

Definitions and General Usability Guidelines

CASCADING STYLE SHEETS

Definition:

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) were implemented in the Netscape 4.0 and IE 4.0 browsers. CSS work on the same premise as style sheets in print layout software: they allow you to manage the structure of the site separately from content. Text styles and content can be modified independently from each other, allowing developers to update web sites more efficiently. CSS enables you to improve the appearance of your site, and can be created and edited with the same text editors as html documents.

Cascading Style Sheets give designers additional control over typographic features such as line spacing, margin indents, and font selection. You can specify the position of elements using CSS rather than the more memory intensive transparent GIFs. This allows your files to be smaller and to be opened more quickly by browsers.

When appropriate, define styles globally

- Styles applied globally affect the entire web site; style rules should be provided in independent text files which are linked to or imported into multiple html files.
- Styles applied locally affect only a single file, and the style rules are stored in the top of the html file.
- In-line styles are specified within the body of the document content, and affect only individual text elements. Use them only when absolutely necessary, since they are inefficient and hard to maintain.

Your system of Cascading Style Sheets will work best when you assign styles at the highest appropriate level. If you apply a style sheet globally, you need to apply it only once. If you apply a style locally when it should be applied globally, you will need to place the code in more than one file. Also, if you apply styles globally, you can more easily make revisions to the layout of your entire site.

When specifying fonts, provide the desired font, an alternate font, and a default font

The cascading system works by making choices and compromises among groups of options. For the system to work properly, alternate font specifications should be provided within the style sheets. For example, you could have a style sheet which states "BODY {font-family: Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif}." This will cause users to see Arial if they have it, Helvetica if they don't have Arial, and whatever sans-serif font is alphabetically at the top of their own font list if they have neither Arial or Helvetica. (The last font specification is a default one, which is not a specific font but rather a class of fonts).

Existing (common) Oxygen CSS id's

ad-rail-white	copyright-flipbook cr-	navlinks-dark	search-table
blurb-text	other-headlines	navlinks-dark-sub	section-label
boolean-content	cr-other-sections	navlinks-light	section-sublabel
breakingnews	cr-table-head	navlinks-weather	sitepromo
breakingnews-front	cr-table-link	poll-choice	sitepromo-front
brief	cr-sublabel	poll-question	source-credit
brief-date	credit	promo-rightrail	stockbox-content
brief-headline	date	promo-rightrail-extra	stockbox-date
brief-main-headline	date-flipbook	quiz-choice	stockbox-head
byline	dateline	quiz-correct	stockbox-subhead
caption	deckhead	quiz-explanation	stockbox-subheadgold
classified-sublabel	footer-links	quiz-incorrect	subhead
classified-table-head	front-label	quiz-question	table-head
classified-table-link	glyph-heading	quiz-score	table-text
classified-table-text	graffiti-topic	quiz-selected	text
classified-table-title	graffiti-comment	quote-body	text-red
column-title	headline	quote-credit	ticker
columnist-name-cr	headline-only-links	rail-credit	titleline
columnist-link-cr	last-modified	rail-date	utility-description
columnist-name-lr	leftrail-all-link	rail-head	utility-label
columnist-name-ur	leftrail-header	rail-link	utility-title
columnist-subhead	leftrail-link	rail-subhead	weather-header
columns-recent-cr	line-spacer	rail-text	
copyright	navbar	search-options	

TEXT READABILITY

FONT SIZE

The correct font size depends on the screen resolution that is being used. The selected font used to present text paragraphs should have the following properties:

The following pairs should be easily distinguishable

- X and K
- I and L
- O and Q
- u and v
- t and y
- S and 5
- I and 1

FONT STYLE

The selected font should have the following properties:

- relatively large height
- moderately expanded (Sample Fonts to avoid - Impact, fonts from the narrow families)
- solid rather than expanded (Sample Fonts to avoid: Script)

- fairly uniform type color (Sample Font forms to avoid: shadowed or embossed)

FONT FACE CONSISTENCY

Fonts must be used consistently. For example, a font that is used in one place in the document to differentiate a heading from the text, should not be used in the body text at another point in the document. Inconsistent use of fonts leads to a cluttered look and to confusion about the inherent structure and organization of the document.

NUMBERS AND FONTS

Using more than four fonts in a text document can make the document look very cluttered. If more than four fonts are being used to distinguish or emphasize certain parts of the text, other methods or emphasis like boldface, italics, font size, font color etc. may be used in combination with the font type.

JUSTIFICATION

Text that is not Left Justified reduces reading speed. Centered, Right Justified and Double Justified text takes longer to read than Left Justified text does.

CASE USAGE

Text that is more than a few words long must not be displayed using all upper case or all lower case letters. Lower case letters have characteristic shapes that can be easily identified. This increases reading speed. Detailed or long (more than two lines) text should always be presented in the standard mixed case format.

EYE CATCHERS

The use of all capitals is recommended for CAUTIONS and WARNINGS, because they are easily visible and are highly salient (eye-catching).

NUMERALS

The use of Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3...) is recommended. Roman Numerals are usually found to decrease reading speed. Some users may not be familiar with the usage of numerals other than Arabic numerals.

EMPHASIS

To emphasize a word the use of boldface or italics is recommended.

The over use of emphasis causes the document to look cluttered. Try to design the document with minimum use of emphasis. If the need for emphasizing various parts still remains, try to reorganize the material.

GRAPHIC USAGE

TARGET AREAS

Graphics can be used to highlight certain areas of a document. For instance, a "new" icon can be used to indicate that some information has been placed online recently. This will help attract the attention of routine visitors to new material. It is possible to guide the attention of "site-scanners" though a skillful combination of graphics type and placement.

After a preliminary design of the web-site, ask a few users to browse through it and ask them a few questions that cover the material that the web site seeks to convey. The responses to this

quiz will provide guidelines for reorganization of the material and highlighting some material by using graphics.

ICONS

Icons should have explanatory text labels. This makes it easier for users to understand the function for which the icon stands.

ANIMATION

Animations consume resources and are distracting. Therefore they must be implemented only when there is a considerable need to use them.

FORMS AND COMMANDS

COMMAND / HYPERLINK PLACEMENT

Command buttons and hyperlinks should not be too small and must not be placed too close together. If the command buttons ("go", "search", etc.) are placed too close to each other, or are too small in size, they may be difficult to access, without accidentally clicking on something else.

FIELD LABELS

If data is to be entered into fields, the field labels must make it clear what data items must be entered into the field.

DEFAULTS

When possible, data entry fields should contain meaningful defaults.

NAVIGATION

USER CHARACTERISTICS

- users comment on the content first; if the content is not relevant, then they don't care about any other aspect of the design
- when they arrive on a page, users ignore navigation bars and other global design elements: instead they look only at the content area of the page
- users don't understand where they are in a web-site's information architecture
- users are extremely goal-driven and look only for the one thing they have in mind - they don't spend much time on promotions for anything else
- in pursuit of their goal, users often rely on search as their main hunting strategy
- goal-driven users rarely look at logos, mission statements, slogans, or any other elements they consider fluff (in particular, they ignore advertising and anything that looks like an ad)
- if a page does not appear relevant to the user's current goals, then the user will usually abandon the page after two to three seconds
- if users don't understand a certain design element, they don't spend time learning it - instead, they ignore it and continue the hunt for their own goal.

SEVEN HELPFUL TIPS

1. Use standard icons, conventions
2. Avoid irrelevant links

3. Reveal structure
4. Leave breadcrumbs
5. Don't bury information
6. Don't be mysterious
7. Provide help

GENERIC LINKING

Do not link to all sections of the site from all pages. There is no reason to mention all features of the site on all pages. Instead, select a very small number of highly useful features and limit pervasive linking to maybe five or six things like search: users turn to search when they are lost, and you cannot predict when that may happen.

Less is more: having a small number of standard links on every page makes it more likely that users will notice those links they do need. In contrast, a link like "how to contact us" can safely be relegated to the home page, which is where users will go when they need it page (one click to a page that is already cached and thus displays in half a second if coded correctly).

PAGE IDENTIFICATION

Every page should have information about the site, and section it belongs to.

LINK NAMES

The links must have unique names. Using same or similar names could cause confusion. Also, the link names or labels should clearly indicate what a link leads to.

ORDERING SCHEMES

The links should be ordered using some familiar or meaningful ordering scheme.

LINKS TO GRAPHICS OR MULTIMEDIA

Where applicable, there should be an indicator warning that the file that a link connects to is large and is likely to take long to load.

LINKING OUTSIDE YOUR SITE

Where applicable, there should be warnings that tell a user that following a link is likely to take a user outside the present site.

HYPERLINKS

The presence of too many hyper-links can make a document difficult to read. In case many relevant hyperlinks have to be presented in a page, it may be better to separate the text and the list of hyperlinks.

PAGE DESIGN

SCREEN REAL ESTATE

Page layouts will set to a fixed width of 760 pixels. Tables structures will be based on a four-column layout. Components of pages should be designed to accommodate their functions.

As a rule of thumb, the main content for each page will make up between 50-80% of the page real estate. This includes, but is not limited to: stories, multimedia items, photos, maps, graffiti boards, polls, etc. as single items or in conjunction with each other.

On destination pages, navigation should take up less than 20% of the page real estate. Home page navigation will have the flexibility to accommodate a larger footprint.

PAGE WEIGHTS

TOTAL PAGE WEIGHT

Total page weight will be kept under 80k

EDITORIAL CONTENT WEIGHT

35k (or less) of the total page weight should be devoted to content

ADVERTISING WEIGHT

45k (or less) will be relegated to advertising

ADVERTISING STANDARDS

POSITIONS

There should be three areas on all pages to accommodate advertising