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How Web Servers Work

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Behind the Scenes

If you want to get into a bit more detail on the process of getting a Web page onto your computer screen, here are the basic steps that occurred behind the scenes:

The browser broke the URL into three parts:

- The protocol ("http")
- The server name ("www.howstuffworks.com")
- The file name ("web-server.htm")

The browser communicated with a [name server](#) to translate the server name "www.howstuffworks.com" into an **IP Address**, which it uses to connect to the server machine. The browser then formed a connection to the server at that IP address on port 80. (We'll discuss ports later in this article.)

Following the HTTP protocol, the browser sent a GET request to the server, asking for the file "https://www.howstuffworks.com/web-server.htm." (Note that **cookies** may be sent from browser to server with the GET request -- see [How Internet Cookies Work](#) for details.)

The server then sent the [HTML text](#) for the Web page to the browser. ([Cookies](#) may also be sent from server to browser in the header for the page.) The browser read the [HTML tags](#) and formatted the page onto your screen.

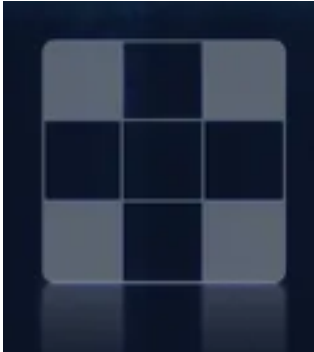
If you've never explored this process before, that's a lot of new vocabulary. To understand this whole process in detail, you need to learn about IP addresses, ports, protocols... The following sections will lead you through a complete explanation.

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