

## Writing for the web

### Introduction

This document is intended as a brief introduction to writing documents in such a fashion as to make their integration into websites as painless and efficient as possible. It is divided into three further sections. First, I discuss briefly what the problem is. Next, I outline a strategy to follow to accomplish our goal. Thirdly, I offer some brief suggestions on how to turn one's web-ready document into one suitable for print. Note: this document supplements the Updating Site document which details how to actually make changes to the SJC website. If after reading this document you are interested in learning further about web site matters at the SJC, the Updating Site document is the next source to consult.

### Problem

Computer users who are not familiar with creating documents suitable for web usage are prone to many pitfalls. This document illustrates these pitfalls and outlines a strategy. These pitfalls make for wasted or unnecessary effort on the part of both those writing the documents and the person who is responsible for implementing their website versions.

Common pitfalls include:

- Using characters that cannot be rendered as-is by web browsers.
- Formatting documents inappropriately
- Including graphics

Yet, many people who wish to contribute to the website have no time or inclination to learn HTML and CSS, two of the languages of the web. This document allows them to participate more effectively without acquiring this knowledge.

### Strategy

In what follows, read through the steps once to get an over-all impression of where to find certain pieces of information, then follow it sequentially until it is necessary to skip a step or two because of its inapplicability to your situation.

1. Decide whether or not the document will also have a print form. If the document is to have a print form, produce that after the web-ready form, rather than the other way around. (See the Web to Print section of this document.)
2. Decide if the document is to contain any equations or any non-Roman based character sets. (E.g., for many Asian or Eastern European languages.) If either is so, please see Keith for further advice – most likely you will type up your document as you would normally for print and produce an Acrobat document.)

3. Open up a text editor and familiarize yourself, if necessary, with using it. Windows ships with Notepad. You can use this; alternatively you may use Textpad, which is available on some of the computers in the office. (If, on the off chance you are using your own MacOS X machine, use TextEdit.) A text editor is very similar in operation to a word processor, except that it does not make use of formatting or similar “prettifying functions” found in word processors.
4. Type up the text of your document only. Do not press enter except twice between paragraphs. (This may result in your window horizontally scrolling. This is fine. The web page structure itself will enforce word wrap, and so on.) If you have a title, please indicate it clearly by placing it within the strings `<h1> . . . </h1>` like this:

```
<h1>Painful Death in Mexico</h1>
```

Otherwise, I will select a title based on your first paragraph when implementing the page. The title bar of the page will contain a similar title to whatever is selected by either of these two methods.

If there are other headings in your document, you may indicate them with `<h2> . . . </h2>` tags. Please note that we have only these two sizes and styles of headings available, as more should be unnecessary in most documents.

5. Please refrain from typing any characters beyond the alphabet, numerals, and the following: `!@#$%^*()-_+=[ ]{}|\|;:,. /?~``

If you wish to type any other character, please consult the following entity list for details on how to type it:

[http://www.w3schools.com/tags/ref\\_entities.asp](http://www.w3schools.com/tags/ref_entities.asp)

Common examples include: `&amp;` for the ampersand, `&eacute;` for an é, etc. Please pay close attention to capitalization: there is a difference between `&eacute;` and `&Eacute;`; - the first of these is an é and the second an É. Helpful tip: once you have one character of the given sort entered as an entity, you can always copy and paste the entity rather than retyping it if that would be faster or easier for you.

6. If you have tables to include, use a well defined structure (e.g. 5 spaces between each cell horizontally) so that Keith can turn your text into an HTML table easily. You may in this case end your lines with a carriage return. If your table is large (say larger than about 10 x 10), please consider breaking it into two or more tables, as otherwise it will not fit nicely in the area allotted to your content on our pages.
7. To type a list, again you may use single carriage returns to break the items. If the list is to have an order and numerals to indicate this, type these. On the other

hand, if the list is to not use numerals and use instead, for example, bullets, do not type these and simply type up the list items.

8. Please note that there is generally no facility for spell and grammar checking your document within a text editor, so be careful.
9. If you wish to use formatting and character styles, consider the purpose. If it is to indicate a quotation, mark it carefully as such. If it is for emphasis, you may indicate the text to be emphasized, but due to the style uniformity of pages it might be necessary to ignore your request. If you wish to use colours in your text, please reconsider your thoughts on this matter, as the colours of the site reflect debate and research. So, introducing extraneous colours is a recipe for ugliness. In any case, no perception of colour should be necessary to navigate the site or understand its content.
10. If you have pictures of any kind to include, indicate their approximate position in the text somehow and a short phrase or word describing the content of the picture. Warning: It might not be possible, straightforward or desirable to reproduce your placement exactly. Here are some guidelines about graphics and pictures:
  - a. They should be in JPEG or GIF format only. If your graphics are in another format, see Keith for advice on how to convert them.
  - b. Make sure the file size of your images is quite small, preferably under 100K. (We do not want to burden users with big, bulky pages.) If you wish to check this, you may use Windows Explorer if you are using a Windows machine: right-click on your document, select Properties and check the Size line. (MacOS X users can click and press command-I.)
  - c. The role of the SJC website is to inform, hence one should include pictures primarily of informational value only. (The site already is designed to have some aesthetic qualities, which is another reason to avoid them as a goal in your work: qualities can clash, and breaking the uniformity of the page styles is not a good idea.)
  - d. Keep in mind that all pages in the site will appear in similar structured layout and appearance.
11. Indicate any links to other web documents in the text. Please refrain from using this feature excessively (say, more than about once per paragraph). If you think that a link might be useful but you do not know where it should go (perhaps to an existing page on the site), please see Keith for advice.
12. Indicate the approximate location in the site for the new content. If you think (for whatever reason) that this new content requires a new category, please discuss your proposal with Derek at some point. I am open to creating more subcategories, though.
13. Place the document and any necessary images in a shared location on our local network. If this step is also unfamiliar to you, please see the document "Using shares".
14. Let Keith know what the location of the document and images is. He will get a hold of you if there is any difficulty with handling your document.

15. Please note that Keith will not be reviewing the content, spelling, etc. of your document. He will merely be implementing the web version of it. You are responsible for the content, etc. yourself.

#### Web to Print

Once you have finished the web-ready form of your document, you can copy and paste the text you have created into a word processor and convert all the webby stuff to suitable formatting and characters in your word processor. (You can find-and-replace the entities, for example.)

The hardest part will be transforming any tables. You will find that transforming them will be very tedious. It may reassure you to know that I will have as much or more tedium transforming your informal tables into HTML as you will converting them in a word processor!

Keep your text document around for as long as you intend to have a web version available, as it may prove useful to go back to the original from time to time, especially if the website style or appearance changes.