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HTML or How To Be the Duke of URL

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In **Kathlene Karg's** article "Coming to Grips with SGML," *Against the Grain*, June 1994, we learned how librarians, publishers, and information providers were plunging into the digital age and how we need to come to grips with standardized methods of coding electronic text. Now that we have begun the plunge and are bringing up library, vendor, and publisher gopher servers, web servers, and a host of other electronic media, we have indeed begun to come to grips with these standards. If you want to learn more about **Standardized Generalized Markup Language (SGML)** connect to:

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/catdir/semdigdocs/hockey.html>

which takes you to **Susan Hockey's** home page where you can review the **Center for Electronic Text for the Humanities (CETH)** project, complete with a reference list on SGML.

What most of us need now is an understanding of a subset of SGML called **HyperText Markup Language (HTML)**. One references these documents via their **Uniform Resource Locator (URL)**. The standard way to identify the location of an electronic resource is via its URL. A complete definition is available via the **Request For Comments (RFC)** at URL:

<http://ds.internic.net/rfc/rfc1738.txt>

HTML has been approved by the **International Standards Organization (ISO)** as ISO 8859/1 and uses ISO 646. ISO 646, also known as ASCII text, allows the creation and editing of HTML documents to be done by any text editor on any computer and transferred over networks by most email or file transfer systems. Ease of creating and updating electronic documents is essential for online storage and retrieval.

Karg notes "SGML is a language allowing a document to be described by its parts, which can be used as a whole (as in a book or journal) or in pieces (as in a database or compendium). The user defines the parts, which typically include headings and footers, paragraphs, illustrations, and captions." Unlike SGML, HTML is not a method of coding text, but a system for marking up documents with tags that indicate how text should be presented and how documents are linked to other documents. HTML uses markup tags to indicate two types of information, those that provide structure to the text of a page and those that change the style of the text. Structure relates to headings, paragraphs, and lists of information, while style relates to adding emphasis, font styles, and other design elements. HTML also provides the ability to link documents from various sources via a URL.

It is probably in creating HTML documents where most librarians, publishers, and information providers will now need to get

their hands DIRTY! The ever burgeoning and amazing uses of the World Wide Web (WWW) have already shown you text, images, and sound from around the globe, home pages from industry as well as from colleagues, and a glimpse of the infinite information resources at your fingertips. These glimpses are views through the underlying structures of SGML and HTML. Everyone is doing it and you can too!

You will see the words "home page" or "homepage" often mentioned in conjunction with HTML. This is the main or primary page an organization or person puts together. It is analogous to a "main menu" where you can link to other HTML documents.

To view and navigate through HTML documents use a Web browser. A Graphical User Interface (GUI) Web browser such as **Mosaic** or **Netscape**, provides navigation tools like scroll bars and radio buttons. These types of browsers also display different font sizes, bolding, italics, graphics, and other presentation features. A less functional, but certainly usable browser is **lynx**, which presents non-formatted, non-graphical information and shows its strength if you are using a "dumb terminal" or similar configuration, and are accessing a system without an ethernet type connection.

A browser's functionality is also determined by its hardware and software. You may potentially have the ability to view graphics in different formats (tiff, gif, etc.) but you may need to install additional graphics-viewer software to see that neat picture(s) that someone included in their home page. In conjunction with the server, a browser provides the ability to (hyper) link to other documents around the Internet and to create personal bookmarks or hotlinks for frequently visited URLs.

How can one become comfortable with HTML in only a few quick lessons? Talk with your systems people, seek out resources and guidelines that are available on the Web, but more importantly become catholic and eclectic, choose wisely and look at design elements that make good use of HTML features.

If you're not yet comfortable with online sources, you can find a wide variety of printed materials in most bookstores and libraries.

Here are a few we recommend:

Aronson, Larry. *HTML: Manual of Style*. Emeryville, California: Ziff Davis Press, 1994.

Eager, Bill. *Using the World Wide Web*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Que Corporation, 1994.

December, John and Neil Randall. *The World Wide Web UNLEASHED*. Indianapolis, Indiana: SAMS Publishing, 1994.

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If you don't have access to a web browser yet, but are on the Internet and can use telnet, you can view online information, type:

telnet telnet.w3.org

(If you have difficulties locating this host, try telnet 128.141.201.214)

If you do have access to the Web here are a few URLs we recommend:

HTML Information — most sources link or reference other good sources.

From Yahoo (David Filo and Jerry Yang, self-proclaimed ya-hoos)

<http://www.yahoo.com>

From the WWW Consortium

<http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/MarkUp/MarkUp.html>

From CERN (Conseil European pour la Recherche Nucleaire — European Laboratory for Particle Physics)

<http://info.cern.ch/hypertext/WWW/MarkUp/MarkUp.html>

From the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, A Beginner's Guide to HTML

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

From the Yale Center for Advanced Instructional Media,

HTML Style Guide and resources for authoring HTML documents
http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/StyleManual_Top.HTML

HTML HELP! There are a lot of places to get assistance but the Web can appear quite disorganized, and sources are scattered. One thing you may notice "on the net" is that if you connect to a discussion group there are many people who offer to help.

Usenet newsgroups:

news:comp.infosystems.www.providers
WWW info provider issues
news:comp.infosystems.www.users
WWW user issues (browsers)
news:comp.infosystems.www.announce
WWW announcements
news:comp.infosystems.www.misc
WWW miscellaneous

Mailing list information:

A list of WWW lists is available via URL:

http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/Mailing/Mail/CERN_mailing.html

A prolific and useful list we've followed is web4lib@library.berkeley.edu. WEB4LIB discusses issues relating to library-based World Wide Web servers and clients, such as, web resource selection, web cataloging issues, and in-house patron access to web servers. Subscription Information: listserv@library.berkeley.edu.

You can create HTML documents with the brute force method by using a simple (generic ASCII) editor and typing the tags in by hand. However, there are now a number of software packages available to assist you in creating HTML documents; for example from a windows systems (pc, Mac, etc.) a package may have a menu bar with buttons to represent the common HTML tags so you can click on a button to create an anchor URL or add a heading. As an aid in learning HTML, Web browsers also provide the ability to view HTML source code. You can actually see the HTML commands that were used for document markup. While HTML deals primarily with the text portions of SGML, other information such as images, sound bites, and interactive forms may be added to your documents to create robust multimedia information resources. Authoring and editing tools and other related information is available via either URL:

<http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/Tools/Overview.html>
<http://info.cern.ch/hypertext/WWW/Tools/Overview.html>

We've shared only a few sites. There are many more we could have listed. We mentioned sites that contain pertinent information for people wanting to get started on creating their own home page or one for their organization. And we are sure that as soon as we submit this article that we will discover a number of other URLs we wished we had shared with you. Keep in mind, as you travel from site to site, sometimes a connection can be fast (this is relative), less-fast, or downright impossible. Also, a URL can be here today, and sometimes moved or gone tomorrow.

Perhaps now you have an idea of what's involved and don't feel you have the time to dive in and do it yourself. But you feel it is important for your organization to have a presence on the Web. Fear not. There are many ways to get there. Some "Internet Providers" rent web space, help get your information online, and even create a home page for you.

Now for a surfing interlude check out these URLs:

<http://www.godiva.com/>
<http://www.panix.com/~rbs/Skate/>
<http://persona.www.media.mit.edu/>
<http://www.persimmon.com/WildDunes>

As with any standard, HTML is a specification that is still being refined, mainly due to questions of defining its expression in terms of SGML, and accurately describing accepted practice. Currently there are two versions in use and a third version in development. If you want to follow the discussions as they occur, or if you want to be part of those discussions more information is available via the URL:

<http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/MarkUp/MarkUp.html>

Now that we've described it, you'll recognize HTML documents everywhere. What's the future of HTML and SGML? Soon we will probably all have home pages on our local Web server, describing our work interests, our hobbies, and be able to communicate instantly, globally, and in multimedia formats with like-minded Internet chums. We encourage you to dive in! You will be truly amazed at what you find. Net surfing provides an infinite number of ideas on how to present your information. 🐼