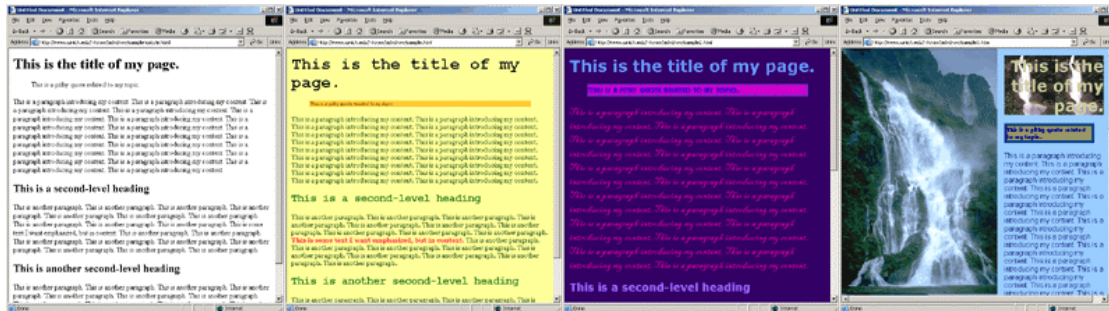


# Advanced Dreamweaver Techniques: Cascading Style Sheets

## A Faculty Exploratory Workshop

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### Overview

#### What are Cascading Style Sheets?

Very simply, Cascading Style Sheets are tools to control the appearance and formatting of your web documents. They can exist within an HTML file, or as a separate attached file (or “sheet”). They are more powerful and flexible than the formatting options available in Dreamweaver, and they can control things that are not available as part of standard HTML formatting.

You define a set of styles by describing the default characteristics you want for paragraphs, lists, tables, and so on. After that, all paragraphs, lists, tables, etc. will follow the new defaults that you have specified. The styles can even be applied to more than one web page.

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## Why “Cascading”?



Style Sheets are called “Cascading” because some styles override others, and they are applied to your document in a “cascading” manner. With a style sheet, you can set the font color for document as black, then create a special style of paragraphs labeled “blue” that appear with blue text.

Any Dreamweaver (HTML) font formatting (especially with the `<font>` tag), overrides any CSS styles – so if you are trying to add CSS styles to an existing web document, you do have to remove any pre-existing formatting that might override your styles.

Web users can create their own style sheets that override the author-defined style sheets. A user with visual impairments may create a style sheet that makes all text display very large, or black-on-yellow. While this “flexibility” of style sheets frustrates many authors who are concerned with visual presentation, it does ensure that the *content* of the page makes it through to the end user.

## Why Should I Use Style Sheets?

At the most basic level, you should use style sheets because it’s the *right* way to make a web page – the correct way, anyhow. The World Wide Web Consortium ([www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org)), which is in charge of standards for the Web, created the first level of style sheets in 1996. Because the browser companies were slow to implement CSS consistently, it has taken a very long time for style sheets to catch on; the newest browsers (finally) do use styles fairly well.

Other reasons for using style sheets:

- They are more powerful and have more options than existing HTML formatting.
- You can change the look of an entire website by editing one file.
- They improve usability of your site, reduce file size, make the web more indexable, lighten your workload, and bring about global harmony. Okay, not that last one...

## Structural HTML

Not many people apply the `<H1>` tag to only the top-level headings of their document – in most browsers it shows up ridiculously large. Most people just use `<font>` tags to make headings larger than other paragraphs, or captions smaller. Sometimes if an author *wants* text to show up ridiculously large, she’ll apply a heading tag in the middle of a paragraph.

This can be a real problem when you use stylesheets...

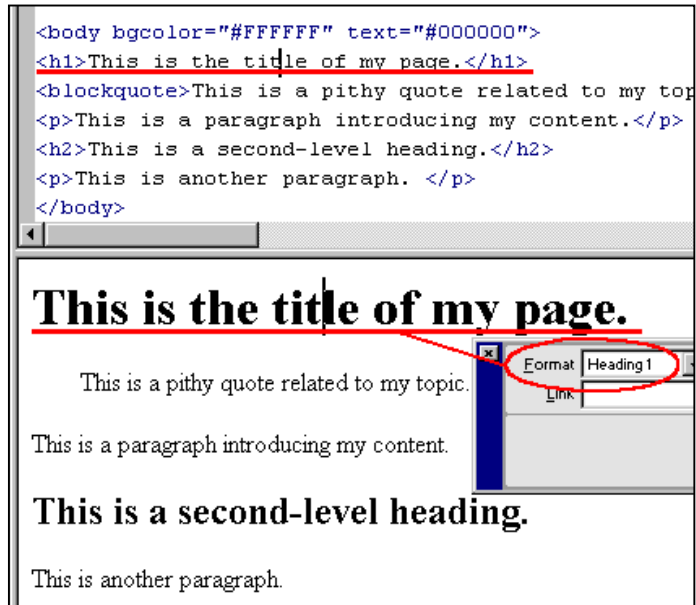
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If every piece of text in your document is wrapped in paragraph tags, any changes you make to the paragraph style will apply to ALL your text, even the parts that are really headings or captions!

The idea of structural HTML is to use tags only when they actually describe the part of the document they're applied to. Don't call a heading a paragraph, and don't call a paragraph a heading. Structural pages do look really ugly when not formatted with a stylesheet, but that's what styles are for!

**Dreamweaver makes all text a paragraph by default!** It is difficult to create structural HTML in Dreamweaver. You have to use the text formatting menu and usually have to edit the code of your webpage for your style sheets to work right.



When your webpage is really structural, vision-impaired users with screenreaders can browse through the top-level headings of a document without having to listen to all the text on the page. Search engines can easily determine what is the "important" text on a page, and what (like a `<BLOCKQUOTE>`) might be less relevant to searchers. Also, you can be certain that *any* web browser can read your page.

Of course, sometimes purely structural HTML does not best serve the purpose of your website. But it helps to know the rules before you decide to break them!

## Internal vs. External Stylesheets

Style sheets can be created so that they affect only the document you are working on – this is called an **internal** style sheet. Style sheets can also be applied to more than one HTML document, by creating an independent, **external** style sheet file and linking to it from one or more HTML documents.

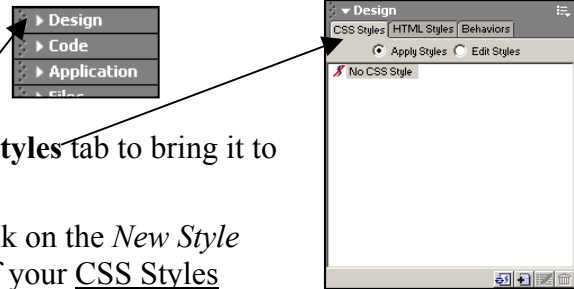
The advantage of external style sheets is that you can change all the documents linked to an individual style sheet just by changing that one style sheet. If you are managing a medium-to-large website, we recommend using external style sheets to easily create a consistent look. For small sites (2-3 HTML documents), it may be simpler to use internal styles.

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## Getting Started with Styles in Dreamweaver

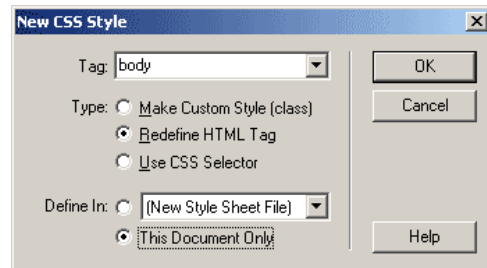
Be sure you can see the CSS Styles Panel. If this panel is not visible, go to the **Panels** area at the right of the screen, and click on **Design**:




The Design panel will open; click on the **CSS Styles** tab to bring it to the front.

To start setting up styles for your document, click on the *New Style* button (  ), third from the right at the bottom of your CSS Styles Palette.

You will see the New CSS Style window as at right. If you want an external style sheet that you can apply to several documents, choose *Define In: New Style Sheet File*. If you want internal styles, choose *Define In: This Document Only*.



The first time you start defining styles for an external style sheet, you will be asked to decide where to save the style sheet file. As with all other linked web files, the style sheet file has to be in the same location relative to your HTML file on both the local computer and the web server. You might create a new folder for all the style sheets for your site, or you can just store the style sheet in the same folder as your HTML document.

If you have already created a style sheet outside of Dreamweaver, or to apply a Dreamweaver-created style sheet to a new HTML document, click the *Attach Style Sheet* button (  ), then browse to the folder where your style sheet is saved.

## Redefining an HTML Tag

Redefining **HTML tags** is an easy way to format large pieces of your documents. You can choose which tag to format by clicking on the pulldown list for *Tag*. Common tags to redefine are:

<b>body</b>	document body	<b>li</b>	list item
<b>p</b>	paragraph	<b>Img</b>	image
<b>ul</b>	unordered (bulleted) list	<b>Table</b>	whole table
<b>ol</b>	ordered (numbered) list	<b>Td</b>	table cell
<b>h1, h2, etc</b>	heading 1, 2, etc.	<b>Tr</b>	table row

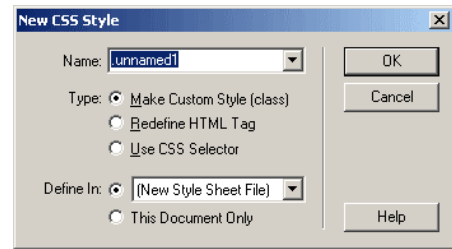
Changing the **p** tag will change ALL of the paragraphs in your document, changing the **ul** tag will change the formatting of all your bulleted lists. Because everything in the document is contained inside **body** tag, setting up a style for the body tag is very like modifying page properties in Dreamweaver – you just have many more options using styles.

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### Classes

Creating a style **Class** is a good idea when you want elements in different parts of the document to resemble each other. Maybe you want to be able to emphasize certain words all over your document, in headers, tables, and paragraphs, by turning them bold, bright red. Go to the CSS Styles Palette and click on the *New Style* button (🔍). Select *Make Custom Style (class)* from the menu and **give your style a name, beginning with a period** – for example, the style suggested above might be called “.red”. Then set the desired properties for your class – for our example, the text is set to bold and red.

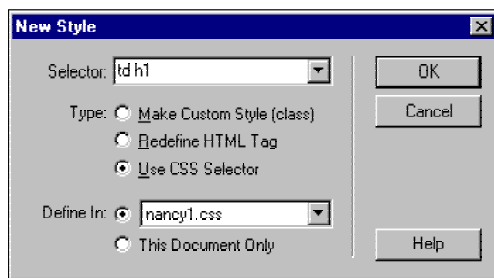


Then highlight text anywhere in your document and click the class name in the CSS Styles Palette to apply your class. Unlike a redefined HTML tag, style classes only take effect when you specifically apply them.

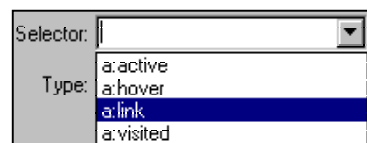
A class style overrides a redefined HTML tag style, if they have conflicting instructions. For example, if you have set things up so that your paragraphs all have green backgrounds and orange text, the style defined above will change the color and weight of the text when you apply it, but because the class does not have a defined background color, the color assigned to the paragraph tag (green) will show through.

### Selectors

Selector styles are even more specific than classes – use selectors to designate styles for specific combinations of tags. A good example would be if you want to format header rows for a table of data differently from header styles elsewhere in your document. Go to the CSS Styles Palette and click on the *New Style* button (🔍). Choose *Use CSS Selector* in the New Style window, and enter the combination of tags in the *Selector:* box.



The Selector at left is for level 1 headings (h1) inside table cells (td). You can specify whatever combination of tags you want. **You can also choose pre-formatted link Selectors (for formatting link styles) from the *Selector* pulldown menu.**



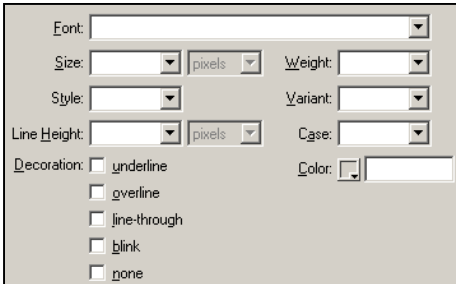
In either case, click *OK* and move on to select your style options from the Style Definition window.

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## What You Can Control With Styles

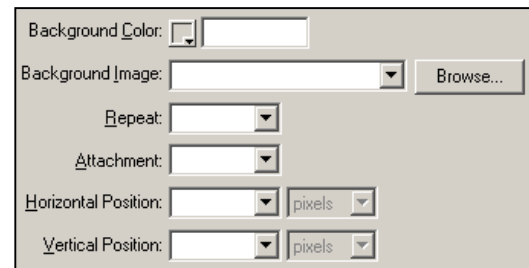
Every style that you set up, whether it is a **tag** style, a **class**, or a **selector**, has the same basic options. Dreamweaver calls these **Categories** – Type, Background, Block, Box, Border, List, Positioning, and Extensions. In each section below, we've noted some of the known problems these categories have with some browsers. In fact, all of the Dreamweaver Style categories other than **Type** and **Background** can be inconsistent from one browser to another. Skilled users may use Javascript to load different style sheets for different browsers – this is a complicated process, but can yield nice results.



The screenshot shows the 'Type' category options in Dreamweaver. It includes dropdown menus for Font, Size (with a 'pixels' unit selector), Weight, Style, Variant, Line Height (with a 'pixels' unit selector), and Case. There are also checkboxes for Decoration: underline, overline, line-through, blink, and none. A Color selector is also present.

**Type** options: In the Type category, you can set the font for a style, its size and weight (bold, normal), style (italics, etc.), variant (small-caps), line-height, case, color, and decorations such as underlines and strikeouts. Decorations may not work in all browsers.

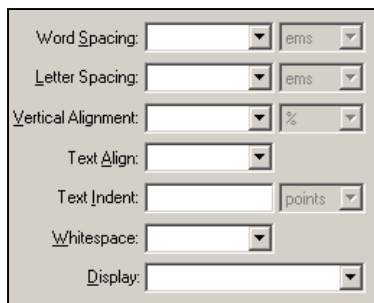
**Background** options: In the Background category, you can set a background color for your style. Unlike the page or table backgrounds you can set in Dreamweaver, CSS background colors can apply to paragraphs or individual lines of text.



The screenshot shows the 'Background' category options in Dreamweaver. It includes a Background Color selector, a Background Image selector with a 'Browse...' button, a Repeat selector, an Attachment selector, Horizontal Position (with a 'pixels' unit selector), and Vertical Position (with a 'pixels' unit selector).

You can also set background images, and *Repeat*: lets you select no-repeat, traditional repeat, repeat-x (one row of background images) or repeat-y (one column of background images). If you select no-repeat, *Attachment*:, *Horizontal Position*:, and *Vertical Position*: let you control where your single background image will appear.

Background styles other than color and image do not display consistently in all browsers.



The screenshot shows the 'Block' category options in Dreamweaver. It includes dropdown menus for Word Spacing (with an 'ems' unit selector), Letter Spacing (with an 'ems' unit selector), Vertical Alignment (with a '%' unit selector), Text Align, Text Indent (with a 'points' unit selector), Whitespace, and Display.

**Block** options: In the Block category, you can control the vertical alignment of your text (where your text will line up if it is in a table cell, or on a line with a much larger object such as a picture), the left, right, and center alignment of your object (text-align will control where tables and images appear on the page, as well as text), and text indents. *Word Spacing*, *Letter Spacing*, and *Whitespace* may not work consistently across browsers.

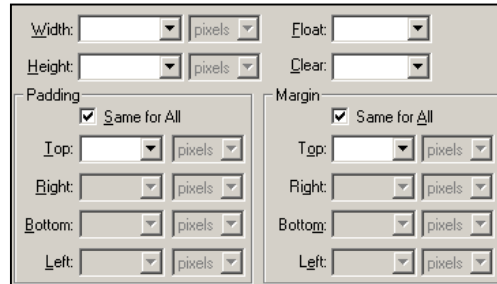
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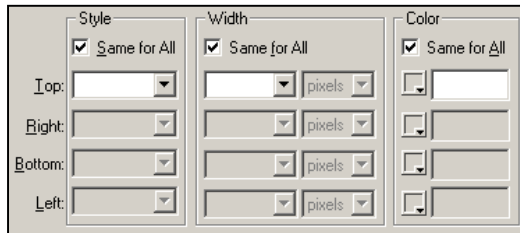
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**Box** options: In the Box category, you can control things like how far your paragraph is set off from the side of the page or how narrow the paragraph is. Use *Width:* and *Height:* with pixel values to set bounding limits on a chunk of text - you can try these with an object such as an image, but results may surprise you.

You can also set *Padding* and *Margin* for elements on your page, be they paragraphs, images, tables, or something else entirely. Unfortunately, older versions of Netscape do one thing with these values, newer versions (6.0 or later) another thing, and Internet Explorer still another thing. Padding and margins are worth trying out, but be certain to check the effects in many different browsers.



The screenshot shows the 'Box' category settings in Dreamweaver. It includes fields for Width, Height, Float, and Clear, each with a dropdown menu and a 'pixels' unit selector. Below these are sections for Padding and Margin, each with a 'Same for All' checkbox and four input fields for Top, Right, Bottom, and Left, each with a dropdown menu and a 'pixels' unit selector.



The screenshot shows the 'Border' category settings in Dreamweaver. It is divided into three columns: Style, Width, and Color. Each column has a 'Same for All' checkbox and four input fields for Top, Right, Bottom, and Left, each with a dropdown menu and a 'pixels' unit selector.

**Border** options: In the Border category, you can control the left, right, top and bottom borders around any kind of page element. If you want your list to have a green box around it, set some green borders as the style for a list. Again, borders don't work consistently in Netscape 4.x and Internet Explorer 5.x, so test, test, test!

**List** options: This category only applies to lists, but with it you can customize the type of bullet or numbering that is applied to your list, and you can even specify an image to be used as a bullet point.



The screenshot shows the 'List' category settings in Dreamweaver. It includes a 'Type' dropdown menu, a 'Bullet Image' dropdown menu with a 'Browse...' button, and a 'Position' dropdown menu.

**Positioning** and **Extensions** options: These categories are very specialized, and very inconsistent across browsers. Save them until you have more experience with styles.