**Summary**

The term *web server* can refer to hardware or software, or both of them working together.

1. On the hardware side, a web server is a computer that stores web server software and a website's component files. (for example, HTML documents, images, CSS stylesheets, and JavaScript files) A web server connects to the Internet and supports physical data interchange with other devices connected to the web.
2. On the software side, a web server includes several parts that control how web users access hosted files. At a minimum, this is an *HTTP server*. An HTTP server is software that understands [URLs](https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Glossary/URL) (web addresses) and [HTTP](https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Glossary/HTTP) (the protocol your browser uses to view webpages). An HTTP server can be accessed through the domain names of the websites it stores, and it delivers the content of these hosted websites to the end user's device.

At the most basic level, whenever a browser needs a file that is hosted on a web server, the browser requests the file via HTTP. When the request reaches the correct (hardware) web server, the (software) *HTTP server* accepts the request, finds the requested document, and sends it back to the browser, also through HTTP. (If the server doesn't find the requested document, it returns a [404](https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTTP/Status/404) response instead.)

To publish a website, you need either a static or a dynamic web server.

A **static web server**, or stack, consists of a computer (hardware) with an HTTP server (software). We call it "static" because the server sends its hosted files as-is to your browser.

A **dynamic web server** consists of a static web server plus extra software, most commonly an *application server* and a *database*. We call it "dynamic" because the application server updates the hosted files before sending content to your browser via the HTTP server.

For example, to produce the final webpages you see in the browser, the application server might fill an HTML template with content from a database. Sites like MDN or Wikipedia have thousands of webpages. Typically, these kinds of sites are composed of only a few HTML templates and a giant database, rather than thousands of static HTML documents. This setup makes it easier to maintain and deliver the content.