



ABOUT CASCADING STYLE SHEETS (CSS)

Cascading Style Sheets are a collection of formatting rules that control the appearance of content in a Web page. With CSS you have greater flexibility and control of the exact page appearance, from precise positioning of layout to specific fonts and styles. It helps to control many properties that cannot be controlled using HTML alone. For example, you can assign custom list bullets and specify different font sizes and units (pixels, points, etc.). The term *cascading* refers to your ability to apply multiple style sheets to the same Web page. For example, you can create a style sheet to apply color and another to specify fonts, and apply them both to the same page to create the design you want. CSS works in 4.0 and later browsers. *By default*, Dreamweaver uses CSS to format text; the styles you apply to text using the **Property Inspector** or menu commands create CSS rules which are embedded in the **head** of the current document, i.e. as *internal style sheets* (see *locations* below). **Note:** *You don't have to know the code to be able to apply style sheets.* This is really an extensive topic in Dreamweaver and I suggest you peruse the subject in **Using Dreamweaver** in the **Help** menu; type in *style sheets* in the **Index** tab. The two files for this exercise are [applycss](#) and [exportcss](#); both are html files of unformatted text: for the [applycss](#) file we will create, apply (attach), and edit a new style sheet for it; for the [exportcss](#) file we will format the text on the page and then capture that formatting as an external css file that can be used to format other Web pages. To get started, you'll need to be in a site, or define one (see 5 of the introductory handout).

Advantages of using CSS:

- As mentioned above, you have greater control over the look of your pages, because for example, you can control the appearance of text using style sheets rather than allow a viewer's browser preferences to determine and potentially distort your page design. Thus locally applied styles override global styles in the browser.
- Another major advantage of CSS is that they provide easy update capability; when you update a CSS style, the formatting of *all* the documents that use that style are *automatically* updated to the new style. This is great if you have many pages to update and helps ensure a more consistent treatment of your page appearance with multiple browsers.
- CSS makes it easier for screen readers used by visitors with visual impairments to *read* your pages. The screen reader doesn't have to read through a lot of formatting tags on your pages; it instead reads once through the CSS, making it especially efficient when these styles affect multiple pages of your site. It's simply more efficient for the screen reader.

CSS tags can reside in the following locations:

- **External CSS style sheets** are collections of CSS styles stored in a separate, external **.css** file (**not** an HTML file). This file is linked to a one or more page pages in a Web site using a link in the **head** section of a document.
- **Internal (or Embedded) CSS style sheets** are collections of CSS styles included in a style tag in the **head** portion of an HTML document.
- **Inline styles** are defined with specific instances of tags throughout an HTML document.

Note: I recommend you use *external* style sheets because you can then reuse them for other pages. Since Dreamweaver uses CSS to format text, you can *export* this formatting as a style sheet to reuse it for other pages (see bottom of page 3).

The screenshot shows the Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004 interface. The main workspace displays the 'Create from Samples' dialog box, where 'CSS Style Sheets' is selected under the 'Create from Samples' category. A red line points from this selection to the 'Create' button in the 'New Document' dialog box below. The 'New Document' dialog box shows the 'General' tab with 'CSS Style Sheets' selected in the 'Category' list. The 'Style sheets' list includes 'Basic page', 'Dynamic page', 'Template page', 'Other', 'CSS Style Sheets', 'Framesets', 'Page Designs (CSS)', 'Page Designs', and 'Page Designs (Accessable)'. The 'Style sheets' list is expanded to show various predefined styles like 'Basic: Arial', 'Basic: Times', 'Basic: Verdana', 'Colors: Blue', 'Colors: DarkGray/Purple', etc. The 'Preview' section shows a sample of HTML code and rendered text, including a table and headings. The 'Create' button is circled in red.

Let's say you are designing a Web site with multiple pages and you want to set up text in a style sheet that you can apply to those pages. When you first launch the program you will get a window like the one above where you can click on **CSS Style Sheets** from the **Create from Samples** category to begin a style sheet in the **New Document** dialogue box. Alternatively you can get this from **New** in the **File** menu. In the **General** tab, select **CSS Style Sheets** to view a list of options. Select a style sheet and click **Create**. Dreamweaver will create a new text file containing a small set of predefined CSS styles (see example next page.)