What are the different link states, and why are they important?

You may have seen a link on a web page become purple after you click it. This is because the state of the link has changed, so different styling gets applied. There are five different states a link can be in.

The first is the default state, which is :link. This state represents a link which the user has not visited, clicked, or interacted with yet. You can think of this state as providing the base styles for all links on your page. The other states build on top of it.

The second state is :visited, which applies when a user has already visited the page being linked to. By default, this turns the link purple - but you can leverage CSS to provide a different visual indication to the user. This is helpful to let someone know they have already read a portion of your documentation. Or, that the site is one they can trust because they have used it before.

The third state is :hover. This state applies when a user is hovering their cursor over a link. This state is helpful for providing extra attention to a link, to ensure a user actually intends to click it.

Then we have :focus. This state applies when we focus on a link.

And finally, we have :active. This state applies to links that are being activated by the user. This typically means clicking on the link with the primary mouse button by left clicking, in most cases. This state can be helpful for showing a user that the element they clicked on is interactive.

When you use these states to style your links, there is a specific order you need to write your CSS in: link, visited, hover, focus, then active.

You should now know how to give links in your page your own personal flair, while still providing the important information a user needs about the state of each link.