



Basic HTML & Blackboard

A Blackboard Tip Sheet

Purpose

By default, Blackboard 5 will format text to 12-point, left-justified Arial. Any other formatting must be done with HTML codes. This Blackboard Tip Sheet will introduce you to some basic HTML codes you can use yourself to add simple formatting to Blackboard documents.

What is HTML?

The acronym **HTML** stands for HyperText Mark-up Language. It is the set of codes used to format (or "mark up") Web pages. A single piece of HTML code is called a "tag." HTML tags are surrounded by pointed brackets ("**<**" and "**>**"), also known as the greater-than and less-than symbols. Tags usually come in pairs. The tags will format the text between the beginning tag and the end tag of the pair.

For example the pair of HTML tags to create bold text looks like this:

```
<B>This text will be bold.</B>
```

The **** tag means "start bold here." The end tag, ****, means "end bold here." End tags always include the forward slash ("**/**").

Using HTML in Blackboard

For smaller formatting jobs, you might prefer to type the HTML tags in yourself as you type your content. Here are some basic HTML tags that you can use.

Do I Use the "Smart Text" or the "HTML" Option?

Most text entry boxes in Blackboard 5 have three options:

- Smart Text
- Plain Text
- HTML

The default option is Smart Text, and most of the time you can leave it at that.

Here's a summary of their different behaviors:

Format Option	Behavior
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<i>HTML</i>	Renders <i>all</i> HTML tags. Primarily used if you are cutting and pasting HTML from another source.
<i>Plain Text</i>	Accepts your text just as you enter it. Does not render HTML codes; any HTML codes will show as text.
<i>Smart Text</i>	Renders HTML tags, but does not require tags for line breaks or paragraph breaks. You can enter line and paragraph breaks as you desire by typing. Web addresses entered in the URL format are automatically converted to links. For this to function the URL <i>must</i> begin with "http://" and there must be a space before the "http://" to distinguish it from the previous word. If an image tag, , is entered in Smart Text, Blackboard will automatically prompt you to upload the image. (This only works when the Blackboard document is first created; it does not work when modifying an existing document.)

Paragraph formatting

Remember: if you select the Smart Text option, you do not need to use HTML paragraph formatting.

line break

<P> or the combination <P> . . . </P>

paragraph break

In HTML, a paragraph break puts a single blank line between paragraphs. A line break inserts no blank line.

The <P> tag can be used alone at the end of a paragraph, or as a pair. If you use it as a pair, you can include the "align=left|center|right" modifier in the beginning tag to control placement. For example, this:

```
<P ALIGN=right>Fourscore and seven years ago, our founding father
set forth upon this continent a new nation.</P>
```

would create a right-aligned paragraph.

Text Formatting

```
<B> . . . </B>  
    bold text
```

```
<I> . . . </I>  
    italic text
```

```
<U> . . . </U>  
    underlined text
```

```
<FONT FACE=fontstyle COLOR=fontcolor SIZE=fontsize> . . . </FONT>  
    formatted font
```

The FONT tag requires that you use at least one of the modifiers (FACE, COLOR, or SIZE), but you do not need to use all of them.

The FACE modifier can be set to any font, *but* the person viewing the page must also have that font installed on their computer. For that reason, it is best to stick to common fonts like Times New Roman, Arial, or Courier New.

The COLOR modifier will recognize basic colors, including black, white, gray, red, blue, yellow, green, purple, orange, cyan, magenta, etc.

The SIZE modifier does not refer to typical font point sizes. In HTML fonts can be sizes 1 through 7. The default font size is 3.

Since each user can set the default font point at which their browser will display text, these font sizes can be relative. For example, one user might have their browser's default font set to 10-point Times while another has their browser's default font set to 12-point Times. The HTML tag `` would create 10-point Times text on the first computer, and 12-point on the latter, since 3 is the default size.

You can use plus or minus signs to indicate sizes relative to the default. For example:

```
<FONT SIZE=+2>Bigger, Better, Faster!</FONT>
```

would create text that is two steps larger than the default font size.

Creating Links with HTML

Links are created using the "anchor" tag:

```
<A HREF="URL">Clickable text</A>
```

where *URL* is the Web address and "clickable text" is the text that will become the link. For example:

```
<A HREF="http://www.blackboard.com">Blackboard, Inc.</A>
```

will take the words "Blackboard, Inc." and turn them into a link that will direct the user to the Blackboard home page.

Creating HTML with Other Tools

Course developers should not feel like they have to learn everything about HTML. It is possible to use Web authoring tools to generate the HTML for you.

There are many applications you could use for this. Some of the most popular are:

Word processors. Microsoft Word, Corel WordPerfect, Apple AppleWorks, Sun StarOffice, and almost every other contemporary word processor contains the ability to convert your word processing documents to a Web page coded in HTML. However, the conversion from a word processing document to an HTML Web page is often far from perfect, especially for documents with complex formatting.

WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web-authoring tools. These tools provide an environment similar to a word processor for Web page Development and entire Web sites.

Again, there are many products you could choose from in this category. Some of the most popular are Macromedia Dreamweaver, Adobe GoLive, NetObjects Fusion, and Microsoft FrontPage. The major browsers also come with free Web-authoring tools. Netscape Composer is part of Netscape Communicator, and Microsoft FrontPage Express (a scaled back version of FrontPage) can be bundled with Microsoft Internet Explorer.

Unlike word processors, Web-authoring tools offer you an authoring environment tailored specifically to create Web pages. The Web, however, poses different problems than a print medium. For example, a Web page might appear different depending on which browser the audience is using, whether they're on Windows or Macintosh, etc. When using a Web-authoring tool, you will not have the same level of control over the online medium that a word processor offers over the printed page, however creating well-formatted Web pages will be much simpler with a Web-authoring tool than if you're relying upon a word processor's "Save as HTML" conversion.

HTML Editors. Applications like BareBones Software's BBEdit and Allaire HomeSite provide an editing environment for HTML documents. While they are not WYSIWYG, HTML editors usually have a "preview" mode that allows you to switch between viewing the raw HTML codes and previewing how those codes

will look in the browser. These products will help you write HTML faster and easier, but they presume you already have knowledge of HTML.

Experiment with some of these tools. You probably already have access to a word processor that can save your documents as HTML. Some of the Web-authoring tools and HTML editors provide free trial downloads from their Websites, and the ones tied to browsers (Microsoft FrontPage Express and Netscape Composer) are entirely free.

Incorporating HTML Generated with Other Applications into Your Blackboard Course

After developing your Web page, you have two options for including that content in Blackboard:

1. You can save it as an HTML file and upload the HTML file itself into Blackboard (using the "Create a link to this file" Special Action on the content-editing forms), or
2. You can copy and past the HTML codes themselves into the text-entry box in the Blackboard content-editing form.

For the former approach, just upload the HTML file as you would any other document. Blackboard will also automatically detect images in an HTML file and prompt you to upload the images as well.

For the latter, you will need to go through several steps:

1. View the HTML source. Most of the tools discussed above will have a mechanism (usually part of a View menu) to allow you to see the "HTML source" (which just means the HTML codes themselves).
2. Copy all of the HTML tags between but not including the `<BODY>` and `</BODY>` tags. Blackboard itself dynamically generates the HTML above and below the BODY tags, so you should not copy that portion of your HTML source.
3. Paste the copied HTML into the Blackboard content-editing forms text entry box.
4. Choose the HTML text-formatting option.
5. Submit the form.

If there are `` tags in the HTML, Blackboard will automatically detect them after you submit the form. You'll receive a second form prompting you to upload the appropriate images. However, if you have other media (video, audio, Flash, Shockwave Director, Authorware, etc.) embedded in your HTML page or if you have included JavaScript scripts in the `<HEAD>` portion of your document, then you will need to package the file(s) before uploading. See the "Importing a Web site" Blackboard Tip Sheet for more information about that process.

Other Resources

If you are interested in learning more about HTML, here are some online resources.

Introduction to HTML

<http://www.cwru.edu/help/introHTML/toc.html>

This tutorial from Case Western Reserve University is an excellent starting point for beginners.

The Beginner's Guide to HTML

<http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/General/Internet/WWW/HTMLPrimer.html>

Even though HTML isn't a supercomputing application, the National Center for Supercomputing Applications has a great HTML tutorial. And they should know -- they're the people who created Mosaic, the first graphical Web browser.

Web Mastery

<http://www.devry-phx.edu/Webresrc/Webmstry/mastery.htm>

The Web Mastery site has a lot of good information. More importantly, the "Learning HTML" section of this site links to dozens of other good tutorials.

The Yale C/AIM Web Style Guide

<http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/contents.html>

Not an HTML tutorial per se, but if you want to become skilled at HTML, you're going to have to start thinking about interface design and page design. The Yale Center for Advanced Interactive Media's Web Style Guide is an excellent introduction to those topics.

The World Wide Web Consortium

<http://www.w3.org>

The World Wide Web Consortium (or W3C, for short) is a non-profit group that is responsible for maintaining the official HTML standards. This is the end-all, be-all for official HTML information, though it is probably too technical for beginners.

For more educational materials about Blackboard Products visit the Instructor Center at <http://www.blackboard.com/>

