

Cascading Style Sheets in Dreamweaver

Software: Dreamweaver MX

Platform: Mac/PC

Overview

For those of us who design Web pages, HTML is a way of life. Unfortunately, the way HTML handles the appearance of our pages is not as exacting as many of us would like. Layout is not a significant part of what HTML was designed to do and the work-arounds that we have created increase the amount of code that we (or Dreamweaver) must write.

But in late 1996, stylesheets quietly entered the scene. Officially called cascading stylesheets (CSS), it was an elegant cousin to HTML that promised:

- more precise control than ever before over layout, fonts, colors, backgrounds, and other typographical effects;
- a way to update the appearance and formatting of an unlimited number of pages by changing just one document;
- compatibility across browsers and platforms; and
- less code, smaller pages, and faster downloads.

Despite lukewarm support from many Web browsers, CSS is starting to make good on these promises. It's transforming the way we make Web pages and is the cornerstone of Dynamic HTML.

So what's so special about stylesheets? In a nutshell:

- You can separate form and structure.
- You can control layout like never before.
- You can make smaller, faster pages.
- You can maintain or update the look of many pages at once, faster and easier than before.
- You can be browser friendly.

Let's look at each benefit:

You can separate form and structure.

HTML was never meant to control the form or appearance of Web pages. It's a language that defines the structure and function of elements on a page. It lets the Web browser decide how those elements should actually appear.

Cascading stylesheets enable us to get more control the right way: by separating the part that defines structure from the part that defines form. The HTML remains clean and simple, as originally intended, and the CSS code controls appearances from afar.

The introduction of this helpsheet is quoted or paraphrased from: [Mulder's Stylesheets Tutorial](http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmon-key/98/15/index0a.html), Steve Mulder, Wired Digital Inc., a Lycos Network site. Retrieved October 14, 2002 from <http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmon-key/98/15/index0a.html>.

You can control layout like never before.

Sure, enabled us to resize text, and table tags helped us create margins. But overall, what we could do with HTML was very limited. We couldn't create text exactly 80 pixels tall, we couldn't specify margins easily, we couldn't control the space between lines or words, we couldn't precisely position images on the screen. Until now. Stylesheets make all these things possible and more.

You can make smaller, faster pages.

Here's more good news: Stylesheets are simple text, just like HTML. There are no graphics, no executable program, no plug-ins, no streaming, no delays. It's as fast as straight HTML code.

And with CSS, you can do things that you previously had to resort to GIFs for. But wait, there's more! As I mentioned earlier, cascading stylesheets also mean fewer table tags and other HTML hacks cluttering up your code. Less code and fewer graphics translate into smaller file sizes and faster downloads.

You can maintain or update many pages faster and easier.

Without stylesheets, if I wanted to update the font used for body text across my entire site, I'd have to manually edit each page. The whole point of stylesheets is to separate form and structure. With stylesheets, I can have all the pages on my site point to a single CSS document. If I want to change the body text, all I do is change one line in this stylesheets document, and the entire site instantly changes.

You can be browser friendly.

Unlike some other Web technologies, CSS code degrades gracefully. That is, users don't get a glaring broken icon if they're missing a plug-in or code gibberish if they're using an older browser. Browsers that recognize cascading stylesheets use it. Browsers that don't recognize CSS simply ignore it.

Some CSS Terminology

Let's look at what's going on in this newfangled code. At the core of cascading stylesheets are rules. The simplest kind of rule looks like this:

```
H1 { color: green }
```

This rule tells the Web browser that all text surrounded by <H1></H1> should be displayed in green.

Each rule consists of a selector and a declaration. In the example above, H1 is the selector. It's the HTML tag that the style is being attached to. The declaration defines what the style actually is, and it also consists of two parts: the property (in this case, color) and the value (green).

Any HTML tag can be used as a selector. Thus, you can attach stylesheet information to any kind of element, from normal <P> text to <CODE> and <TABLE> content. You can even use some cascading stylesheet properties on graphics by applying them to .

You can also group rules together:

```
H1 { color: green; font-size: 37 px; font-family: impact }
```

Similarly, you can group selectors:

```
H1, P, BLOCKQUOTE { font-family: arial }
```

This rule specifies that all text within <H1>, <P>, and <BLOCKQUOTE> tags will display in the Arial font.

Dreamweaver and Style Sheets

The beauty of Dreamweaver is that you don't have to write the rules. You select the options you want from a dialog box and all is done for you automatically. However, just like knowing the basics of HTML it's good to know basics of how stylesheets work so that you can tweak the code and make work for you.

To create a style sheet in Dreamweaver:

1. Click on File > New, the New Document dialog box appears (figure 1).
 2. Select CSS Style Sheets from the Category list.
 3. Select one of the pre-defined sheets from the CSS Style Sheets list.
- Note:** a preview of the styles for your selection appears in the Preview window.
4. Click on Create to display the new style sheet.
 5. Click on File > Save.

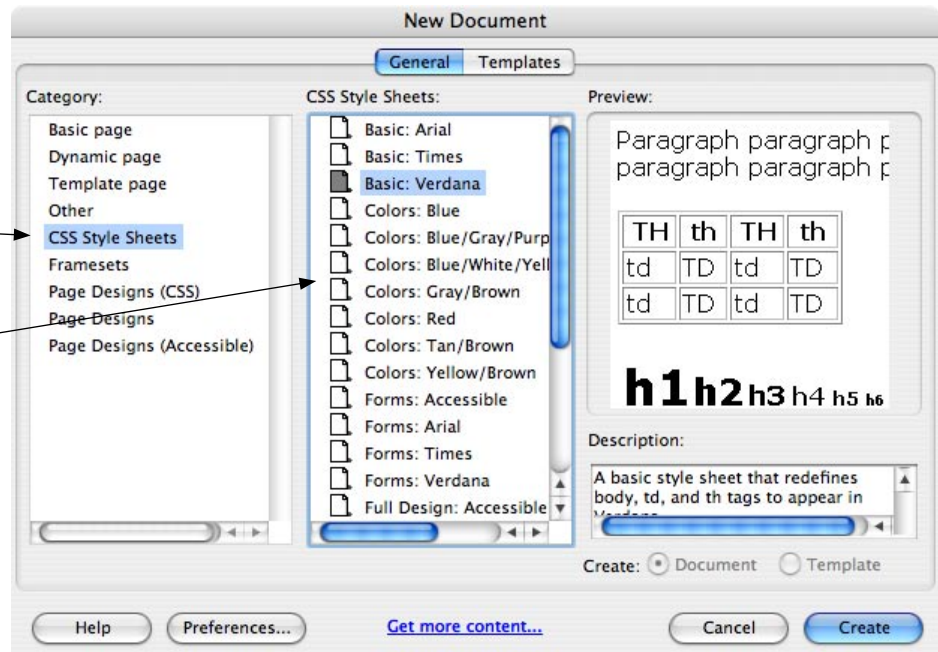


figure 1

The new style sheet will look similar to the one in figure 2 (especially if you selected the Basic: Verdana style). Note that text styles are set for the body and also for tables.



figure 2

Once you have created a style sheet you must link it to all the of the HTML documents that you want it to apply to.

To apply the style sheet:

1. Open an HTML document you wish to use the style sheet with.
2. Choose Window > CSS Styles from the main menu. The CSS Styles panel will appear (figure 5).
3. If you haven't selected a style sheet previously, no styles will show on the panel. To link to your newly created style sheet click on the Attach Style Sheet button (figure 5 breakout).

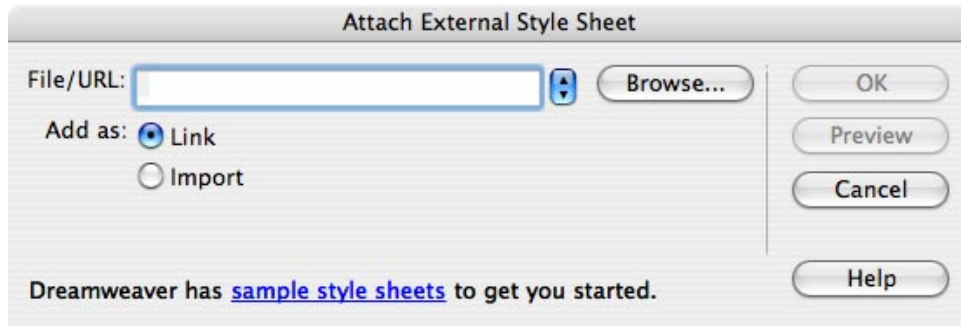


figure 3

4. The Attach External Style Sheet dialog box appears (figure 3). Click on Browse... and navigate to the style sheet you want to use then click on Choose.
5. In the Attach External Style Sheet dialog box click on OK. The style sheet's name and contents appear in the CSS Styles panel. In addition, Dreamweaver places linking code in the header of your document (figure 4).

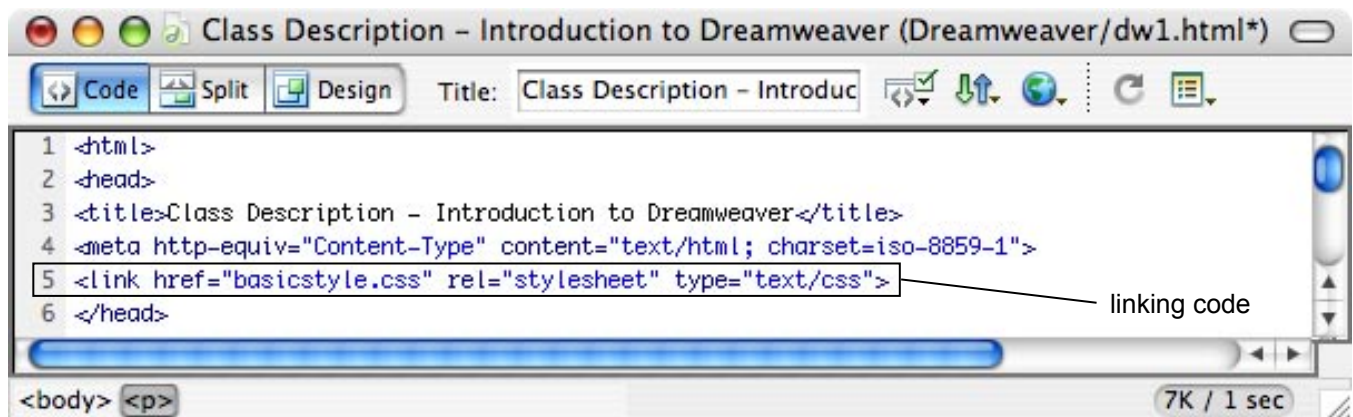


figure 4

Now that you have your basic style sheet set up, you may want to add to or modify the styles in the style sheet.

To modify your style sheet:

1. Open the style sheet you want to modify.
2. Select the name of the style sheet on the CSS Styles panel and click on the Edit Style Sheet button at the bottom of the panel (figure 5 and breakout).

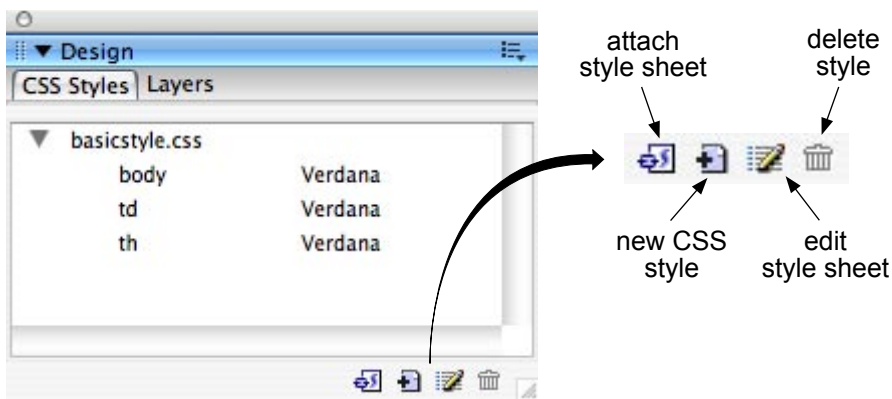


figure 5

3. The Edit Style Sheet dialog box appears with the names of the styles in the style sheet you selected (figure 6). Select the style you want to edit (i.e. body) and click Edit.
4. The CSS Style Definition dialog box appears (figure 7).
5. In the dialog box you may set parameters for the different styles by entering information or selecting items from the drop-down menus.
6. When you are done editing, click on OK to close the CSS Style Definition dialog box and then Done to close the Edit Style Sheet dialog box.

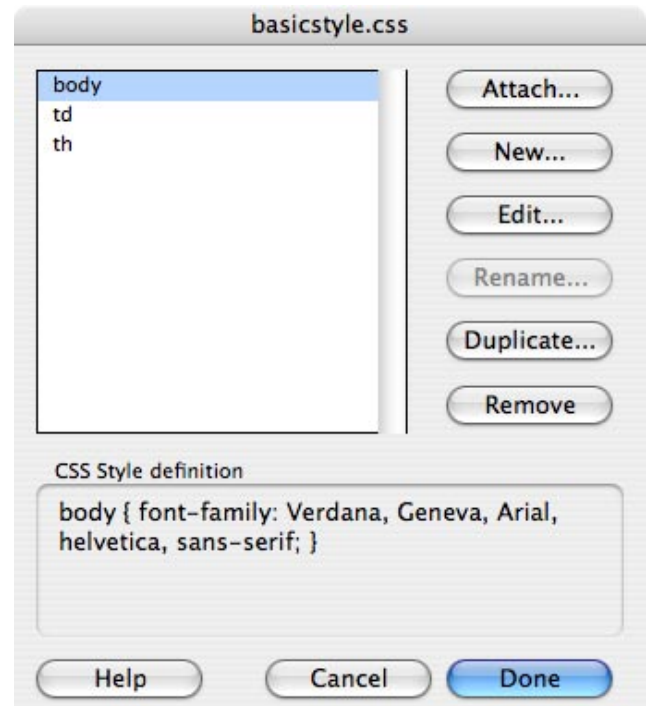


figure 6

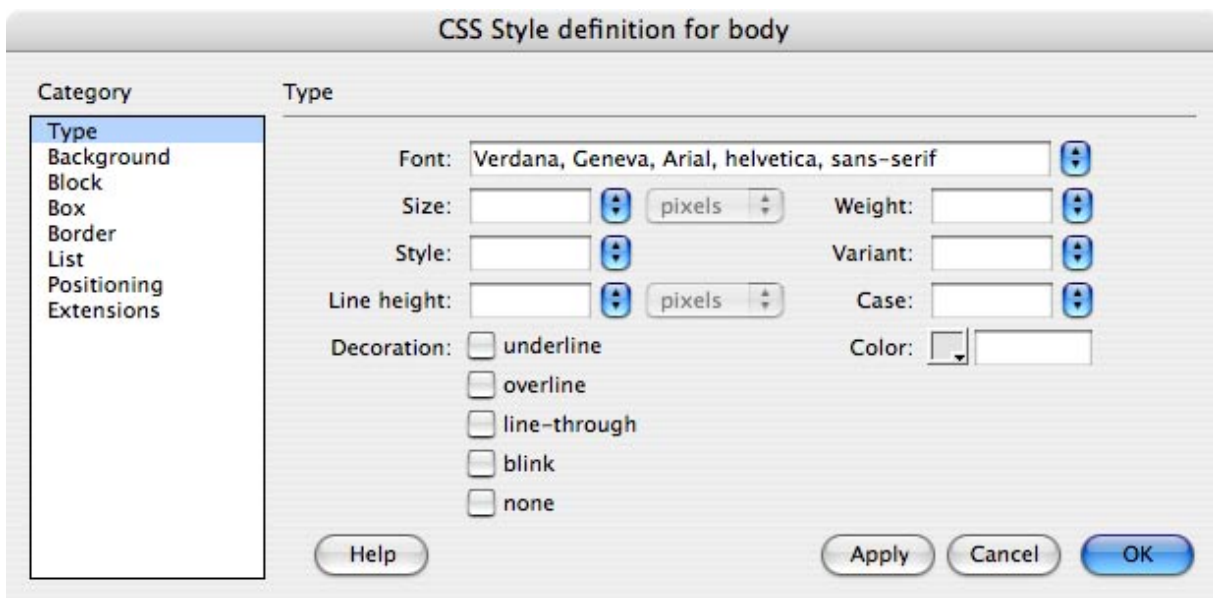


figure 7

One of the cool things you can do with style sheets is create a rollover without using graphics. This is done with the A:hover selector. Some of the earlier versions of IE and Netscape don't support this feature; but these are very old and probably not worth worrying about. So to show the way to create a new style, let's look at creating a hover selector.

To create a new style:

1. Open the style sheet you want to modify.
2. Select the name of the style sheet on the CSS Styles panel and click on the New CSS Style button at the bottom of the panel (figure 5 and breakout).
3. The New CSS Style dialog box appears (figure 8). Click on the Advanced button in the Selector Type area and use the pop-up menu in the Name field to select each of the selectors: a:link, a:visited, a:hover one at a time.
4. When you have selected one of the selectors, click OK. The CSS Style Definition dialog box (figure 7) opens and you can select the property values (color, decoration, etc.) you want for your style. After selecting your values, click OK.
5. Follow steps 3 and 4 for each of the selectors. The style sheet should look similar to figure 9.

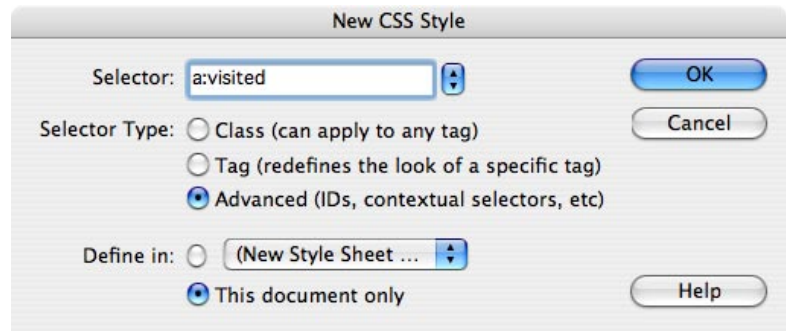


figure 8

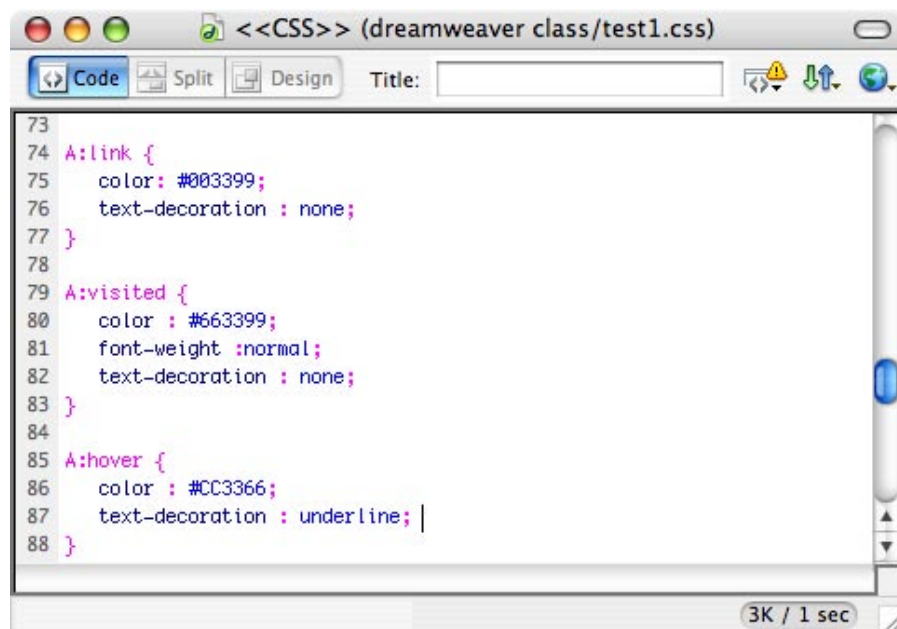


figure 9

Notes About the Code:

- A:link which is a normal link but note that the property "text-decoration" is set to "none." This means the link will not be underlined.
- A:visited is the normal visited link with a specific color set. Colors are in hexadecimal.
- A:hover sets links to change to the set color and appear with an underline when the