30 META Tag

**The META Tag**

The **META** tag is used primarily for two purposes today:

1. It helps robotic search engines (such as Google and Yahoo) better categorize your HTML pages.
2. It automatically moves users from one page to another (as seen on splash pages or forwarding-address pages) using its auto-refresh capabilities.

The **META** tag requires two attributes: **NAME** and **CONTENT**. **NAME** identifies the type or variety of **META** tag in question; **CONTENT** sets the necessary information for that version of the **META** tag. The **NAME** attribute, in some cases, is interchangeable with the **HTTP-EQUIV** attribute; in other words, either **NAME** or **HTTP-EQUIV** will be used as the identifier attribute for the **META** tag, depending on the purpose of that particular **META** tag; the second attribute will always be **CONTENT**.

The **META** tag should self-close in XHTML, but does not need to close in HTML5. The **META** tag always goes within the HEAD of an HTML page; it is NEVER placed in the BODY. You may place as many different **META** tags in the HEAD as you like.

Examples (out of context):

<meta name="keywords" content="Steve Rubin, web design, html, critical thinking">

<meta name="description" content="Home Page of Steve Rubin, CNIT Instructor at CCSF.">

<meta http-equiv="refresh" content="10; url=http://www.yahoo.com/

Examples (in context with XHTML):

<html>   
<head>  
<title>Example META tags</title>   
<meta name="keywords" content="Steve Rubin, web design, html, critical thinking" />   
<meta name="description" content="Home Page of Steve Rubin, CNIT Instructor at CCSF." />   
<meta http-equiv="refresh" content="10; url=http://www.yahoo.com/" />   
</head>   
<body>   
<p>Some content...</p>   
</body>   
</html>

Examples (in context with HTML5):

<html>   
<head>  
<title>Example META tags</title>   
<meta name="keywords" content="Steve Rubin, web design, html, critical thinking">   
<meta name="description" content="Home Page of Steve Rubin, CNIT Instructor at CCSF.">   
<meta http-equiv="refresh" content="10; url=http://www.yahoo.com/">   
</head>   
<body>   
<p>Some content...</p>   
</body>   
</html>

An HTML page on the Web is catalogued in a search engine's database with one entry for every pertinent keyword on the page. Each individual word in the TITLE of an HTML document receives a separate keyword entry in the database. Each individual keyword in the **KEYWORDS META** tag receives a separate keyword entry in the database. In some cases, each single word in the text of an HTML page receives an individual keyword entry in the search engine's database, as well. Again, these entries are prioritized based (in order of importance) on

1. whether the word is in the TITLE (top priority),
2. whether the word is in the **KEYWORDS META** tag, and
3. whether the word appears in the text in the BODY of the HTML page.

In addition to the position of the keyword on the HTML page as a whole, the search engine "grades" the importance of a given HTML page based on how close that page is located to the root directory of its domain; top level (root directory) pages are given top priority, even if a given keyword does not appear in the TITLE of that document, but merely in the **META** tag or in the BODY.

Many search engines also recognize the **DESCRIPTION META** tag. The **DESCRIPTION META** tag allows you to create a brief description of your page or website which will display below the TITLE and URL for your website on a robotic search engine's results page.

In other words, when a user performs a keyword search at Google, they receive a number of results pages which contain links to various web pages; these links are usually represented by the TITLE of the HTML page in question, the text of that TITLE having been hyper-referenced to the desired page; the URL of the page is also present. Right below this information, there is a brief text description of the page. If the **DESCRIPTION META** tag has been set for that page, then the user sees the CONTENT of the **DESCRIPTION META** tag. If the **DESCRIPTION META** tag has NOT been set, then the user sees the first 10-20 words from the BODY of that HTML page in place of the description.

**Auto-Refresh Feature**

<meta http-equiv="refresh" content="10; url=http://www.yahoo.com/">

Two attributes of the **META** tag are required to utilize the auto-refresh feature: **HTTP-EQUIV** and **CONTENT**. The **HTTP-EQUIV** attribute must be set equal to **"refresh"**. The **CONTENT** attribute must be set equal to a value following this format: **"secondsOfDelay; url=someURL"**

The value of the **CONTENT** attribute is broken into two segments, separated by a semi-colon. The first segment is an integer representing the number of seconds of delay you want once the HTML page which contains the **META** tag has been loaded. The second segment is **url=** followed by the absolute or relative URL desired.

**UTF-8 and HTML5**

UTF-8 stands for **U**nicode **T**ransformation **F**ormat-**8**. It is an octet (8-bit) lossless encoding of Unicode characters. The following meta statement is highly recommended in HTML5 files.

<meta charset="utf-8">

**in context:**

<!DOCTYPE html>

<html lang="en">

<head>

<meta charset="utf-8">

<title>....</title>

</head>

<body>

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.

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</body>

</html>