

Creating a Web Site

A Workshop for San Diego State University Students



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Where to Find Help When You Need It

Student Computer Help Web Site

The computer help web site for students provides information about the type of help you can get and locations where help is available. To find this information, look to:

<http://rohan.sdsu.edu/~students>

Help from the BATS Web Page

BATS (Baseline Access, Training and Support) is a California State University initiative to provide all students, faculty, and staff with "baseline" access to information resources via networks, training in the uses of baseline hardware and software systems, and ongoing professional and technical support for utilization of computer resources at San Diego State University. You can access the BATS Web Page by pointing your browser to:

<http://rohan.sdsu.edu/~bats/>

Help in the Love Library Student Computing Lab

The Student Computing Lab's purpose is to facilitate students in completing assigned class work, as well as provide assistance to students having computer problems relating to the Internet, Netscape, SPSS, File Transfers, PC Operating Systems, Microsoft Office Software and Business Databases.

Location: 2nd floor of the Love Library building in LL-224

Hours:

10:00am – midnight	Sunday
7:00am – midnight	Monday - Thursday
7:00am - 6:00pm	Friday
10:00 am - 6:00pm	Saturday

Help from the Student Computing Help Desk

Phone: 594-3189

Location: Love Library 220

Hours:

8:00am – 4:30pm	Monday
8:00am – 4:30pm	Tuesday
8:00am – 7:30pm	Wednesday
8:00am – 7:30pm	Thursday
8:00am – 4:30pm	Friday

E-mail: problems@rohan.sdsu.edu

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Your Place in the Internet World

Is it a Web Page or a Web Site

The difference between a web page and a web site is that a site is a series of web pages that are linked together. All of the pages should be located in the same folder on a server, but the information presented on a page may be generated by a database located somewhere else. Some examples of web sites that are backed with large databases are:

- www.yahoo.com
- www.amazon.com
- www.autotrader.com

Your Basic Web Site

In this class you will be creating a basic web site about yourself, the site will include a homepage (index.html), an on-line resume, and a portfolio of your work. Since this will be your web site you are free to add or subtract from the site using the skills that you will learn in class. If you were to look at the public_html folder of a sample web site, it would look something like figure 1.

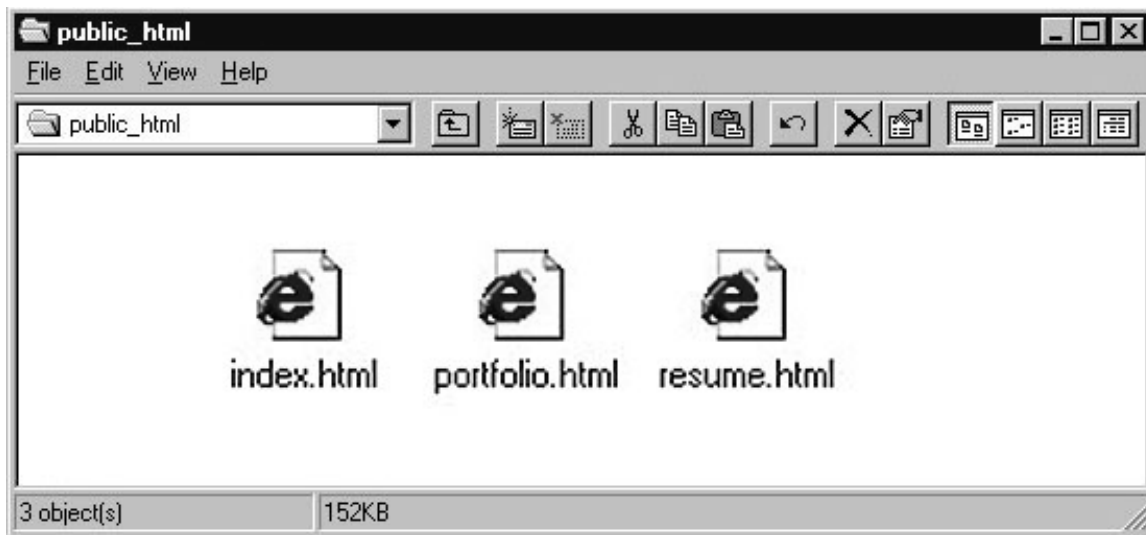


Figure 1 public_html folder contents

But if this folder could show you the relationship between your web site and the rest of the Internet, it would look something like figure 2.

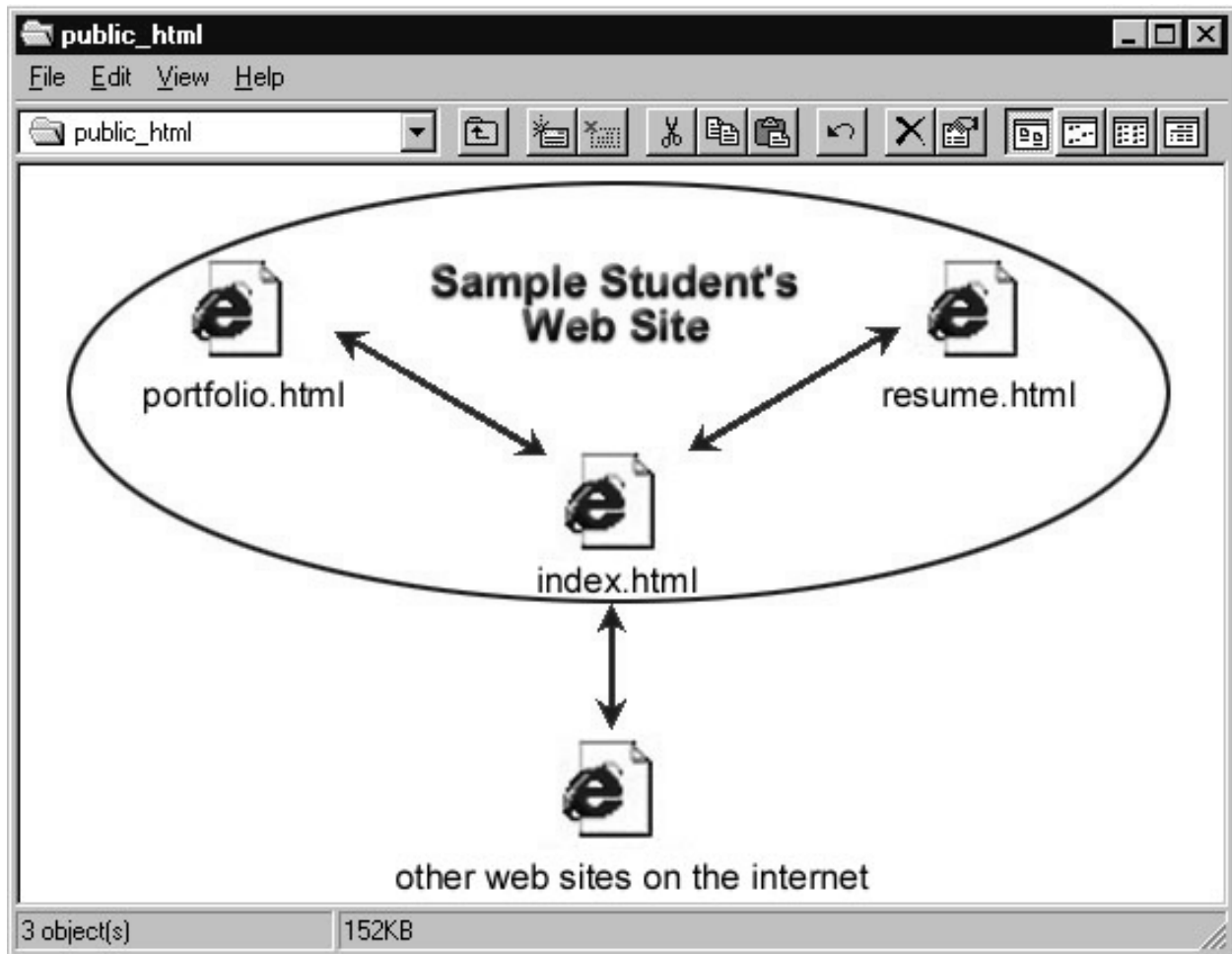


Figure 2 A relational view of your web site

Web Design Principles

Alignment

People surf the Web mostly for information. One of the most successful sites on the Web is Yahoo. It loads fast, and has lots of quality information. Alignment of text and other visual elements facilitates "scanning" for information, as well as reading. It is easier to scan a page that uses alignment well.

Proximity

Web users' eyes are typically moving quickly. By putting blocks of information together, with bigger spaces between blocks that are conceptually distant, and smaller spaces between blocks that "belong" together, you can effectively create conceptual relationships among page elements

even before the user starts reading. Just by looking at the blocks of content and graphics the user will get a feel for the scope of information on a page.

Repetition

Repetition means consistency. For text design, it means using the same headers on each page in the same place, with the same size and type of font, and so forth. On a Web site, repetition also applies to the navigation elements (buttons and links). If the user enters a Web site and sees navigation buttons on the top of the page, and then on the next page they are on the left side, they are needlessly confused, not to mention slightly annoyed. Navigation buttons should be in the same place on each page of a site, with the possible exception of the splash or main page.

Repetition is used on Web pages to establish a "look and feel" which holds the site together. Good Web sites give you an immediate sense on each page that you are still "in" that Web site. This is done using colors, icons, navigation bars, backgrounds, and do so forth.

Contrast

Contrast has long been used in print to lead readers' eyes around a page. While most people's eyes start in the upper left of a Web page and move right it happens only in the first few seconds. After that, we guide the user's eye movements by using contrast. Beyond the use of Bold in text, bullet points, or blocks of colors, multimedia such as animation can be used to pull a viewer's eyes to where you want them. Like most animals, our eyes are instinctively drawn to anything that moves.

Follow these Rules

Rules are made to be broken? Yes, but in order to break them, you have to establish them in the first place, and then break them, well, according to the rules!

What does that mean?

Take a look at some print material such as magazines or coffee table books, and some Web sites. Notice how even the most outrageous and "post-modern" designs end up using the four principles outlined above. For instance, when designers break rules about contrast, they do it consistently, that is, they repeat it, in order to establish the broken rule as a new rule -- at least within their design.

A really useful exercise is to find a print or Web page you think is terrific, and analyze it using the four principles described above. You'll begin to really understand the specific elements and arrangements of those elements that are making the page so attractive to you. Then, you're in a position to adapt those elements and arrangements in your own designs. Particular type styles, line spacing, color palettes, and so forth, are always very intentional in a good design.

How to get started

In this class everyone will be building the same site, with some variations of background color and choice of buttons. Everyone will use the same layout and placement, but if you were going to start from scratch, there are a couple ways to plan out your site. Both methods can be accomplished with a pencil and a piece of paper, or you can use other computer programs that you are familiar with. The first method is called a site map, the example is for fictional company with more than one level. The map shows relationships between different pages, notice that the file name for each page is shown at the top of each box.

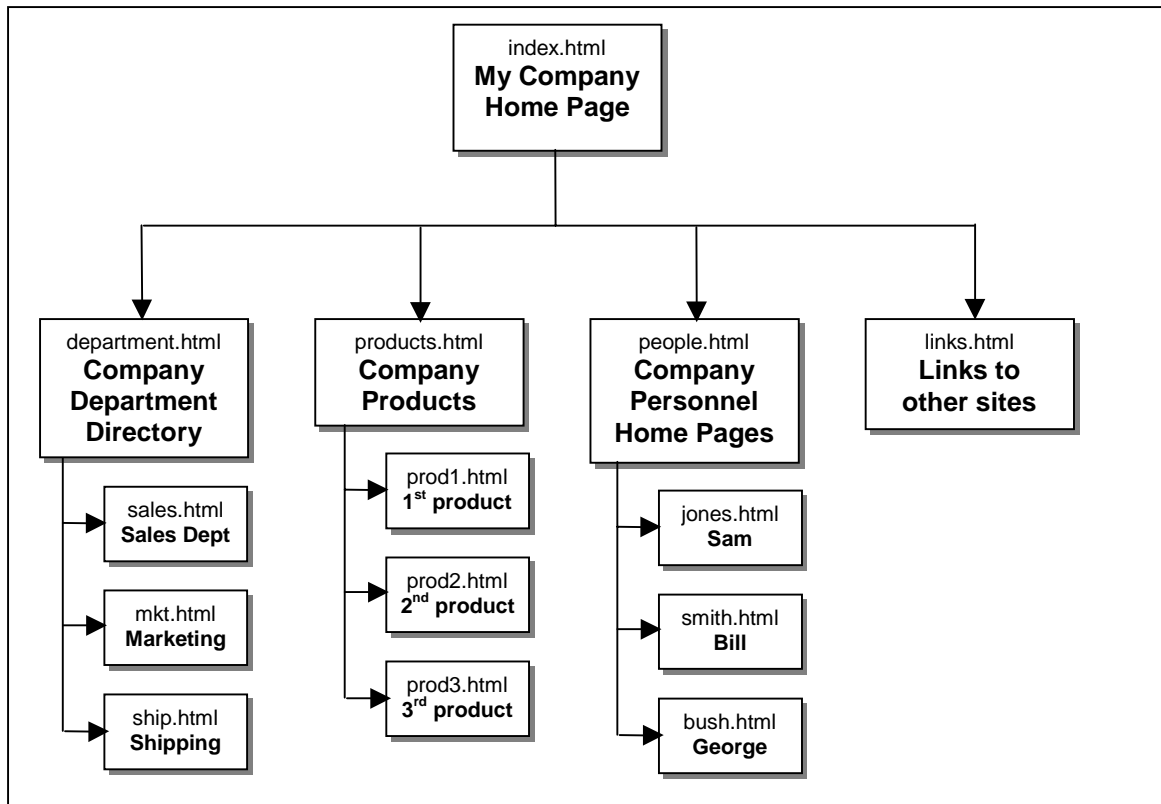


Figure 3 Site Map

The point of a site map is to plan out your site before you start building. Now this may not seem like an important step in the process, but it is vital to do as much up front work as you can before you start working.

This is a top down hierarchy site map. It is widely used to represent your average hierarchy Web site, in other words, a typical site with several top level links that are on every page, and then more pages that are reachable only from certain pages.

There are certain **assumptions** in this format. Assumptions are dangerous. Let's make sure we're assuming together.

1. The "Home" page has all of the links to the second layer. In other words, the first page the user comes to will have links to "Departments", "Products", "Personnel", and "Links".

The site map and storyboard can be used together, if you look at creating your web site like making a film, then the site map would be your script and the storyboards a drawing of each scene.

Using Images on the Web

Before we dive in, here are three central concepts that are essential to understanding images and the Web.

1. GIFs can have only 256 colors. They should be used whenever possible and are good for icons, text, and original digital art with limited colors. And, by the way, "GIF" is pronounced with a hard "G" as in Good, not a soft "G" as in George.
2. JPEGs can have millions of colors and are best for pictures of people, nature and anything with a lot of complex colors.
3. Everything on the Web is protected by copyright, including images! Ask before you use.

The Web handles text very well, it downloads quickly, and there are few technical issues. But people increasingly come to the Web for more than text-based information, which the Web doesn't handle nearly as well.

When you start to add visuals to the text on your Web site, you start walking a thin line between pages that download quickly and pages that provide information using visuals, but download more slowly. If you consider that a good Web site should perform quickly for impatient viewers and provide valuable information, then how do you balance these conflicting priorities?

One way is to make sure that if a user has to wait for an image or other media, they know exactly what they are waiting for and have made a deliberate choice to do so. Another way is that it is worth the wait -- it contributes substantively to the information (or entertainment) the user is seeking.

What are some other ways?

Find a Web site with a variety of images. Can you predict which ones are GIFs and which ones are JPEGs? Test yourself. Download some of them to the desktop and check your predictions. Were there any exceptions to the rules? Are photos sometimes GIFs? Are simple graphics sometimes JPEGs?

Things to look for when you are done

Basics:

1. Clearly displayed information about a single topic using several web pages and multimedia where applicable
2. A consistent navigation interface
3. Less than 10MB in total space (including your personal portfolio site)
4. San Diego State credit as a footer on every page in the site.
5. Credit should read: "This is a personal home page and does not represent the opinions of San Diego State University © 2000 by [Your Name] All rights reserved"

Questions you ask yourselves:

Layout

1. Are the principles of good layout design adhered to?
 - Contrast
 - Repetition
 - Alignment
 - Proximity
2. Information
 - Did you convey information about a single topic?
 - Does the information target the intended audience?
 - Did you have reference areas for further study of the topic?
 - Did you show evidence of researching your topic?
3. Navigation
 - Do I know where I am within the site at all times?
 - Do I know how I got there?
 - Are there any broken links?
 - How long do I have to wait for the page to load?
 - Is it worth the wait?
4. Interface Design
 - Do I know what to click?
 - Do I know where a link will take me before I click on it?
 - Are there obstacles preventing me from clicking something?
 - Can I easily get the information I am seeking?
5. Screen Design & Layout
 - Is each element on the page in a place that is easy to access?
 - Does the layout get radically destroyed if I change the size of the browser window?
 - What happens to the layout if I change the default font, size, etc.?
 - How much scrolling do I have to do?
 - Does implementation of media (text, pictures, video, etc.) serve a useful purpose?

6. Text

- Is everything spelled correctly?
- Is everything grammatically correct?
- Is the text a reasonable size for reading?
- Are large blocks on solid bright backgrounds? And are they easy to read?

7. Site Management

- Are all folders and files named properly? Folders: lower case, no spaces? Files: lower case, no spaces, file extension?
- Are all folders and files organized on the web server in a logical and clean way?
- Are there any extra files, not used in the project floating around?

Go find something you like

If you find a web site that you like, the layout or the use of graphics can usually be recreated. Don't be afraid to try new things when designing your web site, after all it is yours and should reflect some of your tastes and values. Be careful though, creating web sites can lead you where you never thought you might go, maybe even a new career.