**The History of HTML**

A markup language combines text as well as coded instructions on how to format that text and the term "markup" originates from the traditional practice of 'marking up' the margins of a paper manuscript with printer's instructions. Nowadays, however, if you mention the term 'markup' to any knowledgeable web author, the first thing they are likely to think of is 'HTML'.

**In the Beginning**

HTML —which is short for **H**yper**t**ext **M**arkup **L**anguage— is the official language of the World Wide Web and was first conceived in 1990. HTML is a product of SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language) which is a complex, technical specification describing markup languages, especially those used in electronic document exchange, document management, and document publishing. HTML was originally created to allow those who were not specialized in SGML to publish and exchange scientific and other technical documents. HTML especially facilitated this exchange by incorporating the ability to link documents electronically using [*hyper*links](https://www.ironspider.ca/format_text/hyperlinks.htm). Thus the name *Hyper*text Markup Language.  
  
However, it was quickly realized by those outside of the discipline of scientific documentation that HTML was relatively easy to learn, was self contained and lent itself to a number of other applications. With the evolution of the World Wide Web, HTML began to proliferate and quickly spilled over into the mainstream.

**Browser Wars**

Soon, companies began creating browsers —the software required to view an HTML document, i.e., a web page— and as they gained popularity, it gave rise to competition and other web browsers. It may surprise some that back in late 1995, [Netscape](http://browser.netscape.com/) —which now plays a distant second to the King Kong of browsers, [Internet Explorer](https://www.ironspider.ca/browsers/ie7.htm)— was the dominant browser on the market. In fact, Netscape was the first browser to support JavaScript, animated gifs and HTML frames.  
  
Thus began the so-called 'browser wars' and, along with seeing who could implement more 'bells and whistles' than the other guy, browser makers also began inventing proprietary [HTML elements](https://www.ironspider.ca/basic_html/elements.htm) that only worked with their browsers. Some examples of these are the <marquee>**...**</marquee> tags (scrolling text) which originally only worked with Internet Explorer and the <blink>**...**</blink> tags (blinking text) which still only works with Gecko-based browsers such as [Firefox](https://www.ironspider.ca/browsers/firefox.htm).  
  
A side effect of all this competition was that HTML became fragmented and web authors soon found that their web pages looked fine in one browser but not in another. Hence it became increasingly difficult and time consuming to create a web page that would display uniformly across a number of different browsers. (This phenomenon remains to some extent to this very day.)

Meanwhile, an organization known as the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C for short) was working steadily along in the background to standardize HTML. Several recommendations were published by the W3C during the late 1990s, which represented the official versions of HTML and provided an ongoing comprehensive reference for web authors. Thus the birth of HTML 2.0 in September 1995, HTML 3.2 in January 1997 and HTML 4.01 in December 1999.  
  
By now, Internet Explorer (IE) had eclipsed Netscape Navigator as the browser to use while surfing the net due to its superior capabilities but also largely because the IE came bundled with the Windows operating system. Essentially when people bought computers using the Windows OS, it had the 'internet installed on it'. This tended to suit people just fine since the typical newcomer to computers was someone who was tentatively striking forth to take on this intimidating new-fangled technology that was crammed to the rafters with indecipherable acronyms, software help files that made no sense and buggy programs. Hence, the more 'instant' solutions this new technology offered, the better it was.