

HTML 3.2 - The Birth of Wilbur

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In the Beginning

The first rather primitive versions of HTML, used in the early days of cyberspace were replaced with version 3.2 in 1996. HTML 3.2 or Wilbur was released by the W3 Consortium and is, in essence, a SGML application (Standard Generalized Markup Language) which conforms to International Standard ISO 8879. HTML was first invented in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee, a young software engineer at the European Laboratory for Particle Physics or CERN. Both SGML and HTML documents are really simple ASCII text files with presentational tags embedded within them. Many consider HTML more of a "computerese" rather than a true computer language. The first two generations of codes, versions 1.0 and 2.0 contained relatively few tags. With version 3.2, HTML tags have developed from an initial thirty or so to close to one hundred possible coding tags, introducing some fresh new creative abilities to the web development process.

HTML is one of the easiest languages you can learn. It is rooted in English, with a vocabulary made up of basic mnemonic abbreviations, based within a simple document structure. HTML is not a programming language, but rather is a content-based or structural one. The codes describe the contents of a document, and include reference to various parts of the document, such as the headings, paragraphs, lists, and so on.

Version 3.2 added Flexibility and Aesthetics

With the advent of HTML 3.2, a web designer could customize and create web pages that provided distinct web documents, allowed the manipulation and embellishment of text, the insertion of images, sound, video and other multimedia presentations, hyperlinking to other websites, lists, tables, image maps, cascading style sheets and forms all with quite simple and straight forward codes. The easiest way to hand code HTML 3.2 was by using tools such as Note Pad on Windows or Simple Text on a Mac. When saved as an html file, these hand-coded text files became transformed into web pages within the software tools of a web browser.

HTML tags are basically written in one of two ways, as containers or empty. Container tags are always written using start tags and end tags. Like their name suggests, they contain text or other markup language between the start and end tag. For instance, if a bold large heading is desired, the start tag `<H1>` would be typed, followed by the actual text for the heading such as INTRODUCTION, and completed with a matching end tag, `</H1>`. This is an important rule to remember - once you choose a start tag, ensure that you insert an end tag to complete the container coding effect or structure. Empty tags do not contain anything, thus do not have end tags. For instance `` is used to show an image or picture on the web, while `
`, causes a line break. Neither of these require an end tag to work.

In HTML v. 3. 2, more attributes are possible. For instance if one wished to align a heading, image or paragraph, the options would be to align left, center or right. This is an improvement over the first two html versions which were limited to the left and center. The ALIGN attribute of the IMG tag can take one of the values top|middle|bottom|left|right. The "top", "middle" and "bottom" attribute values can be used to suggest vertical alignment of the image within the current line of text.

According to the W3 Consortium, "Every HTML 3.2 compliant document should look basically as follows:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 3.2//EN">
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE>The title of the documents</TITLE>
```

```
<META NAME="description" CONTENT="This is a document">
<LINK REV="made" HREF="mailto:galactus@htmlhelp.com">
</HEAD>
<BODY>
... document body
</BODY>
</HTML>"
```

It is important for serious web designers to understand the various versions and capabilities of HTML. With version 3.2 a standard was set that allowed more viewers to experience color, layouts, arrangements and combinations that were more pleasing to the eye as well as organized. Although considered outdated now, version 3.2 was a pioneer that began the evolution of the more dynamic and complaint versions that came later. Version 4.0 will be the topic of article three of this series - stay tuned! In the meantime, you can explore the resources listed below to learn the nitty gritties of coding in HTML version 3.2.

Further Study

The WDG or Web Design Group offers a thorough explanation of the crucial tags for coding HTML v. 3.2 or Wilbur at <http://www.htmlhelp.com/reference/wilbur/>

The Bare Bones Guide to HTML lists every tag in the official HTML 3.2 specification, plus the Netscape extensions, in a concise, organized format at <http://physics.hallym.ac.kr/resource/html3.2/barebones/>

HTML: The Definitive Guide by Chuck Musciano and Bill Kennedy - offers an online book version which describes the conventions and factors in the evolution of HTML and the birth of version 3.2 at http://www.hackemate.com.ar/textos/O'reilly%20-%20Complete%20Bookshelf/web_bookshelf/html/index.html

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