
Dreamweaver: Cascading Style Sheets

Introduction

Adobe Dreamweaver is a web authoring software that aids in the creation and maintenance of web pages. Dreamweaver use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to apply style to your web pages. The program does this behind the scenes and you need not know anything about CSS to use it. But CSS is a very powerful tool, and the more you know, the better your web pages will be.

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What are Cascading Style Sheets?

Cascading Style Sheets, or CSS, is a formatting language developed by the World Wide Web Consortium in order to separate structure from style in web documents. While HTML is used to apply structure to web documents, CSS is used to apply style to them. It gives web authors much more control over the presentational elements of web pages than do the older, deprecated style elements of HTML.

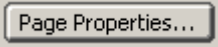
Benefits of using CSS

Not only does CSS give web authors more control over how their pages display, but it is more consistently supported by web browsers than are deprecated HTML presentational elements and attributes. All of the major browser makers (Microsoft, Mozilla, Apple, etc.) have incorporated CSS standards into their browsers.

How CSS Works

CSS works by allowing the author to assign styles to HTML elements either in a separate document, or in a separate section of the web page itself. You can also use CSS to create special classes of styles that can be applied to any HTML element. But as long as you have Dreamweaver, you don't even have to know what HTML elements are. The beauty of assigning styles in a separate document is that it can then be applied to all the pages in your website. This creates consistence and reduces code.

CSS in Action

Let's have a look at how Dreamweaver can create CSS styles. Start the Dreamweaver program and create your site file (as covered in the *Dreamweaver Basics* workshop). Open a new, blank HTML document. Click the Page Properties button in the Properties Panel:  The Page Properties window will open:

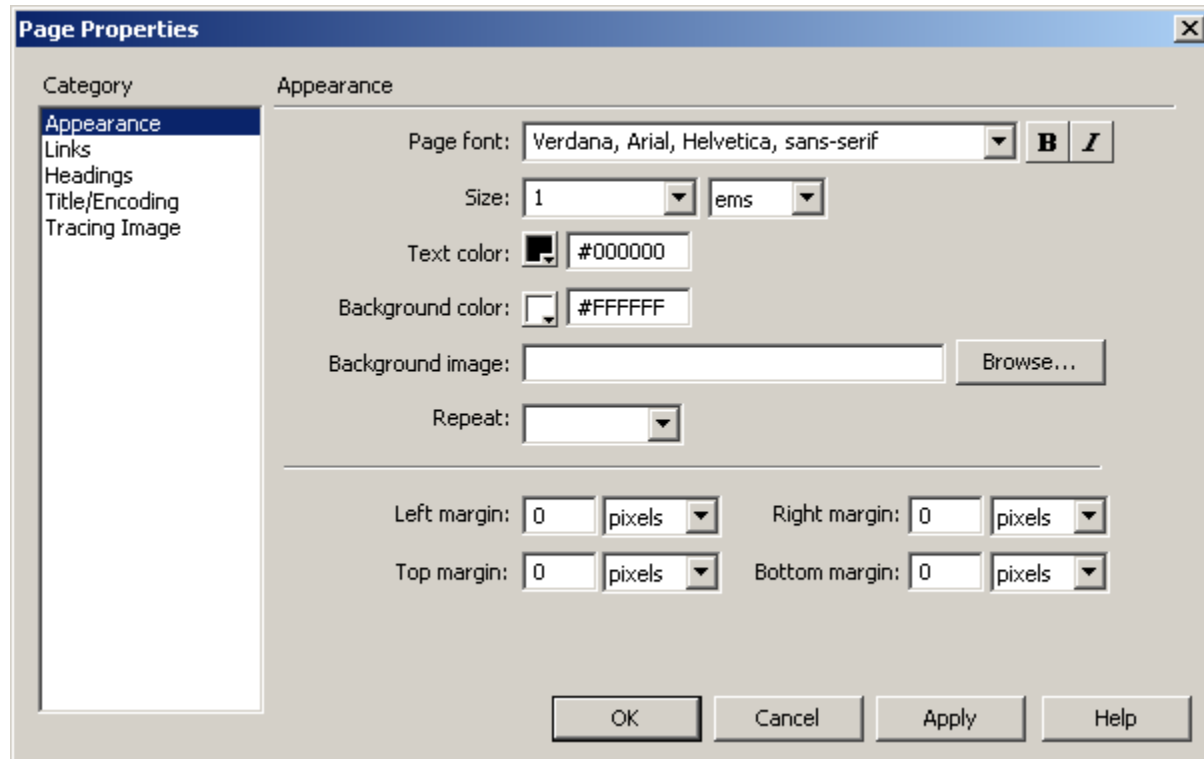


Figure 1: The Page Properties Window – Appearance Category

Here you can create styles that will apply to the entire web page. Under the appearance category you can choose the font, the font size, the text color, background color, background image, and the margins.

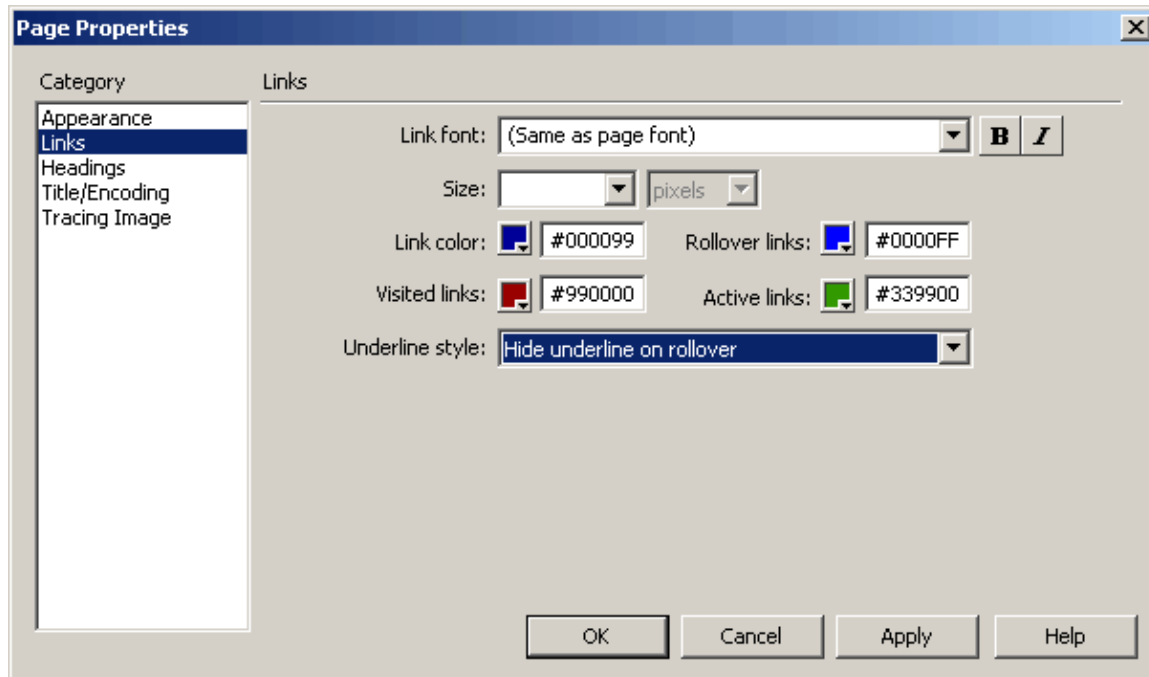


Figure 2: The Page Properties Window – Links Category

Under the links category you can assign font, font size and color to all the different link states, which are as follows:

- Link: How links are displayed on the page
- Rollover Links: How links appear when the user rolls their mouse over them
- Visited Links: How links to pages that the user has already visited appear on the page
- Active Links: How links appear while the user is clicking on them.

Go ahead and assign fonts, font-sizes, colors, etc. under the Appearance and Link categories, as I have done in the above figures, then click the OK button.

Using the CSS Panel to view your CSS

Once you are back in your blank document, click the small black carrot next to the word **CSS** in the panel bar in the upper right-hand corner of the Dreamweaver program. Make sure the **CSS Styles** tab is active, click on the **All** button and click the little plus sign next to **<style>**. You should see something like this:

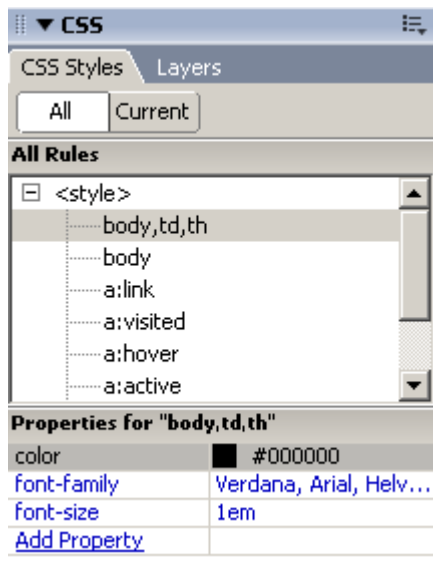


Figure 3: Dreamweaver's CSS Panel

Figure 3 shows all the CSS styles Dreamweaver created based on the page properties you selected as displayed by the CSS panel. Each individual style rule is assigned to an HTML element. You don't need to understand all the syntax, but it is important to note that any styles that you assign to the HTML element **body** get inherited by nearly all the other elements on the page (unless other styles have been assigned to them). With the **body,td,th** tags selected, we see the CSS **Properties** that apply to those elements below. In this case, those properties are color, font-family, and font-size. You can click on any property to change it.

In addition to properties for the **body,td,th** tags, we see properties for the body tag alone, as well as properties for each of the four different link states.

Let's go back and click the Page Properties button again. This time, choose the Headings category:

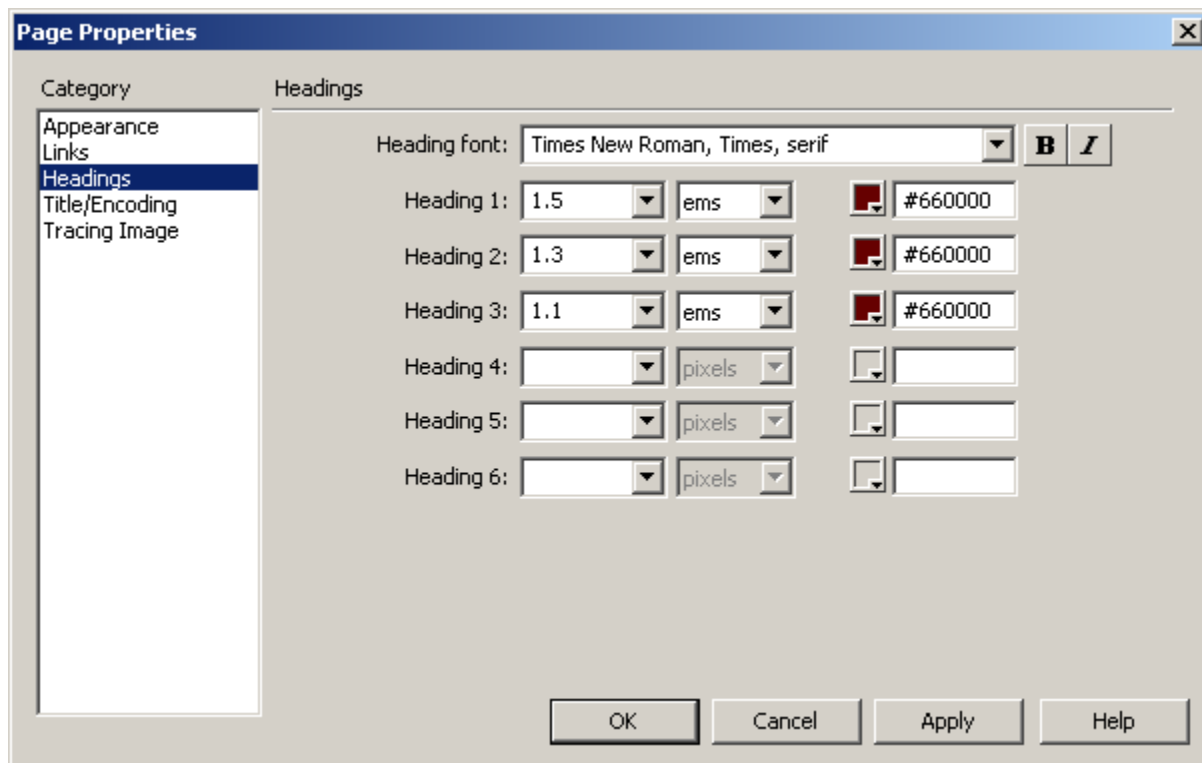


Figure 4: The Page Properties Window – Headings Category

Headings are used in HTML to structure documents. There are six heading levels available, heading 1 being the largest and heading 6 being the smallest. For example, you might use heading 1 for your page title, heading 2 for a section titles, and heading 3 for a sub-section titles. Use the Page Properties to assign styles to your headings, as shown in Figure 4.

I have chosen that my headings be a different font and color from the rest of the text in my document. I have also assigned them font sizes. I only assigned styles to the first three heading levels because I know that is all I will use, but you can assign styles to all six if you will need them. Go ahead and assign styles to a couple of headings and click OK.

Now look back at the CSS Panel and check out how your styles have changed:

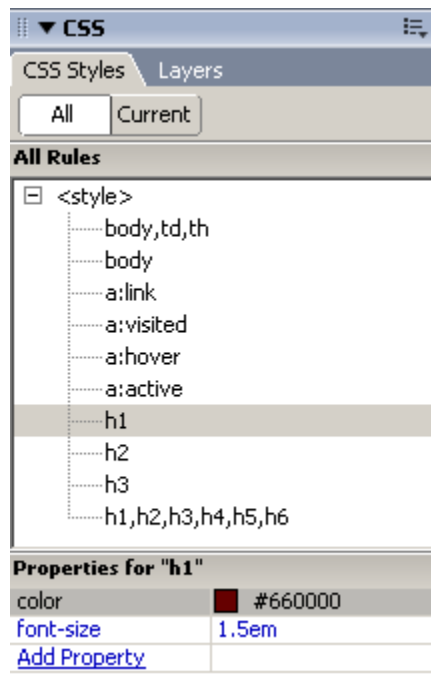


Figure 5: Updated CSS Styles with Styles for Headings

As you can see, Dreamweaver added styles pertaining to heading elements to the style sheet it already started. Now, whenever you format some text as a heading, paragraph or link, it will automatically use these styles.

Using CSS to Set Styles that Don't Apply to the Whole Page

Page Properties aren't the only way to assign styles using CSS in Dreamweaver. If the website you are working on already uses Cascading Style Sheets, you can select any of the pre-existing styles in your style sheet using the **Style** and **Class** properties in the properties panel.

If the website you are working on doesn't have a pre-existing style sheet, you can create styles on the fly. Type some text onto your web page. Then highlight the text and make a change to it in the Properties Panel, like the color or font.

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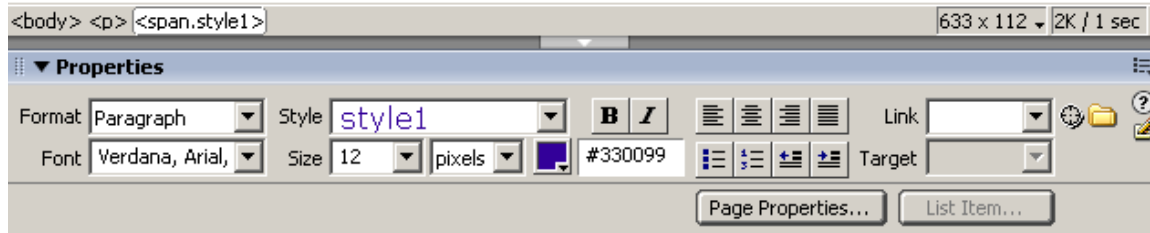


Figure 6: Creating a Style For a Single Piece of Text

In Figure 6 I have highlighted some text and then changed the color of that text. Note that in the Style box is the word "style1." Dreamweaver has actually created a CSS class for this new style. A Class is a CSS style rule that is not assigned to a particular element, but can be applied to any HTML element instead.

Back in the CSS Panel you should see that a new style has been added:

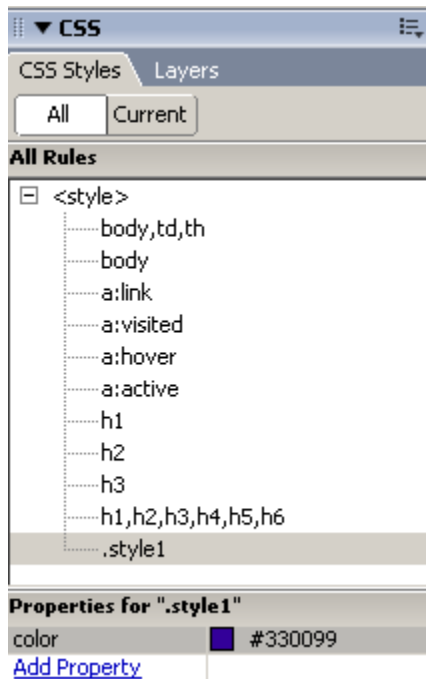


Figure 7: A CSS Class as Shown in the CSS Styles Panel

The period at the beginning of the style rule designates this rule as a class. If you were writing this rule by hand, you would name it something more meaningful than "style1," possibly something like "blue."

But Dreamweaver has no way of knowing the meaning of the style. You can rename the style by right-clicking on it and choosing "Rename." The following dialogue window will appear:

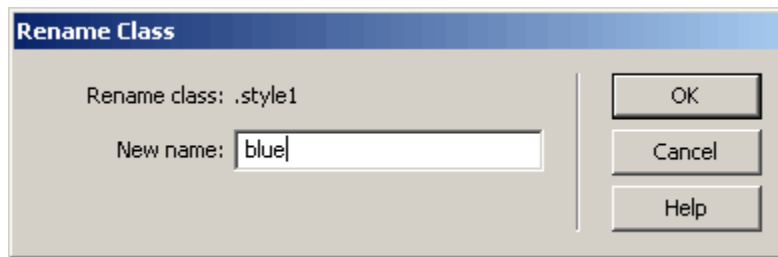


Figure 8: Renaming a Class Rule.

Embedded Style Sheets vs. External Style Sheets

When you create styles in Dreamweaver as we have just done, the type of style sheet that is created is called *embedded* because the CSS styles are embedded right into the document you are working on. You can view the style sheet if you would like by switching to Code View and then scrolling to the top of the document.

But what if you want to assign the same set of styles to more than web page? This is a very common occurrence. Developers almost always want all the pages in their web site to have a consistent look and feel. Creating an *external* style sheet that dictates the styles for all the pages in your site is the best way to accomplish this.

An external style sheet is a separate document that always has the extension .css. Before we begin, there is one important setting that you need to change. Click the **Edit** drop-down menu and choose **Preferences**. Choose the **CSS Styles** category on the left. Make sure that the "Open CSS Files when Modified" option is checked, as in the following screenshot:

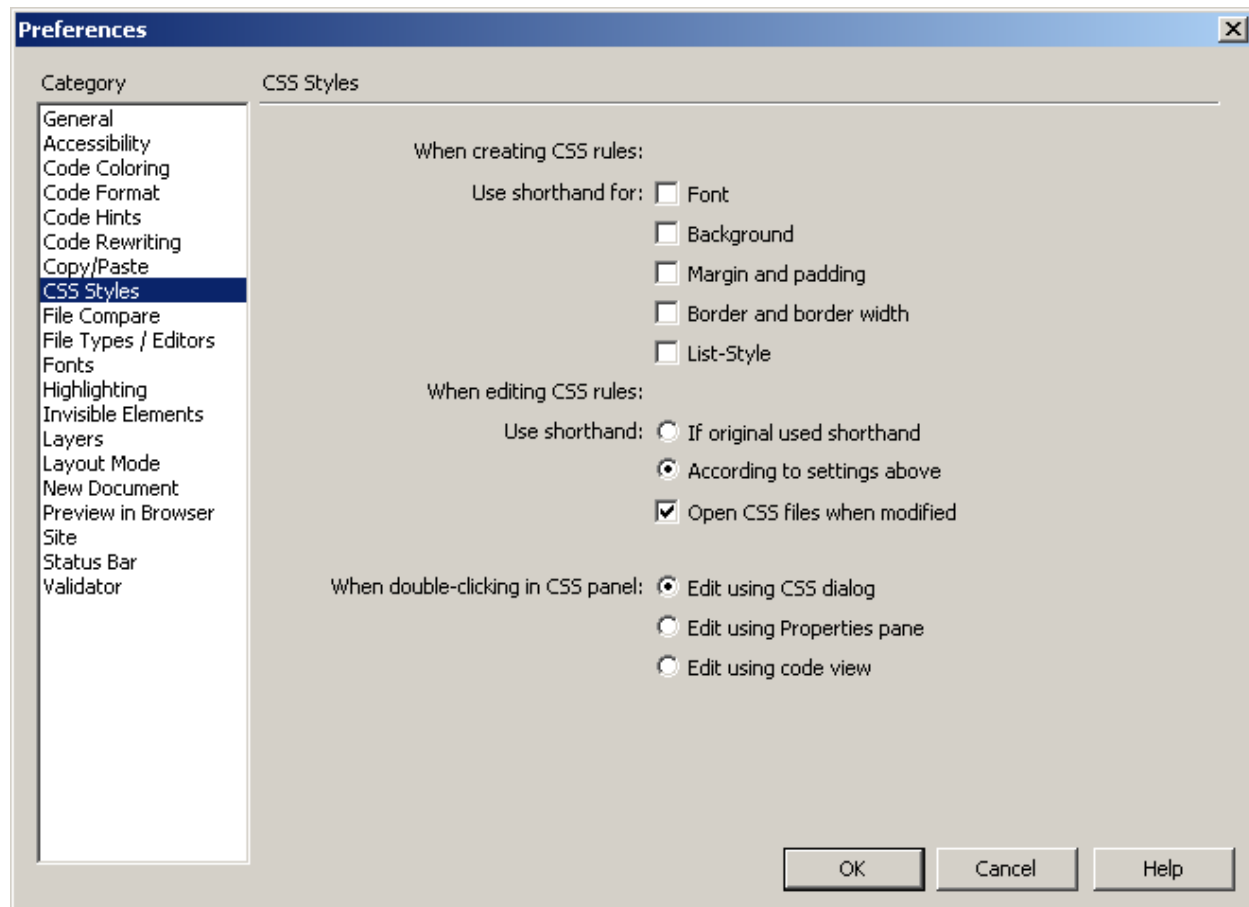



Figure 9: Changing the CSS Styles Preferences

Once you have this option checked, click OK.

Attaching an Existing Style Sheet

If your website already has an existing style sheet, and you want to attach it to a new page you are working on, following these steps:

1. Open the web page you want to attach the style sheet to (if the page doesn't exist yet, create it).
2. Click the small icon at the bottom of your CSS Panel that looks like this:  (it is labeled "Attach Style Sheet"). Click that icon and you will see the following dialogue window:

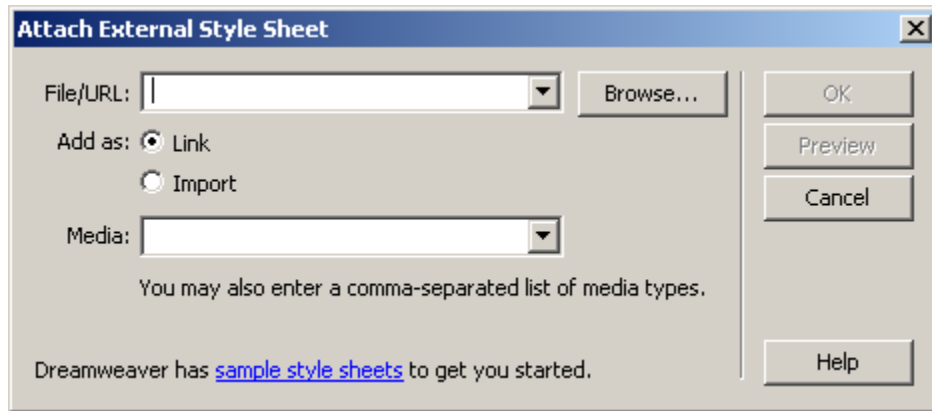


Figure 10: The Attach External Style Sheet Dialogue Window

Browse to the external style sheet file you want to attach and click OK. Note the option to add the style sheet as a link or an import. Under Media, choose "all" (note that you can have different style sheets for different types of media). Click OK.

Creating a New External Style Sheet

You can create a blank external style sheet by clicking on the **File** drop-down menu and choosing **New**. You will see the following dialogue window:

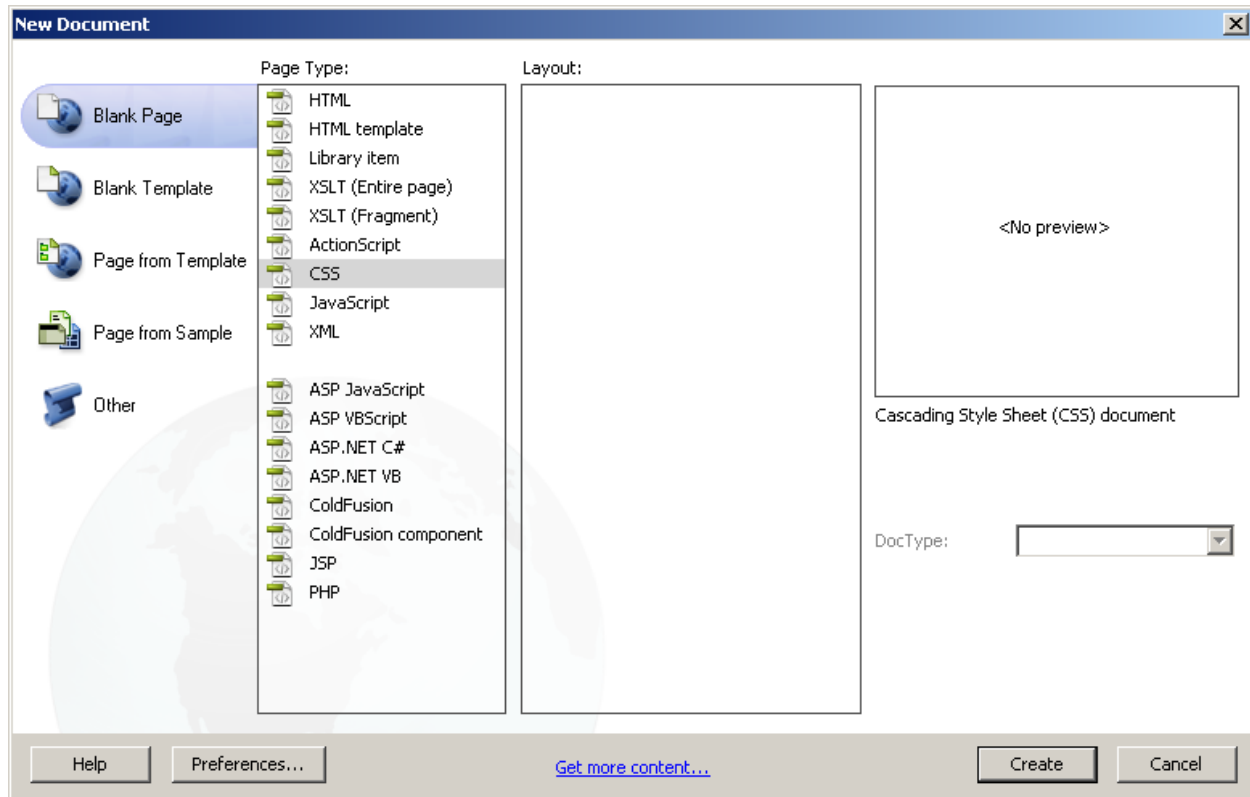



Figure 11: The New Document Dialogue window

Notice that I have selected CSS from the list of Blank Page types in the center of the dialogue window. Click **Create** and a new, blank external style sheet will be created. As you can see, before we add any styles, this document doesn't look like much. Before you go any further, save the file by clicking the Save icon at the top of the window. Name it whatever you would like. I named mine styles.css (note that it must end in .css).

The next step is to create a new HTML document, and attach the newly created style sheet to it. Click **File -> New** again, and this time choose to create an HTML document. Save this file with the .html extension.

The next step is to attach your external style sheet to your HTML document. Click the "Attach Style Sheet" icon () again. This will bring up the "Attach External Style Sheet" dialogue window, where you can navigate to the external style sheet file you just created.

Adding a New Style Rules to Your New Style Sheet

Open the blank HTML and CSS files that we created a few minute ago. Make sure your cursor is in the HTML file. Now let's add a style for all the level-1 headings in our site:

In your CSS Panel, click the **New CSS Style** icon (). You will see the following dialogue window:

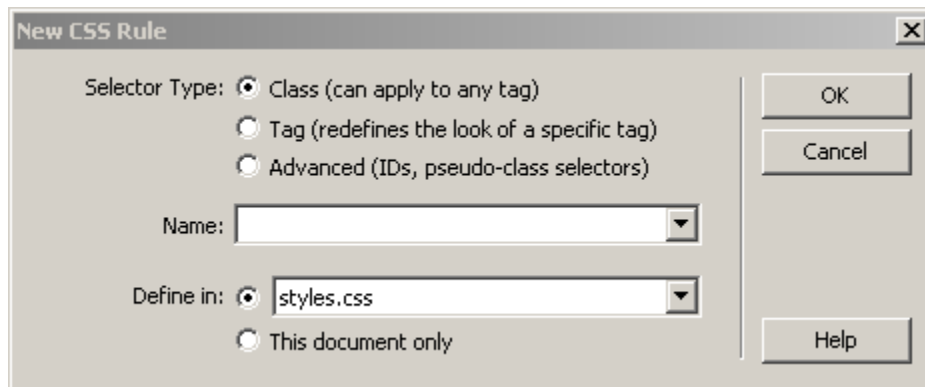


Figure 12: The New CSS Rule Dialogue Window

The first choice to make is whether this style is a *class*, a *tag*, or *advanced* (we will ignore advanced today). A *class* style is one that can be applied to any HTML element, while a *tag* style is one for a particular HTML element. Since level-1 headings are a particular HTML element (h1), we will choose Tag:

Next, choose the HTML tag we want to apply our style to from the list under **Tag**. In this case, we choose h1:

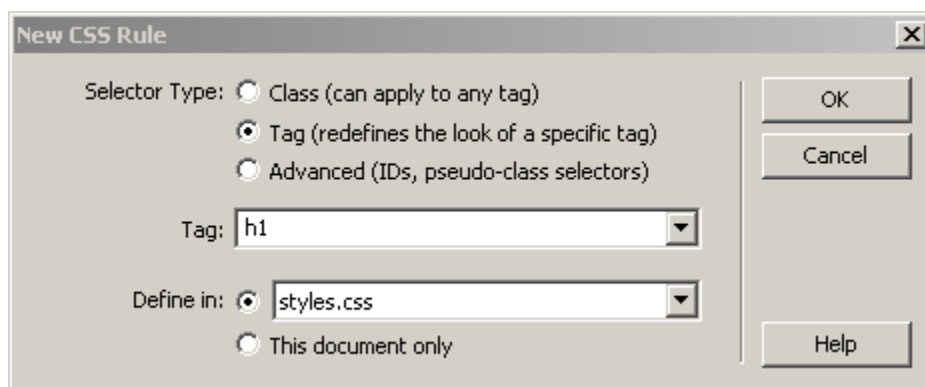


Figure 13: The New CSS Style Dialogue Window with the h1 tag chosen

Notice near the bottom of this dialogue window we choose to define our style in the external style sheet (that I named styles.css) or in this document only. Since we want the style to apply to all the pages in our site, we choose styles.css. Click OK. A new dialogue window will appear:

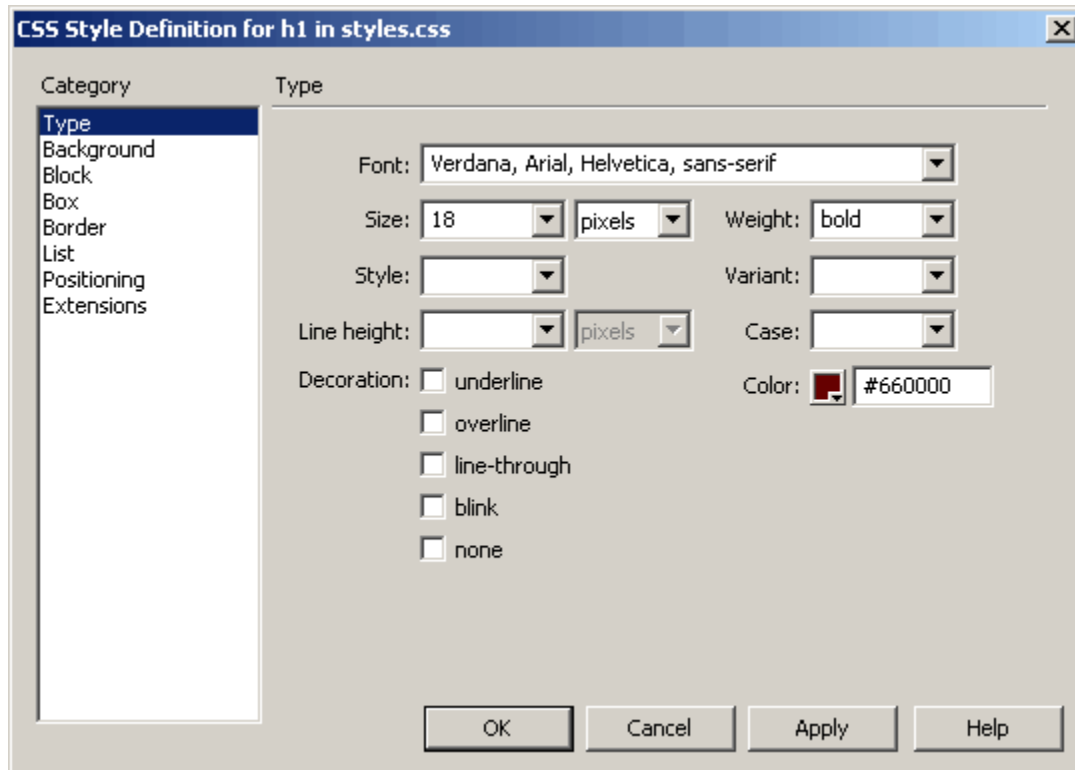


Figure 14: The CSS Style Definition Dialogue Window

Here is where we define the style. I have assigned a font family, font size, font weight (bold) and a font color. Notice that there are many categories of styles to choose from on the left. You can give your headings a background color, borders, etc. Many of these styles may be unfamiliar to you, but they are fun to play around with. Once I am done, I click OK.

Now, back in your document window, type some text. Then select it and change its format to Heading 1 in the Properties Panel. The style you created will be applied.

Dreamweaver's Sample Style Sheets

You may have noticed when we were creating our external style sheet that Dreamweaver comes with sample style sheets. Let's take a look at them. Go to **File -> New** once again and this time choose the **Page from Sample -> CSS Style Sheets** category on the left hand side:

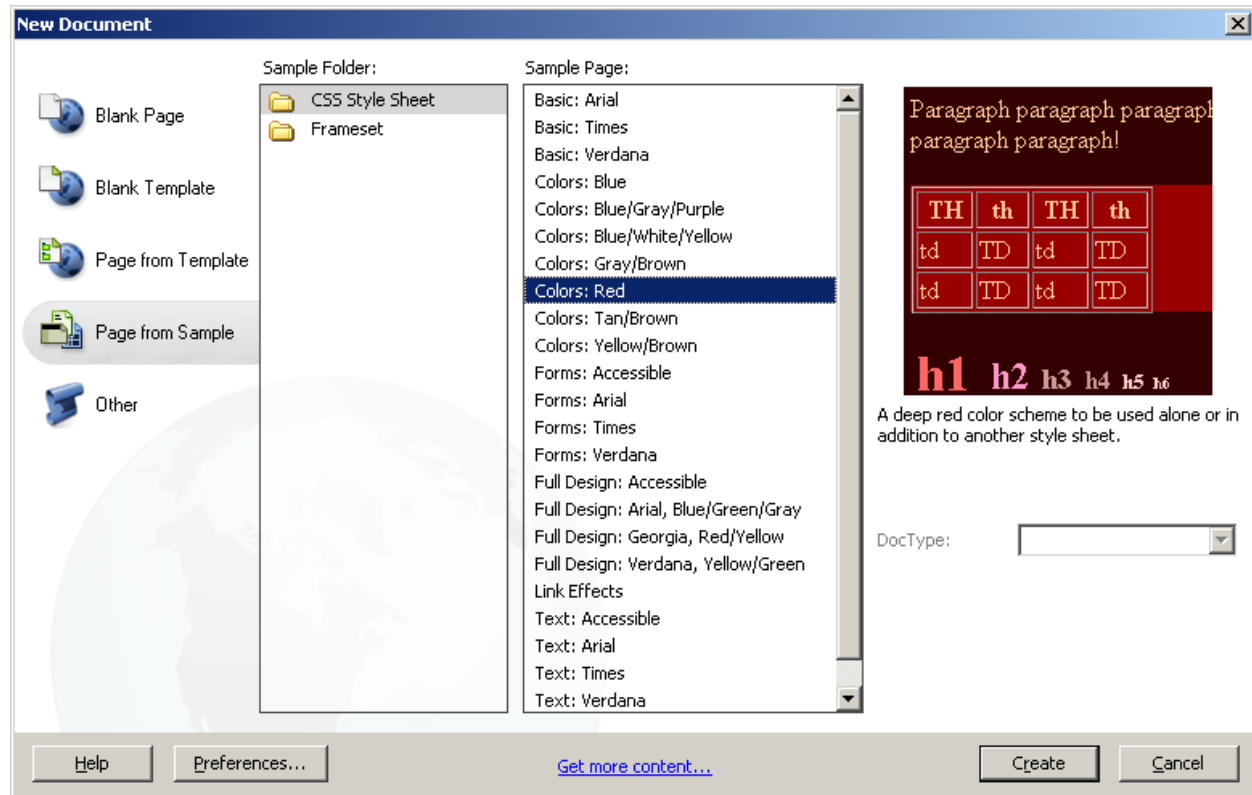


Figure 15: Viewing Dreamweaver's Sample Style Sheets in the New Document Dialogue Window

You can select a style sheet from the center column of this dialogue window, and see a sample of it in the right-hand column.

More interesting than these are Dreamweaver's **Blank Page** designs, which create an html page with an embedded style sheet:

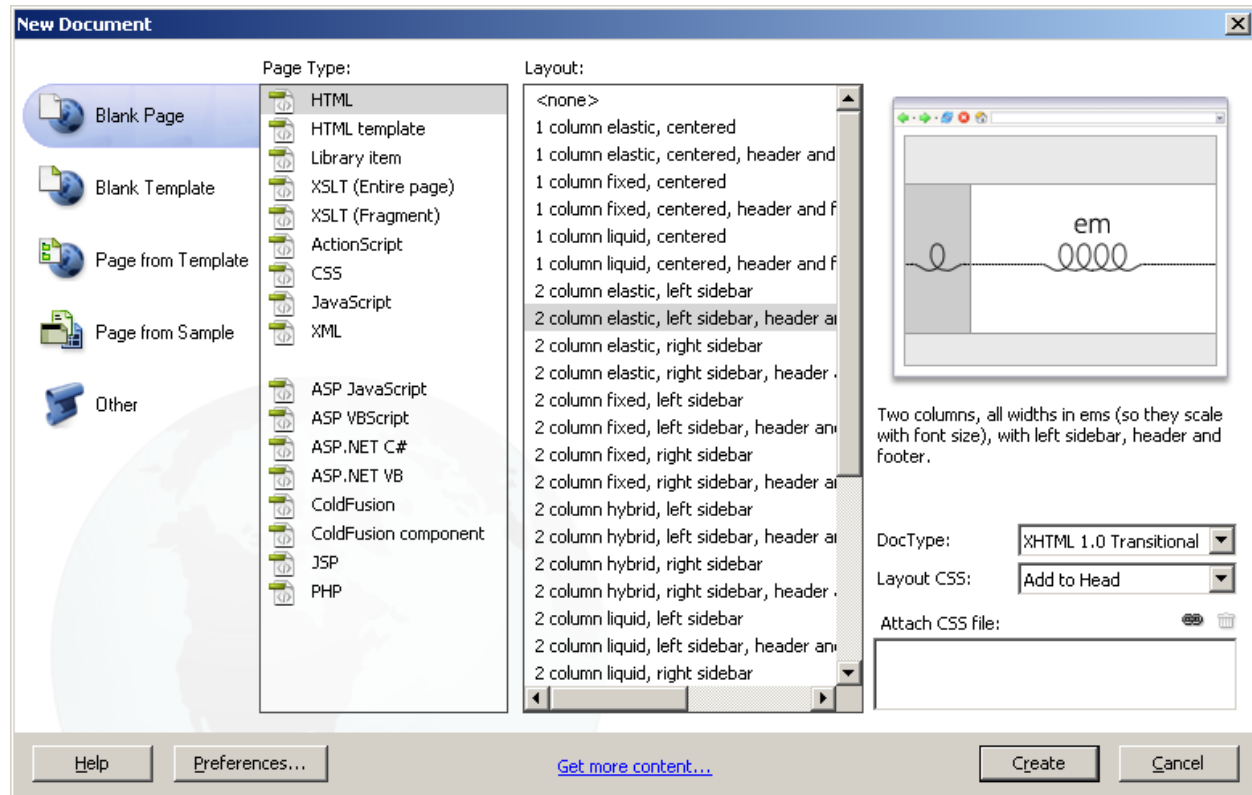


Figure 16: Viewing Dreamweaver's Blank Page Designs in the New Document Dialogue Window

As you can see, these designs are even more elaborate. Go ahead and choose one of these designs, and click Create.

Editing an Existing Style Rule Using the "Current" Button in the CSS Panel

You can access all of the styles in your style sheet via the CSS Panel. But sometimes you want to look to find and edit a particular style. An easy way to do this is with the "Current" button in the CSS Panel.

Highlight an element in the HTML file you just created using Dreamweaver's designs. Then click on the **Current** button in the CSS Panel:

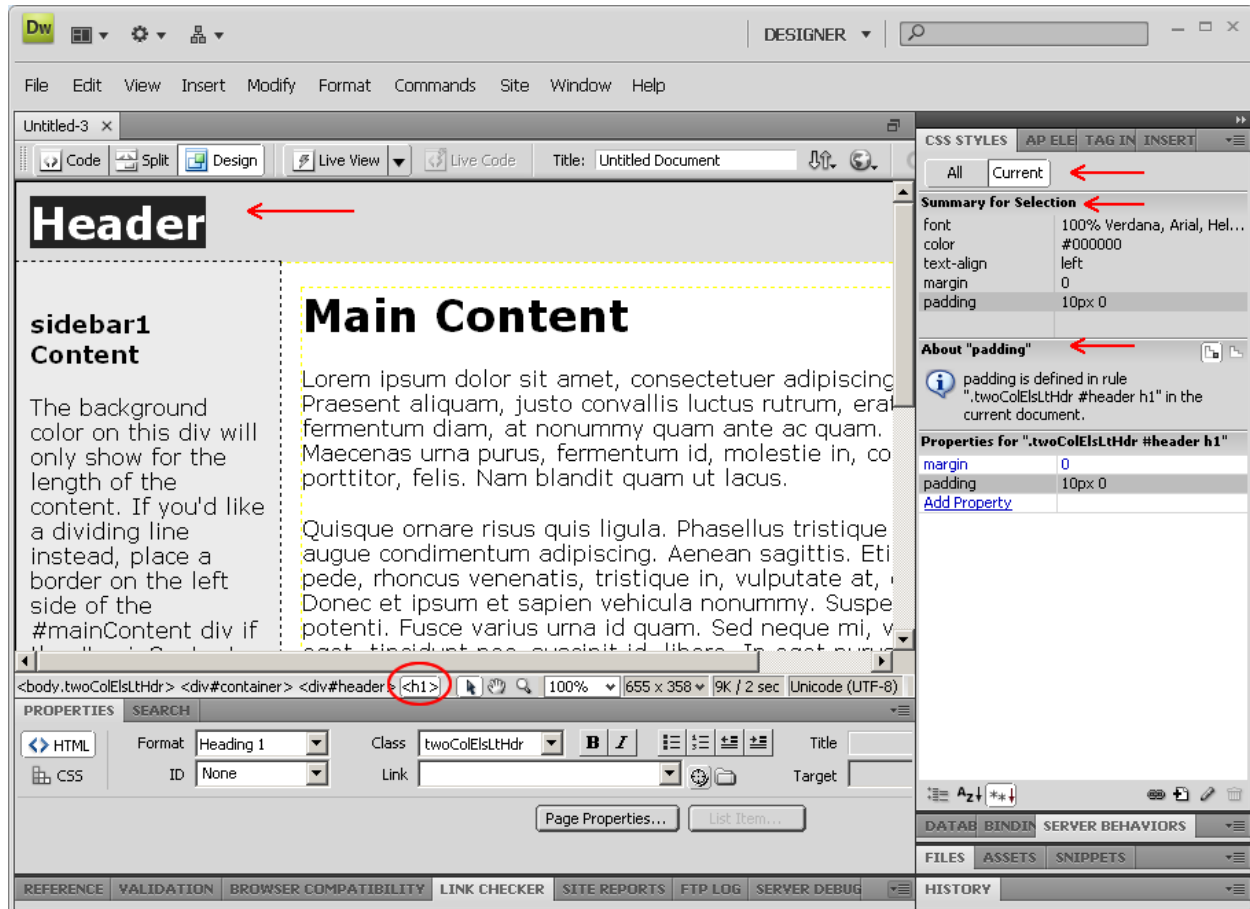


Figure 17a: Finding the right CSS property to change using the Current CSS Tab of the CSS Panel

Let's say that I want to change the background color of the header section. In figure 17a I have selected the level-1 heading using the tag selector. The CSS panel is on the right. At the top you see the **Summary for Selection**, or all the rules that apply to the object you have selected on your page. Next are all the **Rules** that are relevant to that selection. You may need to scroll down to view them all. In this case, the background color is not a property that I can edit.

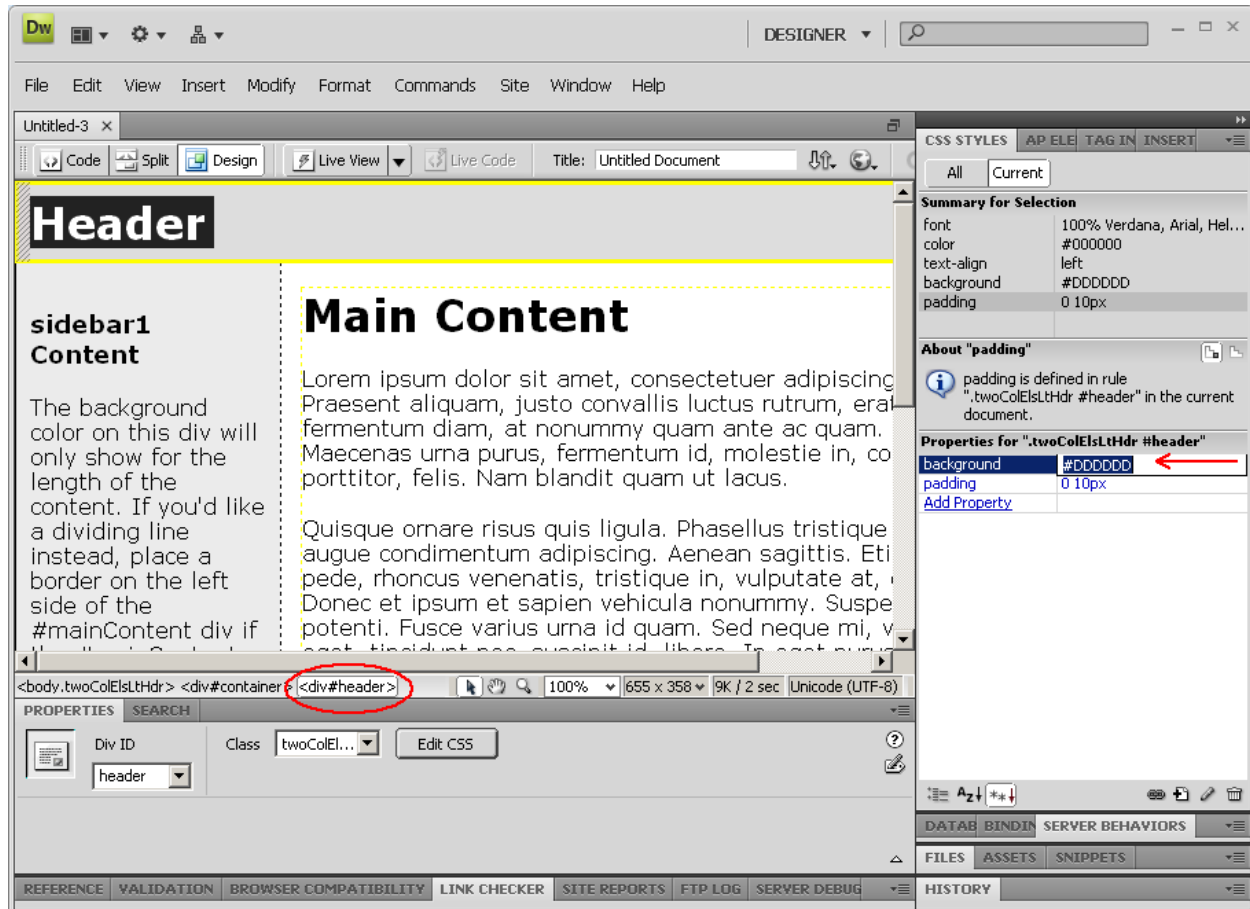


Figure 17b: Changing CSS properties via the Current CSS Tab of the CSS Panel

In figure 17b I have selected `div#header` in the tag selector. This selects the entire header division. Now the background color property is editable in the CSS panel. You can change any of these styles by clicking on them and making your change.

Using the Reference Panel to Learn More about a Property

Being able to find and change a particular style is all well and good, but exactly what should you change? There are dozens of options for every style Rule, and unless you've studied CSS, you don't know what they all mean. This is where the **Reference Panel** in the **Code Panel** comes in to play.

Click the **Window** drop-down menu at the top of your screen and make sure **Reference** is checked. The Reference panel will appear below your **Properties** panel. Click the carrot next to the Book text box and you will see that there are a great many reference books available to you via Adobe Dreamweaver:

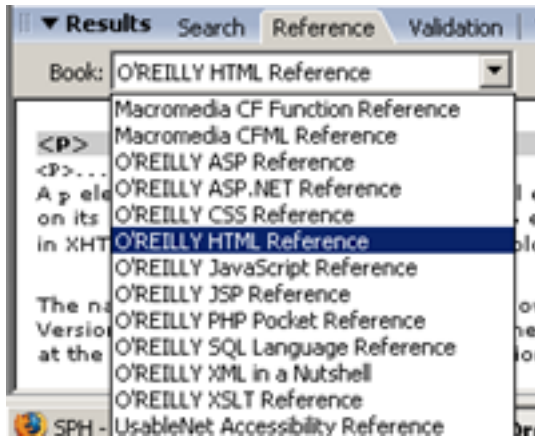


Figure 19: The List of References Available under the Code Panel's Reference Tab

Choose the **O'Reilly CSS Reference** (O'Reilly is a well-respected publisher of technology-related books). Now click the carrot next to the word **Style** to see a list of CSS Properties that you can get more information on:

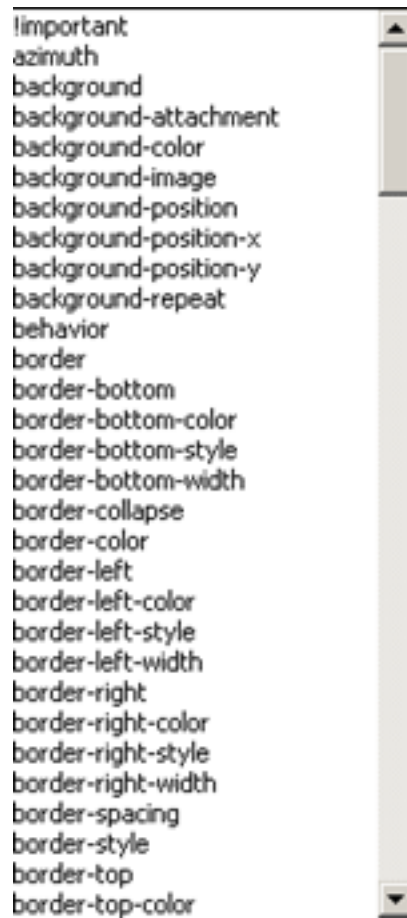


Figure 20: O'Reilly CSS Reference Guide

If you aren't sure what a particular CSS Property is, you can find out more about it here. Another good reference for CSS Properties is Eric Meyer's CSS2 Reference Website at <http://meyerweb.com/eric/css/references/css2ref.html>

Hands-On Exercise: Creating a CSS-based Navigation Section

Before CSS, rollover navigation was created using text images and JavaScript. This made navigation sections inaccessible to people with images turned off, to people with vision disabilities, and to search engines. Today we can easily create this same effect using regular text and styles. Let's create such a navigation section as a hands-on exercise.

Step 1: Create an unordered list containing your navigation. Site navigations are lists of links, so we should treat them like lists. Click the **Unordered List Icon** in the **Properties Panel**. With your cursor in the first bullet point, click the **Insert Link icon** in the **Tool Bar**.

For each link, enter the text that will be clickable, the name of the file being linked to and the title attribute. In the figure below I am adding the final link to my list:

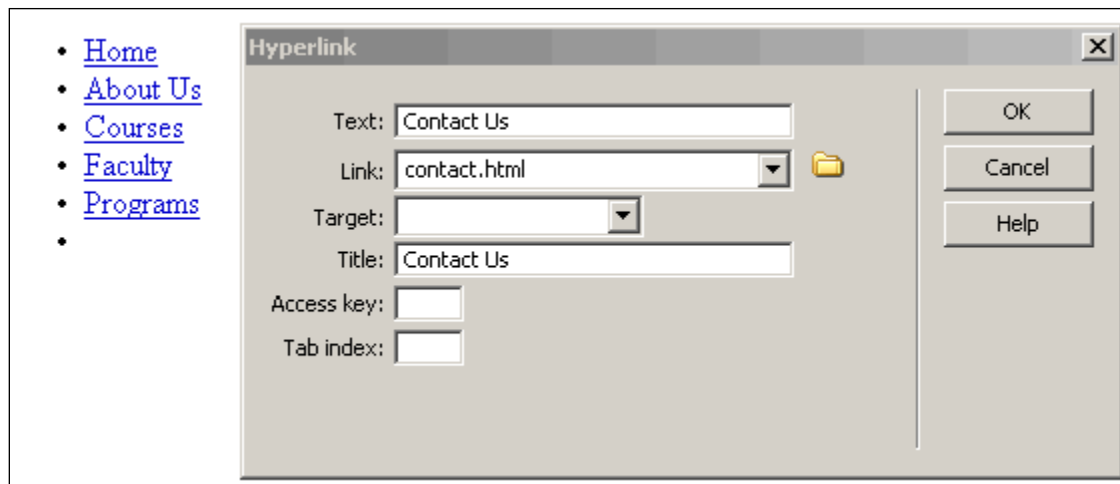



Figure 21: Creating a list of navigational links

Step 2: Create a style for your list. In your CSS Panel, click the **New CSS Style icon** (). You will see the following dialogue window:

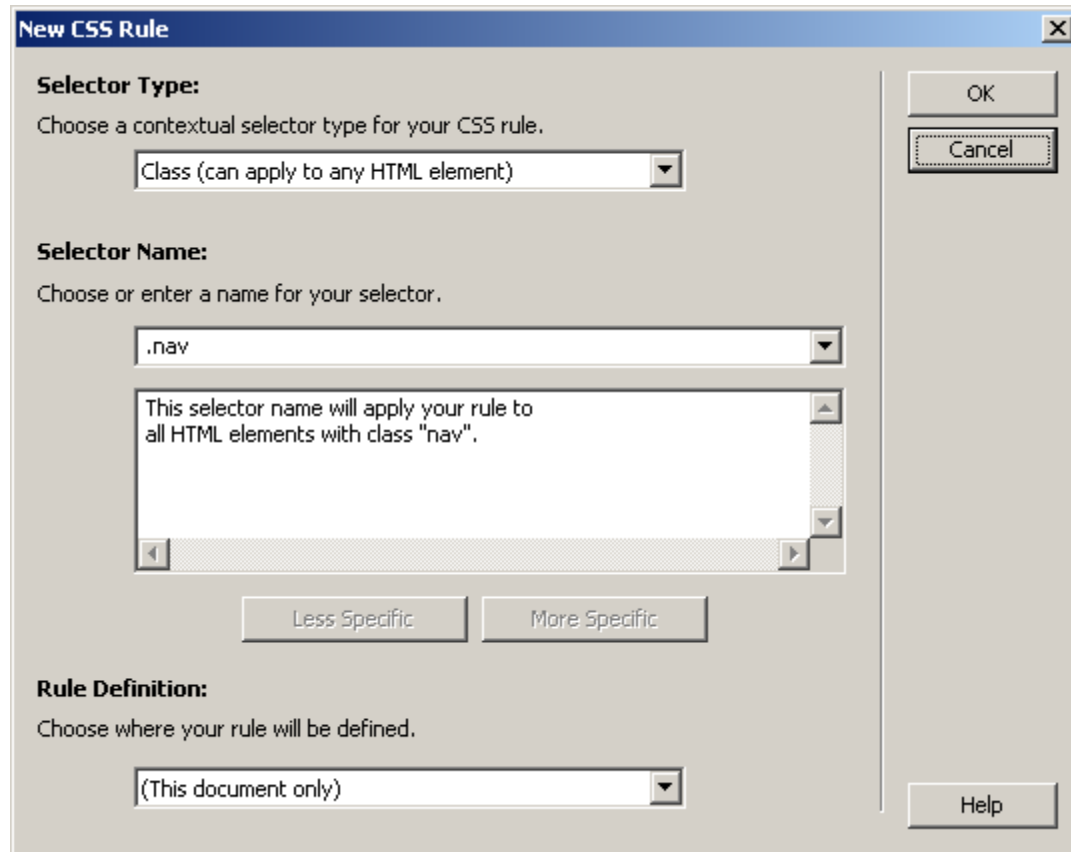


Figure 22: The New CSS Style dialogue window

Choose **Selector Type** Class, and give your class a name. I chose to name my class "nav." For this exercise, choose to define in this document only.

Now it is time to define your style properties. Since we don't want the bullets to show, choose the **List Category** and make the **Type** "none" as shown below.

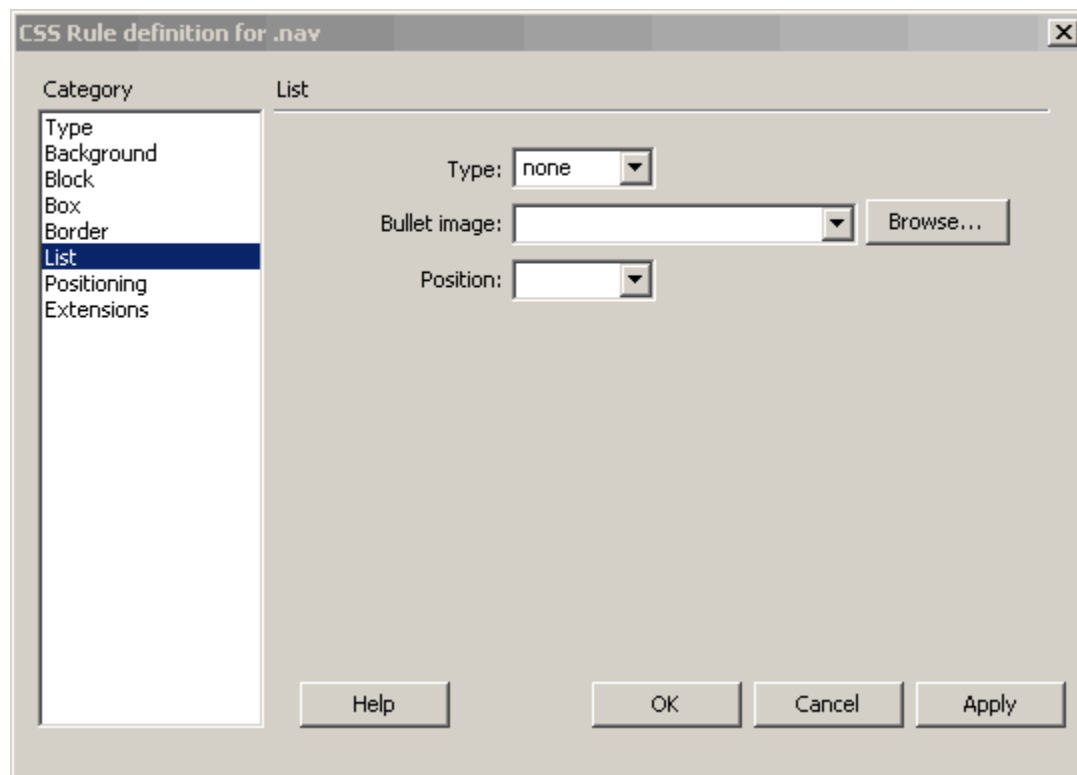


Figure 23: The List category in the CSS Rule Definition dialogue box.

Next, click the **Box Category** and set padding and margin to 0 for all sides:

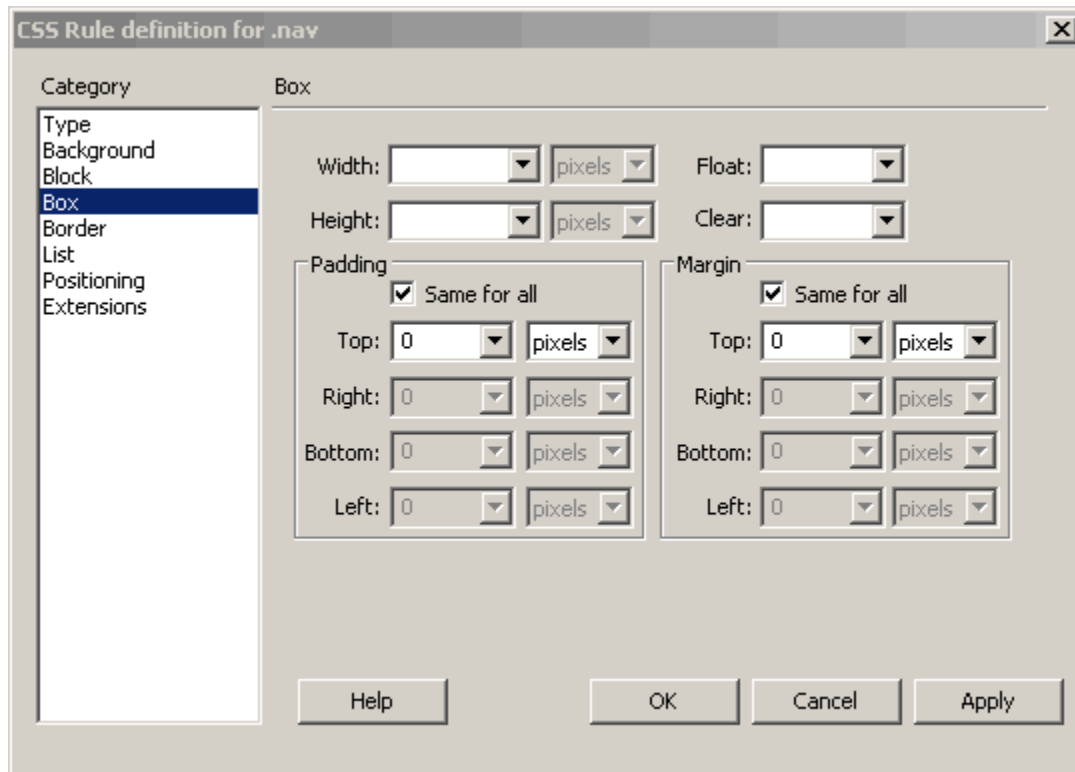


Figure 24: The Box category in the CSS Rule Definition dialogue box.

Click **OK**.

Step 3: Apply the new class you have created to your unordered list: Click the `` tag in the **Tag Selector**, then the **Style** drop-down in the **Properties Panel**. Choose the class you just created.

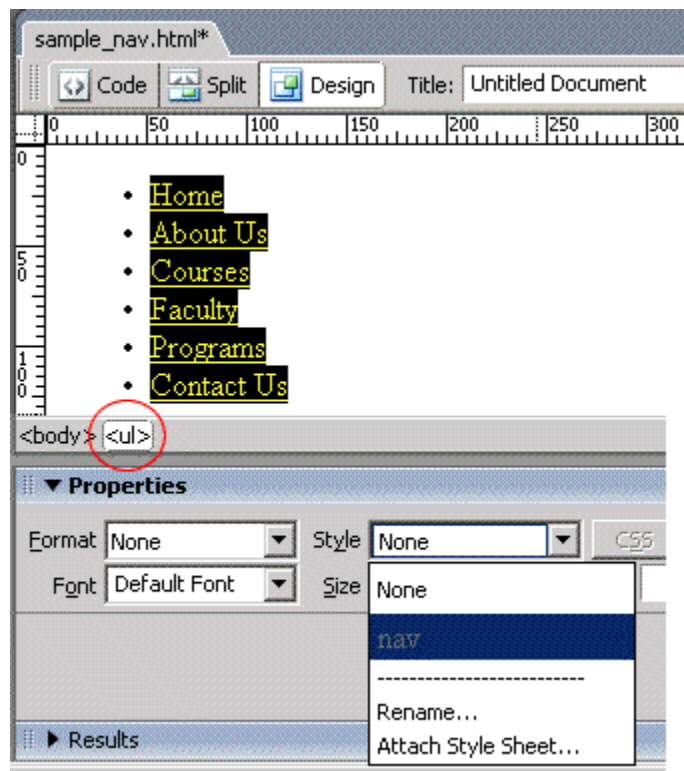



Figure 25: Applying your new class to your list

Step 4: Create styles for the links in your list. In order to make our links display correctly, we need to assign more styles such as text color, background color, borders, etc. Click on an <a> tag in the **Tag Selector** and then click the **New CSS Style** icon () in the CSS panel. The selector will automatically show up correctly as .nav li a. This means that the new rule is for links that are inside of list items that are inside of un-ordered lists that have the CSS style “nav” applied to it.

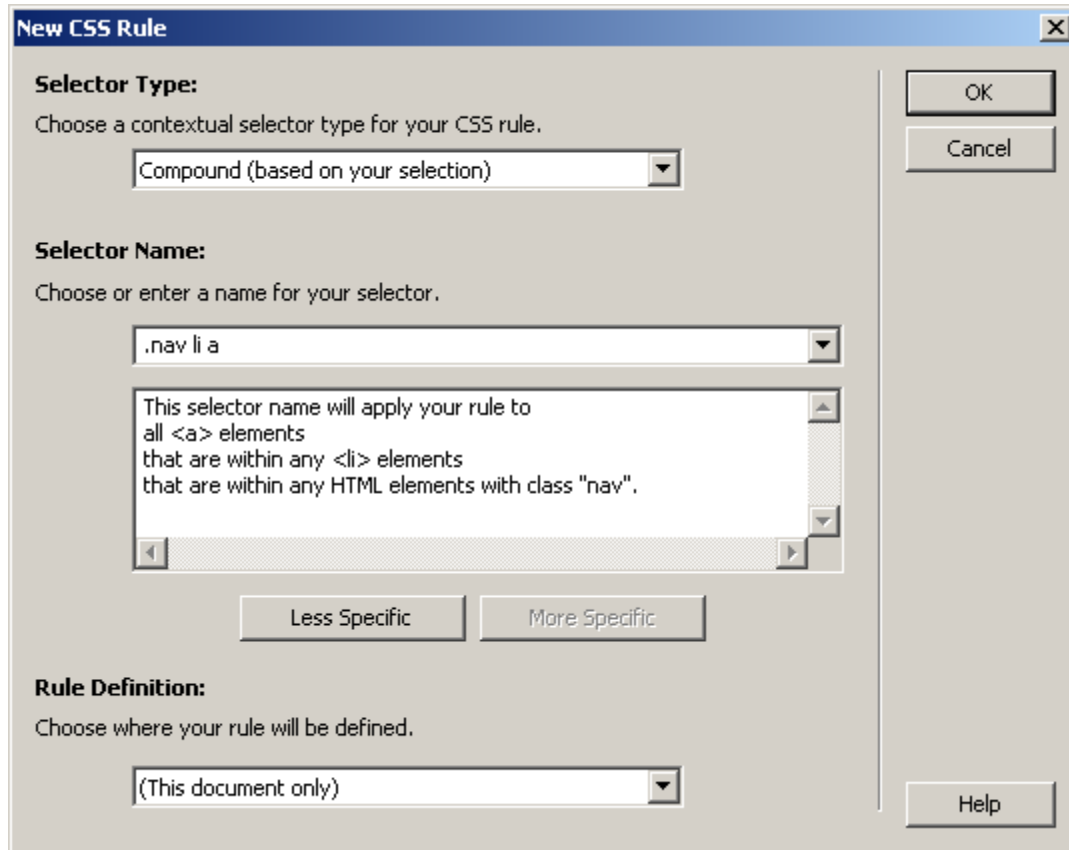


Figure 26: Adding a new rule

Click OK, then choose the **Block Category**. We want to set the *display* property to *block* as shown in figure 27. This will make each link fill the entire space of the list item.

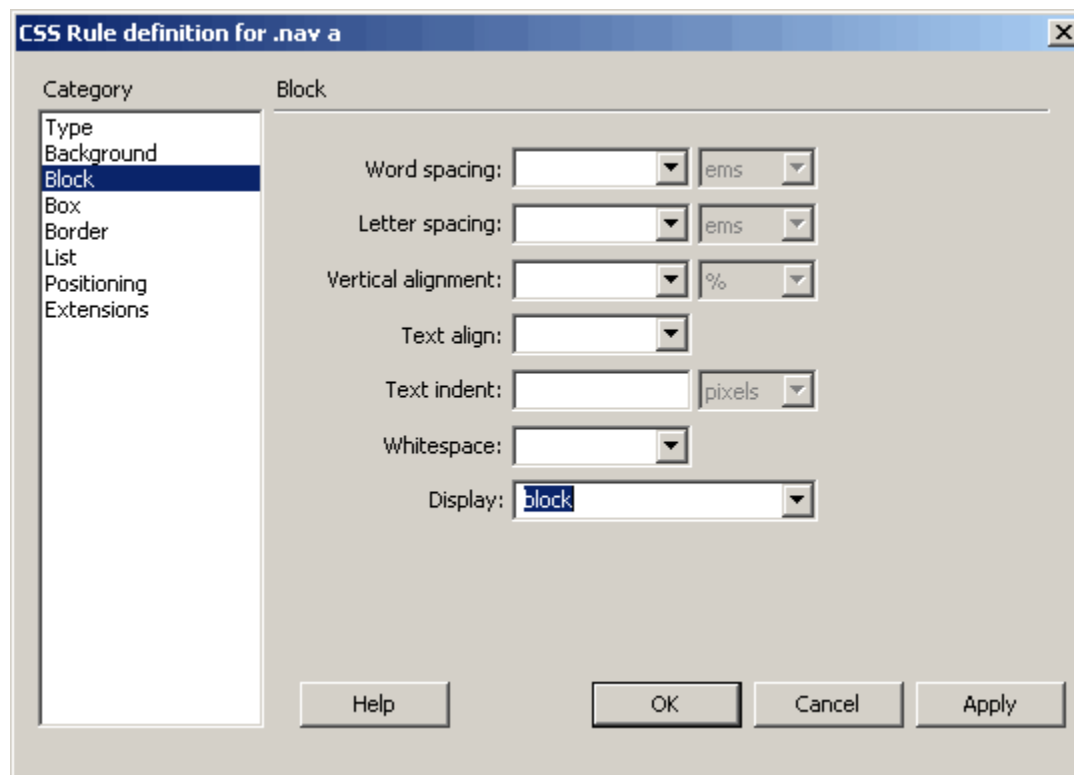


Figure 27: Setting the display property to block.

Next, click the **Background Category** and assign a background color:

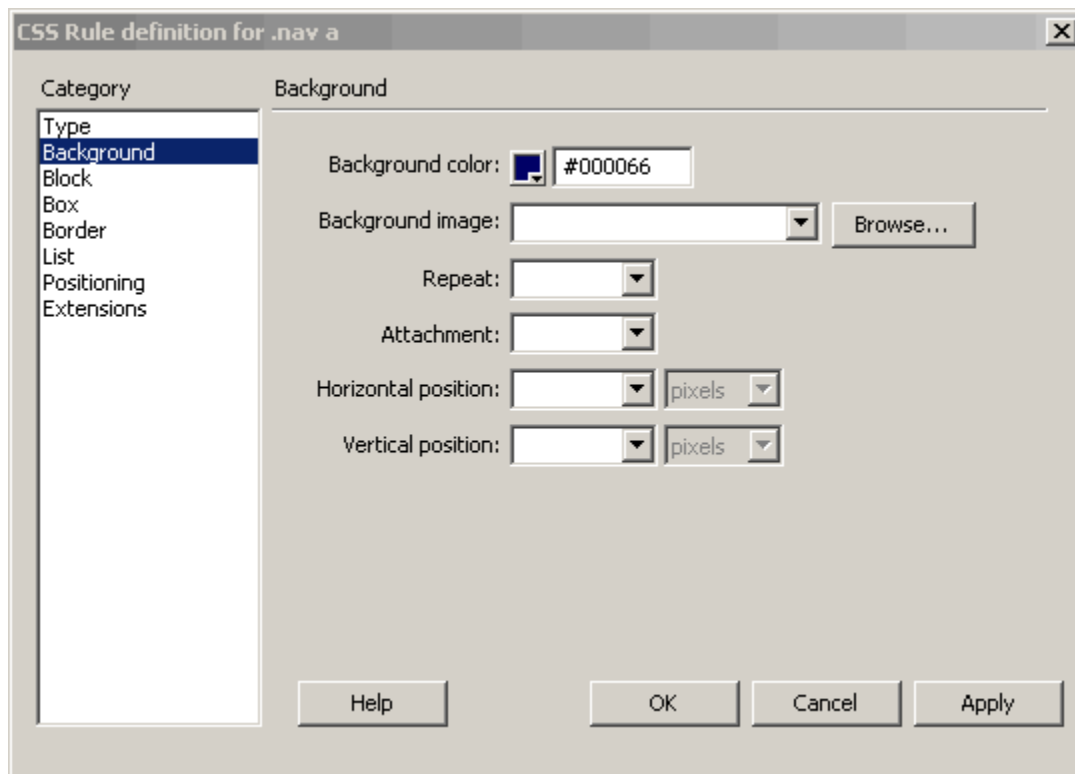


Figure 28: Setting a background color

Next, click the **Type Category** and set a font family, font size and font color. Set text-decoration to none so that your links are not underlined.

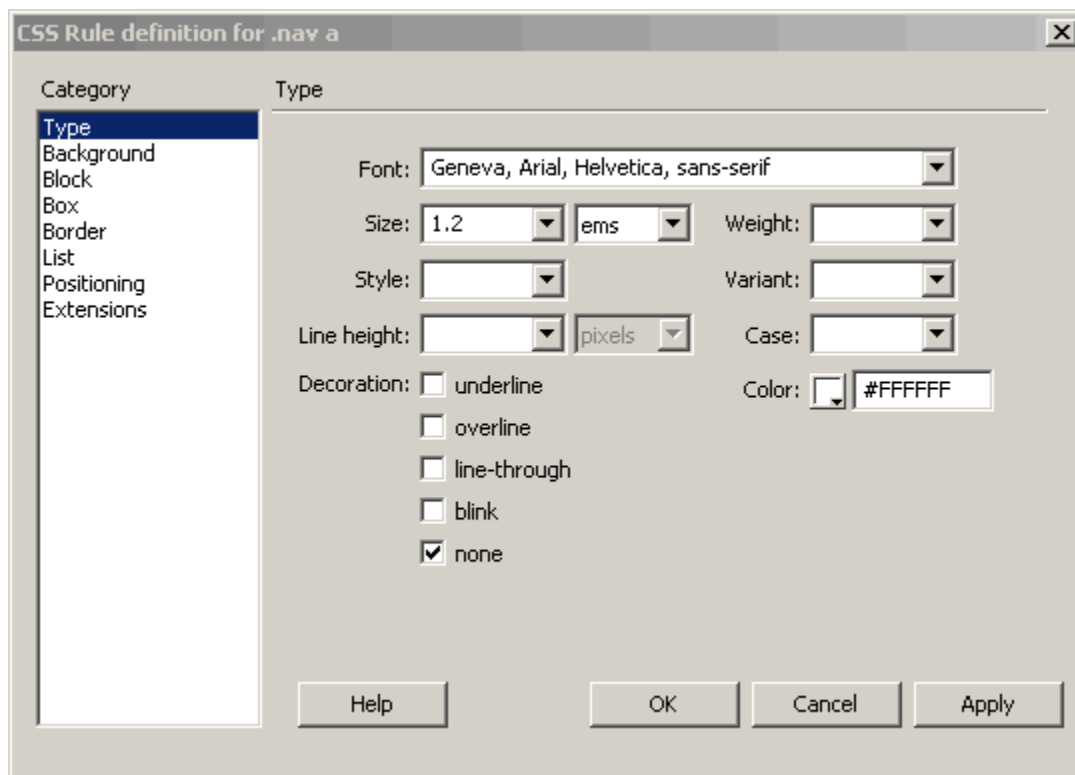


Figure 29: Setting a font family, font size, font color and text decoration

Next, click the **Box Category** and set width and padding properties. I want my navigation section to be 200 pixels wide, and I want there to be 5 pixels of padding on all sides:

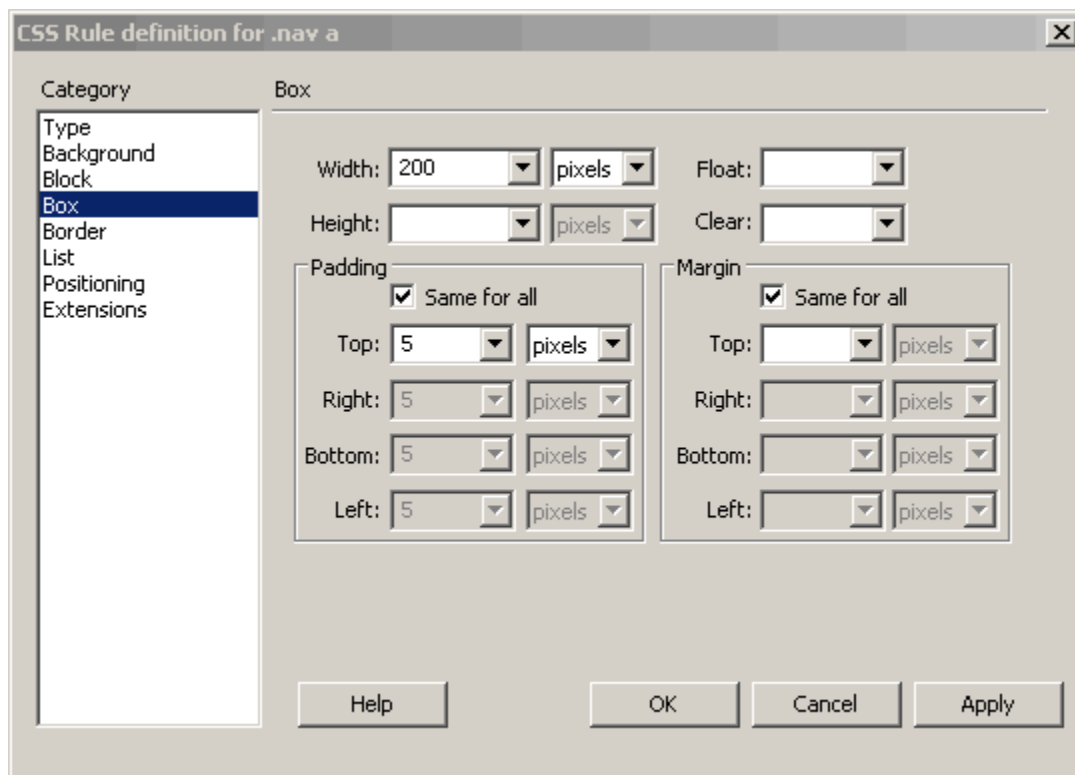


Figure 30: Setting the width and padding

Finally, click the **Border Category** and give your navigational elements a border:

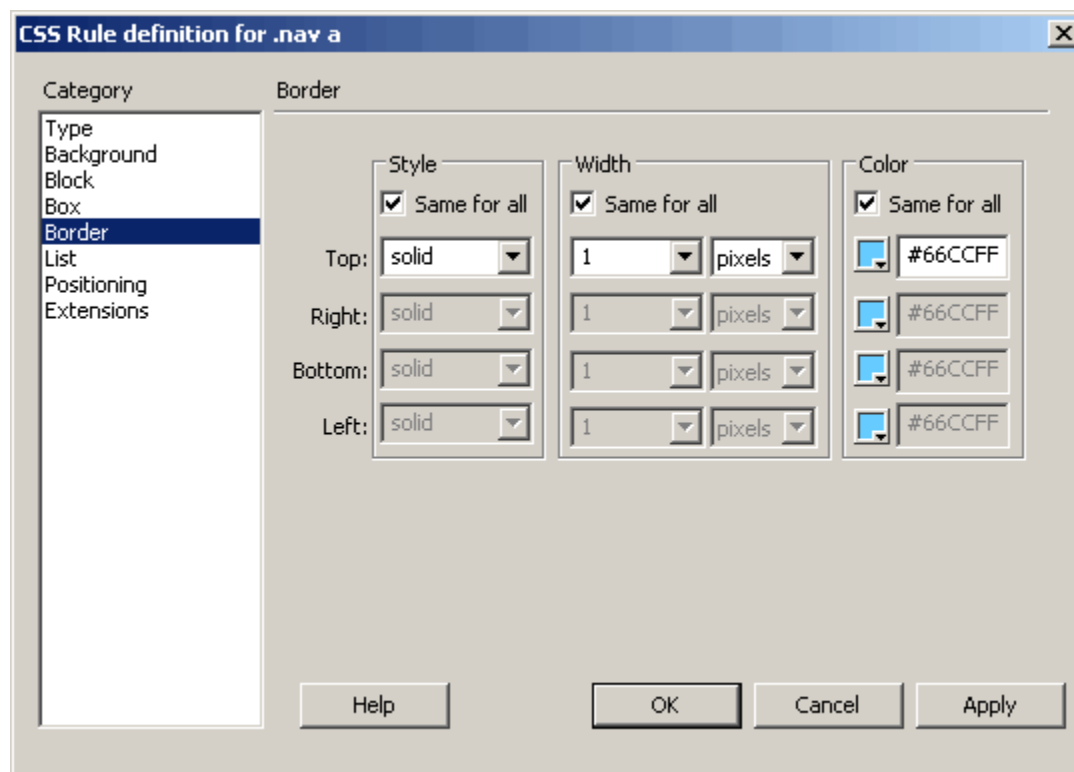



Figure 31: Setting a border

Click the **OK Button**. Your list should now look something like this:



Figure 32: The list with our new styles applied.

Step 5: Add a hover rule. In order to achieve the rollover effect, we need to create a special rule for the hover state of our links, which is triggered by the user rolling their mouse of the links. Again, click <a> in the **Tag Selector**, then click the **New CSS Style** icon () in the CSS panel again. Add ":hover" to the end of the class name, as shown in figure 32:

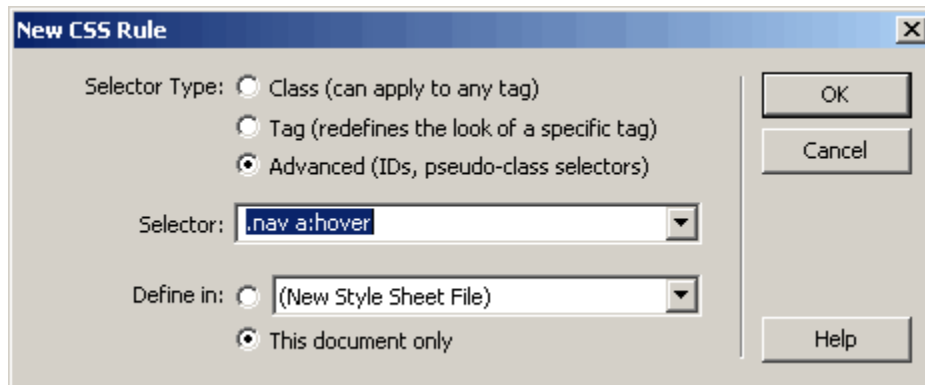


Figure 32: Creating a New CSS Rule for .nav a:hover

Let's change the background color on hover. Click **OK**, then the **Background Category**. Add a new background color. Click **OK** again.

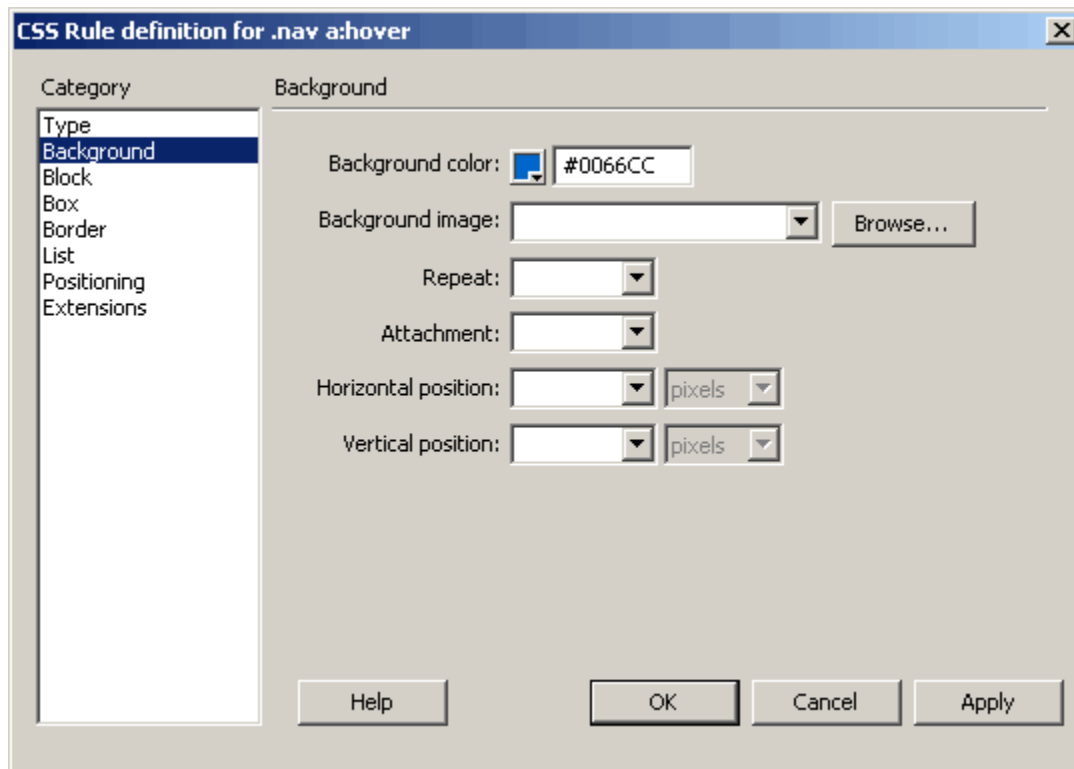


Figure 33: Setting a background color for .nav a:hover

Save your file, then preview it in your browser. It should look something like this with the "Courses" link being rolled over:

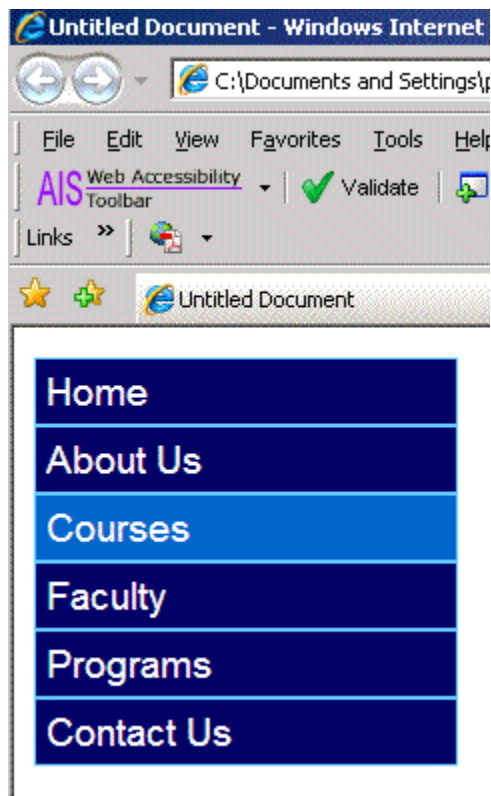


Figure 34: The file viewed in Internet Explorer with the mouse over "Courses."

CSS Resources

CSS in the Adobe Dreamweaver Developer Center:

<http://www.adobe.com/devnet/dreamweaver/css.html>

CSS2 Reference: <http://meyerweb.com/eric/css/references/css2ref.html>

The World Wide Web website on CSS: <http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/>

Books by Eric Meyer, <http://meyerweb.com/eric/books/>

Zen Garden: The Beauty of CSS Design: <http://www.csszengarden.com/>