

Here is a page title from one of his blog entries:

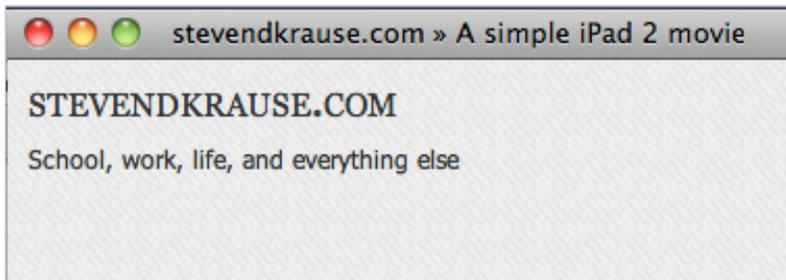


Figure 11. An effective page title includes the topic of the page and the name of the blog or website.

It makes complete sense, doesn’t it? You could look at this page title in any context and know where the page was from and why you would visit. About the only information this page title doesn’t provide is that you should pronounce the “e” at the end of Krause.

Many blogging platforms, such as Wordpress, automatically add the name of a site to a page title, making your life easier, but if you are creating web pages from scratch or if you are working with blogging software that is not as page-title friendly as Wordpress, be sure to include in your page titles both your major headline and the name of your site.

Every Page Should Have a Major Headline. Yes. Every. One.

I have already written a page title? Do I really need a headline too?

Yes. Yes, you do.

It may seem redundant, but a page title is not visible on the page itself. It appears at the top of the window or in other contexts like search engine results. Your major headline, however, is part of the page and

should appear at the top or near the top of that page. A good major headline should give information hunters and gatherers a clear sense of why they should stop on your page.

Say you are working on an audio essay for a first year writing class and you are searching for information on how to use Audacity, the open source audio software. You do a google search and click on a link leading you to a page with the following major headline:

Page 1

Do you think you will read on, or will you return to your Google search for another page?

What if, instead, you found the following major headline:

Using Audacity to Recreate the Autotune Effect

As a reader, you may or may not know that this page will help turn you into the next T-Pain, but at least you know that it isn't a site about comma splices, online casinos, or *Twilight*.

Put your major headline at the top of each of your pages. Tell us what your page is about and make that topic easy to find.

Subheaders and Lists

In addition to page titles and major page headlines, you also want to break up your text with subheaders. Nothing you put on the web should look like the papers you turn in to professors. Nothing says “move on without reading” to web users like grey blocks of text. Ginny Redish recommends that you think of your subheaders as a conversation that you are having with your user. People come to your pages with questions. Use your subheaders to answer those questions.

Here is a page from the website of the English Department at Illinois State University about English minors with all of the subheaders and other formatting removed:

Minors are a combination of courses designed to provide a cohesive introduction to an area of study beyond the student's major. The English Department offers four minors: English Studies, English Education, Writing, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). English faculty and English courses are also included in a variety of University-wide minors. Minor in English: The minor in English is a good choice if you want a minor with a variety of Eng-

lish courses. Learn more about the minor in English. Minor in English Education: The minor in English Education is an option for students in other Secondary Education programs who wish to be endorsed in the Language Arts. By completing the minor, you will be certified to teach Language Arts in addition to your major area. Learn more about the minor in English Education. TESOL: The TESOL minor is most often taken by students who are seeking an endorsement in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Learn more about the minor in TESOL. Writing: The writing minor is taken by students in a variety of majors. Students in the minor can specialize in creative writing, technical writing, or rhetoric and composition. Learn more about the minor in Writing. University-wide Minors Students selecting a University-wide, interdisciplinary minor can take advantage of the many exciting resources of a large university community. Learn more about University-wide minors.

How much time would you be willing to invest searching for information about a minor that interested you? Figure 12 shows a part of the page as it is actually rendered on the department's website.

English Minors at Illinois State University

Minors are a combination of courses designed to provide a cohesive introduction to an area of study beyond the student's major. The English Department offers four minors: English Studies, English Education, Writing, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

English faculty and English courses are also included in a variety of University-wide minors.

Minor in English

The minor in English is a good choice if you want a minor with a variety of English courses.

[Learn more about the minor in English.](#)

Minor in English Education

The minor in English Education is an option for students in other Secondary Education programs who wish to be endorsed in the Language Arts. By completing the minor, you will be certified to teach Language Arts in addition to your major area.

[Learn more about the minor in English Education.](#)

TESOL

The TESOL minor is most often taken by students who are seeking an endorsement in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

[Learn more about the minor in TESOL.](#)

Writing

The writing minor is taken by students in a variety of majors. Students in the minor can specialize in creative writing, technical writing, or rhetoric and composition.

[Learn more about the minor in Writing.](#)

University-wide Minors

Students selecting a University-wide, interdisciplinary minor can take advantage of the many exciting resources of a large university community.

[Learn more about University-wide minors.](#)

Figure 12. Example from [English Minors at Illinois State University](#) of content organized into short paragraphs and subheaders.

Notice that on this page, you can easily find information about the various minors.

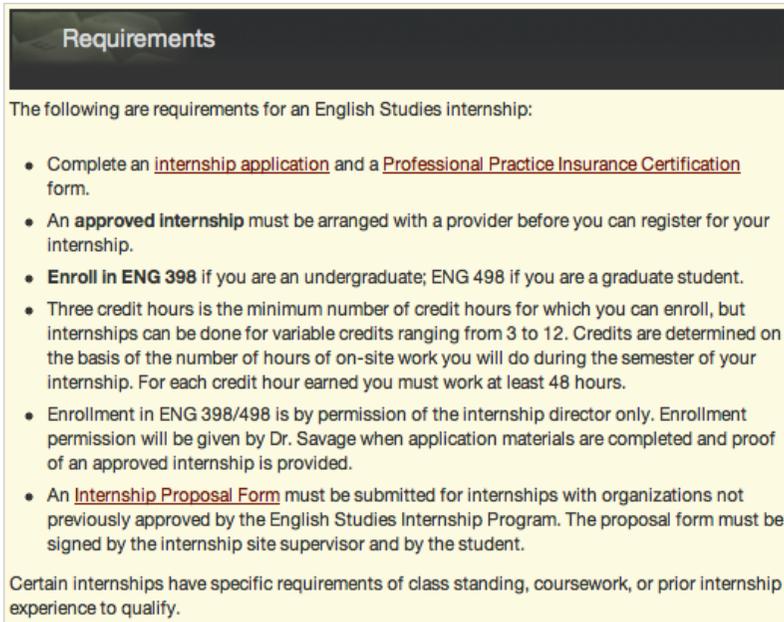
Don't Forget Lists

Lists, both numbered and bulleted lists, are another form of subheaders in that they make the underlying structure of your content visible to your readers. A good list can make clear the steps in a process, the advantages of an option, or the requirements of a program. Here is another bit of text from the Illinois State English Department Website about the requirements for an internship with all of the list formatting removed:

The following are requirements for an English Studies internship: Complete an internship application and a Professional Practice Insurance Certification form. An approved internship must be arranged with a provider before you can register for your internship. Enroll in ENG 398 if you are an undergraduate; ENG 498 if you are a graduate student. Three credit hours is the minimum number of credit hours for which you can enroll, but internships can be done for variable credits ranging from 3 to 12. Credits are determined on the basis of the number of hours of on-site work you will do during the semester of your internship. For each credit hour earned you must work at least 48 hours. Enrollment in ENG 398/498 is by permission of the internship director only. Enrollment permission will be given by Dr. Savage when application materials are completed and proof of an approved internship is provided. An Internship Proposal Form must be submitted for internships with organizations not previously approved by the English Studies Internship Program. The proposal form must be signed by the internship site supervisor and by the student. Certain internships have specific requirements of class standing, coursework, or prior internship experience to qualify.

Does it make your head hurt to work through this list? Figure 13 shows the same information organized in a list as it appears on the website:

Notice how it is much easier to see what you need to do to secure an internship when the steps are organized in a list.



Requirements

The following are requirements for an English Studies internship:

- Complete an [internship application](#) and a [Professional Practice Insurance Certification](#) form.
- An **approved internship** must be arranged with a provider before you can register for your internship.
- **Enroll in ENG 398** if you are an undergraduate; ENG 498 if you are a graduate student.
- Three credit hours is the minimum number of credit hours for which you can enroll, but internships can be done for variable credits ranging from 3 to 12. Credits are determined on the basis of the number of hours of on-site work you will do during the semester of your internship. For each credit hour earned you must work at least 48 hours.
- Enrollment in ENG 398/498 is by permission of the internship director only. Enrollment permission will be given by Dr. Savage when application materials are completed and proof of an approved internship is provided.
- An [Internship Proposal Form](#) must be submitted for internships with organizations not previously approved by the English Studies Internship Program. The proposal form must be signed by the internship site supervisor and by the student.

Certain internships have specific requirements of class standing, coursework, or prior internship experience to qualify.

Figure 13. Example from [Internship Qualifications and Requirements](#) of content organized into a list.

You may also have noticed that in these negative examples, there weren't any paragraph breaks, and instead, the information was presented as one long paragraph. In both examples, putting each new topic in its own paragraph would have made the text much more readable.

Keep your paragraphs short when you write on the web to help your readers. Well-written, short paragraphs have much the same impact as subheaders and lists: they break your text into visible chunks that help the reader find the information he or she is looking for quickly.

Can I Use Catchy Titles and Headings?

Catchy titles and headings can be helpful in some writing contexts, such as on news publications or a blog, where the goal is to attract a loyal following of readers. They might not be such a good choice for a business website or other more formal professional writing situations, depending on the overall tone that is being set for the site.

Think about the purpose of your text. Are you trying to help users locate specific bits of information or answer specific questions they may have? If so, then simple direct headlines and subheaders are probably a better choice. But if you are trying to encourage web users to stop and read your content, then a catchy title can be a good idea, especially if it leads to catchy, engaging writing.

If you choose to use catchy titles for your web pages, beware of making them enigmatic. They should at least hint at the focus of the content. Otherwise, readers who are actually interested in the specific focus of the page may not realize what it's about. Over at Econsultancy, a community for digital media marketing specialists, [Chris Lake suggests using awesome adjectives](#) as an easy tip for creating catchy headlines:

Headlines that include awesome adjectives tend to attract a lot more interest / clicks / retweets / links than those that avoid them. For example, [16 bitchin shortcuts and commands for Twitter](#) beats "16 shortcuts and commands for Twitter." Adjectives can be highly persuasive. Try to incorporate them into your headlines.

But Lake also talks about using important keyword phrases in headlines. Best advice? Make your titles and headings catchy AND informative if you are trying to attract attention.

Don't Forget about Your Other Audience: The Search Engine

There's a computer reader that'll be important for your website: Search engines. How often do you use a search engine to find new content? Most web surfers use them all the time.

When you use a search engine, you aren't actually searching the Web; you are searching a database of website content information selected and maintained by the search engine provider. Search engine companies employ computer programs known as "bots" to surf the Web and gather that information. They then employ a ranking algorithm that uses various factors to determine where (and if) a web page should show up in a search for specific keywords.

The good news is that generally the advice for writing good titles and headings for human readers will work well for search engines. Informative titles and headings help search engines to index your content.

Like your readers, search engines predict that the titles and headings reveal the main content of your web page, and they use the keywords from within them in indexing your content: better titles and headings equals better search engine ranking results for your web pages.

Incidentally, the practice of “writing” for search engines is known as search engine optimization (SEO). If you want to learn more strategies and tips for improving the search engine ranking of your own or your employer’s website, check out SEOMoz’s tutorial [The Beginner’s Guide to SEO](#).

Use Your Platform’s Heading Styles, and Life Will Be Good

Once you have come up with a good title for your writing and sub-headings to use within it, you’ll need to enter them on your site. When using blogging software and other content management systems, you’ll likely be creating your text using a WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) editor which gives you some formatting controls.

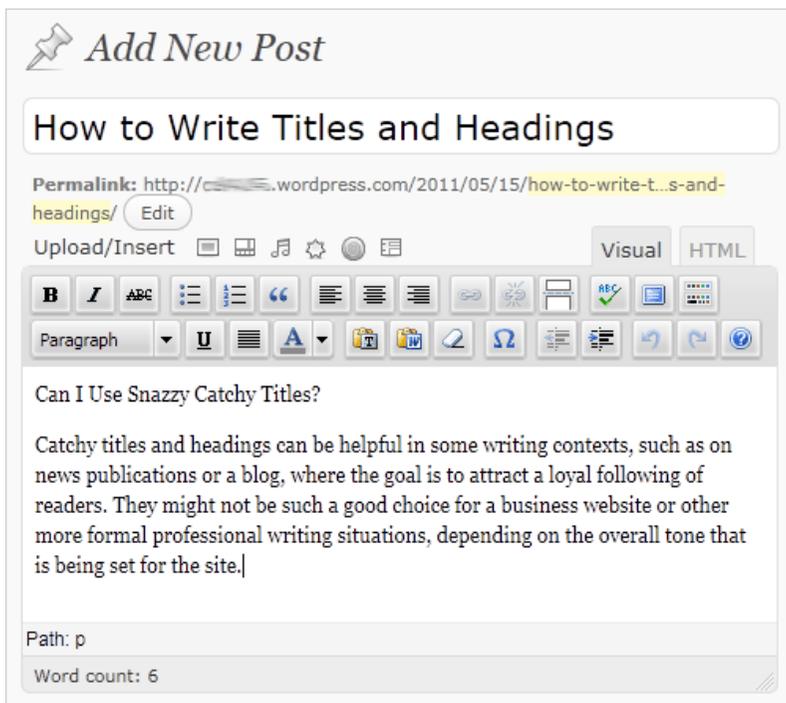


Figure 14. The standard WYSIWYG interface for WordPress. Other blog software and content management systems have similar tools for creating and posting content.

Beware the temptation to style your headings using bold, italics, and font size changes. Your website likely already has styling set for different headings as part of the overall site theme; you just have to “tag” the heading.

For example, suppose you are writing your own blog post about “How to Write Titles and Headings” using WordPress, and you’ve written a few paragraphs. Then you decide to add a new subsection within it that needs a subhead. We’ll use some sample text from this guide and show you how to style it using the WYSIWYG:

To add your major page headline that will appear at the top of the page:

Type your text into the WYSIWYG, and highlight the text.

Look for a pull down menu that says “Paragraph” (some content management systems might say “Normal” for the default text) and open it up.

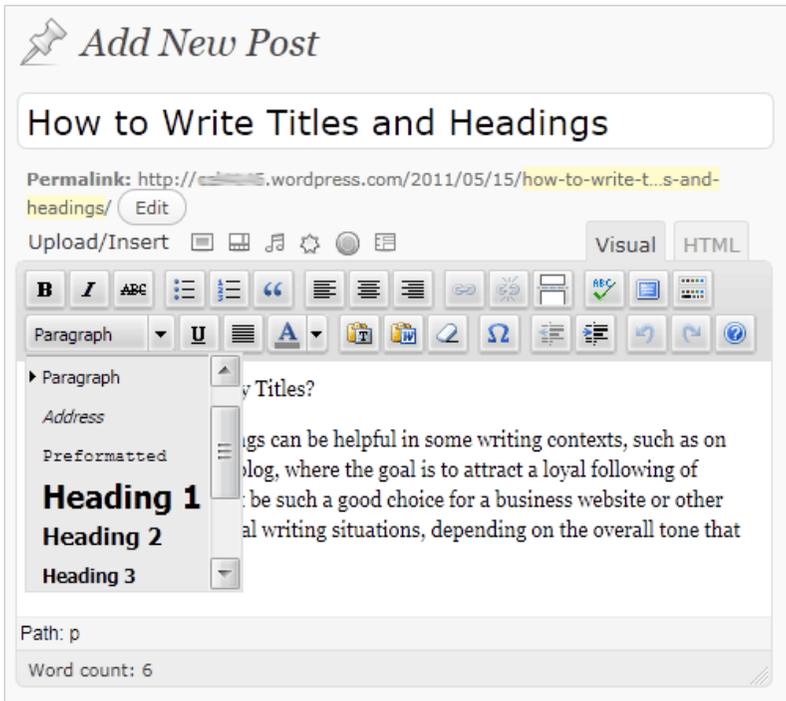


Figure 15. The pull down menu allows the user to set whether a part of the text is a paragraph, heading, etc. It’s important to use these pre-defined styles, when available, so that the formatting is consistent across the site.

In Figure 15, the topic of our new subsection is “Can I Use Catchy Titles?” We can tag this text with the Heading 3 style and the header will be formatted to match all other same level subheads across your blog.

Why Heading 3? Most blogging platforms and templates apply the Heading 1 style to the name of the blog. As a result, many bloggers use either Heading 2 or Heading 3 as the first level subhead in the content that they write. You could try Heading 2 first, and then if you discovered when posted that it was the same size and emphasis as the title of your post, you could change it to Heading 3.

What’s happening here is that your WYSIWYG editor is applying the proper heading H3 HTML tag that you would use if you were coding the text yourself. (See “Creating a Basic Web Page is Easy” to learn more about coding.)

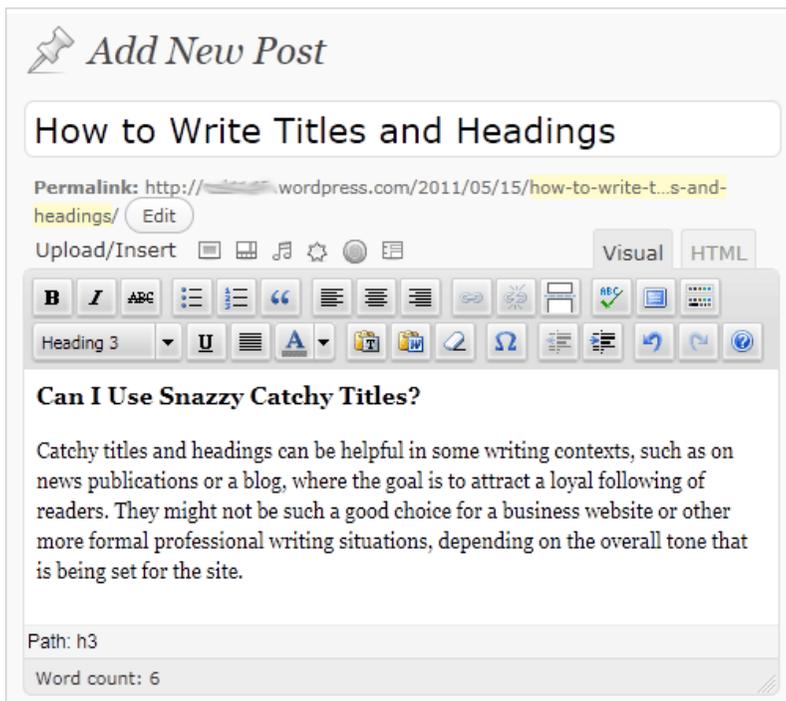


Figure 16. Once the “Heading 3” style is applied to “Can I Use Catchy Titles,” it appears newly formatted within the WYSIWYG editing window.

Why tag your headers? When you tag your headlines and subheaders, you are letting the web do the work for you. If you switch to a new template for your website, all of your Heading 3 headlines will automatically change to the new Heading 3 style used in your template, but any headlines you have styled by hand will have to be changed by hand: each and everyone, over and over and over again.

DAMNIT, JIM, I'M A WRITER, NOT A GRAPHIC DESIGNER! (OR, WHO GIVES A CRAP?)

It's easy to get by in most college writing without thinking about visual design or graphics. About the most visual design college writing asks for is that you emulate the MLA or APA document format, pretty bare bones visual designs in themselves. Create your text of letters and numbers, and plug it in.

The web, though, is a different place. To be a web writer, you have to expand your definition of "text" beyond merely copy (the alphanumeric symbols on the page you might have previously thought exclusively constituted all writing) to include visual design as well as the use of font, images, layout, video, and other media. Using these new forms of writing also raises new issues about copyright and fair use.

A good starting point is to learn some basic design principles. To think about visual design of your pages, you need a design vocabulary: a set of terms you can use to talk about what you like and don't like in a web page.

While there are many different sets of terms you could learn, **contrast**, **repetition**, **alignment**, and **proximity** (CRAP) is a good place to start. Read [Mike Rundle's How C.R.A.P is Your Site Design?](#) and [Travis McAshan's Is Your Website Design "CRAP?"](#) Go read them now. Seriously. It's going to be hard to make progress with visual design without understanding CRAP.

White Space Is Your Friend

In [the previous section](#), we recommended that you read about the CRAP design principals as a way of getting starting thinking about and talking about the visual design of your web pages.

Now that you understand what CRAP is, a good next principle is that the background on the page, the "white space," (also known as

“negative space”) is your friend. Cluttered websites where everything is smashed together can be difficult to read. Take a moment to browse Max Standworth’s article [25 Examples of Clean and Well Designed Web Sites](#). See how in these examples of good design, there is plenty of white space. The text has room to “breathe” and the pages are much more reader friendly for it.

Now suppose your white space is not white, but a background image (this is why we need the term negative space). If the background image is too strong—such as a bright picture or a repeating design behind your text—it will call too much attention to itself. Reading text may be extremely difficult, and you may obscure important information. Look at [Ugliest / Worst Over The Top Web Sites of 2009](#) over at *Web Pages That Suck*. You’ll find some examples where strong backgrounds are a problem. Consider a solid color background and add pictures to create interest. Or if you want to use an image as a background, you might be able to fade the image so that it is very subtle against a solid background, almost transparent.

Still, even solid backgrounds can be a problem if there is not enough contrast between the background and the copy on the page. (See, we just used the C of CRAP, contrast, to talk about a web design issue.) The worst cases are color combinations that will give readers migraines, like red text on a blue background. It might look interesting at first, but it will make your readers’ eyes bleed (or at the very least give them a headache) if they have to look at it for longer than a few seconds. Chances are they won’t stick around that long if they see a page full of jarring colors (anyone tired of MySpace yet?).

But I Might As Well Be Color Blind!

If you thought the previous example of red text on blue background was cool, well it might be true (you might as well be color blind).

Even though most of us can tell that the awful color combination of text and background given in the previous section is a completely insane choice, it still can be difficult for us to work with colors effectively. A designer has to choose colors that are the right tone to support the mission or focus of the website. Most people know that blue (because of water) and green (because of plants) can symbolize life. Red can hint at anger or, ironically, love. Black background websites with some harsh red and white might have a Goth or Heavy Metal feel to

them (no one wants their website to have a hair band feel—unless the website is for a hair band).

Now that you are writing for the web, you might also be expecting a global audience. Did you know that colors symbolize different meaning in other cultures? Check out [Color Meanings by Culture](#) at *The International Business Edge*. For instance in Japanese culture, red symbolizes life.

Beyond understanding symbolism, it can still be hard to come up with a color scheme of multiple colors that work well on a site. If your website has a primary logo or visual, one technique can be to use the color picker in an image editor to choose the colors that match with that logo or visual. Or if you still feel challenged in trying to pick out colors that go together in your design, [Color Scheme Designer 3](#) and [Color Schemer Online v2](#) can help you to come up with matching colors.

YOU CAN'T WRITE FOR THE WEB WITHOUT WORKING WITH VISUALS

What would the web be without images? Pretty boring, right? Consider using relevant visuals on your web pages to enhance the meaning of the copy that you have written. Here are a few important tips to follow:

There are three main file formats for images that you can currently use on the web: GIF, JPG, and PNG. GIFs work well for icons and other graphics with large areas of simple colors, but because GIFs are limited to 256 colors, they are a poor choice for photographs. JPEG (or JPG, as they are commonly called) is a [lossy format](#) (like MP3s) that supports millions of colors and can work well for photographs. In fact, JPG is likely the default file format that your digital camera uses. Beware. The more JPGs are compressed to reduce file size, the more image quality (information) they lose. PNG is a lossless format that can support both a small range of colors, like GIFs and millions of colors in photographs, like JPGs, only without any visual quality loss (but larger file size). Given all these considerations, you may need to experiment saving your images in the different image file formats to determine which provides the quality you need at the lowest file size. (If you want to learn more, see Patrick Lynch and Sarah Horton's excellent article on [graphic file formats on the web](#).)

Make sure your visuals are appropriate and relevant to what the rest of the text says on the page. Don't pick a visual just because it looked "cool" when you found it. Visuals should enhance the meaning.

Make sure your images are good quality. JPG "artifacts" and pixelated images (caused by making a very small original image larger) look unprofessional and sloppy. A good rule of thumb is to stick with the "high" setting (60 or more) when saving JPGs.

Crop images to remove unnecessary information (e.g., when creating screenshots, remove the browser window) and to focus the reader's attention on what is important in the visual. Cropping an image to exclude extraneous detail can dramatically improve the image's effectiveness.

Beware of stretching images out of proportion if you prepare them in an image manipulation program. Don't make your images look like they came from a distorted reflection in a fun house mirror.

Provide captions when using multiple visuals in longer web texts. Captions will orient the reader to your reason for including the visual. Otherwise, readers have to guess your intentions.

Reduce very large images using a graphics program. While HTML provides a method for defining the width and height of an image, this method does not change the file size. You don't want your reader to have to wait for that 5MB image file to load when you could have easily resized and resampled the image to 50k or less. Almost any stand alone or web-based image program can be used to reduce your image file sizes and the results can dramatically increase the speed at which your pages load. (See the [next section](#) for more information on image programs.)

Free Image Editing Programs You Can Use

If you need an image manipulation program to crop or resize your visuals, don't feel like you have to buy Adobe Photoshop. Almost any contemporary image program will work. In particular, there are free desktop graphics programs you can download and install on your computer such as [Paint.Net](#) (Windows) and [GIMP](#) (Windows, Mac, Linux).

While not as powerful as Adobe Photoshop (the industry standard used by commercial photographers and graphic artists), these programs are more than sufficient for a new web writer/designer. Later

on, should you have access to working with Adobe Photoshop, the skills you learn from GIMP or Paint.Net will transfer.

If you just need a one shot tool to do a quick resize or crop, or to reduce the size of a graphics file, and you don't want to install a program, online graphic editing programs such as [Aviary](#) or [pixlr](#) are becoming more powerful and should work just fine.

WTF (WHY THIS FONT?)

There are thousands upon thousands of fonts out there. Why stick with Times New Roman or Verdana when you could use a font that looks just like *The Matrix*? However, will an awesome-looking font really make people like your writing better?

Although computer monitors continue to improve in terms of resolution and clarity, keep in mind that some fonts can look “fuzzy” and thus become hard to read at extremely small font sizes. Under certain viewing conditions (particularly Windows with font smoothing disabled), your fancy typography may be completely unreadable.

There's a reason why almost every website and blog uses the same small selection of fonts. Usually, people want you to pay attention to what their words mean, not just the way they look. Using too many fonts can make a site look messy and chaotic, which is fine if that's what you're going for.

The following sections will help you decide on which fonts will work best for you.

So Many Fonts . . . Which Is the Right One?

Unless you are coding your own web pages, most social media applications will give you little control of typefaces. The what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WSIWYG) editor that you use to create content may allow you to add bold or italics. Sometimes you can change the font size. Rarely will you be able to specify the font.

However, if you are coding your own web pages and have the option of choosing different fonts, start by first considering your rhetorical situation: Who is the audience? What is your purpose for designing? What is the context? Do you want to be humorous? Serious? Are you announcing an event? There are a million things to take into consideration, but the most important thing to consider is readability. Don't

use overly-fancy fonts just because they're cool. At the same time, don't use plain fonts when you're trying to generate some excitement or interest. For example, if you have a Halloween theme going, you can find fonts that appear to be dripping with a liquid (like blood—boo!). Half the fun of fonts is searching for new and interesting ones.

If you want to see some of the many commercial fonts available for purchase, go to [Linotype's web site](#) and check out some of their standard fonts. You can also find free fonts on the Internet, but be careful of viruses or other malicious software and downloads! If you want a safe place to download free fonts, go to [dafont.com](#) or [fontquirrel.com](#).

Note that even if you downloaded a font onto your own computer and included that font in your website design, it was not be automatically usable on the computers of others viewing your site. Until recently, anyone looking at your website would have had to pre-install that specific font file on their own computer in order to see your website as you intended.

For example, if you include the Arial font in your website design, everyone who visits your site must already have the Arial font file pre-installed on their computer in order to see the site the way you designed it. And that font must have the exact same name. The good news in this particular example is that almost everyone already has the Arial font file pre-installed on their computer, so they would see your website the same way you saw it when you designed it.

But if you choose a less common font, like Plantagenet Cherokee, many of your users most likely won't have the Plantagenet Cherokee font file pre-installed on their own computer. When that happens, a user's computer automatically replaces the "unknown" font (in this case Plantagenet Cherokee), with some other font that is available, most likely Times New Roman; all of this means that, to at least some of your users, your website ends up looking completely different than what you had intended.

Consequently, you usually want to stick with fonts that are commonly available; see [Common Fonts to All Versions of Windows & Mac Equivalents](#) for an excellent list.

Choosing a Font: Serif vs. Sans Serif

Ok, my blogging program lets me pick a font. Now what?

Your most important typographic decision is what will be the main font you use on your pages as this font will set a visual tone for your pages. While there are a variety of decorative fonts that look good as headlines, for this main font, you should pick between a serif or a sans serif body text font.

Serif: A serif is the extra little stroke, those little curves, at the ends of letters:

WTF (Times New Roman)

WTF (Palatino Linotype)

WTF (Georgia)

Figure 17. Examples of serif fonts.

Sans Serif: “Sans” literally means “without,” so a sans serif font does not include any extra stroke at the ends of the letters:

WTF (Arial)

WTF (Helvetica Neue)

WTF (Tahoma)

Figure 18. Examples of sans serif fonts.

Many people feel that sans serif fonts look “cleaner” and more “modern,” while serif fonts look more traditional, more book-like. The conventional wisdom has been that serif fonts are more readable—particularly in print—while sans serif fonts are more legible. If you have to read large blocks of text, the serifs at the ends of letters makes them easier to identify and easier to read. On the other hand, the simplicity of Sans Serif fonts are thought to make these fonts more legible and easier to read in small sizes or on coarse screens. For these reason, you see lots and lots of sans serif fonts on web pages.

Which should you use? We are not convinced that the serif vs. sans serif argument really matters anymore. Pick a font you like that fits the tone and the message of your site. Pick a font that you think will appeal to the sorts of people that you want to read your stuff. If you have a more traditional site, you may want a more traditional serif font. If you want a more hip, modern look, you may want a sans serif font.

Want More Choices? Use Font Linking

If you find your choice of web-safe fonts to be too limiting or if you want to use a more decorative font for a headline, your choices used to be very limited. One approach was to set your text in Photoshop and save it as an JPEG, but then search engines could not index your content, and screen readers couldn't read your pages to disabled web users. In addition, every time you wanted to edit your text, you had to make a visit to Photoshop to recreate your image.

Fortunately, in 2009, the major browsers started supporting the `@font-face` specification in CSS3 (Cascading Style Sheets, see [Time to Style Your Document with CSS](#)) that provides significantly more flexibility for website designers in terms of font choices. The `@font-face` rule provides a mechanism for linking font file that is stored on a server to the content in a webpage. The browser downloads the font file and uses it to set text in that typeface. Joshua Johnson's [The Essential Guide to @font-face](#) (2010) provides an excellent summary of current `@font-face` solutions for those who are coding their own websites. In his review, Joshua mentions sites such as [TypeKit](#) and [FontSquirrel](#), which provide both free and paid font solutions.

Joshua also mentions the Google web font service which has expanded considerably since the article was published. TypeKit partnered with Google to develop a simple open process for using CSS font-linking, and in 2010 Google began their [Google Web Fonts](#) font

sharing service. (You can read more about this service at the [Google Web Font Blog](#).) As of May of 2011, the Google webfonts site offers 148 open source typefaces for use on your webpages. These fonts include many decorative typefaces that are well suited for use in headlines.

The Google/Typekit solution is straightforward and easy to use. The fonts are stored on Google servers. You link to a Google style sheet for the typeface you want to use (Google even supplies the linking code), and then you add the font to your CSS rules (Google includes sample rules as well). As an extra bonus, all the fonts are licensed to be used for free on the web.

[Blogger](#) now offers the Google webfonts as choices in its WYSIWYG text editor; we suspect many other platforms will follow.



The image displays five examples of typefaces from Google's free webfont service. Each example consists of a single word or phrase rendered in a different font style. The first is 'Anton' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The second is 'Cabin Sketch' in a bold, black, sans-serif font with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance. The third is 'Calligraffiti' in a black, cursive script font. The fourth is 'LUCKIEST GUY' in a bold, black, sans-serif font with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance. The fifth is 'Raleway' in a black, sans-serif font with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance.

Figure 19. Examples of typefaces from Google's free webfont service.

HOW CAN I USE VIDEO ON MY SITE?

Nearly all websites will allow you to add video but there is a difference between hosting and embedding video on your page. Most blogging software and web hosting services limit the amount of video you can add directly, making streaming from a video hosting site such as YouTube, Vimeo, or the Internet Archive a far better option. Processing and streaming video is their business.

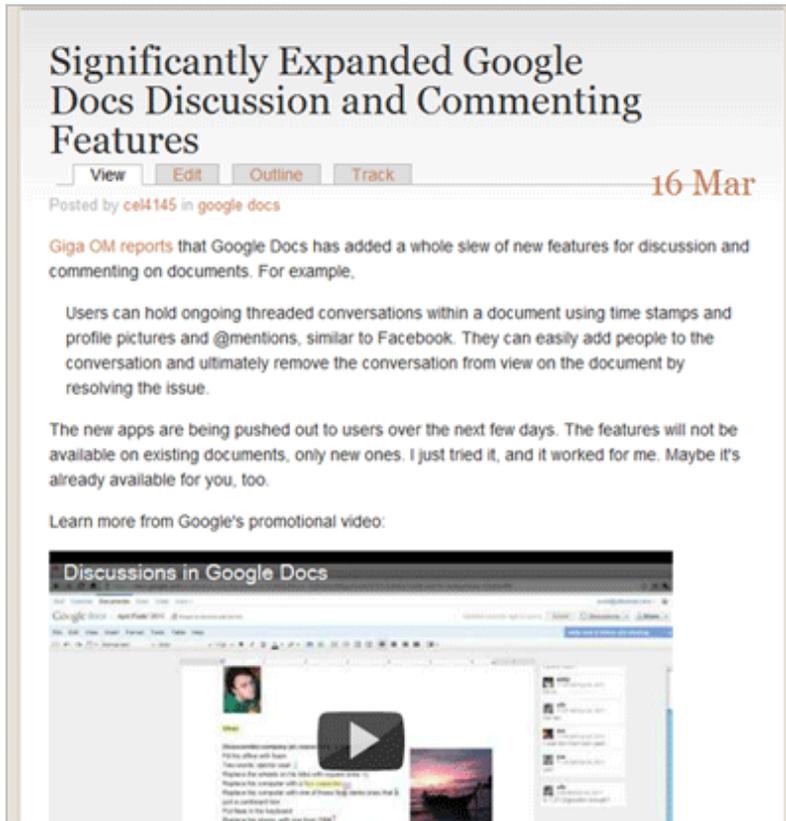


Figure 20. It's pretty easy to embed a YouTube video in your blog. (<http://kairosnews.org/>)

Even if you have your own domain name and server space, you will probably find it easier and more efficient to use a video hosting service than to store your videos on your server.

There are a few different ways to include video on your website. Perhaps the easiest way is simply to include the link to the video you want to show. Many websites will recognize the URL and automatically link it (this can easily be seen on Facebook). The problem with including only a link is getting the audience back to your page (or not having them ever leave it).

Thus, it is more effective to embed video and most video hosting sites will generate the embed code for you, which you can simply paste into your webpage. You often need to use HTML mode, rather than the visual editor. Embed codes are also generated for slideshows such as Prezi, Vuvox, or even a Picassa album of still images, allowing you to embed these moving images like you would a video.

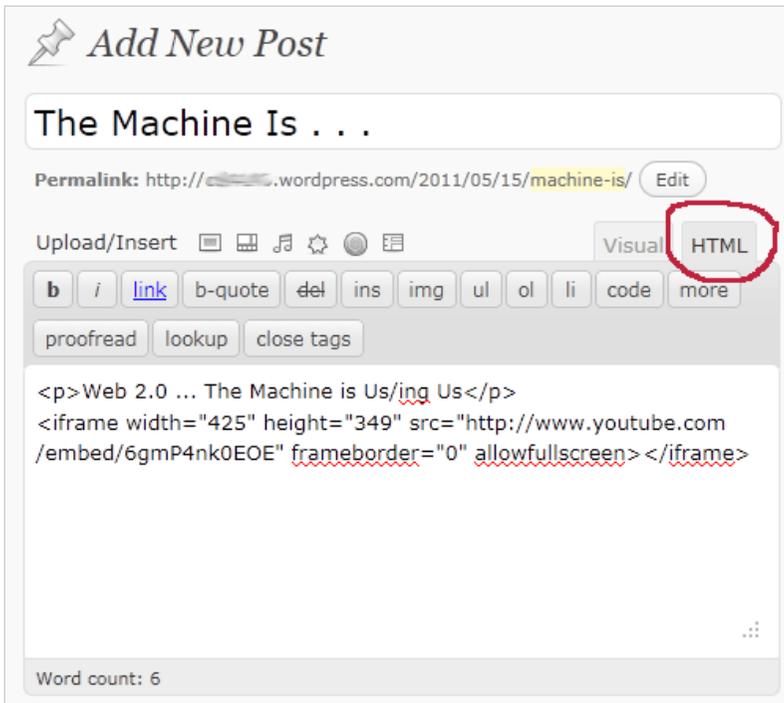


Figure 21. Look for “HTML” or “Source” in your WYSIWYG editor, and use it to paste in the video embed code, as in this example from WordPress.

To embed a YouTube video:

1. Click on the Share button just below the video or slideshow. A link will be shown, but there is also another button labeled Embed.
2. Click on Embed and you'll get the HTML embedding code with various options you can select such as size, play in HD, etc. If you are using a WYSIWYG editor on your blog, you'll have to select the "view source code" or similar option to paste in the HTML that YouTube has provided.

Not surprisingly, Google (who owns YouTube) provides a very similar process for embedding Google Maps into blogs, wikis, or web pages. Click on the "Link" icon in the upper left hand corner of a map, copy the code, and then paste the code into your page, following the same process as above.

JAZZING UP YOUR WEB PAGES: THE GOOD, THE BAD, OR THE UGLY?

If images, videos, and fonts are a good idea why not animated GIFs, Emoticons, and flashy things of all kinds? Why not just kick things up a notch with some moonwalking?

Yeah! That looks cool!!!

But wait.

This handbook is all about the rhetoric. Does your flashy thing have a purpose? What will your reader/user think? Will they say, "This is so cool; I want to be just like this person"? Or will they say: "No way I am touching this flashy page with a ten foot pole" and move on as quickly as they can click the back button?

Each time you jazz up your web page, you need to think about your readers and about the values you are communicating to your readers.

Wait—Animated GIFs Aren't Cool Anymore?

What's considered cliché in the world of web writing?

Animated GIFs are cute, but they can slow down page loading times considerably. While they were immensely popular in the 1990s, today they are usually only found on MySpace pages, fan web sites, and signature lines in forum posts in some online communities. Animated

GIFs do not show up on smart phones, and they are usually limited to certain interface elements.

And while we're at it, Flash can be uncool too, especially when it's used to create a slow-to-load, super-fancy introduction screen that does little but keep users from getting to the content they want.

What about Those Big Flashing Animated Menus? They're So Rad!

I keep hearing about Flash, Silverlight, and all this other stuff that will make my site more interactive and animated? Can I add these to my blog?

Before delving into how to learn to use Flash or Silverlight, keep in mind that not all readers will be able to access the content. iPad and iPhone users, for example, won't be able to see flash animations or applications. Silverlight may require a download, and visitors to your site may not have the time, space, or inclination to download it just to view your site.

If you really want to learn more about animation, HTML5 offers many animation tags that are becoming more popular and more widely supported. See Mark Pilgrim's [Dive into HTML5](#) or [W3Schools HTML5 Tutorial](#).



Figure 22. Animated GIFs are no longer in style.

NOT EVERYONE CAN SEE YOUR GRAPHICS

Because you have enhanced the meanings of your texts using images and visual design, you have to think about how that will impact readers with visual impairment. Although many people with disabilities use devices or software to assist them, there are still things you can do as a web writer to improve their reading experience. For instance, minimally, any images should have captions or “alt” text (an attribute added to image tags with HTML; WYSIWYGs may prompt you for this) to describe the image for those that cannot see it.

It is particularly critical that any image that does rhetorical work in your web pages have an alt tag. For example, if you use a graphic button as your home link, a blind person will not be able to infer the purpose of the link unless you tag it with something like “alt=“home””.

An automated assessment tool like [WAVE: Web Accessibility Evaluation](#) can help HTML coders determine the accessibility of their web pages. Still, WAVE is only going to get you so far if you don’t understand the principles of how to design for accessibility. For an introduction on how to make your website accessible, consult [usability.gov’s chapter on accessibility](#).

IT’S NOT PLAGIARISM IF IT’S ON THE WEB, RIGHT?

You wish.

Let’s think for a second about the difference between copyright violations and plagiarism, a helpful distinction to keep in mind when discussing how this stuff works online:

Copyright violation is a *legal* issue. Because we want people to make awesomely creative content (Words! Music! Art! Philosophy! Etc!), the United States has laws that allow content creators to control how their creations are used for a certain amount of time. The law states that people have an automatic copyright on their own creations. Anything you create is automatically copyrighted once it is fixed in a medium. When you are writing a paper in your word processor and save it to your hard drive, it is copyrighted. Take a picture with your digital camera or phone. The moment it is saved onto your camera or phone memory, it’s copyrighted. No copyright notice required on your part.

Copyright gives content creators a chance to make money from their work and hopefully continue making more. As a copyright holder of a creative work, you control how that work can be redistributed and whether or not it can be modified. There are certain circumstances where it's legal to use copyrighted material in ways beyond what the copyright owner allows. These are called "fair use" situations, but let's not get into that yet.

Plagiarism is an *ethical* issue. While violations of copyright are determined in court and are mandated in laws, acts of plagiarism are often not illegal at all (though they can be). Instead, plagiarism occurs when someone uses content (usually text, but not necessarily) in a way that isn't allowed by the community (e.g., writing in a school setting or academic publishing) in which the content is being used.

With that distinction in mind, we can see how using text or images found online can violate standards of copyright, plagiarism, neither, or both. The same basic principles you use for your college research papers apply when you write for the web. The short version: if you use other people's words, put quotation marks around them; if you use other people's words or ideas, acknowledge them. Similarly you should also acknowledge your use of images or other media elements. (See the next section for more information.)

In terms of what can be quoted, there may be legal issues involved, but generally you are allowed to quote any material that is freely available on the web in the same way that you can in your research writing. By convention and respect for the copyright holder, though, it's a good idea to quote only a few lines of text, or at most a single paragraph. You may also quote small portions of text from print sources. Copying all of the text of a source (print or digital) into your text would be a copyright violation.

There are a few differences between how you handle citing sources in a research paper and on the web. When using quoted material, some bloggers use the rich possibilities of the web to do more than just use quotation marks. Blogging templates often provide a way to indicate long quotations through some design element: a different type font or size; a text-box of some kind; a change of background color; large quotation marks; etc. If you use many quotations in your posts, you may want to think about using some design element to set off those quotations visually.

Good news for bloggers in all this. For acknowledging source authors, you are let off the hook in terms of MLA Works Cited pages or APA References pages. Yippee! Instead, bloggers normally acknowledge authors by linking to their articles or website. If information is taken from a print source, it's pretty standard to link either to the Amazon page for the particular book or to its page on a publisher's website.

Nevertheless, if you're writing in other web genres, you may need to provide sources (for example, Wikipedia provides footnoted references). And if you are writing for a class—blogging or not—don't assume that your teacher doesn't want a Works Cited or References list. You would be wise to ask.

Notes [\[edit\]](#)

1. ^{^ a b} From the 1995 *Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary*:

use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work

qtd. in Stepchyshyn, Vera; Robert S. Nelson (2007). *Library plagiarism policies*. Assoc of College & Resrch Libraries. p. 65. ISBN 0838984169.

2. ^{^ a b} From the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

the wrongful appropriation or purloining and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas... of another

qtd. in Lands (1999)

3. ^{^ a b c d e} Derrida [2001] p.57 quotation: "The history of literature, since you referred to that, is constituted by that kind of thing [reproduction], by quasi-mechanical and automatic functions, always on the border of plagiarism (a notion as obscure and problematic as cloning)"

4. ^{^ a b c d} Arnau [1959] quotation: (p.40) "The boundaries between permissible and impermissible. imitation. stylistic

Figure 23. Wikipedia provides sources for its information in a Notes section at the end of this entry on plagiarism.

Pictures Don't Count, Right?

It's as legal as trading commercial MP3s online. (Not!)

Photographers, artists, and graphic designs put just as much time, effort, and expense (for travel and equipment) into their work as writers do. Just as you shouldn't plagiarize or violate the copyright of written texts, images deserve the same consideration. If you need to use an image, you can create your own, look for free graphics sites online, purchase an image, or contact the creator for permission to use it. There also are a good number of sites where image creators offer their work to be used for free for personal, non-commercial use, asking only for credit and a link back to their site.

Nevertheless, you'll find that bloggers frequently borrow images from other websites without permission because they know that the worst thing that will happen is that the copyright holder can send them a take down notice, a formal letter which says "stop using my image because I own it." If you do choose to do like other bloggers, be sure to properly attribute whose picture it is and where it came from; even though you borrowed the content without permission, many copyright holders might be appeased when they see proper credit is given. Also, you should copy the image to your server rather than linking to a copy of the image on the original server so that you are not using the original artists' bandwidth.

Outside of classroom settings where you may be using an image to make a point in an online essay or as part of a mashup or other project (see the next section), you should only use other people's visuals after you have obtained permission from the copyright holder. Even if you are creating a website for a client as part of a service learning project or in an internship, think carefully before using images you find on the web. You'll want to avoid the professional embarrassment your client or employer would receive from a take down notice.

How Can I Use Images and Create Remixes and Mashups If I Can't Copy from the Web?

If you are creating texts for a class assignment that will only be shared with your teacher and in your class, educational fair use rights do allow you great liberty to borrow copyrighted works from the web. Fair use rights are specific exemptions to copyright law that allow for use

in certain circumstances; creating works for the classroom being one of them. Only you can't share what you produce with anyone beyond the context of that class. No showing your multimedia production to family and friends. And certainly no publishing to the public Internet. That would violate copyright law.

There are some fair use exceptions, other than educational fair use, that allow for using a copyrighted work. Copyright law allows for the use of copyrighted works without permission when creating parody that is social commentary. And fair use is what allows authors to quote text in a work. One can also make limited use of a small part of a copyrighted image that is significantly transformed. On the other hand, even the tiniest sample of a piece of music is considered a copyright violation. Because the laws governing fair use are very complex, it would be best to consult your teacher before deciding that something is fair use on your own.

So play it safe. You can use websites that offer free images, such as [Stock.XCHNG](#) which contains both free to use (though check the license requirements carefully to see what is allowed) and pay-for-use images. Sometimes artists will let you use their work for noncommercial purposes. Another option is to look for works that give you clear copyright to use the work in certain ways, such as public domain works and Creative Commons licensed ones.

For instance, public domain works are those that are no longer covered by copyright law. Works originally published before 1923 in the U.S. are in the public domain and can be freely used however you like ([learn more about the public domain](#)). And if you significantly transform the work, you then have copyright on the new version yourself.

Even when works are covered by copyright, sometimes creators want others to be able to use their works beyond what copyright law allows by default, and they have granted legal rights using [Creative Commons \(CC\) licenses](#). Try [Creative Commons Search](#), and you'll be able to see that there are many works online that are CC licensed.

Another method for finding photographs that may be added to your site legally is to use the public domain and freely-licensed media content available through [Wikimedia Commons's terrific online media file repository](#). There are tens of thousands of images available in this repository. Just make sure you check to see what type of "permissions" are granted for the files you want to use.

Similarly, you can use the [Advanced Search option on Flickr](#) to find images licensed with a CC license. Flickr provides search options for CC content tagged with permissions “to use commercially” or “modify, adapt, or build upon.”

But don't think of this as a free-for-all where you can do whatever you want with the works that you find. Some CC licenses only allow you to make copies of a work—no derivatives allowed. Others allow you to modify a work and integrate it into your own creative composition subject to specific requirements of the license. CC licenses typically require you to attribute the original author. If you decide to use a CC licensed work, be sure to read the license carefully to know what you can and can't do.

IN THE END, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CODE

I use Facebook and other social media sites to post to the web. Why should I learn to code?

While social media allows you to create and post a lot of content to the web without knowing how to code using hypertext markup language (HTML) or cascading style sheets (CSS), you may eventually want to have more control over the presentation of your content. Social media sites, such as blogs and wikis, are a great way to get your written content out to the world quickly; however, these platforms all use templates that limit the control you have over the appearance of your pages. The amount of tweaking that you can do to a template will vary from service to service (and sometimes you will have to upgrade to a paid “pro” account). But in almost all cases, if you want more control over how your pages look on the web, you have to learn about HTML and CSS.

If You Want to Work on the Web, You Will Need to Know Some Code

If you are a Writing, English, Marketing, or Communications major and you enjoy writing on the web, you might wonder what career opportunities are out there. One of the most promising career paths you might pursue is as a content strategist. (For more information on content strategy, see Kristina Halvorson's article "[The Discipline of](#)

[Content Strategy](#)” in *A List Apart* as well as her company’s web site [Brain Traffic](#).)

Content is at the heart of every good website, and content strategists specialize in managing that content for an organization: writing, editing, organizing, managing media, and sustaining the website over time. Although they work on teams with graphic artists, HTML coders, interface designers, and programmers, they still need to understand how the HTML code that runs the web works to be effective. You do not necessarily need to be a whiz at coding web pages, but you should understand what the HTML mark up codes are and what they do.

OK, You Convinced Me. What Is This About Marking Up A Document?

Understanding HTML and CSS can help you understand how many documents work including documents not on the web. HTML is a descendant of something called Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) that was developed in the mid-1960s at IBM as a way of processing large sets of documents on mainframe computers. HTML, a very simplified version of SGML, was developed in the late-1980s and is at the heart of all web pages. Extensible Markup Language (XML), another variation of SGML, was developed in the late nineties specifically to exchange information between different kinds of servers.

Since then XML has become a popular way of exchanging all sorts of information. Did you know that modern word processors use XML and style sheets to format your text and style it? The “x” in .docx for Microsoft Word 2007 and 2010 denotes that your word processing file is XML-based. Meanwhile HTML (now in version 5) continues to be the tagging language that drives the web.

Separating Content from Presentation

One of the hardest and most important concepts to learn for new HTML coders and new content strategists alike is that content should always be separated from presentation. While this principle can be very hard to grasp, it is critical to contemporary web design. When you are writing with a word processor, you can highlight text and click bold. You do not have to think about the relationship of the appear-

ance of the text to the structure of the text. You just click and keep writing.

When you are creating content on the web, however, you use one set of rules (HTML) to define the structure of your content (e.g., a heading, a list, a link) and a second set of rules (CSS) to define how that content will appear (e.g. bold text, double line spacing, blue background). You will find this process of separating structure from appearance difficult when you begin, but the more your work with HTML and CSS, the easier it will become.

You will also find that as your websites get bigger, separating structure from appearance makes your websites much easier to manage. For example, if you decide that your body typeface is too large, you do not have to go through each and every page of your website, selecting text and changing the font size setting by hand over and over and over again; instead, you edit a single style rule and all of the text magically changes because the appearance of that text is all defined by that rule.

The principle of separating appearance from content is also used in the workplace by many writers when managing formatting in very large word processing documents, and it is used by designers and book publishers when producing print documents with desktop publishing software. In addition, EPUB, the open ebook standard used by many ereaders, works the same way, using HTML to markup the content and CSS to add the formatting. Learn a little bit of HTML and CSS, and you could create your own ebook.

Creating a Basic Web Page Is Easy!

Right, I've heard that line before.

Any page on the web—no matter how media-rich it appears—is, at its core, a small, text-only document. The document may contain links to images or to videos that the browser retrieves to create the media-rich page you see, but the core web page—the document ending in .html—is all text.

Your browser (whether you use Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, Safari, or some other browser) is simply a program on your computer that interprets the HTML code in these text files, combines text with media files, and creates pages.

Okay, let's begin getting things done!

1. Open up a plain-text editor. On Macs, the default is TextEdit; on Windows, Notepad.

If you are working on your own computer, you may want to download and install [TextWrangler](#) (Mac) or [Notepad++](#) (PC). These free programs are better in many ways than TextEdit or Notepad. They have nice features, such as color coding HTML tags, showing line numbers, and auto indentation—all of which are really handy and speed up the coding process.

Important! Whatever you do, **do not** use a word processing program like Microsoft Word. The content produced in Microsoft Word does not play well with web browsers and should be avoided at all costs when you are creating your own pages. Use the proper tool for the job: use a text editor, not a word processor.

2. Now you are ready to begin creating your web page. Type the following in your text editor:

Hello World!

3. Save that file as webpage.html. (Note: if you are using Windows Notepad, you will need to change the “save as” file type to “All Files.”) Be sure to type the extension “.html” All files on the web must have an extension. Your browser uses the extension to determine the file type (html, image, video, etc.) Without an extension, the browser can’t process the file.
4. Open up the file in Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, or Apple Safari.

Important! Even though Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) is still the most popular web browser, we recommend that you DO NOT use it as your primary browser for designing web pages. IE has always been notorious for not following HTML/CSS standards. No browser gets standards perfect, but IE is the worst at it by far. You can compose your code properly, according to what you learn in tutorials, and IE will sometimes not display it correctly. Even though if you become serious about web design, you will have to learn to code for IE’s idiosyncracies, using IE is very tough on new designers trying to learn

the basics of HTML/CSS. It's like having a teacher who marks your answers wrong when they are, in fact, correct.

5. Using the menu in your web browser, choose "File > Open" and select `webpage.html`.

The words "Hello World!" should now display in your browser. Congratulations! You have created your first web page!

Now let's add to it. After all, most web pages have more than one sentence. Open your `webpage.html` file, add a line return, and type a paragraph about your new web page. Something like this:

Hello World!

This is my first web page. Once I'm done creating it, I'll be able to brag to everyone that I know how to code HTML and CSS, and before long, I'll be creating my very own stupendous website!

Save your file and open it again in your web browser, or if your web browser is open to the file already, you can hit "refresh" (CTRL-R: you must refresh because your browser won't know that you have updated the file).

The problem is that the browser will display your two paragraphs something like this:

Hello World! This is my first web page. Once I'm done creating it, I'll be able to brag to everyone that I know how to code HTML and CSS, and before long, I'll be creating my very own stupendous website!

The line break is gone. That's because we need to use HTML to tell the browser about the structure of our document: in this case, that there are two distinct paragraphs.

There is [a predefined set of HTML tags \(or terms\) that makeup the HTML language](#). Your job as a HTML coder is to pick the one that most accurately describes the function of the content. It is a heading? A paragraph? A list? A link?

In this instance, we need the paragraph tag: `<p>`. Note that every HTML tag is specified with angle brackets. Add a `<p>` "opening" tag to the beginning of each paragraph and a `</p>` "closing" tag to the end of each paragraph. The `/` in the closing tag tells the browser that the paragraph is finished.

NOTE: You can [learn more about the <p> tag at W3Schools](#); in this section, we'll frequently link to HTML definitions at [W3Schools](#) or [HTML Dog](#) so that you can learn more about HTML on your own and so that you can begin using these sites as resources. Consider W3Schools's and HTML Dog's HTML reference pages as invaluable "dictionaries" of terms; you won't be able to learn the language of HTML (or CSS) without such references.

Assuming that you have typed everything correctly, your file should now look like this:

```
<p>Hello World!</p>
<p>This is my first web page. Once I'm done creating it, I'll
be able to brag to everyone that I know how to code HTML
and CSS, and before long, I'll be creating my very own stu-
pendous website!</p>
```

Save your file and refresh your browser, and voilà! You've told the browser that those are separate paragraphs, and it now displays them with default paragraph formatting

Hello World!

This is my first web page. Once I'm done creating it, I'll be able to brag to everyone that I know how to code HTML and CSS, and before long, I'll be creating my very own stupendous website!

If for some reason your HTML didn't work like it is supposed to, check for typos. Also check that each of your opening tags `<. . .>` has a closing tag `</. . .>`. A web browser is a much more strict grammarian than a writing teacher, and the least little error in adding HTML tags can make your document wonky.

Next, let's add a headline to the page: My First Web Page. To do so, at the top of your `webpage.html` file, type:

```
<h1>My First Web Page</h1>
```

This tells the web browser that "My First Web Page" is the top level heading on a page. Usually coders will reserve [<h1> for the major headline on a page and then use <h2><h3> etc. for subheads](#), much

like an outline or a table of contents where `<h2>` is used to tag all the primary sections of a document and `<h3>` is used to tag the next level of subsections.

NOTE: Even though you can go up to a `<h6>` level of subheads, we recommend that should you ever feel the need to go beyond an `<h3>` subhead, you split your content into more than one page instead.

Anyway, save your file and view it in a web browser. See how “My First Web Page shows up larger with emphasis, much like this?”

My First Web Page

Hello World!

This is my first web page. Once I’m done creating it, I’ll be able to brag to everyone that I know how to code HTML and CSS, and before long, Ill be creating my very own stupendous website!

There are many more tags that you should use to “describe” your content in HTML. For instance, ` . . . ` around a part of text in a paragraph denotes strong emphasis (usually styled with bold type). `<blockquote> . . . </blockquote>` is used to tag—yes, you guessed it—a long quote that should be indented or otherwise emphasized. Then there are tags for constructing [lists](#) and [tables](#), for making [hyperlinks](#), and for inserting [images](#), to name a few.

But before we move on to CSS, this web page is not quite done yet. Take a look at the following code that is similar to what you will find on most web pages:

```
<!Doctype html>
<html>
<head>
<title>Untitled Document</title>
</head>
<body>
</body>
</html>
```

The first line with the `<!Doctype>` tag tells the web browser that you are using “html” which means you are using the latest version of

HTML, HTML5. As you study and learn new HTML tags, be sure that you are learning the ones supported in HTML5. Using older tags can result in strange and difficult to diagnose problems.

The content in the `<head>...</head>` is metadata about your web page that provides information to the browser. Right now, all we have specified is the document title, but there is other metadata that could be useful to specify once you become more advanced at coding. For example, you might want to use the `<meta>` tag to add a description for your website. Google will use the description you provide there when displaying your main website home page in search results.

Between the `<body>...</body>` tag goes the content that will be displayed to your readers. In other words, the main content that you write goes here.

So copy this code over to your webpage.html file and then move the content you have created in between the `<body>` tags like so.

```

<!Doctype html>
<html>
<head>
<title>Untitled Document</title>
</head>
<body>
<h1>My First Web Page</h1>
<p>Hello World!</p>
<p>This is my first web page. Once I'm done creating it, I'll
be able to brag to everyone that I know how to code HTML
and CSS, and before long, I'll be creating my very own stu-
pendous website!</p>
</body>
</html>
```

Now save the file and view it in your web browser. It should look just that same as before. You won't notice the benefits of fully specifying the HTML page in this way until you get further along in your coding skills. But for now, if you look at the source code of a web page, you'll have a better understanding of the major elements that frame the text.

Finally, there is one last thing to do. See where it says “Untitled Document” in between the [<title>](#) tags in your HTML code? You need to change that to the title of your web page, to look like this:

```
<title>My First Web Page</title>
```

Once you have done so, save your file and view it again in your browser. Now you’ll see that the title of your web page shows up in the top bar of the browser window. Search engines will also use this to help index your website. (See “Every Page Needs a Title” for more on the rhetoric of page titles.)

There are certainly many more HTML tags worth knowing about in order to properly markup your content. To learn more, begin either [W3Schools’s HTML Tutorial](#) or [HTML Dog’s HTML Beginner Tutorial](#); they can take you from here.

Time to Style Your Document with CSS

CSS stands for “Cascading Style Sheets.” It is the system used on the web to control the appearance and layout of web pages. In the early days of the web, coders would change the visual look of their content by embedding attributes in the HTML code. For instance, if a web designer wanted all of his or her text to use the Times New Roman typeface, she would place font tags around each and every bit of text using a tag like:

```
<font face=“Times New Roman, Georgia, serif” size=“2”>Hello  
World</font>
```

This font face tag was all about appearance. A major shift in HTML coding was to move all appearance information out of the HTML tags and into cascading style sheets. Using CSS, a modern designer can change the look of all of the text in all of her pages by editing a single style rule.

Separating the styling of a web page’s content from the page’s HTML tags that structure that content result in more compact pages that are easier to revise and that can be easily adapted for delivery to a variety of devices from large screen desktop computers to smart phones. Using CSS rules, you’ll be able to change all kinds of visual

characteristics of your web writing, such as modifying the font color or size and adding margins and borders around parts of your page.

To understand how truly powerful CSS can be, visit [CSS Zen Garden](#), an extensive portfolio of design themes, each created by a different professional web designer. Using the links through the side navigation menu, view the different designs. In each instance, if you view the Page Source to see the underlying HTML code, that code will be exactly the same. Only the CSS rules have changed.

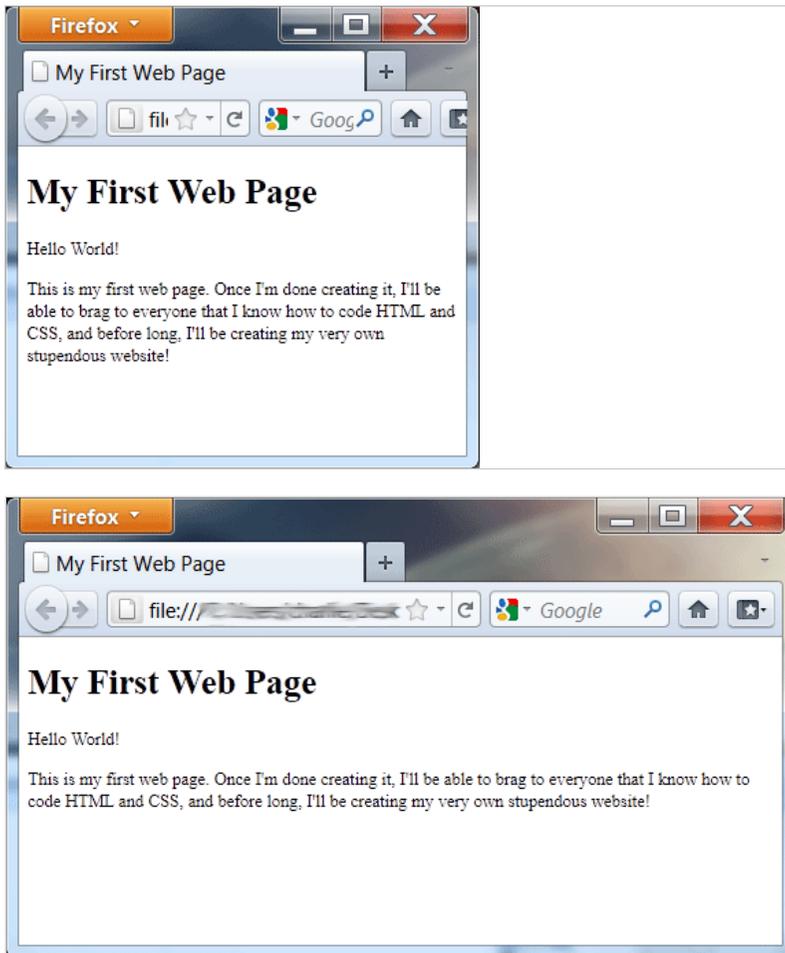


Figure 24. An example web page as viewed in a narrow and a wide window. Notice that the length of the text expands to fit the width of the window.

While you can embed CSS directly in an HTML document, we recommend that you avoid doing so and instead keep your CSS rules in a separate file, much as the CSS Zen Garden designers have done. Having a separate CSS file is much more efficient once you move beyond having only one web page in a web site. Imagine that you have a website that has a dozen or more pages. Now, imagine that on all of these pages you have added a particular background image and italicized text in certain places that you want to change—you want to give your pages a new background image and turn all your italicized words into bold print.

In the early days of web design, you would have to wade through the code of each and every one of those pages, changing the various in-line attributes associated with the background image and every occurrence of the italics attribute of your font face tags. With CSS you have to edit only a few lines in a single document: your stylesheet. Plus, if you ever have to go back and edit the content (the writing) that is marked up by the HTML, it's much easier to read and add to the content when that content is not littered with formatting attributes.

So let's get started with a little CSS coding exercise.

In the article, *Creating a Basic Web Page Is Easy*, you learned how to code a simple web page. Use your text editor to open the webpage.html file you created. Still have it? (If not, you can copy the example HTML text from that section and create a new file.)

View the file in Firefox, Chrome, or Safari again (remember not to use Internet Explorer). As you do, resize your browser window. See how your paragraph always expands or contracts to fill the width of the window?

Suppose you wanted all of the paragraphs in your web page to be the same width regardless of the size of the browser window? Easy to do with CSS:

1. Open your text editor to a new, blank file.
2. Save the new file as `style.css`. (Note: if you are using Windows Notepad, you will need to change the “save as” file type to “All Files.”) Important! Be sure that you are saving the `style.css` file in the same folder on your computer as `webpage.html`.
3. Type the following in your `style.css` file:

```
p {width: 300px;
}
```

The “p” is known as the selector. It is the object (in this case a paragraph tag) that you want to apply a style to. Inside the curly brackets are properties. Your rule can consist of one or many properties. (We’ll see an example later on.) Each property should end with a semicolon.

The width of the text inside the paragraph tag is specified in pixels (px). Since screens have resolutions that are measured in pixels, the pixel is the common unit for describing size on the web.

Now, back to styling your text. Save your style.css file once you have added in the rule for paragraph styling.

There is one more important step. The browser needs to know where to find your style.css file so it can apply your style rules to your HTML page. In “Creating a Basic Web Page Is Easy,” we talked about how the <head> section of your HTML file contained metadata, that is information about the page that the browser processes. The location of your style.css file is another example of metadata.

Add the following in between the <head> . . . </head> tags on the line after the <title> in your webpage.html file:

```
<link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="style.css" />
```

This code will tell your browser that there is a CSS file called style.css in the same folder as your webpage.html file. Your browser will then use the rules in your .css file to style the content of your HTML page.

Once you are done, the top part of the HTML in your webpage.html file should look like this:

```
<!Doctype html>
<html>
<head>
<title>My First Web Page</title>
<link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="style.css" />
</head>
```

Now, view your web page in your browser. It should look something like Figure 25:

If your page does not look like Figure 25, check your CSS and HTML file for typos. CSS rules are very unforgiving. Make sure each rule is surrounded by curly brackets (`{ . . . }`), and each style property ends in a semicolon. Also make certain that your `webpage.html` and `style.css` files are in the same folder. Proofreading issues and misplaced CSS files are the two most common problems that students have when first learning to use CSS to style their web pages.

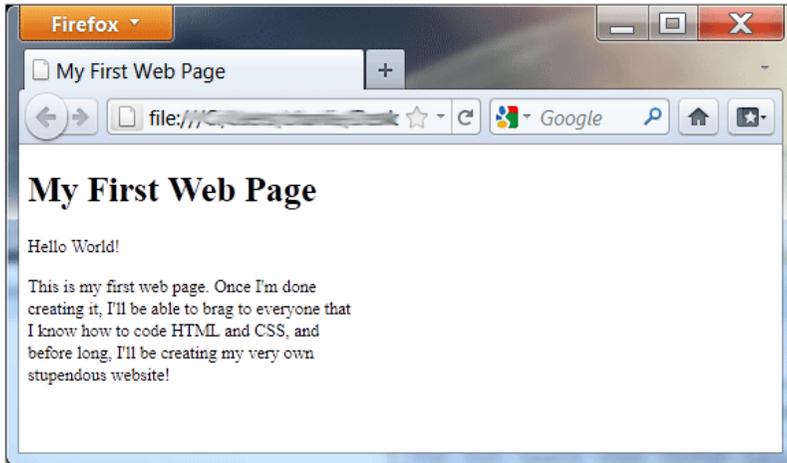


Figure 25. By using CSS, the paragraph width stays the same regardless of the browser window width.

Suppose we want to get a little fancier? Black text on a white background is boring. Let's reverse it. We can do that by specifying properties for the entire `<body>` of the web page. Since the body tag controls everything that appears in the browser window, it's a good place for global style rules.

In your CSS file, leave the previous code you entered for paragraphs, and add the following:

```
body {background-color: #000000;
color: #ffffff;
}
```

The first property sets the background color for the entire page. There is also an attribute, "background-image" that you can use to

specify a visual as the background instead of or in addition to a color. If you examine the CSS code used in the CSS Zen Garden designs, you will find many background images.

The second property, “color,” always refers to text color (even though it doesn’t say font or text). With both the background-color and color properties, the color is designated using a six digit hexadecimal number. Using [W3School’s HTML Color Picker](#) or [Color Scheme Designer](#), you’ll find a wide variety of colors are available for your background color as well as their corresponding hex number.

Save your CSS file and refresh your webpage.html in the web browser. It should look something like this:

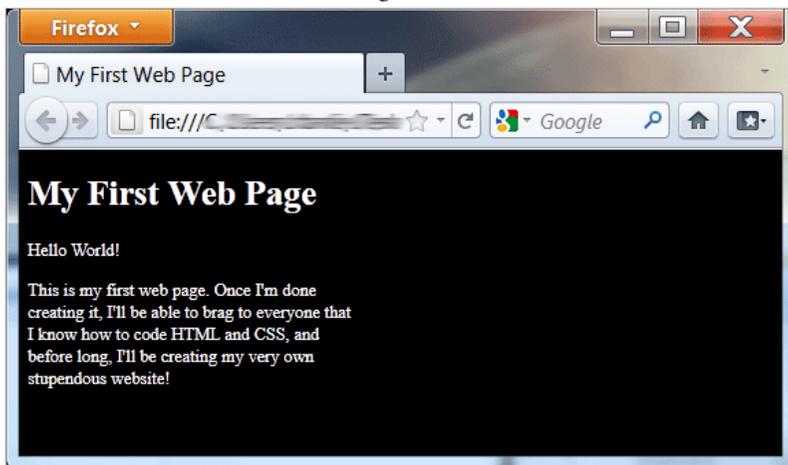


Figure 26. Using a little CSS, we have changed the background color to black and the font color to white.

From here, you can go on to learn CSS rules that set margins, add borders, adjust line height or font size, change the placement of items on the page, etc.—the creative control available through CSS is quite extensive. Start with HTML Dog’s [CSS Beginner Tutorial](#) or W3Schools’s [CSS Introduction](#), and you’ll soon be on your way to coding like a pro.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT CODE

Admittedly, we've made it sound easy so far. It does take some work to get fluent in coding HTML and CSS. You have to learn a new language, after all.

One way to grow from here as a coder without feeling the strain of creating it all yourself is to use templates. Many web hosting sites like [WordPress](#) or [Blogger](#) provide pre-coded templates made by graphic designers for those who want to build a web site but have no design experience. [Blogger](#) will even let you edit the HTML in your template, but do so with care (it would be good to save a backup copy first).

Look around the web. You'll find other places, too. For instance, *Smashing Magazine* has an article by Steven Snell depicting [100 Free High-Quality XHTML/CSS Templates](#). [Open Source Web Design](#) is another good place to look. If you happen to be savvy with HTML and CSS, you can often customize these templates with your preferred graphics or colors. And that's a great way to learn more about HTML and CSS; many of the contributors to this guide learned much the same way.

Fortunately for you, you won't run out of good resources to learn about web design. Because web designers design for—the web—they tend to share all kinds of resources online. For instance, [A List Apart](#) is the premier web design trade magazine. With it, you can read about topics of interest to professional web designers, such as tips for better coding, how to work with clients, and web content strategy. And it's published for free online. A little Google magic, and you can find many more resources about how to do almost anything in web design.