

Best Practices for Using Microsoft Word to Create Simple Web Pages

by Mark D. Webster

Web development applications like *Microsoft FrontPage*, *Macromedia Dreamweaver*, and *Adobe GoLive* expedite the process of creating and editing web pages. These and other programs have become increasingly more popular and more powerful in their capabilities. However, despite readily available training and a reasonably gentle learning curve, many educators are still hesitant to venture into web page design. Perhaps part of the reason is due to the mystique related to HTML and confusion surrounding the many technologies that intersect in bringing us the Internet. For users reluctant to venture into web development, Microsoft Word can be a viable option for someone just beginning to develop web pages.

Microsoft Word has essentially become the standard word processing application and for good reason; it's an excellent, general-purpose application for creating a variety of documents. With the increasing popularity of the Internet, Microsoft has made progress over time in integrating Word and the other Microsoft Office applications with the web. By utilizing Microsoft Word, those seeking to develop simple web pages can begin with a tool and application interface with which they are already familiar. By following some best practices, perhaps forgetting a few bad habits, and using various utilities to cleanup the extraneous HTML code that Word generates, the average user can create simple, static web pages that are acceptable. However, for more dynamic documents that feature interactive elements or more sophisticated page layouts, a web development tool like Macromedia Dreamweaver would be needed.

Those using Word for web page development will need to use Word with the mindset that the ultimate product will be a web page. Web documents are written in HTML, or Hypertext Markup Language, a document language that defines the structure and layout of a web document by using a variety of tags and attributes. While learning how to write HTML code is not necessary for creating web pages, it is important to understand that there are certain constraints imposed by HTML, and a user cannot do everything he or she may be accustomed to doing in using the word processor. Because of the nature of how HTML displays web pages, those using Word in creating a web page will recognize that there are special ways to format the content in a document that might be different from what they are accustomed to doing.

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Getting Started

In beginning a new document, you can either start with a document in Word format, or an HTML document. Selecting **File > New** opens the window you see in the screen capture below:

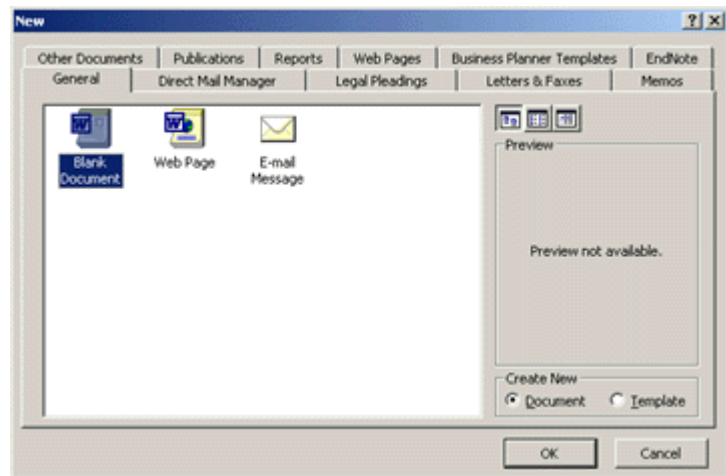


Figure 1: Create new document

If you know from the start that your document will essentially be a web page that will not be printed or saved as an Adobe PDF file, it makes sense to begin with a new Web Page. However, for documents that will likely be printed out, it's important to realize that it's often difficult to print out a web page because you can't use page breaks to lay out the pages, and the pages often break in undesirable places within the document. Therefore, choosing to begin with a blank Word document is often your best option, provided that you follow best practices in creating your document, with the understanding that the ultimate product will be a web page.

There are three layouts that you can select when composing a document in Microsoft Word: Normal, Web Layout, and Print Layout. To change your screen layout, use the View menu. When using Word to create a web page, it is best to work in *Web Layout* mode, although occasionally you should switch to the other modes to check the appearance of your document, especially if it will be printed. Note that in Web Layout view, the margins are close to the edge of the page. When you're in Web Layout, the ruler should be removed from the toolbar. The width of text on your page is dependent upon browser and display settings on the computer that you are using to view your page. Therefore, having the ruler present in Web Layout would serve no purpose when creating your web page. To remove the ruler, go to your View menu and uncheck Ruler.

Forgetting Bad Typing Habits

OK, now don't get too defensive. The first step is to honestly look at how you typically use a word processor. There are several bad habits that will cause trouble in creating web pages. You may get away with these bad habits in typing

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word processing documents, but this will not be the case in creating web pages!

Tab key: *Please forget that your keyboard has a Tab key!*

Outside of using it to move from one cell or field to another in a table, form, or spreadsheet, it has virtually no other purpose in creating a web page document. Do not use the Tab key to indent paragraphs because HTML clean-up utilities, like the one included with Dreamweaver, will remove indentation created with the Tab key.

Formatting Paragraphs

If you need to indent your paragraphs, then use Word's paragraph formatting feature. Select **Format > Paragraph**, and the window like you see on the right will open. Open the drop-down list under **Special** to select **First line** to indent your paragraph. Indenting your paragraphs this way will insure that your HTML code will indent your paragraphs using the text-indent property that is a feature of the Cascading Style Sheet standard.

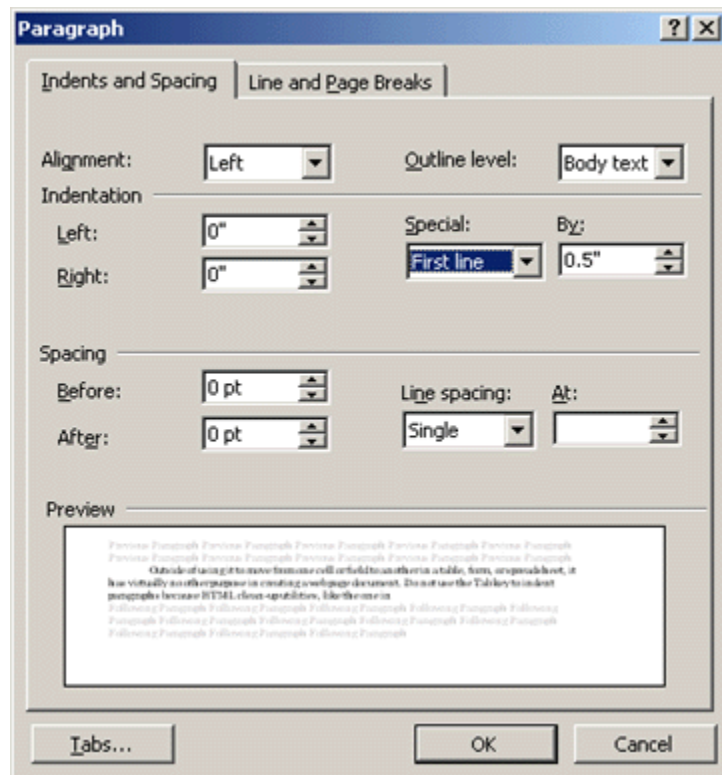


Figure 2: Paragraph window

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Inappropriate use of the Spacebar

Inappropriate use of the Space Bar can get you into trouble when creating documents destined for the web:

- Don't use the Spacebar to indent paragraphs; indent your paragraphs using the paragraph formatting method described above.
- Never use the Spacebar for aligning text or graphics on the page. Use the *Center* tool to center text or images, and use the *Increase Indent* or the *Decrease Indent* to indent entire paragraphs or a list of items. If three page elements need to be spaced across a page, even on a single line, the user needs to follow best practice and create a three-column *table*.

Inappropriate use of the Enter key

The *Return* or *Enter* key can also get you into trouble:

- Very few users are actually guilty of this, but don't hit the *Enter* key at the end of each line like you're using a typewriter. The *Enter* key should only be struck once at the end of each paragraph, unless you are creating a bulleted or ordered list or inserting blank lines on a page. Allow the lines in a paragraph to automatically wrap from one line to the next.
- Do not hit the *Enter* key several times to force text to start on a new page. Inserting a page break for this purpose will allow you to print your document the way you desire, without causing your document to look awful in a web browser because of the extra spaces.

Formatting Issues

Selection of fonts

You should use fonts that are common to both the Windows and Macintosh platforms, and which will be installed on the majority of computers that will be browsing your web pages. If someone views your page and his or her computer does not have the font installed, your page will be displayed using the browser's default font, which is typically Times New Roman. There are basically two major types of fonts: **serif fonts**, in which the letters have little serifs or embellishments on the edge of the type, and **sans serif fonts** that are simpler and lack the serifs. Generally speaking, in printed documents, serif fonts are often used for the main body of text in order to aid in reading and the recognition of characters because the little serifs help to guide our eyes and our brain, while sans serif fonts are often used for headings. However, on a computer screen, many people believe that sans serif fonts are easier to read because serifs tend to disappear on the screen, especially with small type. The sans serif font Arial is a popular font used for web pages. Some serif style fonts like **Courier New** are mono-spaced fonts where spacing is not adjusted to accommodate letters of different sizes (typewriter style fonts).

Regardless of which fonts you use, a general principle for most situations is the rule that ***you should never use more than two fonts on the same page.***

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Using too many fonts on a page can be a bit of an eyesore. The text of this article, for example, is sans serif. While the safest fonts to use are probably Times New Roman and Arial, there are other fonts that are a relatively safe bet, and which will be found on most computers. The following table lists fonts that are good for web pages:

Serif	Sans Serif	
	Arial	The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
	Arial Black	The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
	Comic Sans	The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
Courier		The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
Courier New		The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
Georgia		The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
	Impact	The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
Times New Roman		The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
	Verdana	The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Figure 3: Font chart

Use Styles

Often, those using Microsoft Word for word processing will spend a lot of time highlighting text throughout a document and manually changing the font and font size over and over again. There is a better way. Using **Styles** allows you to quickly format a document in such a way that you're consistently applying the same font attributes throughout the document. For example, let's assume you want certain sub-headings to all be the same font and size, in bold text. Rather than manually having to make these three changes repeatedly for each sub-heading, you can use Styles to simply the process. For example, the title at the top of a page might be set for Heading 2, section headings might be Heading 4, while the main body of text is Normal text.

Not only does using Styles save time and labor for general word processing, but using Styles is also important for documents that will later become web pages. When a document that uses Styles is saved to HTML, Word will save your document using the HTML heading tags such as H1, H2 and so forth. To use the Paragraph styles in Word, highlight your paragraph or text, and select **Format > Style**, or use the drop-down list on the Formatting toolbar.

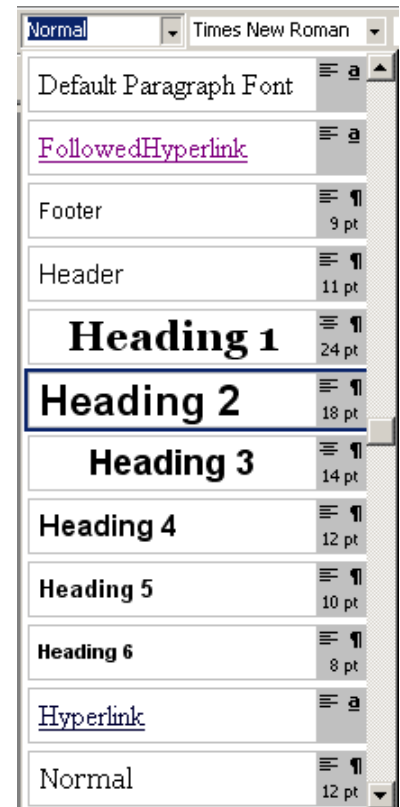


Figure 4: Style selector

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Use Bulleted and Numbered Lists and Decrease and Increase Indent

Use automatically formatted bulleted and numbered lists for both documents in Word format, as well as web pages. Note that if you start trying to type a list manually by beginning the first line with 1. (number 1 followed by a period) and then a space, Word automatically converts your text to a numbered list. Automatically formatted lists format well when saved in HTML.

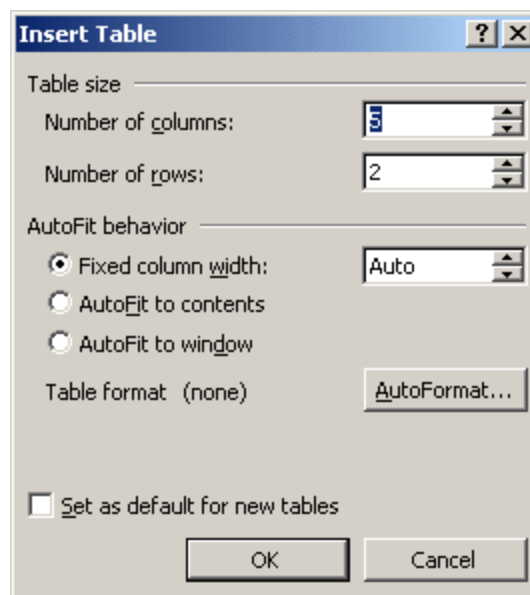
Please note what was emphasized above under the sections relating to inappropriate use of the Tab key and Space Bar. If you want an unordered list without bullets, then you can type your list of items, highlight the text and use Decrease Indent or Increase Indent to indent the list of items. If you want a bulleted list, then simply type your list, highlight the text and create a bulleted list.

When creating bulleted lists, don't try to get too fancy with the style of your bullet. Using customized bullet styles relies typically upon the Wingdings font, so that the computer being used to view your page must have Wingdings installed (however, most computers will have Wingdings installed).

Use Tables!

Tables are an excellent tool for organizing and displaying information in rows and columns. As mentioned earlier in the section relating to inappropriate use of the Tab key, the practice of typing and using the Tab key to manually move over a set amount of space for each column is not best practice (unless you're using an old typewriter that you happen to pick up from an antique store).

Those creating web pages must become proficient with tables because web page layout is typically highly dependent upon effective use of tables. Word provides you with some decent tools for creating tables. There are generally two main ways to create tables in Word:



Use the *Table* menu to insert a table

You can select **Table > Insert > Table** to create a table and specify the number of columns and rows.

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Draw Tables

You can draw a table using the *Tables and Borders* button on the Standard toolbar.

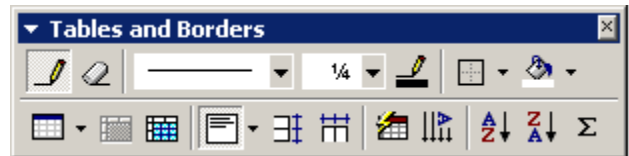


Figure 6: Table draw toolbar

While drawing tables is an easy way to create tables, there is a serious drawback if you're creating tables for a web page with this method. When you draw tables, Word, of course, creates a table with the exact dimensions that you drew. However, tables that are drawn do not automatically scale very well in the web browser to suit different display settings. In most cases it is best NOT to draw tables, or even overly "tweak" the height of rows or the width of columns. While sometimes you will need to adjust the height of rows or the width of columns, leaving these settings undetermined will allow a table to automatically scale to suit different display settings and whatever content is placed in the table. Therefore, our focus will be on using the Table menu to create tables and on becoming proficient with ways to customize tables and edit their properties.

Table Properties

After you create your table, it is easy to adjust the properties of the table. Place your cursor anywhere within the table, and select *Table > Table Properties*. The best way to learn how to create tables is just to do it. Create a practice document and experiment

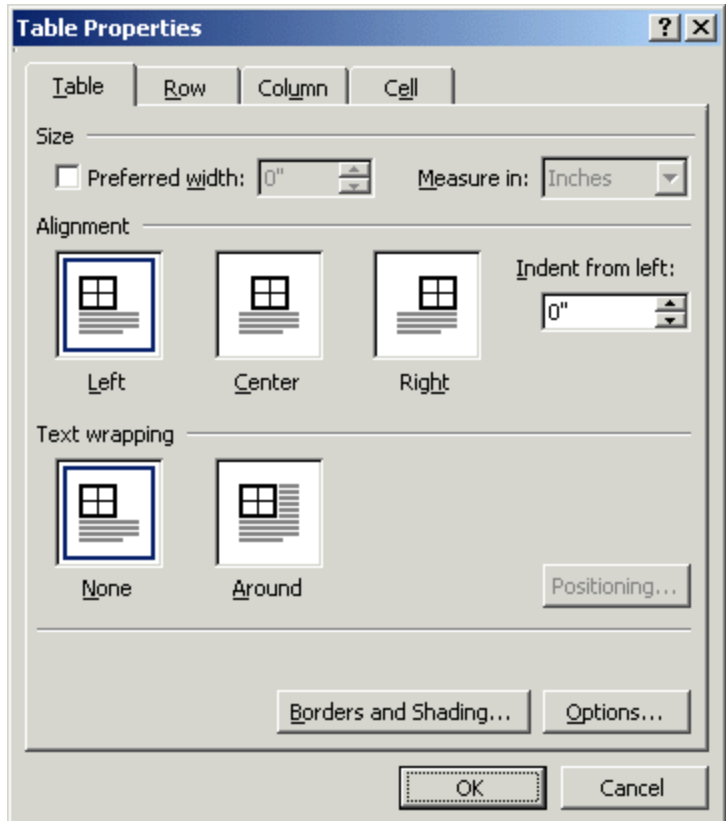


Figure 7: Table properties (table tab)

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with creating different tables and changing properties. In the screen capture on the right, notice you can change the properties of the table as a whole, or the properties for a row, column, or even an individual cell.

Changing Cell Properties

Knowing how to change the Vertical Alignment of a cell is something that will be useful in formatting your table. In this particular cell, the vertical alignment is set so that the text starts at the top of the column.

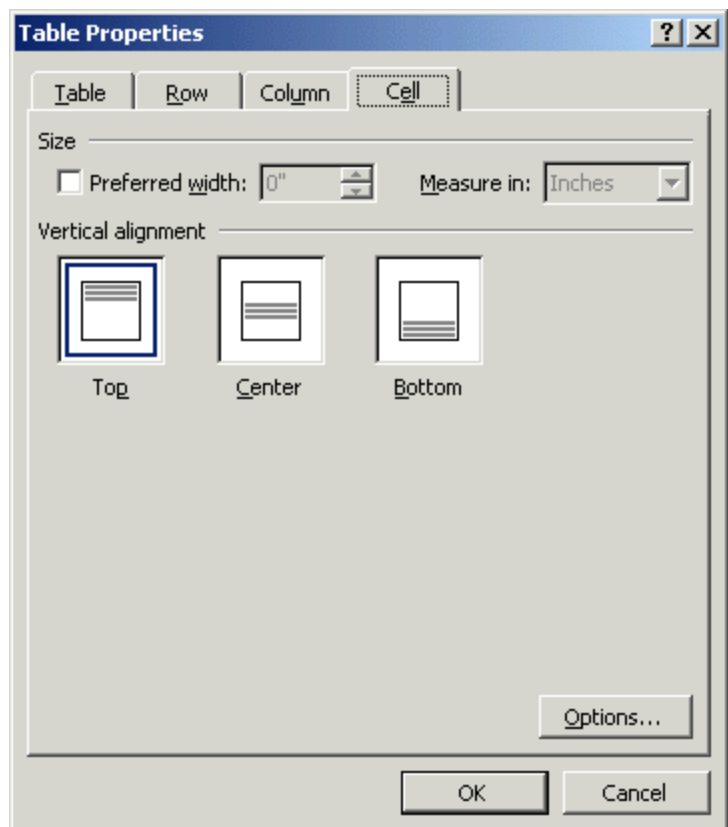


Figure 8: Table properties (cell tab)

Using Horizontal Lines

To add a horizontal line to your document, select **Format > Borders and Shading**, and then click on the button on the Borders tab.

This opens the Horizontal Line window, seen in the screen capture. Please note that all of the options on the **Pictures** tab use images for the horizontal lines, except for the first option. Choosing the first option allows you to create a horizontal line without adding additional download time to your document because Word takes advantage of the horizontal rule `<HR>` tag in HTML for this particular option.

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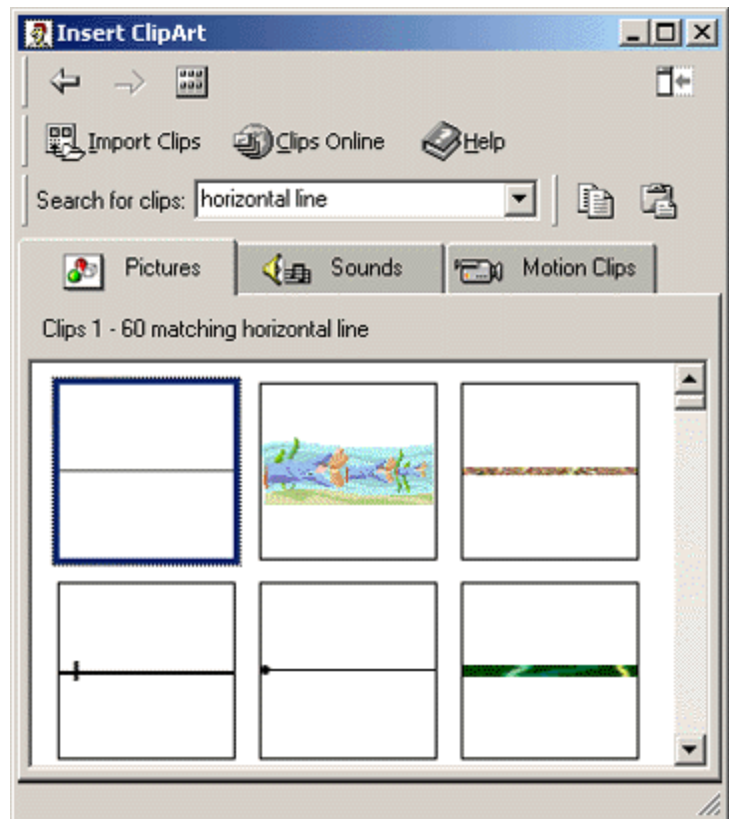


Figure 9: Horizontal line window

Inserting Image Files

Pictures From File

There are several ways to add images to your documents in Microsoft Word. You may have existing image files that you'd like to add, in which case you simply select **Insert > Picture > From File** and browse to the location on your drive where the file is stored, and then select the file and click on the Insert button.

When you later save your page in HTML format, you'll need to remember to copy both your web page file as well as image files when you copy the page to another drive, computer, or web server.

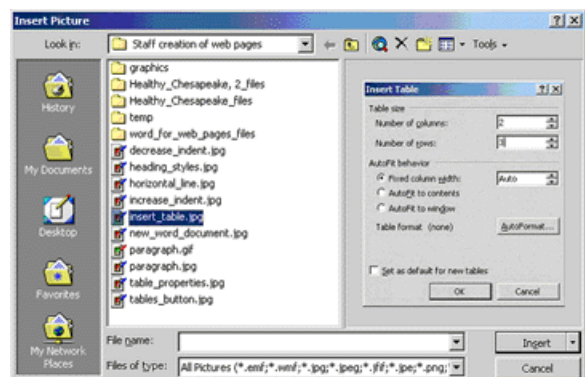


Figure 10: Insert pic window

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Copy and pasting images

Virtually any image that you copy to the Windows clipboard can be pasted into your Word document. When you later save your document in HTML format, Word creates a special folder for image files and assigns a file name to each of the individual images on the page. For example, this particular document was saved using the file name *word_for_web_pages.htm*, and Word automatically created a folder entitled *word_for_web_pages_files* to house the images that are embedded in the document.

Using the Microsoft Clip Art Gallery

You can also use the Microsoft Clip Art Gallery to add images to your page, by selecting **Insert > Picture > Clip Art**. The gallery features a search function that works very effectively. For example, assume you were searching for an image to accompany a hyperlink that you're providing for visitors, so they can contact you by e-mail. Depending upon how many images are installed on a particular computer, using the search function to search for the keyword "e-mail" or "mail" will probably find several images of envelopes or mailboxes.

Saving Your Document and the Microsoft Office 2000 HTML Filter

The first section in this document, *Getting Started*, discussed that in beginning a new word processing document you can either start with a document in Word format or an HTML document. If you opt to create a document in Word format, it is easy to convert your document to HTML format. Simply choose **File > Save As** and open the drop-down list for Save as type. Choose *Web Page* for the file type, as seen in the following screen capture.

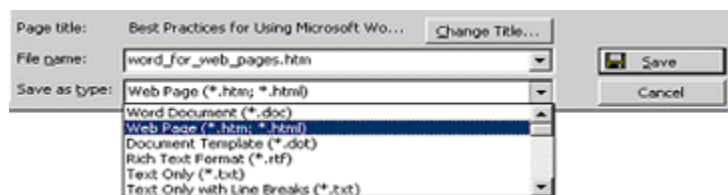


Figure 11: Save as window with .html highlighted

DO NOT include any spaces in the file names of web pages or accompanying image files. You can use an underscore to separate parts of a file name, but do not use spaces.

If you save a Microsoft Word document in HTML and examine the source code generated by Word, you will notice that there are special Office-specific markup tags embedded in the code. These tags are designed to assist with the "round-trip" of a document from HTML format back to Word format. Before beginning to create word documents with Office 2000, it is recommended that you download and install the Microsoft Office 2000 HTML filter, available on Microsoft's web site: <http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/2000/Msohtmlf2.aspx>

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This special filter is free, and it allows you to save your document and remove the Office-specific tags. Removing these Office tags from the code makes your document more compact and more HTML compliant, and you reduce the file size of a document, thereby saving on storage space on your hard drive or web server. The Office 2000 HTML filter also adds the *Copy as HTML* feature as an option under the Edit menu.

Using the Office 2000 HTML Filter

To export a document using the Microsoft Office 2000 HTML filter, simply choose **File > Export To** and choose *Compact HTML*.

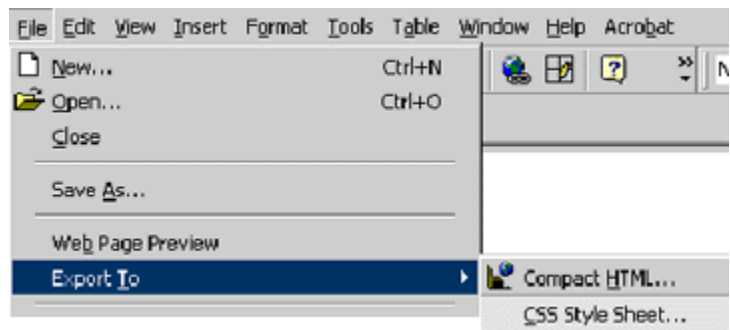


Figure 12: Export to

Microsoft Word and Macromedia Dreamweaver

While the Microsoft Office 2000 HTML Filter does a pretty good job of cleaning up Office-specific HTML code, the professional web development product

Macromedia Dreamweaver includes a similar utility that performs much the same function. After opening Dreamweaver, select **File > Import > Word HTML** and browse to select and open your Word document. Dreamweaver's import utility

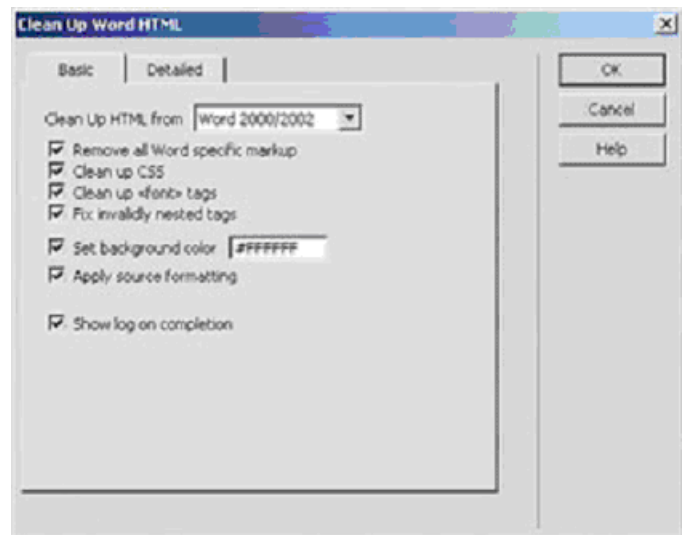


Figure 13: Clean up word HTML

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opens a window that allows you to choose the version of Microsoft Word for the document and the specific items that you'd like to clean up.

Experiment with Macromedia Dreamweaver and you'll quickly see that the application provides a treasury of features and advanced capabilities far beyond what Microsoft Word offers for web development.

However, for simple web pages, Microsoft Word can be a viable option for someone just getting started. By using the tool with the mindset and requisite skills that the ultimate product will be a web page, you will find that Microsoft Word will allow you to create simple web pages that are nicely formatted.

Article Resource URLs

- Convert Word to HTML with Minimal Baggage!
<http://www.delta.edu/emptrain/bookworm/word2html.html>
- Converting Word Files to HTML
http://web.pdx.edu/~bowersn/basics/word_to_html.html
- Converting Word to HTML
http://www.yale.edu/instruct/web/html_info/word_to_html.htm
- Word 2000 Tutorial
<http://www.fgc.edu/support/office2000/word/web.html>
- Building a Web Page with Microsoft Word 97
http://html.miningco.com/library/beginning/bl_begin070399.htm

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