22 Attributes

**Attributes**

We can use attributes to change the BEHAVIOR of a tag, as with the ALIGN attribute for the paragraph, div, and heading tags. Some examples:

<p align="right"> <div align="left"> <h2 align="right">

We can also use attributes to change the APPEARANCE of a tag.

Tag: **BODY**  
Attribute: **BGCOLOR**  
Values: color values (named colors or hex codes)  
Description: The BGCOLOR attribute in the BODY tag can be used to set the background color for the BODY of an HTML page.

Tag: **BODY**  
Attribute: **TEXT**  
Values: color values (named colors or hex codes)  
Description: The TEXT attribute in the BODY tag can be used to set the text color for all content in the BODY of an HTML page.

The BODY tag, which represents the visible "document" of a web page, may be modified to have a specific background color using the BGCOLOR attribute.

In the following examples, you could also use the hex values of the colors instead of the color names. Many web designers prefer this. For example, black is #000000 and yellow is #ffff00.

Example:

<body bgcolor="white">

This is how this code would look in an HTML page:

<html>

<head>

<title>Test Page</title>

</head>

<body bgcolor="white">

<p>The background color of this page has been set to white.</p>

</body> </html>

I could set a black background simply by changing the BGCOLOR attribute's value.

Example:

<html>

<head>

<title>Test Page Two</title>

</head>

<body bgcolor="black">

<p>Now this content is on a black background.</p>

</body>

</html>

You will not able to read the text in the above example when you viewed it in your web browser. Your browser's text color is probably black, which is the default color for TEXT set in the preferences for your web browser; black text on a black background has VERY low contrast indeed!

To rectify this, we could set the text color for the page using the TEXT attribute for the BODY tag. If I wanted a black page with yellow text, for example, I could set both the BGCOLOR and TEXT attributes for the BODY tag.

Example:

<html>

<head>

<title>Test Page Three</title>

</head>

<body bgcolor="black" text="yellow">

<p>This text is yellow on a black background.</p>

</body>

</html>

Attributes may be added in any order to a tag. The following example works identically to the previous example.

<html>  
<head>  
<title>Test Page Four</title>  
</head>  
<body text="yellow" bgcolor="black">  
<p>This text is still yellow on a black background. Attributes may be placed into a tag in any order; switching the attribute order makes no difference to a web browser.</p>  
</body>  
</html>

You may add as many attributes to a tag as you desire; there is no limit. However, you may NOT repeat the same attribute twice in the same tag!

When you add attributes to a tag, you must NEVER restate those attributes in the closing tag. I mention this again because it is a common misunderstanding for many students. The following would be INCORRECT:

<html>  
<head>  
<title>Test Page Five</title>  
</head>  
<body bgcolor="black" text="yellow">  
<p>This text is still yellow on a black background. Sadly, this page is technically incorrect because I have restated the attributes in the closing tag; never do this, as the page may operate incorrectly.</p>  
</body bgcolor="black" text="yellow">  
</html>

**Notes on Attribute Syntax**

As mentioned before, every attribute must follow this syntax:

attributename="value"

This syntax illustrates the strict XHTML standards, which requires that EVERY attribute be identical in form. HTML4, however, is more relaxed about attribute syntax. You will often see attributes with the quote marks omitted in HTML4 pages. Be aware that leaving out quote marks will not be permitted once the XHTML standards are firmly in place. So, I suggest that you ALWAYS use quote marks surrounding attribute values.

**Note about Quote Marks**

When we talk about quote marks in HTML and other programming languages, we really mean "straight" quote symbols, not the curly or "smart" quotes that are substituted for straight quotes by most word processors. Curly quotes are not recognized by web browsers and must NEVER be used, as they will break your HTML page.

Use straight quote marks: **" "**

Never use curly or "smart" quote marks: “ ”

Microsoft Word and many other standard word processing programs will automatically replace straight quotes with curly quotes as you're typing, so be careful. The straight quote key is the usual one, right next to the "Enter" key on the PC, or the "Return" key on the Macintosh.

**Debugging Note**

The most common reason for student web pages to break or operate incorrectly is a missing quotation mark surrounding an attribute value. If you forget to place one quotation mark around an attribute value, your page may display strangely or the whole page may fail to operate. Therefore, if you run into problems, check for missing quotation marks FIRST; that's what I do.

The following example would be incorrect and would probably break the page:

<body bgcolor="white>

If you leave out BOTH quote marks in the above example, the page will operate correctly:

<body bgcolor=white>

The above syntax, however, does not conform to the latest standards, and will not be supported in the future. Therefore, you must ALWAYS use both quotation marks surrounding an attribute value:

<body bgcolor="white">

The above examples correctly express how attribute syntax operates and are valid in XHTML, but should be avoided. As of HTML5, all appearance information for an HTML page has been removed from the HTML tags themselves and placed in Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). The sorts of background and text color attributes cited in the examples, therefore, would not be used in BODY tags on websites which have implemented HTML5. I chose to use ALIGN, BGCOLOR, and TEXT attributes as examples because they do something readily comprehensible, but I also want you to know that they are on the way out. We will discuss the details of CSS and document appearance in later books.