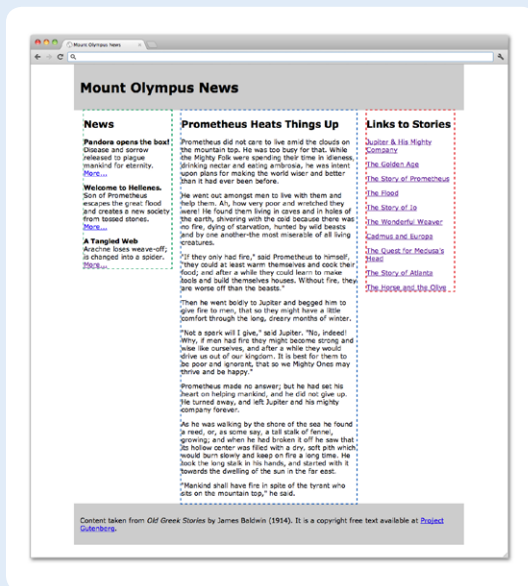


## exercise 16-1 | You try it

We've seen a lot of examples so far of two- and three-column layouts using floats, in both fluid and fixed-width layouts. I think it is time you try some of these techniques out using the three-column fluid layout we just looked at as a starting point. The file for this exercise, *mountolympus-ex1.html*, is in the *materials* folder for this chapter on [learningwebdesign.com](http://learningwebdesign.com). The resulting styles are listed in [Appendix A](#). The outline styles are included, but you can "comment them out" (wrap them in `/*` and `*/` to hide them) if you want to turn the outlines off and see the layout without them.

First, rearrange the side columns so that `#links` is on the right and `#news` is on the left. You don't need to change the markup, only a few style values. (Hint: think float direction.) Be sure to adjust the left and right margins on the side columns and clear the `#footer`.

Next, convert this fluid design into a centered, fixed-width design. This time you will need to add some markup (see the two-column fixed example if you need help). The resulting page is shown in [Figure 16-12](#).



**Figure 16-12.** The resulting fixed-width layout with swapped side columns.

## Any order columns using negative margins

When float-based layouts were beginning to gain steam, many designers wondered, "Is there a way to do three-column floats that is independent from the source order?" Turns out the answer was "Yes!" The trick is to use the magic of negative margin values and a heaping tablespoon of math (a little bit of math never hurt anyone, right?). The technique was first brought to light by Alex Robinson in his classic 2005 article "The Search for One True Layout" ([positioniseverything.net/articles/onetruelayout/](http://positioniseverything.net/articles/onetruelayout/)).

### The strategy

Apply widths and floats to all three column elements, and use a negative margin to "drag" the left column across the page into the left position. The underlying structure and resulting layout is shown in [Figure 16-13](#). Notice that although `#main` comes first in the source, it is in the second column position. In addition, the `#links` `div` (last in the source) is in the first column position on the left. This example is fixed, but you can do the same thing with a fluid layout using percentage values.

### The markup

```
<div id="wrapper">
  <div id="header">Masthead and headline</div>
  <div id="main">Main article</div>
  <div id="news">News items</div>
  <div id="links">List of links</div>
  <div id="footer">Copyright information</div>
</div>
```

### The styles

```
#wrapper {
  width: 960px;
  margin: 0 auto;
}
#main {
  float: left;
  width: 520px;
  margin-top: 0;
  margin-left: 220px;
  margin-right: 20px;
}
#news {
  float: left;
  width: 200px;
  margin: 0;
}
```