

Reflection Paper Introduction to Web Development (Q360)

What I Have Learned

When I decided to take this course, I really had no idea what to expect because this was the first time I had ever taken an online class. Truthfully, I was not too concerned about the content of the course because I have worked with HTML before and I had already developed four other web sites. I was debating on whether or not to jump up to the next course and skip the introduction, but I decided that although I had some prior experience, I had been mainly self taught and felt as if I was likely missing some key knowledge about web site design. In retrospect, I am very grateful that I made that decision because there was a great deal of the material that was new to me.

First of all, I had never really studied the design elements of web development. Because of my artistic background, many issues related to design were intuitive to me, such as color scheme, consistency, and balanced usage of space. Still, I had never examined those issues extrinsically, and it was very helpful to discuss design matters in tangible terms. I also enjoyed and learned a lot from the process of examining good and bad examples of web site design. There have always been things that have annoyed me on the Internet, but I have never taken the time to identify what those things were and why they were annoying to me. By doing so, I was able to consciously avoid including bad design elements in my own site.

Another issue that was very interesting to me was accessibility, mostly because I had never thought about it before at all. I guess I just assumed that visually impaired people never use the Internet. By examining accessibility issues and by learning about the tools that are available to assist disabled Internet users, I became aware of the wide variety of people that I need to consider in web site design, at least in a small degree. Still, I am aware of much more now than I was before and I will therefore be a better web designer.

Although I have designed using HTML before, I did not realize before this class that there were so many incarnations of HTML and how different each of those versions were. One of the most surprising things to me was that different browsers will even invent their own tags that are not an official part of the HTML language. I used to be a Netscape user and I even used Netscape Composer to create a few of my web pages, but upon reexamining those pages, I can see that various browsers would parse the information much differently, especially when Composer would insert a Netscape only tag. I was also surprised by what jumbled mess the HTML code turned out to be by using Composer. Basically, I have been converted to using raw HTML, though I would certainly be interested in finding a good HTML editor. Also, I know that the advanced course uses a different WYSIWYG editor, so I may be converted back someday, but with my current level of knowledge, I'm just going to stick with the raw code. Not only does it keep a much cleaner document of code, but I have definitely experienced a great sense of accomplishment by being able to write such complicated and neat things by using the most basic program in Windows. It makes me feel as if my site is actually my creation rather than a piece of software's.

Perhaps one of the most exciting things that I learned about in this class is Cascading

Style Sheets. In fact, I am extremely anxious to learn more about them. I know that we just barely brushed the surface in this class, and even now I wanted to do more than was contained in the book, so I looked up some other neat tricks on the Internet and experimented with what I could do. I was really excited about the use of the external style sheet because I could apply so many changes to my entire site at one time. When I was working on my final project, I spent hours tweaking the color scheme. I changed the colors of the links at least a dozen times. That process would have taken me much longer if I had to apply my changes to each individual page. My external style sheet allowed me to trial and error to my hearts content. Honestly, I just can't wait to learn more about it.

There are other things that I am anxious to learn about, too. I have used JavaScript in the past, but only cut and paste from free online Script libraries. I would really like to know how to write my own script. Java is also of interest to me, but I have heard that it is a very large and complicated language. I am especially interested in Dynamic HTML and I will probably read the chapter in the book about it before I return it to the person I borrowed it from. With all of these things that I am curious about, I most assuredly will be taking the Advanced class as soon as I can, which will likely be in the Spring.

My Web Site Development

I came into this class with a pretty clear idea of the project that I would use for my final web site, but I really had no idea how it would turn out. I have to say that I am very pleased with the results and I am honestly a little surprised by what I was able to create. I briefly mentioned some of the measures that I took to test my site in the Evaluation paper, but I noticed that this assignment asks for a little more.

Although frames were not required, I have always been fascinated by them, and since I have had prior HTML experience, I was determined to try something new. I also wanted to design my own graphics for my site, which proved to be a very long, but enjoyable process. I started with my program logo. I searched through several resources and spent a couple of days using trial and error before I came up with something that I liked. Finally, I ended up using the tools at flamingtext.com to create the text. Since I had already decided on the background for my site, I was able to import my background into my logo so that the text would blend seamlessly into the background. After finalizing my text, I added the "Sullivan Middle School" text to the logo and the Eagle mascot I had created last year, though the mascot needed color added to it. I pulled the "Proud Home of the Sullivan Eagles" logo right off of the district web site. I also created my own buttons for the various pages, though I honestly am still not happy with them and I will probably redo them in the future.

Once I had all of my graphics ready, I sat down one Sunday and decided to create my frameset and navigation. Using the book as a heavy crutch, I started by creating basic HTML files for all of the pages in my site, though I left the content of pages blank except for a title and header. After about 8 hours, I finally had my frameset working with the navigation buttons on the left, the logo on the top, and the links to each page working correctly. I figured that the hardest part was over and that I just needed to add the content of the pages, but I was mistaken.

I have to admit that I approached this site with a bit too much of a perfectionist attitude. Although the site content took me only a few days, once I set about testing my site on various places such as websitegarage.com and doctor-html.com, I just could not leave well enough alone.

I ended up spending days reducing graphic file sizes to facilitate quick downloading, tweaking my code, adding tables and additional navigation menus, and striving for perfection. I even went to the W3C validator tool and tested my site there. Although my site contained only a couple of HTML errors which I easily fixed to make my site HTML 4.0 compliant, I wasn't happy until my each and every page on my site qualified as XHTML 1.0 Transitional. I also made sure that my index.htm page was XHTML 1.0 Frameset compliant, too. I know that was probably over the top, but I am pleased with myself that I was able to do it, a fact evident by the proud display of the "XHTML 1.0 Checked" logo on each page of my site. Through all of this testing, I also tried to make sure that my site was viewable on as many browsers as possible and that all of my spelling was correct.

Overall, I realize that I likely went way beyond the requirements of this assignment, but I did not create this site to just to get a class grade, but to primarily serve as a service to my students, parents, and community. I can't describe how much fun I had with it, but also how relieved I was when it was finished. I look forward to maintaining and improving this site as I continue to learn more.

Learning Teams

I must say that I am surprised by how well I got to know the members of my learning team. One thing I really enjoyed about this class over the other I am currently taking is that many of our assignments encourage interaction with each other. Our team really interacted well with each other. I do feel bad because I think [name omitted] felt a little out of his league. He really struggled with the content of this course and we tried to offer him support as much as possible, but he seems to have gotten very frustrated. Overall, however, I think I was working with great people who were very willing to help each other out.