A Quick and Dirty Introduction to HTML

Prefatory Remarks

1. HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language. HTML, like other markup languages, is a way of inserting labels, or "tags" in plain text (ASCII) files. These tags tell a Web browser how to display that text. HTML is "special" in the world of markup languages in that it includes the ability to use hypertext "link" tags, allowing a reader to navigate from page to page or section to section by clicking a link.

2. This is a very very basic introduction, but it's enough to help you make your first page, and guide you in finding more information.

Stuff You Need to Have

1. A computer—ideally, one that's connected to the Internet.
2. A Web browser, like Safari, FireFox, Netscape, Mozilla, or Chrome.
3. A text editor. I suggest BareBones TextWrangler for Mac OS X and TextEdit for Windows. These are both free. See:
   http://www.lisaspangenberg.com/writing/web/html.html
4. A few paragraphs of text to play with, and two or three URLs or Web site addresses.

Note: You need to **remember to save your HTML files as Plain Text or ASCII (they are the same things) with the .htm or html extension**. Don't use Microsoft Word or Word Perfect or another word processor, and for the purposes of this tutorial, while you're learning, please don't use an HTML editor like DreamWeaver or GoLive. If you actually type the tags, and see the tags, you learn them very quickly and can write a formatted HTML page almost as quickly as you can use an ordinary word processor.

On Tags

1. Tags in HTML have angled brackets around them, to indicate that they are "special," and not part of the human readable text. This is a paragraph tag:
   <p>

2. Some tags come in pairs, as they "turn on" a feature or quality and then later turn it off. This tag **<p>** goes at the start of a paragraph; this tag **</p>** goes at the end. Paired tags generally use the / (see the ? key on your keyboard) as the "off" signal.

3. Some tags are singletons; they have no close tag. There are not many of them; the Break tag, which forces a line of text to "break" at the point the tag occurs is the most common one. It's useful in formatting lines of poetry. This is a Break tag: **
.** In more recent forms of HTML and related XML, you'll see **
** tags are paired with **</br>**

4. Many tags have "attributes," these are parts of the tag that describe the behavior of the tag in more detail. For instance, a paragraph tag can have **Align** as an attribute.
<p align="right"> </p>

5. The tags for making links are in a class by themselves.

Anchor or Link Tags

1. Anchor tags can be a little confusing because they have three parts.

a. The tag that indicates a linked URL or Web address follows:
<a href="">
The URL goes between the quotation marks.
<a href="http://www.example.com">

b. The linked text, that is, the text a reader clicks to go to the link.

<a href="http://www.example.com">**Click to go to Example.com**

c. Finally, the close or **"anchor"** tag that tells the browser to stop treating text as is if it is a link:
Click to go to Example.com****

(Eexample.com is the official site to use for examples.)

You need to keep in mind that less formatting is sometimes the best formatting. The reader's Web browser has final control, based on the user preferences, over font, font size, and font color, for instance.

Tags Every Page Must Have

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 3.2 Final//EN"
   "http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Wilbur/HTML32.dtd">


<html>




<head>
        <title>Your Page Title</title>



</head>




<body>

<p>Your text here.</p>

</body>




</html>
```

> **Lisa Spangenberg 4/12/09 8:38 PM**
> **Comment:** This is the Document type; it indicates the version of HTML that's used, and helps a Web browser application determine how to "read" the tags. It's not, strictly, necessary, but it is a courtesy. HTML 3.2 is an "old" version, but most Web browsers can read it. The current version is 4.0.1.

> **Lisa Spangenberg 4/12/09 8:38 PM**
> **Comment:** The <html> tag is crucial; it tells the Web browser that yes, this is an HTML page. It gets turned "off" at the very end of the page.

> **Lisa Spangenberg 4/12/09 8:38 PM**
> **Comment:** The "Head" contains the "metatdata," that is the data about the page. There are several sub-tags of the Head tag, but most of them are not required. The Head tag is turned off.

> **Lisa Spangenberg 4/12/09 8:38 PM**
> **Comment:** The Title tags surround the Title of your page; this is the text that your reader will see in the Window Title bar of their Web browser. The Title does *not* have to be the same as the HTML file name, but it should be descriptive of the contents.

> **Lisa Spangenberg 4/12/09 8:38 PM**
> **Comment:** The Body contains the actual contents of your page. At the very least you will have a few paragraphs of text here. Notice that it is the next to the last "off" tag.

> **Lisa Spangenberg 4/12/09 8:38 PM**
> **Comment:** Here's an example of a Paragraph tag in action.

<div align="center">**Resources**</div>

The tutorial I'm using, that you have in hardcopy, is here:

http://homepage.mac.com/lymond/html_intro/

http://www.lisaspangenberg/writing/web/intex.html

Books

HTML & XHTML: The Definitive Guide. Fifth Edition. by Chuck Musciano, Bill Kennedy. O'Reilly, 2002. This is the "standard" book for HTML pros. It is not for the faint hearted.

HTML for the World Wide Web with XHTML and CSS: Visual QuickStart Guide. Fifth Edition. by Elizabeth Castro. Peachpit, 2002. Her *Creating a Web Page with HTML: Visual QuickProject Guide* (Visual Quickproject Series) is also quite good, but uses a different approach.

There really are enough materials on the Web that you don't have to buy any books.

Comments on Style

In the **Resources** page I link to above, I've included some links to HTML style guidelines. Do take a look at them, but consider the following as basic principles.

1. Close your Paragraph tags. This is extremely important now for readers relying on assistive technology to read the page aloud. In the future, Web browsers will require Paragraph tags to be closed.

2. While **** and **** may *look* the same as **** and **** to you (or not, depending on the page in question) they are not identical. The **<strong>** describes a degree of emphasis; it's **strongly emphasized**, while **** (and its companion **)** indicate a milder *emphasis*. They're used as guides for visually disabled people dependent on "screen readers." The "readers" will emphasize those bits.

3. Lengthy quotations, roughly forty words or more of prose, or four lines or more of poetry should be set using **<blockquote>** and its companion **</blockquote>**. The Blockquote tag insets the text as a block quote; you may use several in a row to describe the amount of indentedness, being sure to close each of them. You can use a new set of Blockquote tags (closing the previous ones) to separate the text into paragraphs, instead of using <p> and </p> tags to indicated stanzas of poetry, or several quoted paragraphs. If you are quoting verse, remember to add a <br> tag at the end of each line, so that the lines don't run together.

4. Instead of setting titles of long works in italics using <i> and </i>, use the <cite> and </cite> tags, which will (depending on the style of the page) generally display the title in italics, as well as identifying the reference as a citation.