I designed this supplement to be included in workshops on FrontPage, Dreamweaver and preparation of materials for online courses.

Web Page Design Principles Partial, 8 pgs

Supplement 2003

Planning (*mostly*) Makes Perfect

Ask the Right Questions

Professional designers generally don't begin projects without planning for a good reason: *it saves time*. Proper planning before you begin to create your Web pages will better prepare you to design *effective* Web pages while saving time and avoiding some of the frustrations the medium presents. When planning your Web site, take out a pad of paper (*and* sticky notes for #3) and jot down answers to these four questions, which are further explained below:

1. *Who is your target audience?*

Who are you designing this site for, what factors will influence how you present your information online? In the case of students, the needs for your site may be tied to those of prospective employers if the Web site is to become an online resumé. For educators, the needs for your site will be tied to those of your students if it is an online resource for them. The language, content, and presentation should reflect their expectations and satisfy your goals in the process. What type of company are you applying to, will they have access to the site through a high speed network or will you provide a CD-ROM, what are the basic demographics of your audience, etc.? ***Activity:*** Describe your audience and any special requirements to consider.

2. *What is the content and the scope of information needed for your Web site?*

To determine the content and scope of your site, you need to ask yourself what the *purpose* is for your site, and what *specific information* visitors to this site need to know. ***Activity:*** First write the purpose for your site, then make a list of the general topic areas you want included to satisfy this purpose. For the topics that are broad enough to become separate Web pages, draft a content object for each page to flesh out the scope of the site; e.g., *The home page will provide an overview of our department with links to other site content and relevant resources.*

3. *How will you organize the topics and subtopics for your site?*

This question is closely tied to the previous, for you need to determine which topic areas will become separate Web pages and what the scope will be for the content of those pages. From here, you want to begin to organize and prioritize these topics into a diagram of your site, what topics are on what page(s), which ones will form links from the home page, which ones will form links from secondary pages, and so on. ***Activities:*** (1) Take out a pad of sticky notes and prioritize and arrange the topics that represent separate Web pages into a diagram of your site, starting with *home page* at the top. (2) Take out sheets of paper and begin to draw a rough layout for your proposed home page, with ideas for how secondary pages might look and relate to the overall design of the site. These act as visual templates to refer to later.

4. *What tools will you use to achieve this?*

The tools you choose should suit your needs. In choosing tools we often consider cost, but you need to consider your own skill level and whether you need training to learn these tools. For example, if you don't have time to learn a lot of HTML language to construct Web pages, then you can select software that handles this for you. Most Web authoring programs offer the designer the option to play with the HTML code if you like, but will automatically write that code while you design your pages. The current crop of popular programs for Web authoring include Macromedia Dreamweaver, Microsoft FrontPage, and Adobe GoLive among several others. Many offer free trials that you can download and use for a period of time, often 30 days. Additional software used for building Web sites include graphics and multimedia software to create and edit animations, images, video and sound for the Web. ***Activity:*** Try different free trial versions of software programs *before* purchasing; look up reviews of software you're interested in on www.zdnet.com to see what others are saying about these tools and new ones as they become available.

Web Page Design Principles

Keeping It Together

Once you get started gathering materials for your Web site, it can seem difficult to keep everything organized. Basically the three strategies here for keeping it together with the fewest problems: name files carefully, organize by folders, and keep a backup copy of everything.

1. *Name Files Carefully*

Keeping the names of files simple will help reduce problems at the visitor's end of things. The list below is a naming strategy that represents a common denominator for file names recognized by most computers connected to the Internet:

- ***Aim low:*** Stick to lowercase letters for all Web file names whenever possible
- ***Keep it simple:*** Stay away from fancy or strange characters, use only letters &/or numbers in the name; exceptions to this rule are the *tilde* (the ~ symbol), *underscore* (the _ symbol), *hyphen* (the - symbol), and *period* (.)
- ***Avoid gaps:*** Don't add spaces in the name, ever!
- ***Short is better:*** Keep the name short and logical to reduce typos when others have to type the name in their browser
- ***End it properly:*** Add the extension **.htm** or **.html** to all your *Web page* files; for files *other* than Web pages, add the appropriate extension to that name. For graphics, the two primary extensions are (including the *dot*): for **GIF** files, add **.gif** to the file name; for **JPEG** files, add **.jpg** *or* **.jpeg** to the file name

Note: Ever notice that the file name for the home page of many sites includes **index.htm** or **index.html** at the end of the Web address? When the host Web server is presenting a site to the World Wide Web, it can identify which page is the first or home page among the pages of that site if it is given this standard Web nomenclature. This, however, depends on who's host computer server you send your files to; you may or may not have to give your home page this name. Check with the provider who will be hosting your site for file name requirements.

Activity: Some file names below are correct, others have problems; read why:

myfamily.jpg	*correct,* both jpeg and jpg are fine, no errors
INDEX.HTML	*technically correct,* but lowercase is preferred
lynn's resume.htm	*incorrect,* can't have spaces or apostrophes in the name
class/project.html	*incorrect,* can't use slash character in the name
ccc_transcript.gif	*correct,* succinct, underscore is acceptable
class2001-photo.jpeg	*correct,* succinct, letters & numbers are best, hyphen is acceptable
SpencerCrest:Mayclasspicnic.jpg	*incorrect,* can't use colons in the name; the name is long; remove caps

2. *Organize by Folders*

Organize everything *from the beginning* by creating the folders you need to store all related files for your site:

- Store files in *three* main folders: Create a manila folder (or a binder) for hard copies of materials (this is a nice backup too), a main folder for *all* digital files related to the Web site, and a Web site folder for just those files that will be uploaded and viewed on the WWW, including of course, the home page.
- For the Web site folder, if you have a small Web site (say, 30-40 or fewer *total* files, including all media and Web pages) store those files in that one folder or in a *few* well named subfolders, so that links between pages and items on those pages (like graphics) are more easily managed and preserved as you move them to the Web.
- Name your Web site folder and *any* subfolders within it with as much care as the files you put in them, and don't change those names after you add items, to preserve links you've established between files (see *Name Files* above). Once you place items in folders, don't move them into new folders, to avoid broken links and having to re-link files.

3. *Keep a Backup Copy*

How large your site is will determine what backup storage media to use. **Never** use 3½ inch floppy disks; they are notoriously unreliable. Your best bet if you can't store files on the school's server, is to backup on **Iomega Zip disks** or burn a copy of everything onto a **CD**. Zip is great cause you can reuse it to update your current copy; CD's are great cause they can hold more material (about 650 MB); both are more reliable. Also, external hard drives that connect to your computer and can store several gigabytes are becoming popular. Disasters can happen; plan for it just in case.