Test Drive

Tweak Owen's script and try out the changes.

Add the code for the new variables to `report.php`, as well as the code that echoes the variables to the browser as formatted HTML. Then upload the script to your web server, open the `report.html` page in your browser, and fill out the form with alien abduction information. Finally, click the Report Abduction button to submit the form and see the results.

there are no Dumb Questions

Q: What actually happens when I concatenate multiple strings together using periods?

A: Concatenation involves sticking more than one string together to form a completely new string. The end result of concatenating strings is always a single string, no matter how many strings you started with. So when you concatenate strings as part of an `echo` command, PHP combines the strings together into one first, and then echoes that string to the browser.

Q: When I concatenate a variable with a string, does the variable have to contain text?

A: No. Although concatenation always results in a string, variables don't have to contain strings in order for you to concatenate them. So say a variable contains a number, PHP converts the number to a string first and then concatenates it.

Q: What happens to PHP code on the browser?

A: Nothing. And that's because PHP code is never seen by a browser. PHP code runs on the server and gets turned into HTML code that's sent along to the browser. So the browser is completely unaware of PHP's existence—web pages arrive as pure HTML and CSS.

Q: OK, so how exactly does the server turn PHP code into HTML and CSS code?

A: First off, remember that by default the code in a PHP script is assumed to be HTML code. You identify PHP code within a script by placing it between `<?php` and `?>` tags. The server sees those tags and knows to run the code inside them as PHP, and all of the code outside of those tags is passed along to the browser as HTML.

Q: Right. But that still doesn't explain how the PHP code gets turned into HTML/CSS code. What gives?

A: Ah, that's where the `echo` command enters the picture. You can think of the `echo` command as outputting information beyond the confines of the `<?php` and `?>` tags. So the `echo` command is the key to PHP's ability to dynamically generate HTML/CSS code. By concatenating strings of text with PHP variables, you can construct HTML code on-the-fly, and then use `echo` to output it to the browser as part of the resulting web page. A good example of this is in Owen's `report.php` script when the `<br />` tag is tacked on to the end of a piece of text to generate a line break in HTML.