

A short introduction to HTML

A webpage is nothing more than just text. There are no pictures, no textstyles, no fonts and no colors, just text. If you open a webpage in a texteditor like Simple Text, you may see that there is nothing else, but if you open the same page in a web-browser, there will be stylized text, links, probably pictures and maybe even animations, sounds and interactive mumbo jumbo. The secret how the text becomes that nice is HTML, an abbreviation HyperText Markup Language.

HTML is again just text, but with embedded codes, called tags, that make fancy things if the browser understands them. A tag is everything between angle brackets, like ``. Some tags needs properties, like `<P ALIGN="center">`. There are two types of tags, the ones that can survive on their own and the ones that needs an end-tag. The first types can be images or other objects that will be replaced with something by the browser. The oother ones will take effects on the text between the first tag and the end-tag, for example `Hello` that will make the "Hello" to be rendered in bold. Since the first HTML-definition, many new tags has been added. Old browsers that doesn't understand these new tags can still display the entire information on the page though, because if the way that HTML works. If the browser does not understand a tag, it's always ignored, so if the browser, for example, doesn't understand the ``-tag, it will still display "Hello", but not in bold.

In the first HTML-definition, the HTML-language was quite simple, and the pages were because of that really boring. Today, there are hundreds of tags, and many techniques to extend the HTML-language. A today's page may use images, videoclips or interactive programs, but they are always putted together in a HTML-file. While the Web has became more popular, and while the HTML-language has become more complex, visual HTML-editors and so called WYSIWYG-programs (What You See Is What You Get) has been released, which makes it easy to create a page without knowing the HTML-language. These programs puts the page together for you, but the pages are still made of HTML-tags.

One of the first questions that a webdesigner use to ask is why there are no ways to exactly define the page. People who've been using DTP-programs, such as Quark XPress, are familiar with fixed sizes, a page that is exact x mm wide and y mm high, with an image that is printed exactly where it should, and so on. A webpage on the other hand is made to be displayed in any browser, on any computer, with any screen and with any fonts installed. One user may have a black and white 13" screen, while another user has a 24-bit 21" color monitor. The main information on the page will, however, still look almost the same. That's why WYSIWYG-programs for making webpages never can be that exact as DTP-programs such as Quark Xpress can be for printings.

Well, today you don't need to know HTML to be a webdesigner, though some people says that you do must know HTML if you want to make good pages. If it's true or not is another story, but it may still be useful to know the HTML basics, either you're writing the pages like in the old days using a text editor or if you're wondering what things you are able to do with your page in the editor. (After all, no editor will ever allow you to do things that is not possible to do in HTML, so it may be interesting to know the features and limitations). HTML Vocabulary is a collection of the most well-used tags, among information in which browsers they are supported and how to use them. Personally I use an editor named PageSpinner `<http://www.algonet.se/~optima/pagespinner.html>` to create my pages, but I keep the Vocabulary open in the background as a reference on how to do, what I can do and such questions.

FAQ: Is HTML case-sensitive?

No, HTML doesn't care about upper- or lowercase text, except for entites (`Ä` means Ä while `ä` means ä). But some people, like me, think that it's easier to read the text if the tags are in uppercase, and therefore all tags in the Vocabulary are in uppercase too.

FAQ: Do I always have to use quotes?

No, not always, but sometimes. On the other hand, there is no reason to not use them, so the most simple thing would be to always use quotes. In some situations quotes are required, for example to define an ALT-text to an IMG-tag that includes spaces. In other situations, it actually makes no much sense.