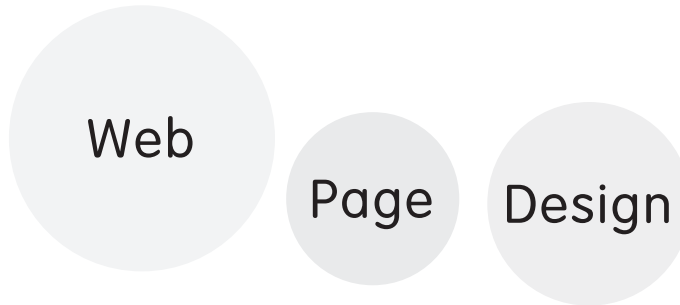


Unit 8



After completing this unit, you should understand the following:

The structure and hierarchy of a Web page and site

Two ways in which to begin creating your site

How to use the Web site prototype development form

Developing Your Web Presentation

A Web site's *presentation* is everything about the Web site: its look and feel, the organization of pages and information, the flow, etc. The bad news is that it's easy to create a bad or boring presentation; they proliferate on the Web. The good news is that it's also fairly easy to create an interesting, even inventive

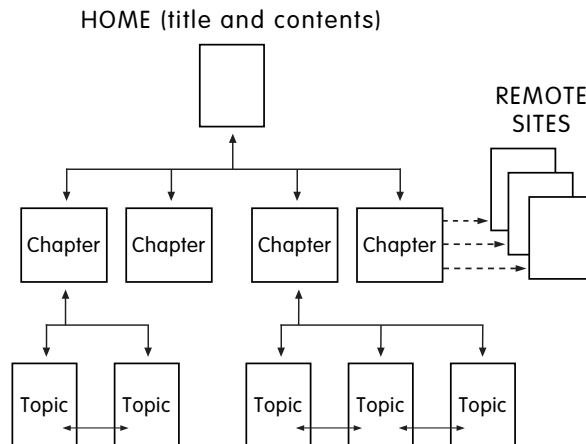


FIGURE 8-1 Hierarchical and Linear Organization

presentation. All you need is some good advice and a little forethought. The good advice is supplied in the following pages. The forethought, well, that's up to you.

Organizing the Structure of the Site

Before getting into the nuts-and-bolts development of your Web site, it's important to think about its overall organization. How will the pages relate to each other? Briefly, there are two ways to look at site organization: *hierarchical* (up and down) and *linear* (side to side). Most Web sites combine the two forms in a manner similar to Figure 8-1.

Let's use a book metaphor to help visualize how these relationships can be organized. Think of the home page as the introduction and table of contents (links). From each item in the table of contents, you jump to a "chapter" page. Most chapter pages link to appropriate "topic" pages. Some topic pages may be linked to each other, forming linear relationships. Other topic pages may contain only links

to remote Web sites. If your presentation is more complex, you can insert “section” pages between the home page and the chapter pages or insert “subtopic” pages.

Like a book, your presentation can be “opened” arbitrarily from any page. You should provide descriptive links on each page, guiding visitors back to a logical chapter or the home page. Unlike a book, each Web page should stand alone. Visitors shouldn’t have to read other pages to make sense out of the site that they’ve entered. By making the <TITLE> descriptive of the contents as well as the presentation (such as, “International Writers Consortium—Tips for Web Writers”) and by including your address or home link at the bottom of each page, visitors can quickly orient themselves.

This is a simplified description of a typical Web presentation. There are many ways to organize Web sites. The point is to keep the relationships among pages as uncomplicated and logical as possible. This will not only help visitors use your site, it’ll also make it easier for you to maintain and upgrade it.

Organizing the Information on a Page

In addition to thinking about the overall structure of the site, you must also think about the organization of information on individual pages and from topic to topic. Loose or sloppy organization generates a lack of confidence in the value of your presentation. If you want visitors to spend time at your site, the contents of each page should be orderly and navigable.

Four simple ways to organize information are:

- *Organize by location* (north, south, east, west; Mercury to Pluto). Destination sites and retail establishments often organize in this manner.
- *Organize by time* (first you do this, then this, then finally this). Sites that instruct typically structure their topics in this fashion.
- *Organize by comparative value* (most important to least important, expensive to inexpensive, old to new, fast to



slow, complex to simple, most favorite to least favorite). This style can fit into almost any list of topics. There's usually some way to organize topics comparatively.

- *Organize alphanumerically (A–Z, 1–9).* This works on subjects with no geographic, time-specific, or comparative differences. Indexes are often organized in this manner, as are the white pages of the phone book. A simple alphanumeric sort makes it easy to locate topics.

Here's how you can use any of these four structures to organize a Web page about your favorite vacation spot, Seattle, Washington.

- *Seattle organized by location* (west to east—the waterfront, downtown, the inland areas). Topics (or links) in each of these locations might continue to be organized by place, or you could switch to comparative value.
- *Seattle organized by comparative value* (most-popular tourist attractions, secondary side trips, pleasant time-wasters). Topics (or links) in each of these areas could be organized by time or your personal merit-o-meter (e.g., Pappy's Picks, Endorsements by Eleanor).
- *Seattle organized by time* (visit Lake Washington for a morning jog, spend midday shopping downtown, and end the day with dinner at the Space Needle). Write about what to do first, second, and third in each of the destinations.
- *Seattle organized alphanumerically* (an alphabetical index of tourist attractions). Each item in the index is a link to the Web page that describes the attraction. An index of this sort would be best as a backup reference, not at the top of the presentation's hierarchy.

Constructing Your Prototype

When you're developing something as potentially complex as a Web site, it's usually best to design and build a lean prototype. A prototype is a model, like an initial design or mockup. A prototype helps you get a handle on the size and scope of the project. It also provides direction for your efforts.

Think of your prototype development cycle as consisting of three simple stages: specification, design, and implementation. These are described in detail in this section. (Use the Web site development form on pages 139–142 to record your ideas.)

Defining Your Web Site Specifications

Anybody can type text between a pair of `<HTML>...</HTML>` tags. As you browse the Web, you'll find many egocentric homilies with lots of words and little else. To create more than just another "This is me" stop on the Web, you must target

your presentation appropriately and then design around your target ideas. To target your presentation, you must define a few important Web site specifications:

1. Decide the purpose of your Web page.
Is it to advertise widgets? Is it to educate people about your nonprofit enterprise? Is it to tell a story? Is it to publicize you and your collected works?
2. Define your potential audience.
The audience helps to guide your writing style, your inclusions, and the approach you use to publicize the site. Adults, teenagers, or children? Scuba divers? Gamers? Freelance writers? What are their personality traits? What are their interests? What do they want to see?
3. List the benefits people will receive by visiting your site.
In the old days, just having a Web site was a big deal. Now most people require a good reason to visit your

site. You must offer more than ego data. Benefits range from supplying entertainment (being an especially clever or weird spot) to demonstrating Web skills (an inventive use of graphics, forms, or whatever) to providing useful information. Think about your hobbies or your job. What information can you gather about a topic that is important to you? Practical information encourages repeat hits.

Designing Your Web Site

Once you outline your Web specifications, you can use them to guide your Web site design process.

1. Describe the kinds of information to be presented at your site.

Use the Web specifications to help guide your choices. In particular, consider the audience you want to attract. Brainstorm everything you'd like to include. Don't worry about the order of presentation, space considerations, or anything else.

2. Group subjects together.
Think hierarchically. What subjects can be grouped under other subjects? Think about your home page and what you'd like as the table of contents. If some material seems too complicated to worry about right now, just leave it alone. You don't have to do everything.

3. Sketch a diagram of your site.

Draw a rough flowchart. Use arrows to indicate link directions. (If all pages link to home, note it in your head; don't draw a million extra arrows.) If you don't know all your link pages or remote sites, don't worry about it. Remember that this design will develop over time.

4. Write a "to-do" list (optional).

Based on the previous information, what do you need to find, do, or learn? Do you need to find appropriate graphics? Do you need to research a topic? Write a rough list of "to-do"



items. Attempt to prioritize and, if possible, even date a few of them. If you have more than one task at the same priority level, do whatever is easiest or least expensive first.

5. Define a “stretch” task (optional).

Think about something you might eventually add to your Web site that will stretch your HTML capabilities. This “stretch” is a guide for your studies. It’ll help to broaden your Web authoring skills. If you’re new to HTML, your stretch can be as simple as creating a thumbnail graphic. If you’ve got some HTML experience, your stretch can be adding an image map or creating a form.

Implementing Your Web Design

With your specifications completed and your design roughly mapped out, it’s time to get down to brass tacks. Time to start *writing*.

There are two simple ways to get going:

- Start with the home page and work your way down through the links
- Start with the individual subject pages and work your way up to the home page

The first method works well if you know what you want on your home page. The second method works well if you don’t have a sense about the overall look of your presentation but you do know some detailed pages that you want to include. In any case, your end result probably won’t look much like your original design. That’s okay. It’s all part of the physics of Web site development.

Using the Web Site Development Form

The Web site development form guides you through the first two stages of Web site development: specification and





design. Once you complete the form, you move into the implementation stage by beginning to construct a simple prototype of your site. It probably will need more work and time, but at least you'll be on your way.

Keep the following in mind as you go through the development process:

- Don't get locked into perfection on any of this. Web pages *evolve*. When you're starting a new page or site, try for "okay" instead of "perfect."
- Don't get rigid figuring out the details. Details can always be changed.
- Fill out the form quickly. Keep moving through the questions. The faster you work, the less likely you'll become mired in a single idea or page concept. This is an overall envisioning process; you'll work out the details as you go along.
- Have fun. This is a creative endeavor.

Take no more than 30 minutes to fill out this form. Enjoy the envisioning process but don't spend too much time on details. Don't worry if it's sketchy in places (you'll fill it in later). Once the time is up, begin authoring a simple local prototype of your home page or whatever page you choose to start authoring.

WEB SITE PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT FORM

SPECIFICATIONS (USE EXTRA PAPER IF YOU NEED MORE ROOM)

1. What is the purpose of your Web page?

Example:

The purpose of this Web page is to introduce me to the world. It's for fun, a job reference, and to advertise my writing.

Your turn:

2. Who is your audience?

Example:

Mostly adults. My preferred audience would be potential employers, friends of mine, vegetarians, people interested in my books. Potential employers would want to know about my work background, successes, professionalism. Friends would want to see the lighter side of me. Vegetarians would want other Web sites on that subject. Maybe good recipes....

Your turn:

3. What benefits will people receive by visiting your site? If there's no benefit beyond reading about you and your life, think about your hobbies or your job. What information can you gather about a topic that is important to you? Practical information encourages repeat hits.

Example:

I'd like to include a list of Web sites on vegetarianism. Employers would want to see a good bio sketch and a professional resume.

Your turn:

DESIGN

4. What kind of information will be presented at your site? (If you want to add information that doesn't cater to your audience, do you need to expand or change your audience specification?)

Example:

A welcome graphic; favorite links; pictures of my dog, Herman, and my family; a resume and brief bio sketch; a photo of me; a list of my heroes; my favorite music; my favorite vegetarian recipes; links to business associates.

Your turn:

5. How can you group the subjects together?

Example:

Home page: welcome graphic, welcome text, menus of links, return address.

Resume and Bio: all bio material including a photo of me, photos of my family, and, of course, Herman; maybe bio should be a link off of resume.

Vegetarian page: a link to veg pubs on the Net, recipe of the week, graphic of a happy chicken...

Your turn:

6. How can you graphically sketch a diagram of your site? Use arrows to indicate link directions. Put question marks where you need to fill in data.

Your turn:

7. Do you need to write a “to-do” list?

Example:

Design my prototype home page (today and tomorrow)

Design a welcome graphic (next Saturday)

Convert my resume to HTML (date?)

Search the Web for veg sites (study about search utilities) (date?)

Your turn:

8. What do you want to eventually add that will stretch your HTML skills?

Example:

Add an audio file of Herman barking.

Your turn:

Skills Check

1. Two ways to look at site organization are
 - a. metaphorically and literally.
 - b. structured and unstructured.
 - c. hierarchical and linear.
 - d. online and offline.
2. Four simple ways to organize information are
 - a. beginning, middle, end, and index.
 - b. alphanumerically, by comparative value, by time, and by direction or location.
 - c. with tables, without tables, with graphics, and without text.
 - d. using a grid, using tables, using a spreadsheet, and using paper and pencil.
3. List the three major specifications for defining your Web site.
4. Describe the two ways of getting started implementing your design.