

**BUILD YOUR OWN
WEB SITE
THE RIGHT WAY**
**USING
HTML & CSS**
BY IAN LLOYD



LEARNING HTML AND CSS HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN!

Build Your Own Web Site The Right Way Using HTML & CSS (4 Chapter Sample)

Thank you for downloading this four-chapter sample of Ian Lloyd's book, *Build Your Own Web Site The Right Way Using HTML & CSS*, published by SitePoint.

This excerpt includes the Summary of Contents, Information about the Authors, Editors and SitePoint, Table of Contents, Preface, four chapters of the book, and the index.

We hope you find this information useful in evaluating this book.

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Build Your Own Web Site The Right Way Using HTML & CSS

by Ian Lloyd

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Ian Lloyd is a web designer and developer who believes passionately in the importance of web standards. He is a member of the Web Standards Project (<http://webstandards.org/>) and has spoken at several high profile web conferences, including South By Southwest in Austin, Texas, and @media in London. Unlike many of his peers, Ian does not run his own company but remains a “salary man”, working for Nationwide Building Society in the UK (where he constantly harps on about web standards, accessibility and usability to anyone with a sympathetic ear!).

Ian lives in Swindon, UK, a town that is known only for two things:

- the famous “magic roundabout”—a mega roundabout that comprises five individual but joined roundabouts
- for being that place off *The Office* (thus making it second in dullness only to Slough)

That said, Ian does his best to get out of Swindon in his treasured air-cooled VW camper van (<http://vwkombi.com/>) when he’s not glued to the laptop for one reason or another.

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About SitePoint

SitePoint specializes in publishing fun, practical and easy-to-understand content for web professionals. Visit <http://www.sitepoint.com/> to access our books, newsletters, articles and community forums.

*For Manda (who will, at the
very least, read this page!)*

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Preface

Congratulations on buying this book. Oh, wait a minute—perhaps you haven’t yet. Perhaps you’ve just picked up the book in your local bookshop, and are trying to decide whether it’s right for you. Why should this be the book that makes it into your shopping basket? The answer can be found in the title of the book: it’s all about getting things right the first time, not learning bad habits—bad habits that you have to *un*-learn at a later date—for the purposes of getting a quick result.

Let’s take a step back for a moment, and look at another skill that many people learn at some point in their lives: learning to drive. Apologies if that particular experience is *also* new to you, but stick with me. For many people, first driving lessons can be very confusing—you’ve got to figure out which pedals to press, in what order, and manage to get out of the driving school car park without hitting the other students. Meanwhile, other more experienced people just get into their cars, start the engine, and drive from A to B without even really thinking about what they’re doing. These drivers may have picked up a few bad habits along the way, but if they learned with a proper driving instructor, the chances are that they were taught properly from the beginning, following a strict set of rules and guidelines to ensure they stay safe.

The driving instructor tells you to check your mirrors diligently, observe speed limits, and avoid cutting corners (literally as well as metaphorically!). Imagine, though, if the instructor told you not to worry about the speed limit signs, to “put your foot down” because the road is clear, or told you that the one-way sign “wasn’t all that important at that time of night.” It’d be a miracle if you passed your driving test, and the chances are that those bad habits would stay with you (so long as you could manage to keep your license).

Learning to build web pages can be a bit like that.

I’ve been designing and building web sites for around eight years now, but I can clearly remember the joy of creating my first site. Admittedly, in hindsight, it was a pretty nasty-looking web site, but it achieved the goal at the time—I had published something, and I was able to create it with the bare minimum of tools. It gave me an enormous sense of achievement, and made me want to learn more and create even better web sites.

At the time, there weren’t that many books that really seemed to what I wanted, but I lapped up everything I could find, learning some tricks from books, and

getting other ideas from visiting web sites. But then I discovered that I'd been doing it all wrong. The books I had learned from had given me what later turned out to be poor advice, and the web sites I'd visited had themselves learnt from the same sources and made use of similar bad techniques. So, what had gone wrong?

In the early days of the web, when people first started properly to embrace the technology, to publish homepages, and to develop online corporate presences for their companies, they all realized fairly quickly that the medium was quite limiting. Necessity is the mother of invention, though. People began to coax out of their web pages tricks and displays that were never intended by the technologies they used, and the browsers helped them along the way by adding features that offered even more opportunities for this kind of behavior.

Numerous books have been written on the topics of web design and programming, as have many free tutorials that you can read on the 'Net. Many of them were written during those heady years, and were based on what seemed like best practices back then, but their authors were constrained by browsers that often rendered the same well-designed pages in vastly different ways. This meant that the tutorials' authors needed to resort to abusing various features of those browsers, such as using data tables to lay out pages. This certainly got many people building their first web pages, but it ensured that bad habits were ingrained at an early stage, and many people are still using these bad practices years later.

Web developers the world over have learnt bad habits (myself included) and must now try to un-learn them all. There's no longer a need for these practices—they often produce pages that are inflexible, slow to download, and difficult to maintain, but like the badly taught driver who insists on flouting the rules because it's worked for him so far, many developers find those outdated habits difficult to break.

I saw the light many years ago, and have tried to educate as many people as possible since. But for the eager beginner, those same old books are still peddling the same bad old ideas. This just *has* to stop. And it stops now.

You're not going to learn any bad habits in this book. Not one.

In this book, you'll learn the right way to do things. If there's a wrong way to do things—a way that cuts corners to save time but encourages bad techniques—we won't even tell you about it. Not even as a “by the way, you might try this...” You won't need to avert your eyes—we'll take care of that for you!

What is a Browser?

If you use Microsoft Windows, the browser is probably what you know as the “little blue e on the desktop” (shown in Figure 1), but is commonly called Internet Explorer. The majority of people don’t stray beyond using this program for the purposes of viewing web pages—for many, Internet Explorer *is* the Internet.

Figure 1. Internet Explorer—the “little blue e on the desktop”



Internet Explorer (or **IE**, as we’ll refer to it from now on) is the most commonly used browser, largely because Microsoft included it as part of the Windows operating system as far back as Windows 95 (this was later to come back and haunt Microsoft—it became the catalyst for a massive anti-trust trial which ruled that the company had stifled competition by bundling IE with the operating system to the exclusion of all others).

However, there are other browsers that you can use instead of IE. Currently riding an ever-increasing wave of popularity is Firefox,¹ a small, speedy program that has a number of attractive features that aren’t available in IE (at the time of writing), and handles the features of some web pages better than IE can. It’s also available for Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux, while the latest versions of IE are only available for Windows. The screen shots you’ll see in this book were taken using Firefox on Windows XP, unless stated otherwise. We recommend that you download a copy of Firefox for the purposes of working through the exercises in this book.

Alternatively, you might like to try another browser that supports web standards well—check out BrowseHappy² for some more ideas.

Not interested in a different browser? Well, you can use IE, as indeed the majority of web users still do. In fact, you can be sure that everything you read here will work in all recent browsers without any real hiccups.

¹ <http://www.mozilla.com/firefox/>

² <http://browsehappyy.com/>

Who Should Read this Book?

Does this sound like you?

- an absolute beginner—at least as far as creating web pages goes
- confident with using a computer, but not necessarily a “power user”
- someone who uses the Web a lot, enjoys other people’s web sites, and would like to create your own

Perhaps you have a hobby that you want to tell the world about, or you want to start a web site for a community that you belong to (be that a knitting circle or remote-control car racing club)

- quickly put off by the techno-babble that computer people tend to speak

When you have conversations with your more tech-savvy relatives about a problem you’re having with your computer—perhaps you’ve been struck down by a computer virus—do you find a lot of the jargon goes over your head?

- perhaps a little daunted about learning this new skill, but keen to learn (with some friendly hand-holding)

If any of the above descriptions strikes a chord with you, then this is the book to put in your shopping cart—we’ll ease you in gently, and have you building web pages like a pro in no time!

Don’t worry if you don’t understand the terminology that your 15-year-old nephew (or cousin!) keeps spouting when you ask him about building web sites. I’ve assumed no prior knowledge of any of these terms, and I’ll be guiding you all the way through the process of creating a web site from scratch. By the end of this book, you’ll know how to build the site, how to secure hosting, how to promote the site, and how to keep it running once it’s live.

The best part is this: what you learn in this book, you’ll never have to un-learn. You’ll be learning how to build sites the right way from the get-go.

What you'll Learn from this Book

By the time that you finish reading this book, and trying out the exercises contained within, you'll be able to build a complete web site—the right way—without incurring any costs for expensive software or web hosting.

Using an example web site, I'll guide you through the process of developing web pages from scratch. From these humble beginnings, great things will evolve! By the end of the book, you'll be able to create a web site that includes the following features:

- easy-to-use navigation
- a professional-looking site header
- a regularly updated news/events section
- a “Contact Us” page
- tables—the presentation of data in neatly organized grids
- attractive forms
- a simple image gallery
- a search engine that covers our site, as well as related sites
- simple statistics that you can use to see who's using your site, how they found your site (e.g. from search engines), and so on

You'll also learn how to manage your web site effectively, without it becoming a chore or getting too technical. I'll show you how you can:

- Get your own dot-com (or dot-net or dot-org) web address.
- Find somewhere to host your web site.
- Upload your files to your web site.
- Get feedback from visitors while avoiding spam emails.

How you'll Learn to Build your Web Site

This book will take you through each new topic using a step-by-step approach. It provides a mixture of examples and practical exercises that will soon have you feeling confident enough to try a little HTML for yourself.

HTML, Markup, CSS... Welcome to your First Bits of Jargon!

From here on in, you're going to see these phrases more and more. But what do they mean?

HTML HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language. It's the primary language that's used to create web pages, so you'll come to know it very well through the course of this book. We'll be using the latest version of HTML, which is called XHTML.

markup Imagine, if you will, that you're a newspaper editor. You've been passed a news story, but the text—from the heading through to the conclusion—is all the same size, and the headings, paragraphs, quotes, and other features of the text are not clearly indicated. It's just one big block of text. For starters, you'd probably want to emphasize the headline, maybe by displaying it in bold or italic text (or in all caps with an exclamation mark if you were working for a tabloid). As an editor, you'd probably grab a pen and start scribbling annotations on the print-out—an “h” here to signify a heading, “p”s here, there, and everywhere to show where paragraphs start and end, and “q”s to denote quotations.

This is essentially what markup is—a set of simple tags that suggest the structure of a document (this section is a heading, paragraph, a quote, etc.). We'll cover the various tags that HTML uses in detail a little later.



Markup isn't Computer Code

Markup is not the same thing as “code.” Often, people incorrectly refer to markup as code, but code goes beyond the basic abilities of markup. With code, you can create programs, and do more dynamic things with your web page, while markup simply deals with the page's structure. So, if you want to impress your friends

and relatives, refer to markup rather than code. See, we told you we'd teach you good habits!

CSS CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets. We'll be using a combination of HTML and CSS to create web sites. CSS is a language that lets you control how your web pages look, but we'll get into that in more detail later. For now, it's important that you know what the abbreviation stands for.

Building the Example Site

Each example that's presented in this book will be backed up with a sample of the markup you need to write, and a screen shot that shows how the results should look.

Each example is complete: nothing's missing. You'll see the picture build gradually, so you won't be left trying to guess how the example web site got to the point it's at. The files we'll use in all the examples are provided in a separate code archive (described in more detail in a moment).

What you Can Expect from the Example Web Site

- a fun web site project that will be built up through the chapters
- a complete web site that demonstrates all the features you're likely to need in your own web site
- all the XHTML and CSS used to progress the site through each chapter—in a single download

You can pick up the project at any point, so you don't need to worry about mistakes you might have made in previous chapters' exercises!

What this Book Won't Tell You

While it might be tempting to cram everything into one book and claim that the reader will learn everything in 24 hours, the honest truth is that this is not necessarily the right approach for everyone.

This book won't try to force-feed you everything there is to know about creating web pages; instead, it focuses on the most useful aspects that you'll find yourself using over and over again.

This book does not cover:

- JavaScript
- other programming languages, such as ASP or PHP
- advanced CSS techniques
- search engine optimization techniques

By the time you've finished this book and have had a chance to tackle your own web site, you might want to take the next steps to increasing your site-building knowledge. We'll be recommending next steps where appropriate throughout the book, and suggesting other resources that you might like to check out.

So, this is where the introductory piffle ends and the process of learning begins—learning how to build web sites the *right* way. So step this way, ladies and gentlemen...

What's in this Book?

Chapter 1: *Setting Up Shop*

In this chapter, we'll make sure that you have all the tools you're going to need to build your web site. I'll explain where you can get the right tools—all of them for free! By the end of the chapter, you'll be ready to get cracking on your first web site.

Chapter 2: *Your First Web Pages*

In this chapter, we'll learn what makes a web page. We'll explore XHTML, understand the basic requirements of every web page, and investigate the common elements that you'll see on many web pages. Then, you'll start to create pages yourself. In fact, by the end of this chapter, you'll have the beginnings of your first web site.

Chapter 3: *Adding Some Style*

In this chapter, we'll start to add a bit of polish to the web pages we created in Chapter 2. You'll learn what CSS is, and why it's a good thing, before putting it into action for yourself. As the chapter progresses, you'll see the

project web site start to take shape as we apply background and foreground colors, change the appearance of text, and make web links that have been visited look different from those that haven't.

Chapter 4: *Shaping Up with CSS*

This chapter builds on the previous chapter's introduction to the color and text-styling abilities of CSS to reveal what CSS can do for border styles and page layouts in general. First, we'll review the full range of border effects that you can apply to elements such as headings and paragraphs. We'll experiment with dotted borders, and big, bold borders, as well as some slightly more subtle effects. In the second half of the chapter, we'll learn how it's possible to use CSS to position the elements of a web page—including blocks of navigation—anywhere on the screen.

Chapter 5: *Picture this! Using Images on your Web Site*

As the chapter title suggests, this one's all about images. We'll discover the difference between inline images and background images, and look into the issue of making images accessible for blind or visually impaired people (blind people surf too!). We'll also learn how to adjust pictures to suit your web site using the software that we downloaded in Chapter 1. Then we get practical, putting all this knowledge together to create a photo gallery for the project site.

Chapter 6: *Tables: Tools for Organizing Data*

In this chapter, we'll learn when tables should be used and, perhaps more importantly, when they should *not* be used. Once we've got the basics out of the way, I'll show how you can breathe life into an otherwise dull-looking table—again, using CSS—to make it much more visually appealing.

Chapter 7: *Forms: Interacting with your Audience*

In Chapter 7, we learn all about forms—what they're used for, what's required to build a form, and what you can do with the data you collect through your form. I'll teach you what the different form elements—such as text inputs, checkboxes, and so on—do, and show you how to use CSS to make a form look more attractive. Finally—and this is something that other books may not explain—I'll show you how you can use a free web service to have the data that's entered into your form emailed to you.

Chapter 8: *Getting your Web Site Online*

It's all well and good to build a web site for fun, but you need a way for people to see it—that's what this chapter is all about. We'll learn about hosting plans, discuss the pros and cons of using free services, and look at

the tools that you'll need in order to transfer your files from your computer at home to a web server for the world to see.

Chapter 9: *Adding a Blog to your Web Site*

Blogging's one of the best ways to keep your web site's content fresh and ever-changing. In this chapter, you'll learn what a blog is (that's always a good start), and how you can set one up for yourself. We'll also spend some time making sure it looks consistent with the rest of your web site.

Chapter 10: *Pimp my Site: Cool Stuff you can Add for Free*

You've heard of the MTV program *Pimp My Ride*, right? No? Well, every week, the guys on this show take an everyday car and transform it—with some well-placed and carefully executed cosmetic touches—into a real head-turner of a vehicle. And that's this chapter's aim for your web site! You'll discover that there are all kinds of tools, plugins, and add-ons that you can build into to your web site to make it even more useful for you and your visitors. Among the tools on offer we'll find site search facilities, statistics programs, and online discussion forums.

Chapter 11: *Where to Now? What you Can Learn Next*

In this final chapter, we summarize the skills that you've learned in this book, then consider your options for learning more. I'll recommend web sites that I feel can take you to that next level, and books that really should be on your bookshelf (or rather, open on your desk next to your computer!), in an effort to ensure that you continue to learn the good stuff once you've put this book down.

Appendix A: *XHTML Reference*

This appendix lists all of the XHTML elements that are available for use in your web pages. It's not intended to replace the official W3C reference, but it does provide detailed information about each element and how it can be used. The appendix also includes an example of how each element can be applied within markup, so you should find it to be a handy reference not just as you work through this book, but in the web projects you tackle in future.

The Book's Web Site

Located at <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/html1/>, the web site supporting this book will give you access to the following facilities:

The Code Archive

As you progress through the text, you'll note a number of references to the code archive. This is a downloadable ZIP archive that contains complete code for all the examples presented in the book. It also includes a copy of the Bubble Under web site, which we use as an example throughout the book.

Updates and Errata

No book is perfect, and I expect that watchful readers will be able to spot at least one or two mistakes before the end of this one. The Errata page, at <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/html1/errata.php> on the book's web site, will always have the latest information about known typographical and code errors, and necessary updates for new browser releases and versions of web standards.

The SitePoint Forums

If you'd like to communicate with me or anyone else on the SitePoint publishing team about this book, you should join the SitePoint Forums.³ In fact, you should join that community even if you *don't* want to talk to us, because there are a lot of fun and experienced web designers and developers hanging out there. It's a good way to learn new stuff, get questions answered (unless you really enjoy being on the phone with some company's tech support line for a couple of hours at a time), and just have fun.

The SitePoint Newsletters

In addition to books like this one, SitePoint offers free email newsletters.

The SitePoint Tech Times covers the latest news, product releases, trends, tips, and techniques for all technical aspects of web development. The long-running *SitePoint Tribune* is a biweekly digest of the business and moneymaking aspects of the web. Whether you're a freelance developer looking for tips to score that dream contract, or a marketing major striving to keep abreast of changes to the major search engines, this is the newsletter for you. *The SitePoint Design View* is a monthly compilation of the best in web design. From new CSS layout methods to subtle

³ <http://www.sitepoint.com/forums/>

Photoshop techniques, SitePoint’s chief designer shares his years of experience in its pages.

Browse the archives or sign up to any of SitePoint’s free newsletters at <http://www.sitepoint.com/newsletter/>.

Your Feedback

If you can’t find your answer through the forums, or you wish to contact me for any other reason, the best place to write is books@sitepoint.com. We have a well-manned email support system set up to track your inquiries, and if our support staff are unable to answer your question, they send it straight to me. Suggestions for improvement as well as notices of any mistakes you may find are especially welcome.

Acknowledgements

While writing a book sometimes seems like quite a solitary process, the truth is that there are a lot of people who indirectly guide—or have guided—the hands that type the words on these pages. None of this would have been possible had I not been pointed in the direction of influential and persuasive web sites like webmonkey.com, whose CSS tutorial first made me see the light, and individuals such as Jeffrey Zeldman, Molly Holzschlag, and Eric Meyer, whose pioneering work has benefited me (and many others) greatly. However, if I were to list the names of all the people who have inspired me in way, shape, or form in the last few years, this acknowledgments section would end up looking more like an index! You folks know who you are, keep up the good work!

I would like to acknowledge the work undertaken by the Web Standards Project (of which I am also a member, albeit a pretty inactive one for the last couple of years!), and give a little shout-out to my fellow “Britpackers”—wear those Union Jack pants with pride, folks!

Thanks to all those at SitePoint who have helped me in the crafting of this book, particularly to Simon Mackie, my main point of contact and sounding board, and my expert reviewer, Marc Garrett—your comments were always on target. Thanks to Matthew Magain, who tech edited the book—I hope I didn’t leave you much to correct or find fault with! And then of course there’s Georgina Laidlaw, who ensured that any peculiarly British turns of phrases were removed, despite my best efforts to sneak a few in.

Finally, thanks to Manda for putting up with me when deadlines loomed and I all but shut myself off from civilization to get the chapters in on time. Social life? Oh that! I remember... At those times it seemed like it would never end, but finally we can both see the fruits of my labour. Now, if only it were something she'd actually want to read!

Conventions Used in this Book

You'll notice that we've used certain typographic and layout styles throughout this book to signify different types of information. Look out for the following:

Markup Samples

Any markup—be that HTML or CSS—will be displayed using a fixed-width font like so:

```
File: webpage.html (excerpt)
<h1>A perfect summer's day</h1>
<p>It was a lovely day for a walk in the park. The birds were
  singing and the kids were all back at school.</p>
```

Menus

When you need to select something from a menu, it'll be written as File > Save; this means “select the Save option from the File menu.”

Tips, Notes, and Warnings



Hey, you!

Tips will give you helpful little pointers.



Ahem, Excuse me...

Notes are useful asides that are related—but not critical—to the topic at hand. Think of them as extra tidbits of information.



Make Sure you Always...

...pay attention to these important points.



Watch Out!

Warnings will highlight any gotchas that are likely to trip you up along the way.