HubSpot

The Beginner's Guide to HTML & CSS for Marketers

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Introduction

Have you ever right clicked on a web page and clicked "view page source" or looked at the source code for an email? Or are you a former MySpace user who learned how to update the code to add a snazzy background or song to your MySpace page? That's HTML. CSS is a complementary coding language that applies a style sheet to a given page of HTML code, changing the look and feel of the page to match your brand.

HTML and CSS are some of the most popular languages used by developers, marketers, and designers. While they may sound highly technical and seem like they require extensive training, there are many ways to use basic HTML and CSS in everyday marketing. You may have already used HTML without even knowing it when you formatted a link, updated a page header, or edited a page of your website or a blog post. Knowing HTML and CSS as a marketer saves you time and allows for customization, optimization, and SEO benefits.

HTML header tags in blog posts improves your SEO? By learning a few simple HTML codes and understanding how HTML and CSS work together, you'll have the ability to improve your marketing strategy and troubleshoot issues that would typically cost you a lot of time and money if you don't have an in-house developer.

This guide will go over the most common HTML and CSS applications for marketers. We'll review the basics of each language, the differences between the two, and provide resources, tools, and additional training.

What are Coding Languages?

Coding languages like HTML and CSS, also known as programming languages, are written instructions that tell software what to do, how to display something, or how to process an algorithm. Common programming languages are Java, Python, and SQL. HTML and CSS are known as **declarative programming languages** that declare what is on a web page and how it should look.

Typically, developers write code, like HTML or CSS, to communicate with software and tell the page to scroll in a certain way, display your brand's colors, place an image in the center of the page, or do something when a user takes an action, like **clicking on a link to bring them to another section of the page**.

HTML was originally created to distinguish between structural elements of web pages like paragraphs, body copy, and headers in a .html file format. Since it was lacking in design functionality, CSS was developed as a separate file that would serve as the design code and exist as a .css file.

Now, HTML and CSS work hand in hand to deliver beautifully designed web pages with customization and SEO elements.
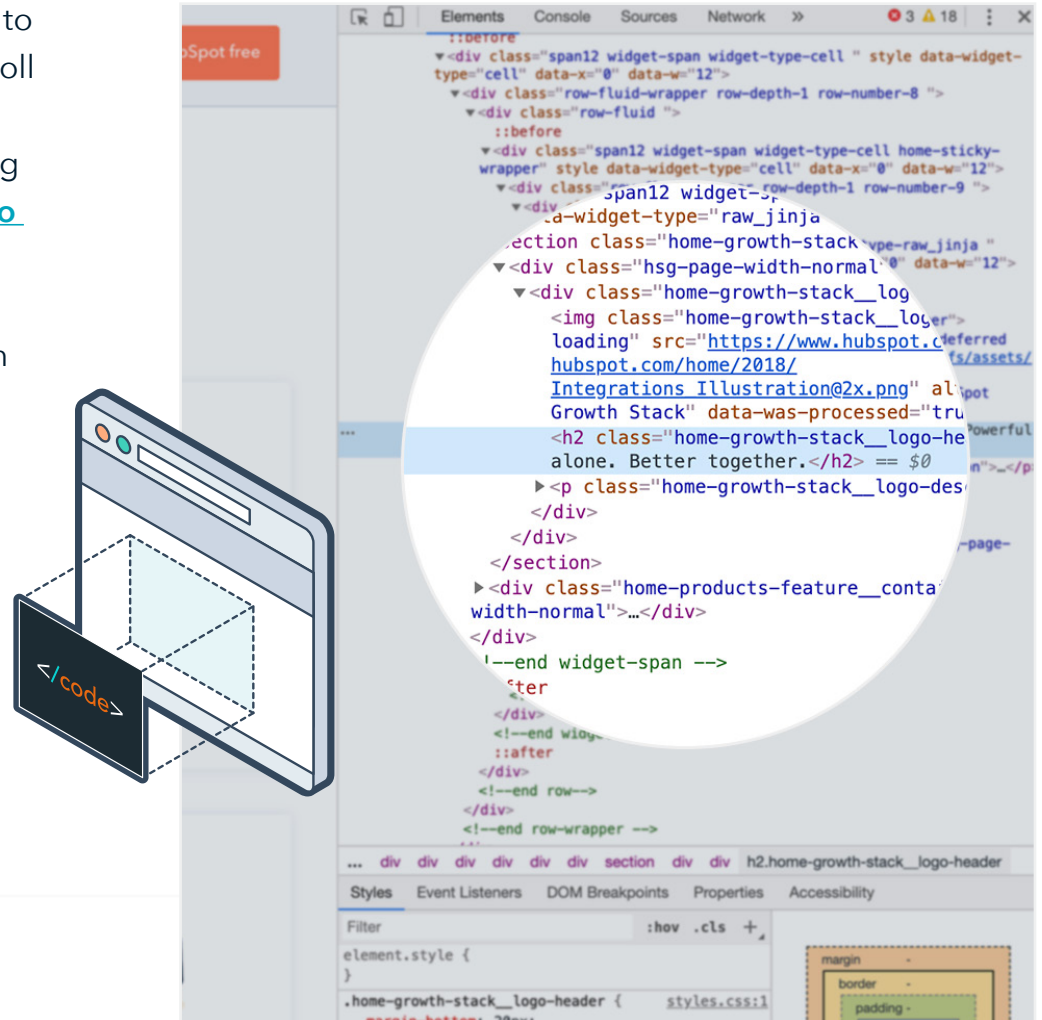
What is HTML?

HTML, or HyperText Markup Language, uses tags to alter the structure, or how text or objects appear on a web page. HTML tags help you to organize content, make a page easier to read, or tell search engines what the most important keywords are using header tags. Here's an example of a snippet of HTML code for hyperlinked text.
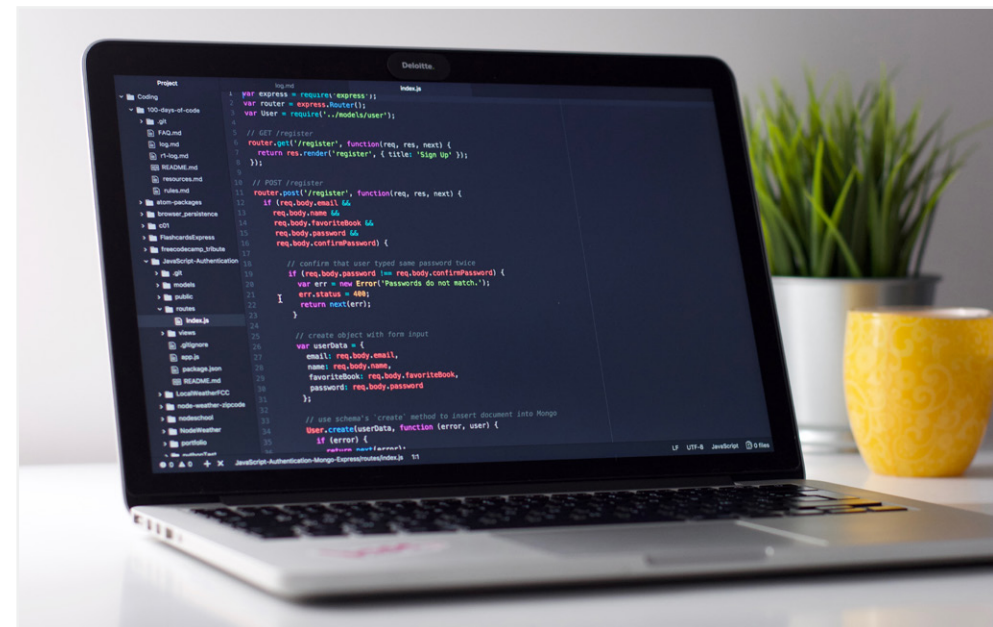
```
<a href="https://www.hubspot.com">click here</a>
```

This code would appear like this: **click here**
The bracket, <, opens the code, and a close bracket closes the code. Without a closing bracket, the code won't work properly.

HTML is most often used on web pages, in email, or in the back end of blog posts. Many content management systems (CMSs) have two different ways you can edit content. One way is a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor, where you can edit things like font color, size, and style by selecting from a drop-down menu. The alternative is an HTML editor, often called the "source." You can also edit HTML in a standalone **HTML editor**.

Later, we'll go over common HTML codes to know and how to format them.

What is CSS?

CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets. CSS tells the software how the HTML on the web page should look including layout, color scheme, and formatting. CSS is a list of rules that are applied to the HTML on the page that indicate background colors, fonts, line spacing, alignment, and more.

CSS can be implemented on a page using either an internal style sheet or an external style sheet. For an internal style sheet, within an HTML document, you'll tell the software what the background color should be, the fonts, and any other design elements that apply to a certain section or the whole page. External style sheets are linked to the page, but exist as their own page of design codes.

Here's an **example of an internal CSS style applied to some text** (in a handy test editor where you can try out some code!)

Hello World

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

```
<p style="background-color:tomato">Lorem ipsum </p>
```

In this example, p is the selector, it is selecting where to apply the style. P means paragraph, so the color "Tomato" will apply to the paragraph.

Here is another example of HTML and CSS together:

```
<h1 style="color:red">Intro to HTML & CSS</h1>
```

Intro to HTML and CSS

This is an h1 header tag (indicating that it is the main headline of the page) that includes a CSS style tag indicating that the color should be red.

HTML vs. CSS

HTML is the technical backbone of a webpage. It provides the basic structure for the page, like a framework. CSS is the style, which shows the end user the design, branding, colors, and fonts that make your brand identity unique. HTML without CSS is functional, but not aesthetically pleasing.

HTML is a way to format and update a web page's structure, add links, add images, create lists, create tables, and alter the text on a page. CSS updates design elements and can change a page's background color, font color, set an image as the background, change borders, margins, change elements on the page when a user takes an action (like hiding them), and more.

Here's an example of a blog post in HTML without CSS.

Source: **HubSpot**
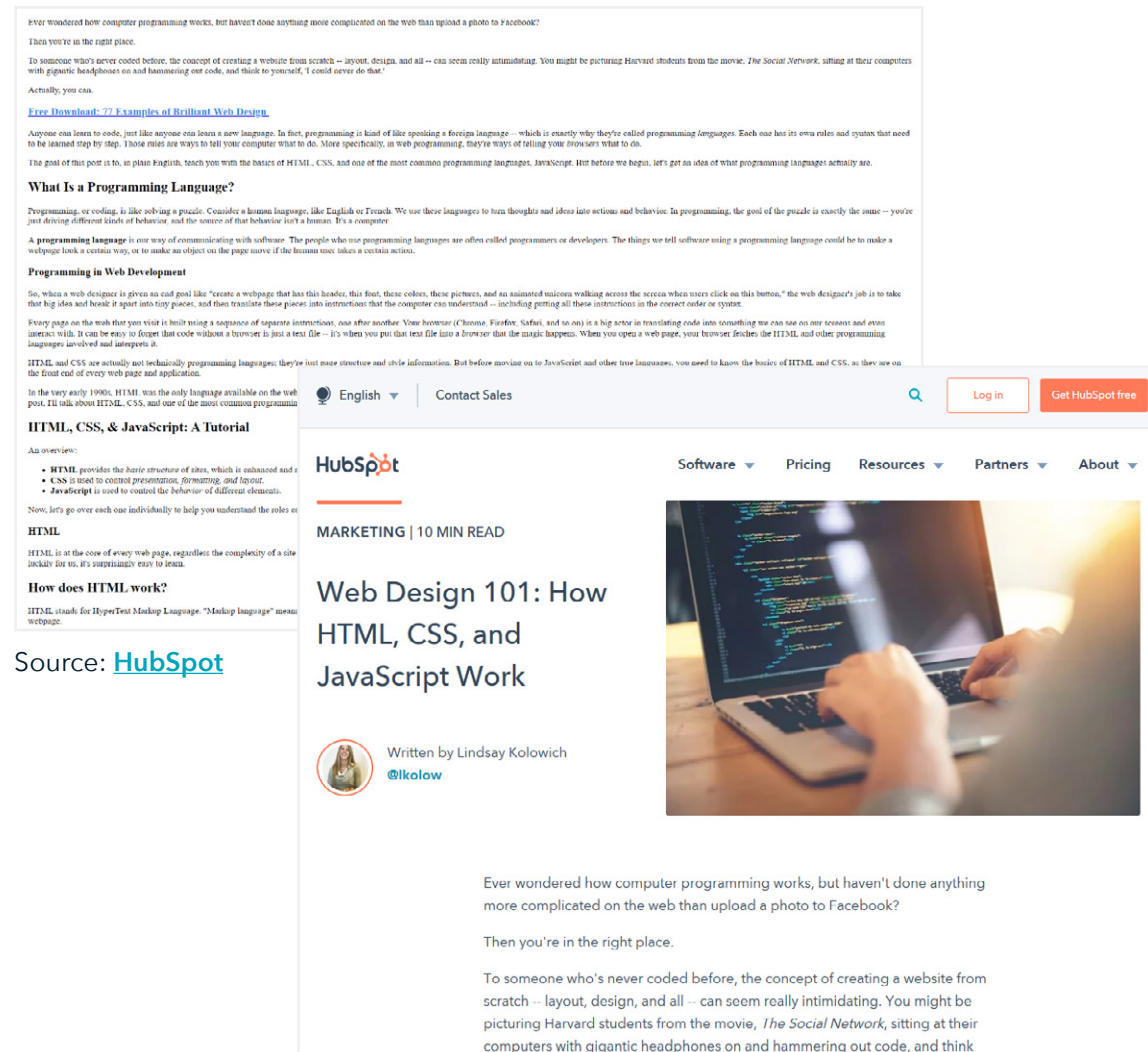
Here's the same blog post with a CSS stylesheet applied. See? Much better.

HTML vs. CSS: Here are the main differences

HTML

1. Code for the structure of web page

2. Codes for mainly individual items and elements

3. Can exist without CSS

4. Easy to learn

5. Can be processed by all browsers, limited technical requirements

6. Free, lots of available resources/support

7. Lacks security features

8. Limited dynamic abilities

CSS

1. Code for the style of web pages

2. Codes for mainly entire pages or individual pages

3. Cannot exist alone

4. More technical to learn

5. More style choices and options than HTML

6. Better style and formatting than HTML

7. Free, lots of available resources/support

8. Not uniform between browsers

9. Lacks security features

10. Can be applied to other XML languages

HTML Codes to Know

No matter where you write the HTML, there are common HTML tags that are written the same way, independent of the editor.

Here is the basic layout for an HTML document.

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
    <body>
        <h1>This is our main header</h1>
        <p>This is our first paragraph</p>
    </body>
</html>
```

Every HTML tag begins with open brackets like <html> and ends with closed brackets </html>. In the above example, the first tag denotes to the browser that this is an HTML document. The <body> tag indicates body copy, <h1> is Header 1, the main headline of the page, and <p> means paragraph copy.

Common HTML Tags for Marketers

HTML tag: <html> Your webpage here </html>
This specifies that the page is an HTML page. It starts at the very beginning of the document and the tag is closed at the very end.

Header tag: <h1> Your header here </h1>
<h2> Your subheadline here </h2>

Header tags are important for blog posts. They structure your posts and help to draw the reader's eye to the different sections. They are also helpful for **on-page SEO purposes**, as search engine algorithms give more weight to keywords that are in your headers.

Headers can be formatted using CSS to indicate the style (font, font size, bold/italics, spacing on the page) for each header tag (h1, h2, h3, etc.)

Hyperlink tag: Link text
Hyperlinks are common in emails, blog posts, and other HTML files.

Common HTML Tags for Marketers

List tag:

Bulleted list

 first list item
 second list item
 third list item

Numbered list

 first list item
 second list item
 third list item

Lists help to break up and organize content. You can use CSS to change the types of bullets, numbers, or alignment within the list.

Paragraph tag: <p> paragraph here </p>
This tag separates a group of text into paragraph format.

Image tag:

```
<img src="image file link" width="300" height="200" alt="keyword description">
```

This tag adds an image to your document from an image file and allows you to change the size and add alt text, which helps with SEO. You can add different padding or other attributes using CSS later.

Text formatting tags:
Bold text here
Underline <u> text here </u>
Italicize text here

To format font size, font family, font weight, line height, or other text styling, you'll use CSS style tags, or the style for your entire document will be applied to the text.

Social sharing tags:

LinkedIn:
http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=URL

Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=URL

By adding your desired URL to the section of this code that says "URL," those who click the link will automatically go to LinkedIn or Facebook and see a pre-populated post with the link provided, saving your site visitors the trouble of copying the link to a new post themselves. This helps to encourage social sharing and gets you more page visitors. These can be used on blog posts or in emails and attached to an icon of the LinkedIn or Facebook logos.

Title tag: <title> your title here </title>
This tag sets the title for the page that appears at the top of your web browser.

Body tag: <body> your webpage here </body>
This tag, as seen in the full HTML page example above, is the container for the contents like lists, paragraphs, hyperlinks, and images on your webpage.

Line break tag: </br>
This is a really helpful code for formatting. It adds a break in the text and can be used within headers, paragraphs, or anywhere on the page to move the copy after the break to the next line.

> <h1> Your header that is really long and needs </br> to be broken up onto two lines here </h1>

Span tag: item
This tag helps to preserve the formatting of the page. By placing an object in a span tag, you'll avoid messing up any of the formatting surrounding that image or icon.

To test out HTML codes and practice, use **W3Schools "playground"** and click "Run" to test out your code.

How to Update Your CSS

To update CSS, most developers recommend using a style sheet for entire documents or your entire site. This makes it easier on you as a marketer. For example, if you have a style sheet, you can include CSS that says that all h1, heading 1, tags should be bold, size 32 font, sans serif, and the color blue. Then, when you're writing your HTML, you'll simply link the style sheet to the HTML document, then use an h1 tag and those styles will be applied.

The other way to update CSS is inline styling. This method means that within your h1 tag, you'll add a "style" tag and specify elements like font, weight, and color. This is a more time consuming method that leaves more room for error and inconsistency across your site, but occasionally will be necessary or helpful for singular pages or singular elements.

> **Tip:** Inline styling trumps style sheets, so if you make changes, they will overwrite any master stylesheet styling.
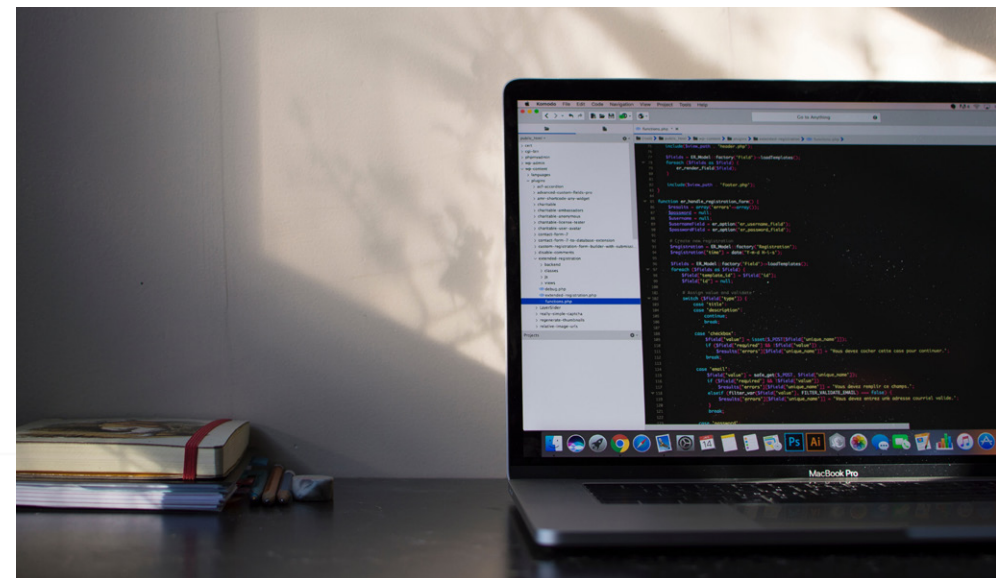
Inline CSS

Inline CSS, as we mentioned earlier, looks like this:

```
<h1 style="color:red">Intro to HTML & CSS</h1>
```

Here, the CSS part is the color which is indicated by the "style." You can update inline CSS by using style codes and update all design elements including padding, font family, background colors, margins, and more.

Use **this list of CSS codes** to find individual inline styling tags.

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External style sheet

To update CSS using an external style sheet, you'll create a separate .css file with the desired styling for elements or groups, then link the .html file with the .css file.

Here's how to link an external style sheet to an HTML file.

```
<head>
        <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css"
        href="thisisyourcssfile.css">
</head>
```

This code is telling your HTML file to associate your CSS file to this page and goes in the header of your HTML document.

Tip: The header of your HTML document is not the same as your h1, h2, and h3 tags. Header tags within the document denote headings of sections but the <head></head> tag denotes the header of the entire webpage. This is where you can include things like Google Analytics tracking tags and other software trackers to be able to capture information from the webpage.

Here's what a .css external stylesheet looks like.

```
body {
    background-color: lightblue;
}


h1 {
    color: navy;
    margin-left: 20px;
}
```

When you link this style sheet to an HTML document, the background will be light blue, and all h1 tags will be navy and indented by 20px (pixels.)

When there are multiple CSS codes, the order of priority that the software will choose is:

1. Inline styling

2. External style sheets linked in the header

3. Browser default style

HTML & CSS: What to Avoid

When it comes to HTML and CSS there are a few major things that developers will tell you are big no nos. Since CSS stylesheets can apply to many pages on your site, beware of making major changes to something that may cause changes sitewide.

Here are HTML and CSS tips on what to steer clear of when it comes to code.

HTML

1. Forgetting a close bracket. For every open bracket like an open paragraph <p> there must be a matching close bracket, </p>.

2. Always include alt tags for images. These help with SEO optimization and to describe what's in the image to search engines.

3. Don't use line breaks to create lists, use the list tag outlined earlier.

4. Don't forget your DOCTYPE or you'll risk having issues with browsers not recognizing the document type. They may not be able to properly read your code.

CSS

1. While sometimes it makes sense to do inline CSS styling and applying a style to an individual heading or paragraph, usually, it is easier to make a style sheet for the entire web page with the master styling for all h1, h2, h3 tags, backgrounds, margins, padding, and other styled elements.

2. When creating CSS style sheets, group sections accordingly and make sure everything is well-documented.

3. Don't update a style sheet if you don't know how many pages you'll affect. Check with your developers if you have questions as you could potentially break pages on your site, making them unreadable.

Courses, Lessons, and Books to Explore

Now that you know the basics of HTML and CSS, you may be interested in learning more. It's not as scary as you may have thought, right? Here are our favorite courses, lessons, tutorials, and communities to help you learn to code.

Codeacademy offers courses in all coding languages from early beginners to advanced experts. They offer free courses as well as a paid subscription that includes more support and feedback from their pros.

W3Schools.com has code simulators and a practice environment to test your code along with templates for coding structures for both HTML and CSS.

freeCodeCamp is a free (as the name suggests) resource with over 5,000 coding tutorials.

HTML Hacks for Marketers is a guide with HTML codes and tutorials for marketers from HubSpot.

Learn to Code HTML and CSS by Shay Howe is a well-reviewed book on Amazon that gets into the nitty gritty of learning HTML and CSS.

Stack Overflow is an online community for developers with helpful questions and responses. Ask these smarty pants for advice or help when learning to code or when you encounter issues.

<conclusion>

These tools will help your marketing team to become more independent, but with great power comes great responsibility. Many marketing and development teams join forces to create a master list of HTML/CSS codes that are available for marketers to edit, and those that need to be avoided. Try your hand at updating an **HTML email** and designing a stellar email newsletter, add social sharing links to your next blog post, or optimize your entire blog library for SEO using keyword-rich header tags, updating alt text on images, and using top-notch on-page SEO. Remember—what gets opened must get closed! Don't forget close brackets!

</conclusion>