

A History of HTML¹

Included in this chapter is information on:

- How the World Wide Web began
- The events and circumstances that led to the World Wide Web's current popularity
- How HTML has grown from its conception in the early 1990s

Summary

This chapter is a short history of HTML. Its aim is to give readers some idea of how the HTML we use today was developed from the prototype written by Tim Berners-Lee in 1992. The story is interesting - not least because HTML has been through an extremely bumpy ride on the road to standardization, with software engineers, academics and browser companies haggling about the language like so many Ministers of Parliament debating in the House of Commons.

How the Web Began

Tim Berners-Lee is the inventor of the Web. In 1989, Tim was working in a computing services section of CERN when he came up with the concept; at the time he had no idea that it would be implemented on such an enormous scale. Particle physics research often involves collaboration among institutes from all over the world. Tim had the idea of enabling researchers from remote sites in the world to organize and pool together information. But far from simply making available a large number of research documents as files that could be downloaded to individual computers, he suggested that you could actually link the text in the files themselves.

In other words, there could be cross-references from one research paper to another. This would mean that while reading one research paper, you could quickly display part of another paper that holds directly relevant text or diagrams. Documentation of a scientific and mathematical nature would thus be represented as a '*web*' of information held in electronic form on computers across the world. This, Tim thought, could be done by using some form of **hypertext, some way of linking documents** together by using buttons on the screen, which you simply clicked on to jump from one paper to another.

Tim's prototype Web browser on the NeXT computer came out in 1990.

¹ adapted from <https://www.w3.org/People/Raggett/book4/ch02.html>