

Styling `<hr>` with CSS

Introduction

Even though it's sometimes recommended to replace the `<hr>` element with cascading stylesheets only using horizontal borders of other elements, I prefer `<hr>` as a section divider. This makes a web page more readable even in older browsers that receive only pure HTML with no style sheet.

You can read this article in Italian: [<hr> stilosi con i CSS](#).

On the other hand, simple, unstyled `<hr>` does not look good in richly styled documents. That's why I tried to find a couple of cross-browser compatible ways to make it prettier. I used to hide style sheets from the version 4 browsers and older, so my targeted browsers are IE5+, Opera 5+ and Mozilla/NN6.

Which properties work

Various CSS properties can be applied on `<hr>`:

- All three browsers allow setting **width** and **height** of the `<hr>` element.
- The **border** property can be used in IE and Mozilla. It does not work well in Opera (see examples below).
- IE uses the **color** property for the `<hr>` element.
- Opera and Mozilla use **background-color** for the `<hr>` element.
- All three browser allow setting a **background-image** of the `<hr>` element,

however this is not very useful in IE and Opera (see the last example).

Examples

Now, let's take a look at a couple of examples. The style sheet of this page begins with the following rule set:

```
hr {  
  border: 0;  
  width: 80%;  
}
```

so all rules are 80% wide and should have no initial borders. Such a rule looks almost the same in IE and Opera, however K-Meleon (Gecko-based browser) displays nothing, because it uses borders to render the `<hr>` element. In your current browser it looks like this:

Let's add colors

If you want to show a solid, red line, use the following code:

```
color: #f00;  
background-color: #f00;  
height: 5px;
```

and you get this result:



Notice, that you have to use both the `color` and the `background-color` properties — the former for IE, the latter for Opera and Mozilla. Also notice, that Opera still displays 1px borders around the rectangle, so setting the `height` property less than 3px may not be a good idea. For Mac compatibility info see [note 1.1](#).

Next three examples shows another variations that look reasonably well in all three browsers.

Thin, red (unfortunately black in Opera), solid line, 1px high:



Empty, red rectangle, 10px high:



Two thin lines, one above another (Opera displays a rectangle). Both are red, the first is dashed, the second solid:



What about images

Simple images are often used to divide sections in web pages. Is there a way to incorporate an image in the `<hr>` tag? Yes it is, but it isn't so easy.

The first option I've tried was the `background-image` property. Surprisingly enough, it works in all three browsers, yet with some caveats. Take a look at the following example:



It looks great in Mozilla, where only the image is visible, however the result is not so good in IE and Opera, because these two browsers display a border around the image (see also [note 1.3](#)). Unfortunately, I have found no way to hide this border.

Because I did not find a workaround, I've added a `div` in the source code:

```
<div class="hr"><hr /></div>
```

and the following CSS rules:

```
div.hr {  
    height: 15px;
```

```
background: #fff url(hr1.gif)
no-repeat scroll center;
}
div.hr hr {
display: none;
}
```

The result is perfect in all three browsers now:



Conclusion

The above method, i.e. wrapping the `<hr>` in a `<div>` of a particular class and hiding the `<hr>` in the style sheet seems to be the most flexible solution. The standard horizontal rules are visible in an unstyled document (for older browsers and handhelds), while in a styled one you can style them as you like. However, pay attention to the following:

- Background images are not printed by default in most current browsers. So if you use a background image for your rules for screen, don't forget to define different style in the print style sheet.
- While the simple `<hr>` element has some initial top and bottom margins in most browsers, it may lost them if you wrap it in a `<div>`. Thus setting the top and/or bottom margin for the outer `<div>` may be a good idea.

Notes

1. *Adam Kuehn* sent me his observations on Mac (Thanks, Adam!):
 1. Example 1: Fails to render at all in NN6. IE5 shows 2px-high grey rectangle.

2. Example 2-5: Good in both browsers, although NN6 has all of them at 80% width, while IE has them extend the width of the text.
 3. Example 6: Good in NN6 (= three "cloverleaf" images). IE5 shows only a default grey `hr` about 12px tall, 80% width, with no border. The images are not displayed at all.
 4. Example 6 w/ workaround: Good in both browsers (= three "cloverleaves").
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2. The reason why IE5 on Mac shows a grey rectangle in the examples 1 and 6 (see Adam's observation above) is probably the `transparent` value of the `color` property. Although it is not a valid value (only the `background-color` can be `transparent`), it works in IE on Windows and that's why I used it. However that's another argument for the last solution — `hr` wrapped in a `div`.
 3. *Craig Sailsa* sent me a link to his *Web Building Tips*, where you can find another useful information about [styling horizontal rules](#) and much more.

Your comments and suggestions are welcome at marek@sovavsiti.cz.

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