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Personal Portfolio Site Journal

Link to website: <https://psutblock.github.io/index.html>

This journal is a cumulative summary of the process of creating my personal portfolio website using the knowledge gained from my class, CS586. To summarize quickly, the process was quite the challenge initially to complete the site. However, once I entered flow state, I quickly saw the clearing in the forest, and that ultimately kept me motivated and excited to continue the project. Needless to say, more planning could have been done on my part to ensure that little was left to do in the final hours.

The Visual Beginnings

I began my project by initially reviewing other individuals' portfolio sites or personal blog pages for inspiration. My takeaways from this process was that I wanted to keep my site very simple, I did not want to overstretch my own skills and keep the site looking both clean, and aesthetically interesting. I drew a few mock ups of what I visualized in my head and began thinking about how to implement this style.

Palette and Design

Like starting photography, limiting what colors you use initially helps provide a better understanding of balance when it comes to composition and color. I planned to incorporate only three colors on this site (excluding colors from images) to ensure that my site was not loud or overbearing. I often worry about cognitive overload, and I would never want the visitors of my page to be confused on reading my content due to too much color. Lastly, I did check to see if my contrasts between colors were accessible and they achieved a AA standard on WCAG. It is not the highest, but I chose to stay the course with the color scheme I selected.

The design was also kept simple as well. Simple in the sense that there are very little clicks to accomplish any navigation and little clutter. On various pages I saw when initially looking for inspiration the "breathability" of the content was something I liked. My last bit of design style was that I wanted to implement visual animations on my home page. I did a quick search to find that Lottie animations were my best bet at adding animation.

Lottie Extension

While I could have used .gifs to perform the same functionality, I found that the size and scalability of Lotties was impressive. At least to my understanding Lotties are just .svg images that are wrapped in some javascript to animate them. Then you can either host them locally or

use the website lottiefiles.com to host them. The site extends a nice interface to modify or tweak the file before referencing it, so that is what I chose for this project. I was pretty impressed with how the animations turned out. They were by no means masterpieces, but they fitted the style I wanted.

I learned about the use of Lotties just from the sheer amounts of advertisements I would get on websites. Many Youtube videos that I would watch to learn about web design typically an ad about animation and what not appear. So, I went to learn more, and found a free lesson on a website called udemy. I went through it pretty quickly, knowing how to use Adobe After Effects beforehand was convenient. I am looking forward to continuing to learn how I can incorporate these animations into other portions of my web projects.

Design Takeaways

Overall, I think what I would have done differently would be further drafting the style and look I wanted before executing. Personal doodles, and sketches in a book were not enough for me to go off of, and I relied heavily on my mind to alter the design as I was working. Next time I would probably use software like Adobe XD to create layouts of my pages and then dissect those layouts to identify how they could be made with html, css, and javascript.

What's Under the Hood?

Coming into this class, I had very little experience between the three languages html, css, and javascript. Thankfully, I feel that I have walked away with a lot more skills and knowledge than I would have thought. A lot of questions I had were demystified by assignments, which led me to some success with my portfolio project. Before I started however, I did define a groundwork of what I wanted to accomplish codewise. Aside from the minimum project requirements, these were my goals:

1. Use flexboxes to make the site responsive
2. Set strict viewports on how the information is presented on a variety of screens
3. One page uses at least a .json file to provide information for the page.

I decided to use flexbox because it was a layout that I preferred out of the three we used in class. It provided the perfect amount of movement to resize and adjust my site layout, with what I felt was minimal effort on my side. In addition to the flexboxes, I really wanted to ensure that my page displayed information that was exactly how I envisioned it to be. Using the media rules, I set specific parameters to accomplish that. Lastly, I was very uncomfortable and knew very little about how javascript worked within a webpage, but after week 8 I gained more clarity, and so I wanted to try to use a .json file to populate my webpage of information. Aside from showcasing that I could do it, doing so allowed me to take my first steps into another project that I have been working on that requires these file types to populate the DOM.

Struggles with CSS

I believe that is just something that comes with time and practice, but I would say the biggest challenge of this site was using CSS styling and then organizing those attributes in a way that was readable and clear in their intentions. On Day 2 of working on this project, I had more or less got the layout of my home page designed, next I wanted to move that to other pages, but because all of my pages were different, the css I had wrote for my home page did not really mesh well with my design of other pages. So I really struggled with trying to get things organized to the point where this same day, I simply restarted. A bit stressful, but recognizing the failure on my part was just the first step towards a better implementation, and I think with the final product you can see just that.

I really do think that web development workflows are forged with time, I cannot imagine that every designer's first project came out exactly how they envisioned it to be, and within the time they planned for. However, just like everything else the more time and practice you put into an art, the more refined your process becomes. I believe on day 4 I realized that the workflow I was doing had put me in my flow state and it really allowed me to quickly construct the pages and information in the way I had envisioned. I still think my site is rough around the edges, but I am sure many can say that with their first projects in any discipline. I simply look forward to refining it, and in order to do so I will need to keep gaining skill in using CSS to command the DOM and display what I want!

Javascript, .Json and npm

With this site I really focused on the overall layout and design of the site using primarily html and css. In this project I was a bit timid in using a lot of javascript because my understanding of it is a bit light compared to probably my other peers, but I still wanted to do at least one page that used javascript to import elements from a .json file. Surprisingly it worked well! The homework revolving around javascript has helped a lot to clarify my understanding and will probably continue to be a good resource to review in the future, or at least until it becomes second nature.

Accessibility

One aspect that I wanted to focus more on was accessibility, but did not really have time to thoroughly comb through the site. I did an WAVE check on the site after I had completed it and it found little to no issues aside from a redundant link. So, it was not too bad overall, but after reviewing it with Apple's VoiceOver and NVDA I found I had trouble navigating with VoiceOver, but not with NVDA. I may sum up this experience due to my lack of use of both screen readers. A particular issue I had was that when paragraph content was being read by NVDA, it would randomly stop talking and wait for me to continue. I am uncertain why this is the case.

Moving Forward

My ultimate takeaways from this project are as follows:

1. Don't underestimate the project size
2. Plan ahead and draft examples, styles, etc. well before starting
3. It's ok to restart, but have a better plan staged before you restart.
4. Javascript is not too bad even if I did not use as much as I may have wanted
5. Think about the style of the site and how it 'cascades' throughout the site
6. Developing a site from scratch takes time!

I loved this project, and the outcome is a real reflection of who I am and I simply enjoy going to this page on my phone during my lunch breaks, even though I know I haven't changed a single thing. I am very proud of myself for how it turned out, and I am satisfied with the learning outcomes. A lot of what I learned was on both the project management side and a lot from the overall technical skills of using the various languages to produce the portfolio. These two aspects relate a lot to each other. On one hand, had I gauged my skills appropriately early on, maybe I would not have had to restart. On the other hand, had I better planned and scheduled out the project in a more reasonable time, perhaps I would have been able to account for novice skills. As mentioned before, I do not think it is a big deal, but it is better to realize these issues on the first project instead of the next.

In conclusion, my next steps are to review my takeaways, how to plan to mend them in my next web project, and further find opportunities to use javascript libraries and extensions to better command my site information from behind the scenes, but at the same time choosing those that appropriate and useful for the sites design. Additionally, I would like to start building little code snippets that I can reference back to in case I would like to use them again. Aside from that I have certainly walked away from this class with an enormous amount of knowledge and confidence regarding web development.

Proposed Project Schedule

Below was the ideal journal schedule for this project.

Day 1

1. Review rough drafts and identify the vision for the site
2. Draft the foundation for the home page
3. Implement css styles for the home page

Day 2

1. Finalize website styles
2. Begin making drafts for other pages in this particular order
 - a. Home, About, Resume, Contact

Day 3

1. Finalize drafted pages
2. Apply style to pages
3. Implement Javascript to populate the information for the project page
4. Draft the form page

Day 4

1. Finalize form page and apply styles
2. Explore Lottie Files and how to implement them
3. Add Lotties to the home page
4. Review how pages are linked and update if needed

Day 5

1. Finishing touches
 - a. Reviewing overall movement of information and navigation
2. Accessibility check using Wave and using a screen reader
3. Finalize journal and wrap up

Actual Project Schedule and Tasks

Day 1

1. Review rough draft and identify vision of site
2. Draft home page
3. Draft home page css

Overall a great first day, I accomplished what I wanted to get done, but it definitely took longer than I would have liked.

Day 2

1. Begin working on form draft
2. Finalize site css
3. Begin drafting other pages

This day was pretty much a flop. I deviated from the original plan think that the form page would be more difficult to implement, but that was not necessarily the case and now I have a spaghetti dish of a .css document. Thinking I could pivot from this issue, I only made more trouble for myself by moving to the other pages. The layouts were not working well with any of the css that I had written.

Day 3

1. Restarted Project
2. Begin working solely on the draft of the home page
3. Draft and finalize the homepage css
4. Learned how to incorporate Lottie animations into my site

This was a blunder. I discovered that my css skills are still something to be desired and the mess I made on my previous work day was not particularly helpful with cascading the styles to the other pages. I restarted the project and focused on just the home page. All of the files are stored in a folder called "old", in case I wanted to look at the monstrosities. To cheer myself up, I looked into how to incorporate Lottie animations, and that did help get me motivated to continue working on the project.

Day 4

1. Refined CSS Styles
2. Made an overarching style and some specific to pages
3. Drafted all pages and finished the Home, Contact, and Resume pages
4. Organized folders in directory

Finally getting the hang of CSS at a larger level, I have created a main style for the site in general, and if other pages have some specifics they are placed in their own css file associated with the other. It has made reading the css much easier and easier to troubleshoot. That being said, this helped get a majority of the pages completed today.

Day 5

1. Started working on the Projects page
2. Implemented content import with a .json for Projects Page
3. Created css for Projects page so javascript can reference the styles
4. Started working on form "contact" page

Today was a big success, I was weary that I would have to troubleshoot a lot with importing the information, but I succeeded after a few little issues. I had thought about doing this with at least one page because If the content was more dynamic, why not just simply add a new object to the .json file it references instead of editing the html itself. I thought the Projects page would be great for this. The success of day 4 continued today and I was able to quickly implement the CSS for the Projects page.

On a side note, I need to start storing things I have worked on more often! My project list is a little sparse and little is completed.

Day 6

1. Completed the form for the contact page
2. Reviewing the site and testing it for usage
3. Testing with a screen reader

I think I am at the end and I have completed what I wanted to accomplish. Everything seems to be working in order and after testing it with two screen readers, I think is accessible. The site is also responsive to my liking, and I really enjoy pulling it up on my phone. In both safari and chrome.