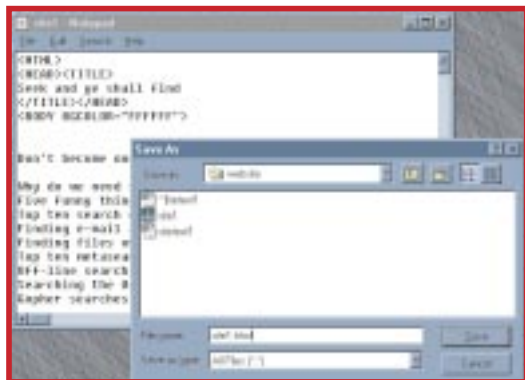HTML boils down to writing pages in text, adding formatting tags and inserting instructions to place images and links to other pages. The quickest way to learn it is to create a simple page from scratch.

You don't need any fancy software or hardware to do this, just a text editor or word processor such as SimpleText on the Mac or the Notepad accessory supplied with Windows. It is also handy to have a Web browser running alongside your text editor so you can see how your page is shaping up. Any browser will do, but you'll need the latest version of Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Explorer if you want to see the very newest HTML features in action.

If you take a look at the code behind any Internet page (look for a Source or Document Source option on your browser's View menu), the first thing you will notice is that the text is surrounded by comments enclosed between 'less than' and 'greater than' symbols:

<TITLE> Seek and ye shall find </TITLE>

These comments are called tags. They usually come in pairs, and they affect everything that falls between the opening and closing tag.

Every Internet page contains certain basic elements made out of these tags. Here are those vital ingredients:

<HTML>
<HEAD><TITLE>
Seek and ye shall find
</TITLE></HEAD>

When you save your page, give it a name ending in .htm or .html. You can then open it in your Web browser and see how it looks.

<BODY>
Don't become one of the lost souls on the Net…
</BODY>
</HTML>

And there you have it. One properly structured – if very basic – Web page. But hold on, what do the commands actually mean?

Basically, every Web page has two parts, a head and a body. The <HEAD> tag tells the server that the first section contains information about the document. Text inside the <TITLE> tags appears in the very top bar of your browser window and is used for index information by programs which search the Web. It's also the default name for any bookmarks which visitors to your page create, so choose something short and meaningful.

The <BODY> contains the information you want to display in the browser window. Everything which visitors will see – text, pictures, links and so on – is described in this section.

Putting <HTML> at the beginning tells the browser it is looking at a Web page. </HTML> marks the end of the document.

Save your file with an .htm (PC) or .html (Mac and UNIX) extension. If you're using a word processor rather than a text editor, make sure you save the file as plain text, because your Web browser can't interpret word processor files.

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