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Markdown

Learn how to efficiently manage your content and use different services with Markdown

Arturo Herrero

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Instant Markdown

Learn how to efficiently manage your content and use different services with Markdown

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BIRMINGHAM - MUMBAI

Instant Markdown

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Instant Markdown

Welcome to *Instant Markdown*. This book has been especially created to provide you with all the information you need to set up Markdown. Markdown is a simple way to add headings, links, and rich formatting to plain text documents and convert them to perfect HTML files. You will learn the syntax of Markdown, get started with writing and doing some cool things, and discover some tips and tricks for using Markdown.

This document contains the following sections:

So what is Markdown? helps you find out what Markdown actually is, what you can do with it, and why it's so great.

Installation will help you learn how to download and install Markdown with minimum fuss and then set it up so that you can use it as soon as possible.

Quick start – Creating your first Markdown document will show you how to get started with Markdown.

Top 8 features you need to know about will help you learn how to perform eight tasks with the most important features of Markdown. By the end of this section, you will be able to do the following with Markdown:

- ◆ **Participating in forums and discussions:** Use Markdown on different websites
- ◆ **Writing e-mails:** Write e-mails with Markdown quickly and easily
- ◆ **Sharing documents:** Share a single Markdown document with others
- ◆ **Blogging:** Create a blog using Markdown
- ◆ **To-Do lists:** Create To-Do lists with Markdown
- ◆ **Presentations:** Create beautiful, simple, and interactive presentations
- ◆ **Converting files to other formats:** Convert a document to other formats such as PDF
- ◆ **Using Markdown extensions:** Use extensions to get more advanced features

People and places you should get to know provides you with many useful links to the project page and forums as well as a number of helpful articles, tutorials, blogs, and Twitter feeds of Markdown's super contributors.

So, what is Markdown?

Markdown is a lightweight markup language that simplifies the workflow of web writers. It was created in 2004 by John Gruber with contributions and feedback from Aaron Swartz.

Markdown was described by John Gruber as:

"A text-to-HTML conversion tool for web writers. Markdown allows you to write using an easy-to-read, easy-to-write plain text format, then convert it to structurally valid XHTML (or HTML)."

Markdown is two different things:

- ◆ A simple syntax to create documents in plain text
- ◆ A software tool written in Perl that converts the plain text formatting to HTML

Markdown's formatting syntax was designed with simplicity and readability as a design goal. We add rich formatting to plain text without considering that we are writing using a markup language.

The main features of Markdown

Markdown is:

- ◆ **Easy to use:** Markdown has an extremely simple syntax that you can learn quickly
- ◆ **Fast:** Writing is much faster than with HTML, we can dramatically reduce the time we spend crafting HTML tags
- ◆ **Clean:** We can clearly read and write documents that are always translated into HTML without mistakes or errors
- ◆ **Flexible:** It is suitable for many things such as writing on the Internet, e-mails, creating presentations
- ◆ **Portable:** Documents are just plain text; we can edit Markdown with any basic text editor in any operating system
- ◆ **Made for writers:** Writers can focus on distraction-free writing

Here, we can see a quick comparison of the same document between HTML and Markdown. This is the final result that we achieve in both cases:



The following code is written in HTML:

```
<h1>Markdown</h1>

<p>This a <strong>simple</strong> example of Markdown.</p>

<h2>Features:</h2>

<ul>
  <li>Simple</li>
  <li>Fast</li>
  <li>Portable</li>
</ul>

<p>Check the <a href="http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/">official website</a>.</p>
```

The following code is an equivalent document written in Markdown:

```
# Markdown

This a simple example of Markdown.

## Features:
- Simple
- Fast
- Portable
```

Check the [official website].

[official website]: <http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/>

Installation

Markdown is commonly used in different websites, text editors, and applications, so most of the time we don't need to install a specific converter to use it because it is integrated into the tool that we are already using. However, in order to directly transform any Markdown document, we can use a Markdown converter.

In 5 easy steps, we can install Markdown and get it set up on your system.

Step 1 – Prerequisites

The official Markdown converter is a script written in Perl. This is the converter that we are going to use.

Before we use Markdown, we will need to check that we have all of the required elements listed here:

- ◆ Perl 5.6.0 or later
- ◆ The Markdown script

Step 2 – Downloading and installing Perl

Perl is a general-purpose programming language, originally developed for text manipulation and now used for a wide range of tasks.

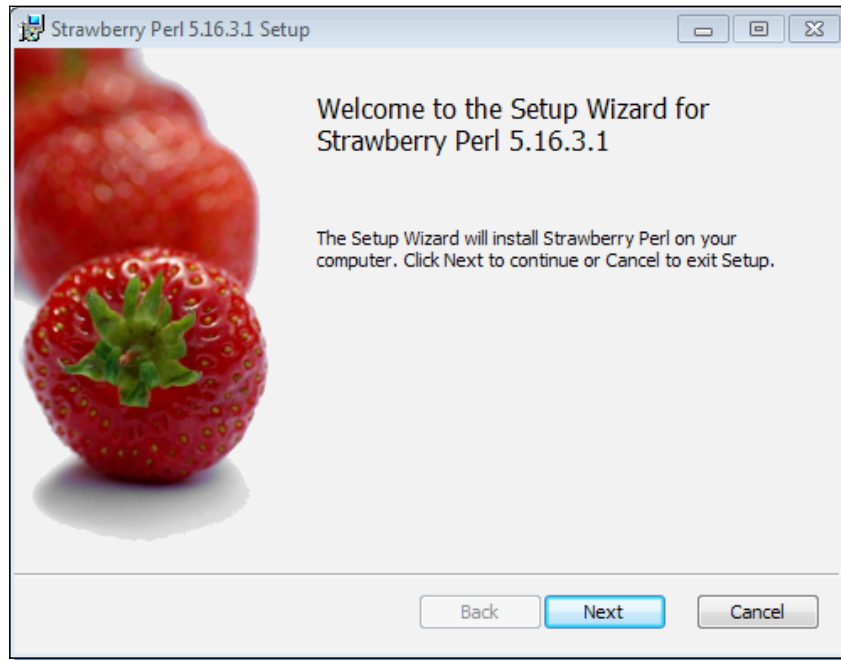
It is installed by default in OS X and many different Linux distributions, so you don't need to install it if you are using any of these operating systems. But you need to download and install it if you are a Microsoft Windows user.

MS Windows

The official Perl website provides references to several Perl distributions for MS Windows at <http://www.perl.org/get.html#win32>.

In this example, we choose Strawberry Perl, which is a Perl environment for MS Windows and contains all you need to run and develop Perl applications. It can be found at <http://strawberryperl.com/>.

We suggest that you download the most current and stable build of Strawberry Perl. After downloading the Windows installer file, just follow the onscreen instructions to set it up on your system:



Mac OS X

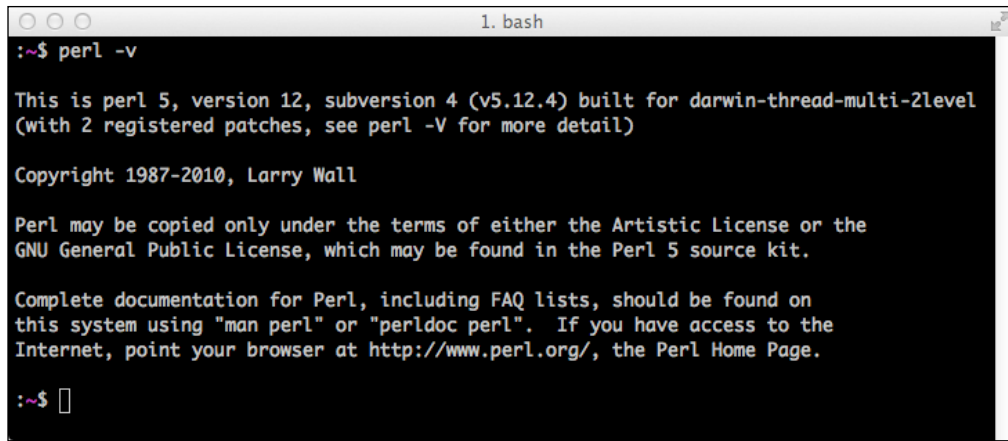
Mac OS X already has Perl installed. Check the latest version on the official website at <http://www.perl.org/get.html#osx>.

Linux distributions

You probably already have Perl installed. Check the latest version on the official website http://www.perl.org/get.html#unix_like.

Step 3 – Verifying that Perl is working

In order to be sure that Perl is working properly, we can find out which version is installed on our system. Open the command-line interface on your system and type `perl -v`.

A terminal window titled '1. bash' with a dark background. The prompt is ':~\$'. The user has entered 'perl -v'. The output is: 'This is perl 5, version 12, subversion 4 (v5.12.4) built for darwin-thread-multi-2level (with 2 registered patches, see perl -V for more detail)'. Below this is 'Copyright 1987-2010, Larry Wall'. Then, 'Perl may be copied only under the terms of either the Artistic License or the GNU General Public License, which may be found in the Perl 5 source kit.' Finally, 'Complete documentation for Perl, including FAQ lists, should be found on this system using "man perl" or "perldoc perl". If you have access to the Internet, point your browser at http://www.perl.org/, the Perl Home Page.' The prompt is now ':~\$ ' with a cursor.

```
:~$ perl -v

This is perl 5, version 12, subversion 4 (v5.12.4) built for darwin-thread-multi-2level
(with 2 registered patches, see perl -V for more detail)

Copyright 1987-2010, Larry Wall

Perl may be copied only under the terms of either the Artistic License or the
GNU General Public License, which may be found in the Perl 5 source kit.

Complete documentation for Perl, including FAQ lists, should be found on
this system using "man perl" or "perldoc perl". If you have access to the
Internet, point your browser at http://www.perl.org/, the Perl Home Page.

:~$ 
```

Step 4 – Downloading Markdown

The Markdown converter is a script only 18 KB in size, and it has been on Version 1.0.1 since December 17, 2004.

We can download it from the official website, http://daringfireball.net/projects/downloads/Markdown_1.0.1.zip.

Step 5 – Running Markdown

The Perl script is not too complicated to use. Again, in our command-line interface, we run Perl that takes two arguments: the path of the Markdown script that we just downloaded and the path of the Markdown file that we want convert.

```
perl Markdown.pl markdown-file.md
```

Markdown will process the Markdown file; the resulting output after running the script is the HTML code shown in the terminal.

To save this output, we redirect the standard output to an HTML file:

```
perl Markdown.pl markdown-file.md > output-file.html
```

And that's it!!

By this point, we should have a working installation of Markdown and are free to play around and discover more about it.

Quick start – Creating your first Markdown document

The syntax of Markdown is incredibly simple and intuitive. At the end of this section, we will have learned all the syntax we need to write anything with Markdown.

Markdown documents are created as plain text files, and it's not a requirement to create these files with concrete file extensions to use them. However, in order for editors or applications to make sure that the file they are using is Markdown-formatted, we could use some of the most common file extensions, such as `.md`, `.mkdn`, or `.markdown`.

Step 1 – Inserting paragraph and line breaks

A paragraph of text is one or more consecutive lines:

```
A paragraph,  
divided into two lines.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p>A paragraph,  
divided into two lines.</p>
```

Paragraphs separated by one or more blank lines create new paragraphs:

```
A paragraph  
  
Another paragraph, separated by a new line.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p>A paragraph</p>  
<p>Another paragraph, separated by a new line.</p>
```

Two or more spaces at the end of the line create a line break:

```
A sentence,  
with a line break.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p>A sentence, <br />  
with a line break</p>
```

Step 2 – Inserting headers


There are two styles for declaring headers in Markdown: **setext** and **atx**.

Setext style

For the two top-level headers (the `<h1>` and `<h2>` tags), there is a special syntax that can be used:

```
Header 1
=====

Header 2
-----
```

 The number of equal-to signs (=) or hyphens (-) doesn't matter; you can get away with just one.

The preceding code will produce:

```
<h1>Header 1</h1>
<h2>Header 2</h2>
```


Atx style

Begin a paragraph with a hash (#), and that paragraph becomes a header. The number of hashes signifies the heading level number (h1 – h6):

```
# Header 1
## Header 2
### Header 3
#### Header 4
##### Header 5
##### Header 6
```

Optionally, we may close atx hash headers:

```
# Header 1 #
## Header 2 ##
### Header 3 ###
#### Header 4 ####
##### Header 5 #####
##### Header 6 #####
```

 The number of closing hashes doesn't matter.

The preceding code will produce:

```
<h1>Header 1</h1>
<h2>Header 2</h2>
<h3>Header 3</h3>
<h4>Header 4</h4>
<h5>Header 5</h5>
<h6>Header 6</h6>
```

Step 3 – Inserting emphasis

Markdown treats asterisks (*) and underscores (_) as indicators of emphasis. A single symbol is used for italics and a double symbol for bold:

```
*single asterisks*
_single underscores_
**double asterisks**
__double underscores__
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<em>single asterisks</em>
<em>single underscores</em>
<strong>double asterisks</strong>
<strong>double underscores</strong>
```

Step 4 – Inserting lists

Markdown supports ordered (numbered) and unordered (bulleted) lists.

Ordered lists

Ordered lists use numbers as list markers:

1. One
2. Two
6. Six



The actual numbers you use to mark the list have no effect.

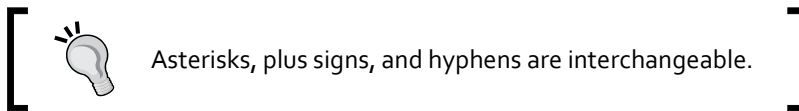
This will produce:

```
<ol>
  <li>One</li>
  <li>Two</li>
  <li>Six</li>
</ol>
```

Unordered lists

Unordered lists use asterisks (*), plus signs (+), and hyphens (-) as list markers:

- * A list.
- * Second element.
- + A new entry.
- Another entry in a list.
- And the list goes on.



The preceding code will produce:

```
<ul>
  <li>A list.</li>
  <li>Second element.</li>
  <li>A new entry.</li>
  <li>Another entry in a list.</li>
  <li>And the list goes on.</li>
</ul>
```

Nested lists

List can be nested as follows:

- First level
 - Second level
 - Third level
 - Second level again

The preceding code will produce:

```
<ul>
  <li>First level
  <ul><li>Second level
    <ul><li>Third level</li></ul></li>
    <li>Second level again</li></ul></li>
</ul>
```

Step 5 – Inserting links

Markdown supports two styles of links: **inline** and **reference**. In both styles, the link text is delimited by square brackets ([and]) and the title attribute is optional.

Inline

An example is shown as follows:


```
An example of [inline link] (http://example.com "Example").  
[This link] (http://example.net/) has no title attribute.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p>An example of <a href="http://example.com"  
  title="Example">inline link</a>.</p>  
<p><a href="http://example.net/">This link</a> has no title  
  attribute.</p>
```


Reference

```
This is [an example][id] reference-style link.  
This is [an example] [id] reference-style link.
```

 We can use one space to separate the sets of brackets.

Then, anywhere in the document, add:

```
[id]: http://example.com/ "Optional Title Here"  
[id]: http://example.com/ 'Optional Title Here'  
[id]: http://example.com/ (Optional Title Here)
```

 We can enclose the title attribute in double quotes ("), single quotes ('), or parentheses ((and)).

This will produce:

```
<p>This is <a href="http://example.com/" title="Optional Title  
  Here">an example</a> reference-style link.</p>
```

Another way to declare a reference link is by using the link text directly:

```
This is [another example] reference-style link.
```

Again, we need the link label somewhere in the document:

```
[another example]: http://example.com/
```

Step 6 – Inserting automatic links

Creating automatic links is possible by wrapping the text with angle brackets (< and >)

The automatic URL as follows:

```
<http://example.com/>
```

This will produce:

```
<p><a href="http://example.com/">http://example.com/</a></p>
```

An encoded mailto as follows:

```
<address@example.com>
```

This will produce:

```
<p><a href="mailto:address@example.com">
  address@example.com</a></p>
```

Step 7 – Inserting blockquotes

The syntax for blockquotes is similar to that of e-mail blockquotes—it uses right-angle brackets (>):

```
> A blockquote.
> Another line of blockquote.
```

Optionally, we may only put one bracket before the first line of a paragraph:

```
> A blockquote.
Another line of blockquote.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<blockquote>
  <p>A blockquote.
  Another line of blockquote.</p>
</blockquote>
```

Blockquotes can be nested:

```
> First level of the quote.
>> Nested blockquote.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<blockquote>
  <p>First level of the quote.</p>
  <blockquote>
    <p>Nested blockquote.</p>
  </blockquote>
</blockquote>
```


Step 8 – Inserting code blocks

The embedding of pre-formatted code blocks is possible by indenting every line of the block with four spaces or one tab:

```
    echo 'Hello World'
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<pre><code>echo 'Hello World'</code></pre>
```

Step 9 – Inserting code spans

To insert inline code, we wrap it with backticks (`and`):

```
Type `echo 'Hello World'` in your terminal
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p>Type <code>echo 'Hello World'</code> in your terminal</p>
```

Step 10 – Inserting images

Markdown uses syntax similar to that of the links to insert images in a document, allowing two styles: **inline** and **reference**.

Inline

```
![Alt text] (/path/to/img.jpg "Optional title")
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p></p>
```

Reference

```
![Alt text] [id]
```

Then, add the following line anywhere in the document:

```
[id]: url/to/image "Optional title attribute"
```

This will produce:

```
<p></p>
```

Step 11 – Inserting horizontal rules

To insert a horizontal separator, put three or more hyphens (-), asterisks (*), or underscores (_) on a line:

```
---
***
*****
* * *
```



We can use spaces between asterisks, hyphens, or underscores.

Any of these will produce:

```
<hr />
```

Step 12 – Inserting backslash escapes

Markdown uses many symbols to specify its syntax. If we want to write any of them without being interpreted, Markdown provides backslash escapes (\) for the following characters:

```
\  backslash
`  backtick
*  asterisk
_  underscore
{} curly braces
[] square brackets
() parentheses
#  hash mark
+  plus sign
-  minus sign (hyphen)
.  dot
!  exclamation mark
```

Escape asterisks in text as shown in the following code:

```
\*this text is surrounded by literal asterisks\*
```

This will produce:

```
<p>\*this text is surrounded by literal asterisks*</p>
```

Step 13 – Inserting HTML

Finally, Markdown allows you to include raw HTML. You may write HTML code anywhere in a document. Consider the following example:

```
This is a paragraph.
```

```
<table>
  <tr>
    <td>Row</td>
  </tr>
</table>
```

```
This is another paragraph.
```

The preceding code will produce:

```
<p>This is a paragraph.</p>
```

```
<table>
  <tr>
    <td>Row</td>
  </tr>
</table>
<p>This is another paragraph.</p>
```

Top 8 features you'll want to know about

As you start to use Markdown, you will realize that there is a wide variety of things that you can do with it. This section will teach you all about the most commonly performed tasks and most commonly used features in Markdown.

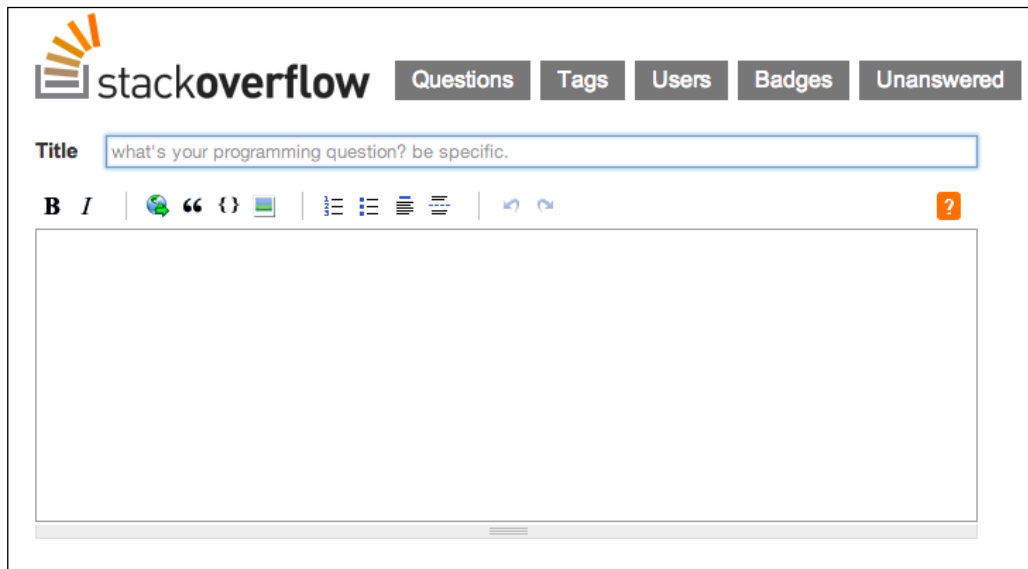
There are many services that use Markdown. In general, these services are websites that exploit the full potential of Markdown to do a particular task. Here we will explore some of them.

1 – Forum and discussion

Markdown has become very popular, thanks to the different websites and forums that facilitate discussions among users. Users write Markdown inside web forms; the website does the Markdown conversion on the server and then displays the text in HTML.

Sites such as GitHub, BitBucket, Reddit, StackOverflow, SourceForge, Trello, and Disqus use Markdown with great success. Some of these have created their own flavors of Markdown to add new interesting features to the language. Two of the most famous sites are GitHub and StackOverflow:

- ◆ **GitHub:** Read about it at <https://help.github.com/articles/github-flavored-markdown>
- ◆ **StackOverflow:** Read about it at <http://stackoverflow.com/editing-help>



GitHub Flavored Markdown

GitHub uses **GitHub Flavored Markdown (GFM)**, which differs from standard Markdown in a few significant ways and adds some additional functionality.

Newlines

The first difference is in handling line breaks. GFM treats newlines in paragraphs as real line breaks such as:

```
A paragraph
A new paragraph
```

Multiple underscores in words

GFM ignores multiple underscores in words such as:

```
ignore_multiple_underscores
```

URL autolinking

GFM creates automatic links for standard URLs.

Fenced code blocks

GFM supports fenced code blocks. Just wrap your code blocks in ````` and you won't need to indent manually as shown in the following lines of code:

```
```
function test {
 echo "Hello world!"
}
```
```

Syntax highlighting

Code blocks can have syntax highlighting if you request it. In your fenced block, add an optional language identifier:

```
```shell
function test {
 echo "Hello world!"
}
```
```

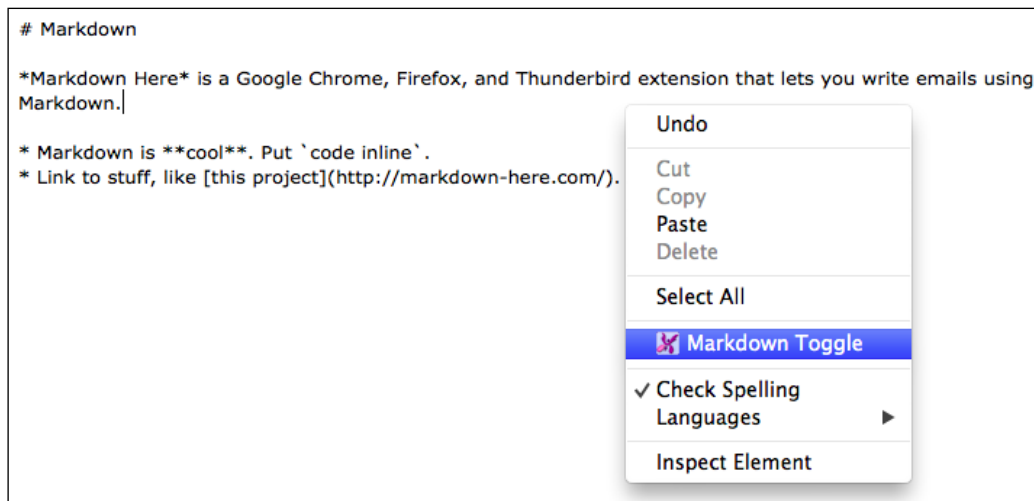
2 – Writing e-mails

We use Markdown in websites and that is really nice, but how about in e-mail? Writing e-mails is one of the things that takes up a lot of our time in the day.

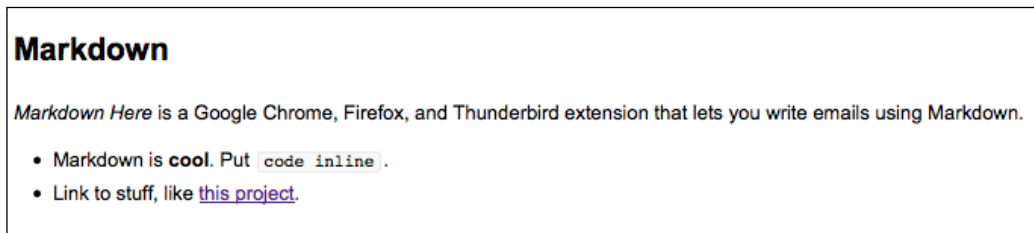
We can write e-mails with Markdown using **Markdown Here**: <http://markdown-here.com/>.

Markdown Here is an extension for the most common web browsers (Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, and Thunderbird) that lets you write e-mails in Markdown and render it before sending.

Just write e-mails using the Markdown syntax as shown in the following screenshot:



After writing the e-mail, we use the context menu and click on **Markdown Toggle** to get the final result before sending the e-mail.



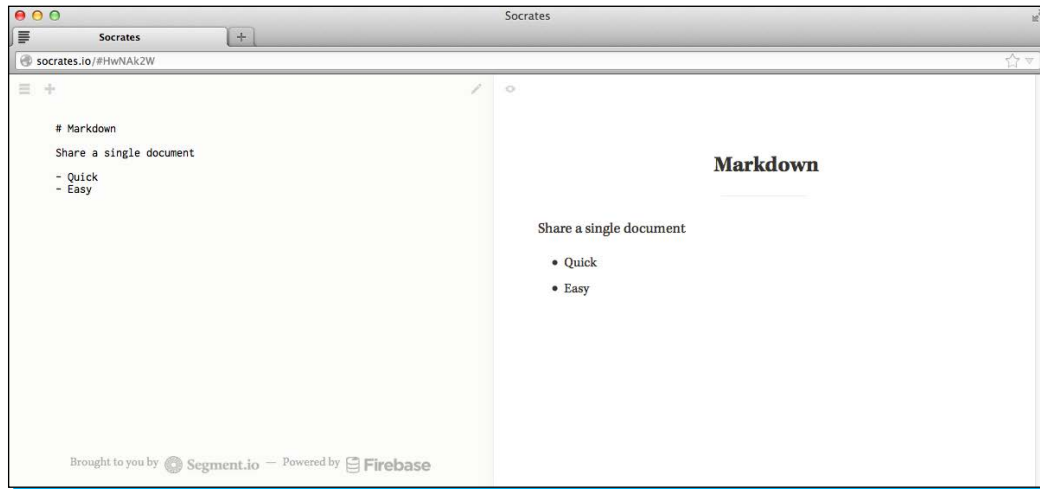
3 – Sharing a single document

Creating and sharing a document with someone can be achieved very easily with different web services. Here we present two of them that work in exactly the same way:

- ◆ **Hashify**: Read about it at <http://hashify.me/>
- ◆ **Socrates**: Read about it at <http://socrates.io/>

Instant Markdown

Every time we go to one of these two sites (Hashify or Socrates), it creates a unique URL to share with others. We type our document in Markdown on the left-hand side, and automatically preview the text on the right-hand side as shown in the following screenshot:



4 – Blogging

Writing a blog using Markdown is possible in different ways.

Some blog platforms, such as Tumblr, have an editor that supports writing in Markdown.

Other platforms, such as WordPress, have plugins that we can install to compose content in Markdown. In this case, we need to install WP-Markdown, which allows Markdown to be enabled in posts, comments, and bbPress forums. For further information on WP-Markdown, go to <http://wordpress.org/plugins/wp-markdown/>.

Another option is to use static site generators such as Jekyll, Octopress, or nanoc. This way we can transform plain text files into static web pages and blogs.

However, the option that we describe here combines Markdown and Dropbox. Dropbox is a free service to store files, and we can use this service to save our Markdown plain text files and publish them using the Web.

Some of the Dropbox Markdown blogging platforms we can use are:

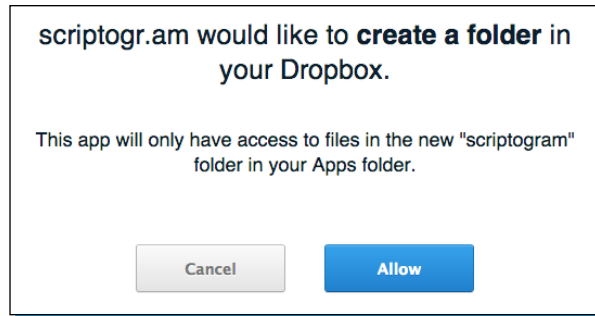
- ◆ **Calepin.co**: Read about it at <http://calepin.co/>
- ◆ **Scriptogr.am**: Read about it at <http://scriptogr.am/>

Scriptogr.am

Getting started with Scriptogr.am consists of the following three steps:

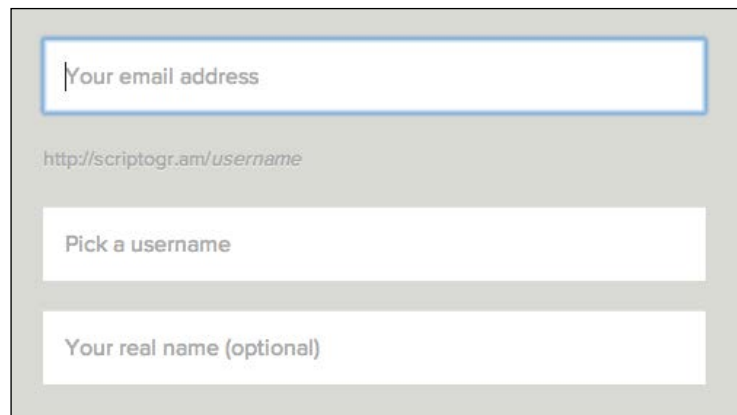
Step one

First we connect Scriptogr.am with our Dropbox account.

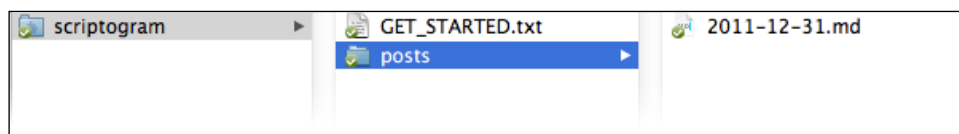


Step two

We configure our Scriptogr.am account.

A screenshot of the Scriptogr.am configuration form. It has a light gray background and a blue border. The form contains three input fields: "Your email address" (with a cursor), "http://scriptogr.am/username" (a URL field), "Pick a username" (a text field), and "Your real name (optional)" (a text field).

After connecting our Dropbox account to Scriptogr.am, some necessary files and folders are added to our Dropbox account at Apps/scriptogram.



Step three

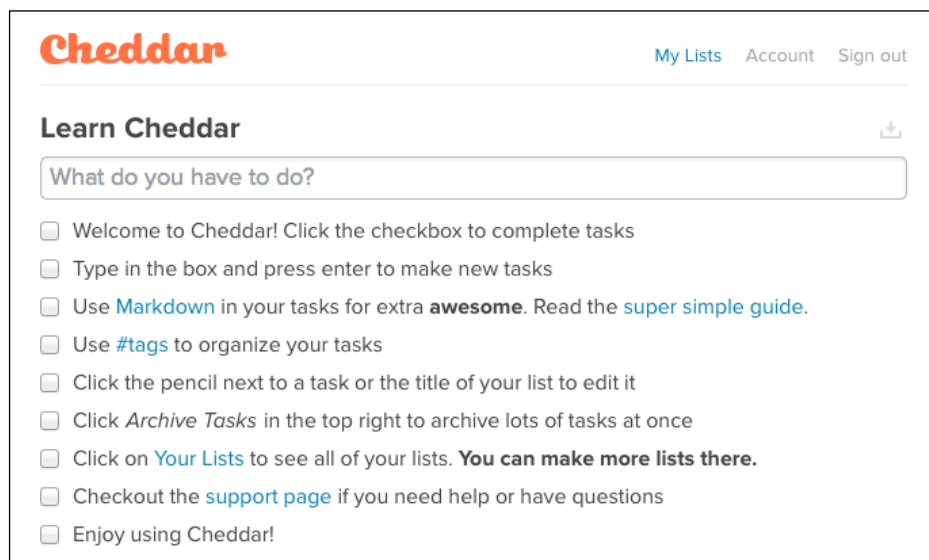
Just write new posts using Markdown and save the new files in the `posts` folder. The new blog entries will automatically be synchronized and published on the blog.

5 – To-do lists

We can use Markdown for personal organization. To-do lists are prioritized lists of tasks that we need to do.

The service that we are going to use is **Cheddar**, which can be found at <https://cheddarapp.com/>.

Cheddar uses Markdown to format italics, bold, links, or code when defining tasks. The following screenshot appears after signing in:



6 – Presentations

Creating beautiful, interactive, and simple presentations is possible with some of the presentation frameworks based on JavaScript and Markdown.

Two such frameworks that support a Markdown extension are **reveal.js** and **deck.js**.

- ◆ **reveal.js**: Check this out at <http://lab.hakim.se/reveal-js/>
- ◆ **deck.js**: Check this out at <http://imakewebthings.com/deck.js/>

In **reveal.js**, each section represents one slide, so we can write slides in plain text using Markdown:

```
<section data-markdown>
  <script type="text/template">
    ## Page title

    A paragraph with some text and a [link](http://hakim.se).
  </script>
</section>

<section data-markdown>
  <script type="text/template">
    ## New slide

    Presentations made easy
  </script>
</section>
```

7 – Converting files to other formats

If we need to convert files from Markdown format into another format, **pandoc** is the tool that we need, and it can be found at <http://johnmacfarlane.net/pandoc/>.

Pandoc is able to convert documents from Markdown to many different formats, such as:

- ◆ HTML formats (XHTML, HTML5, HTML)
- ◆ Word processor formats (Microsoft Word docx, OpenOffice/LibreOffice odt, OpenDocument XML)
- ◆ Ebooks (ePub Versions 2 or Version 3, FictionBook2)
- ◆ Documentation formats (DocBook)
- ◆ TeX formats (LaTeX)
- ◆ PDF
- ◆ Lightweight markup formats (reStructuredText, Textile)

Installing Pandoc is really easy. On the official website, we can find the package installers for MS Windows and Mac OS X, and an installer is also available in the repositories of different Linux distributions.

Pandoc is a command-line tool, so we need to open a command-line interface to use it. For example, to convert a Markdown file to PDF, simply type the following command:

```
pandoc document.md -s -o document.pdf
```

8 – Markdown extensions

There are Markdown extensions implementing multiple syntax features currently not available with the Markdown syntax. These extensions are similar to Markdown flavors but add to or modify the syntax in a more advanced way.

MultiMarkdown is a popular superset of the Markdown syntax and can be found at <http://fletcherpenney.net/multimarkdown/>. Some of the features it adds to Markdown are:

- ◆ Footnotes
- ◆ Tables
- ◆ Citations and bibliography
- ◆ Math support
- ◆ Smart typography with support for multiple languages

Footnotes

Here is an example of a footnote:

```
Here is some text containing a footnote[^somefootnote]. More text

[^somefootnote]: Here is the text of the footnote itself.
```

Tables

The format of a table is shown as follows:

```
| First Header | Second Header |
| :-----: | :-----: |
| First row | Data |
| Second row | **Cell** |
[simple_table]
```

Citations

Here is an example of a citation:

```
Let's cite a book. [p. 42] [#book]
```

Math

Here is a math support example:

```
\\[ {e}^{i\\pi }+1=0 \\]
```

People and places you should get to know

If you need help with Markdown, here are some people and places that will prove invaluable.

Official sites:

- ◆ The homepage: <http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/>
- ◆ Syntax and documentation: <http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/syntax>
- ◆ Editor and converter: <http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/dingus>

Articles:

- ◆ See the article by Jeff Atwood discussing the standardization of Markdown—for it to be consistent in every service—and its future at <http://www.codinghorror.com/blog/2012/10/the-future-of-markdown.html>
- ◆ *78 tools for writing and previewing Markdown*: <http://mashable.com/2013/06/24/markdown-tools/>
- ◆ Find out more about comparing the output of various implementations at <http://johnmacfarlane.net/babelmark2/>

Community:

- ◆ The official mailing list can be found at <http://six.pairlist.net/mailman/listinfo/markdown-discuss>
- ◆ The Markdown community page can be found at <http://markdown.github.io/>

Twitter:

- ◆ Follow Markdown on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/markdown>
- ◆ Follow John Gruber, the creator of Markdown, on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/gruber>
- ◆ For more open source information, follow Packt Publishing at <http://twitter.com/packtpublishing>



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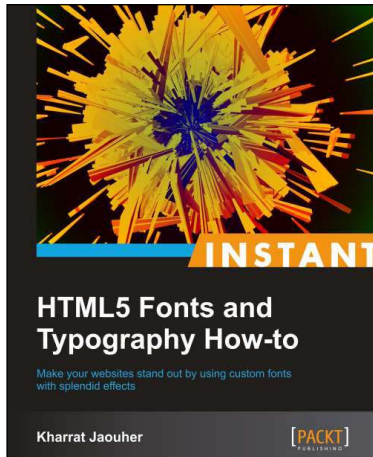
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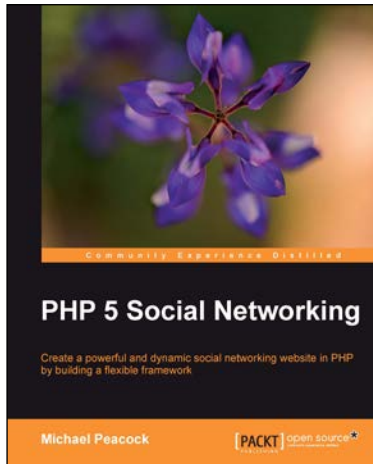
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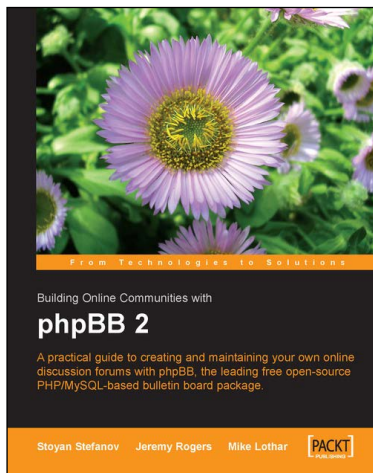


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