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# Dreamweaver Article

## An Overview of CSS in Dreamweaver MX 2004

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I have watched web designers adopt Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) with interest. While some designers have gleefully adopted CSS as a must-have technology, plenty of developers resist adopting CSS. Yet, I think anyone who finally adjusts wonders why they waited so long.

Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004 makes adjusting to CSS even easier. The new Dreamweaver user interface allows developers to edit CSS styles more easily than in previous versions of the product. In fact, using and creating CSS styles is an inherent part of the development workflow. A developer has to work hard not to use CSS.

### Requirements

#### Dreamweaver MX 2004

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### User Interface (UI) Changes

The most obvious change to the way Dreamweaver supports CSS is in its implementation of CSS within the interface. Don't worry. For those of you familiar with previous versions of Dreamweaver, the CSS Styles panel is still around. But, you should see how things have changed...

### Property Inspector

Dreamweaver MX introduced the concept of applying custom styles to a selected text object with the text Property inspector. This workflow may not have been apparent to everyone, however, since the developer had to toggle between HTML styles (which generated HTML font tags and assigned attributes to that tag) and CSS styles (which provided a pop-up menu of all custom styles defined within the available style sheet.)

In Dreamweaver MX 2004, the Property inspector only generates CSS styles, unless a user sets a preference to generate font tags. When I first saw this implementation, I thought this was rather... well... high-handed of the application. I've since gotten off my high horse. CSS is here to stay, and the font tag is not. Dreamweaver MX 2004 is driving that point home.

While this adjustment in the Property inspector may be transparent to users who have not been using CSS, CSS devotees will quickly become accustomed to applying custom styles at will from within the Property inspector. This is easy with the new CSS style preview available from the Style pop-up menu.

I think it is almost too easy to define new text styles within the Property inspector (and to end up with a number of poorly named custom styles in the process). Developers will need to find a workflow that makes sense. (Luckily, I have suggested a couple of workflows below.).

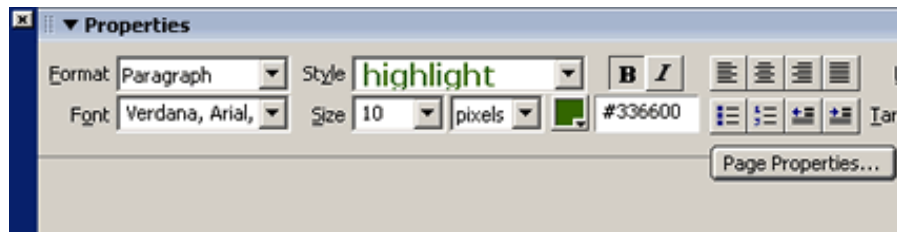


Figure 1. Defining page properties.

Before we leave the Property inspector, though, let me point out the Page Properties button. In line with the other Macromedia MX products, developers can now define page properties by clicking this button. The Page Properties dialog box appears, just as it will if you choose that command from the Modify menu. As with other improvements, though, the more significant changes happen behind the scenes.

## Page Properties Dialog Box

The Page Properties dialog box may look similar to the dialog box in previous versions, but it acts very differently.

By specifying choices within the Page Properties dialog box, developers define style attributes for the body tag. Therefore, if a developer chooses to set the background color for the page to yellow and the text color to brown, those color attributes are assigned to the body selector in the head. And, to accommodate those of us who might forget, Dreamweaver will even assign the text color to TD and TH selectors so that they will be the same color!

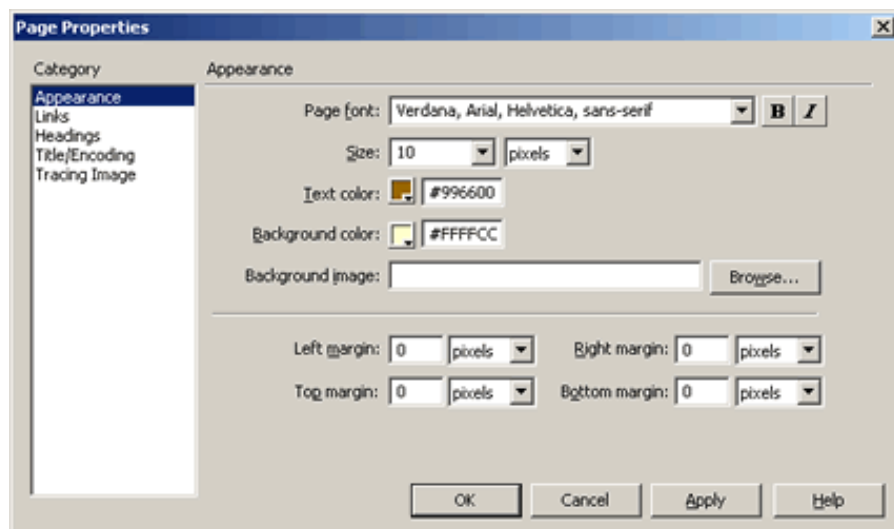


Figure 2. The Page Properties dialog box.

As a special note, the Page Properties dialog box includes settings for link colors and underlining text (choose the Links category in the Page Properties dialog box). Any setting choices in this version will define the hyperlink pseudo-class selectors (a:link, a:active, and so forth). The Underline Style pop-up menu even provides an intuitive way to choose how you should use underlines within the hyperlink pseudo-class selectors.

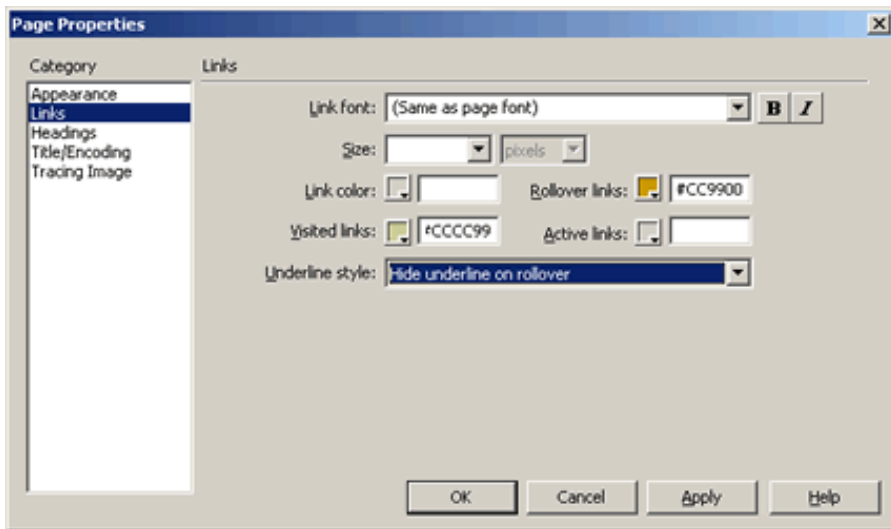


Figure 3. Settings for link colors and underlined text.

## CSS Styles Panel

The CSS Styles panel should still be very familiar to developers. The changes are slight. Instead of the Apply Styles and Edit Styles duality of the CSS Styles panel in Dreamweaver MX, users can only select and edit styles within the CSS Styles panel in Dreamweaver MX 2004. Users cannot apply the styles from the CSS Styles panel. The Property inspector's Style pop-up menu does an admirable job of replacing that functionality.

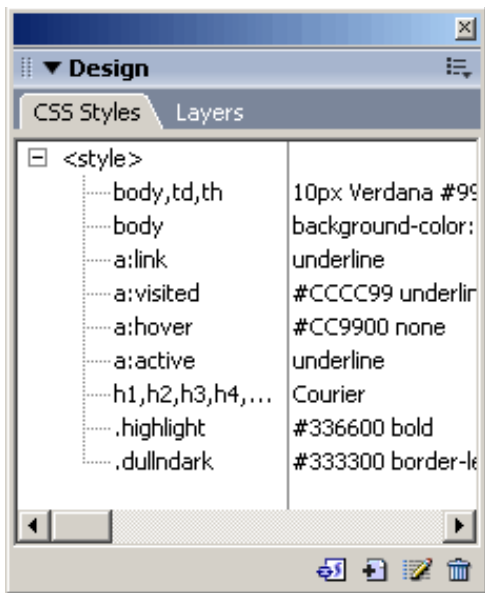


Figure 4. The CSS styles panel.

Double-clicking a style listed in the CSS Styles panel will now open the external style sheet as a document in Dreamweaver, or will open the Code and Design view of the current document to the style definition in the head. This may be a little disconcerting at first, but it is nice to see the actual code for the styles. Clicking the Edit Style button in the bottom left corner of the panel will open the CSS style editor as in previous versions.

The CSS Style editor has seen little change, except for some wording changes in the New CSS Style dialog box.

## Tag Inspector (with Relevant CSS Panel)

The Tag Inspector has seen a significant overhaul, and this may be your new favorite place. The Tag Inspector is now a panel group, housing Attributes, Behaviors, and Relevant CSS panels.

As far as CSS goes, the Attributes panel doesn't hold much of interest. You can quickly see the class name applied to the tag, but that is available in a few places. I think an interesting application of this panel is the display of class, ID, and style attributes. Ever find yourself creating an inline style to counteract something in a class style (I know... shudder)? Now you can see it and edit it. Or, more likely, have you ever inherited an over-styled page? Now you can quickly identify the pesky inline styles and remove them.

Far more interesting for our purposes is the Relevant CSS panel of the Tag inspector panel group. With a given tag selected, this panel will indicate any CSS styles affecting that tag. I was able to apply class and ID selectors to a tag, add some inline styles, modify the style of the tag selector, and create a contextual selector... and all of the styles defined by these various selectors were listed in the top of the Tag Inspector's Relevant CSS panel. It even showed styles defined in a grouping of selectors. Choose a selector from the list at the top, and you can modify the style attributes below. The more I think about this feature, the more I like it (and the more I will expect to become dependent upon it).

By the way, the Relevant CSS panel even indicates styles that are not literally relevant to the selection (but that are applied to an element that *is* relevant). For example, if both the body tag and H1 tag have been defined with style attributes, clicking in text surrounded with H1 tags will include the body tag in the panel, but any attributes that are not inherited by the H1 tag are indicated with a red strikethrough.

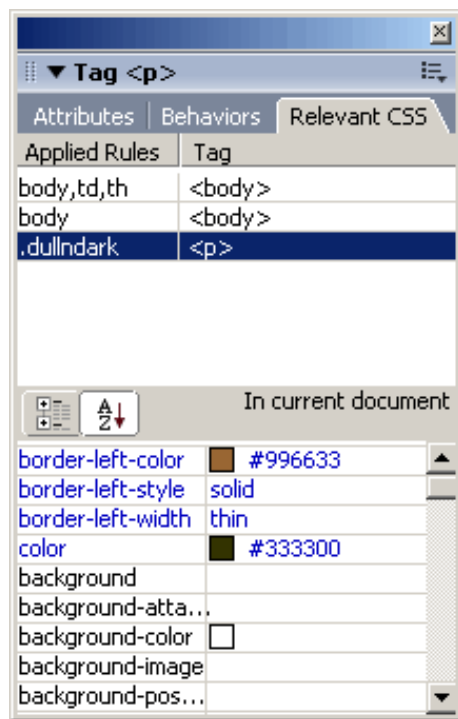


Figure 5. The Tag inspector.

## CSS Properties Panel

The CSS Properties panel appears if you double-click a selector or a style attribute in the Relevant CSS panel. I haven't gotten used to this panel, and find it disconcerting if I mistakenly double-click something expecting the old CSS Style Editor dialog box to appear. This is nice, though, in that you can focus specifically on one selector, and set attributes accordingly. By the way, if the list of attributes looks long and confusing, set the display method to Show Category view. This will allow you to collapse the categories you won't be using.

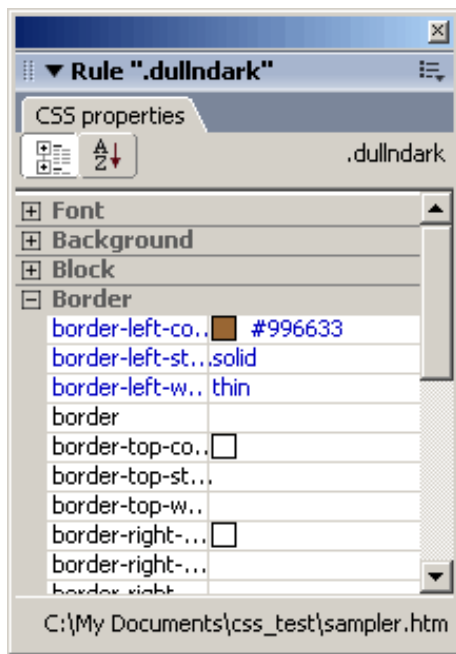


Figure 6. CSS properties panel.

## Workflow Recommendations

Experienced CSS developers will quickly adjust to the changes in the interface, because they are quite intuitive. Novice CSS users, on the other hand, may feel confused by the sheer number of methods available for making changes to styles.

So let's look at what it does. It's time to roll up our sleeves and dive in. Create a css test site:

1. Launch Dreamweaver MX 2004 and choose Dreamweaver Site from the Create New column in the Start Page menu. Alternatively, once you launch Dreamweaver, choose Site > Manage Sites > New, then click Site. Click the Advanced tab if necessary.
2. In the Site Name text box, type CSS test site.
3. Click the file folder icon next to the Local Root Folder text box.
4. In the Choose local root folder dialog box, browse to an appropriate place on your hard drive and click the New Folder icon to create a new folder called `css_test`.
5. Select the `css_test` folder as the local root folder for your site.
6. Click OK to accept these minimal settings. If you came to the Site Definition dialog box from the Manage Sites dialog box, click Done from within the Manage Sites dialog box.

We will use this same site to house the files we create in the following workflows.

## Quickly Generate Simple Styles and Build Upon Them

This may be how developers accidentally use Dreamweaver MX 2004 at first. Although the style attributes you can define within the Property inspector are limited, it is easy enough to add attributes to existing selectors. And, let's face it: it sure is handy.

### Determine the Overall Appearance of the Page:

1. With the CSS test site active, create a new HTML file. Again, this is easy to do from the Start Page if that is showing, but you can also choose File > New; then from the Basic page category, choose HTML. Click Create.
2. Save the file into the CSS test site as **sampler.htm**.
3. In the Property inspector, click the Page Properties button to open the Page Properties dialog box. The Appearance category appears by default.

4. Specify the following settings:
  - o **Page font:** Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif
  - o **Size:** 10 pixels
  - o **Text color:** #996600
  - o **Background color:** #FFFFCC
  - o **Left Margin, Right Margin, Top Margin, Bottom Margin:** 0 pixels
5. Switch to the Links category, and specify the following settings:
  - o **Rollover links:** #CC9900
  - o **Visited links:** #CCCC99
  - o **Underline style:** Hide underline on rollover
6. Switch to Headings category, and specify the following setting:
  - o **Heading font:** Courier New, Courier, Mono
7. Click OK.
8. Switch to Code view and look in the head region of sampler.htm. The CSS code is efficiently written (and note that the TD and TH tags are included with the body tag to receive the appearance stylings).
9. Switch back to Design view.

## Adding Content to the Page

To give you an idea of what we have, add some content to this page.

1. Type: This is the way text will appear without additional styling. Click Enter/Return to move to the next paragraph.
2. In the Property inspector, choose Heading 1 from the Format pop-up menu, then type: This is the way Heading 1 will look. Click Enter/Return to move to the next paragraph.
3. In the Property inspector, choose Heading 2 from the Format pop-up menu, then type: This is the way Heading 2 will look. Click Enter/Return to move to the next paragraph.
4. In the Property inspector, choose Heading 3 from the Format pop-up menu, then type: This is the way Heading 3 will look. Click Enter/Return to move to the next paragraph.
5. Choose Insert > Table, and specify the following settings:
  - o **Rows:** 2
  - o **Columns:** 3
  - o **Table width:** 100 percent
  - o **Border thickness:** 1
  - o **Cell padding:** 2
  - o **Header:** click the third image, which shows the header at the top
6. Click OK. A table of that size appears. In the table cells, enter the following information:
  - o **Column 1, row 1:** Table heading 1
  - o **Column 2, row 1:** Table heading 2
  - o **Column 3, row 1:** Table heading 3
  - o **Column 1, row 2:** Table content cell 1
  - o **Column 2, row 2:** Table content cell 2
  - o **Column 3, row 2:** Table content cell 3
  - o Below the table, type: This is how a link will look. Highlight the word **link** and type in your favorite URL into the Link text box in the Property inspector. Note that the link appears blue in the Dreamweaver Design view. This is how it will appear in the browser as well since we did not specify a color for the link setting in the Page Properties dialog box. We specified a color for the rollover link and visited link, however.
7. To see the other link settings, preview in browser by choosing File > Preview in Browser. If there are no browsers listed, click the Edit Browser List command and browse to locate at least one browser that Dreamweaver can use for previewing. By the way, not all browsers will show the rollover link (Internet Explorer 5 and above does).
8. In the browser, click the link to go to the URL you specified. As you hover over the link, some browsers will display the brighter color and remove the underline.
9. Use the browser's back button to go back to the sampler page. The link text will now display the lighter color to indicate that you have already visited that link.
10. Close the browser.

So far, everything we have done has involved defining styles for HTML tags. This means that the structure of the body content itself is not affected by the styling choices. But perhaps you want additional flexibility.

## Define Custom Appearance Choices in the Form of Class Styles:

1. Click Enter/Return after the last line of text on the sampler page, and type: Some things may need to be a different color.
2. Highlight the words **different color**.
3. In the Property inspector, click the bold button, and type #336600 in the color text box. Note that the word Style1 has appeared in the Style pop-up menu.
4. With the words still selected, notice that the tag selector in the lower left corner of the design window has highlighted <span . style1>.
5. With the words still selected, switch to Code view and note that the code highlighted is as following: <span class="style1">different color</span>
6. Scroll up to the head region and note the code for the style1 class:

```
.style1 { font-weight: bold; color: #336600; }
```

7. Switch back to Design view and choose Rename... from the Style pop-up menu.
8. In the Rename Style dialog box, choose Style1 if not already selected and type: highlight.
9. Click OK and notice that the highlight style has replaced Style1 in the Style pop-up menu. Looking in the code will also indicate that the class has been renamed in the head and in the span tag. You may also see the Results panel appear, indicating the results of what is a successful find and replace function.
10. In Design view, select the words **Heading 2** in the third line on the page.
11. With those words selected, choose highlight from the Style pop-up menu in the Property inspector. You have applied the highlight class style to the text otherwise styled as Heading 2.

## Forcing Dreamweaver to Add the Class to an Existing Tag

Since you applied the highlight class to pieces of text rather than to a block element, Dreamweaver has no choice but to add the <span> tag to your code to hold the class designation. Using this methodology efficiently requires that you understand when to apply the class styles to block elements instead of creating a new tag for holding it. The following example shows how you can force Dreamweaver to add the class to an existing tag.

1. Click within the last line of text on the page (the one that reads **Some things may need...**).
2. In the tag selector at the bottom left corner of the design window, select the entire paragraph tag by clicking the <p>.
3. In the color text box in the Property inspector, type: #333300. Note that in the design window, the two words colored with the highlight class are still the brighter green, but the remainder of that line of text is now a dark, dull green.
4. Switch to Code view and note that instead of adding yet another span tag, Dreamweaver has added a class attribute with the value of Style1 to the existing paragraph tag, <p class="Style1">.
5. Switch to Design view and choose Rename Style from the Style pop-up menu.
6. In the Rename Style dialog box, choose Style1 if not already selected and type: dullndark.
7. In the table, click in the middle cell in the second row.
8. In the tag selector in the bottom left corner, click the table data tag (<td>). This selects the entire TD tag in the code.
9. With the table cell selected, choose dullndark from the Style pop-up menu. This adds the dullndark class to the table cell tag, and will affect any text contained within that table cell.

## Setting Off Some of the Class Styles Using the Tag Inspector

As experienced CSS users will have noticed, the choices immediately available within the Property inspector are limited solely to common appearance choices available for text. Let's set off some of the class styles we have already developed by breaking out the Tag inspector.

1. Choose Window > Tag Inspector if necessary to enable this panel group.
2. In the Tag inspector panel group, select the Relevant CSS tab.
3. Click either within the table cell or the paragraph that has the dullndark class applied.
4. Although you can make the changes to that particular class within the Relevant CSS panel, let's use the CSS Properties panel by double-clicking the dullndark class in the Relevant CSS panel.
5. As the CSS Properties panel appears, the page switches into Code view and navigates to the code for that style. Navigate to the Border category.
6. Set the following border settings:
  - o **Border-left-color:** #996633
  - o **Border-left-style:** solid
  - o **Border-left-width:** thin
7. Switch to Design view (or click in the body of the code in Code view) to switch the panel back to the Tag inspector panel group.
8. Save sampler.htm.

The one drawback to this methodology is that you will write styles to the document head itself. You will best leverage the power of CSS if you create external CSS files and link to them, rather than define styles within each page. Although Dreamweaver allows you to export CSS styles to an external style sheet, once they are defined internally, doing so does not remove the internal style sheet code in the head of the document. Could that cause problems later? You betcha!

## Define the Styles and Apply Them as You Create the Page

A far more common approach is to generate the CSS styles (or link to an existing external style sheet) independently of the content as you are developing it.

Actually, our sampler page is one approach to use for creating a style sheet: the page doesn't contain real data, and you can quickly make general decisions about appearance. Even if you use a sampler page, however, you will undoubtedly encounter design needs along the way.

### Export any existing styles into an external style sheet:

1. Open sampler.htm and duplicate the page by choosing File > Save As.
2. Save the file as sampler\_external.htm in the CSS test site.
3. Choose File > Export > CSS Styles.
4. In the Export Styles as CSS File dialog box, save what will be a CSS file as css\_sampler.css.
5. Although a CSS file has been created containing all of your styles, those same styles also still exist in the head of your document. Launch the CSS Styles panel by choosing Window > CSS Styles.
6. In the CSS Styles panel, you will see <style> and the existing styles may or may not be visible indented underneath. This listing includes all of the styles included in the internal style sheet. Select <style> in the CSS Styles panel and click the Delete CSS Style icon in the bottom right of the panel (it looks like a trash can).
7. Although the page suddenly looks ugly—and the style code has been removed from the head of sampler\_external.htm—the class attributes are still written to the code where those classes were assigned.
8. Still in the CSS Styles panel, click the Attach Style Sheet icon.
9. Within the Attach External Style Sheet dialog box, click the Browse button and locate the css\_sampler.css file you exported in step 4. Click OK, then OK again to return you to the page.
10. Note that the page returns to the same appearance, including the table cell and the paragraph of text to which you applied the class styles. The CSS Styles panel now says css\_sampler.css instead of <style>.
11. Switch to Code view and note that all style code has been removed from the head of the document with the exception of a link tag, which points to the css\_sampler.css file.

## Using the CSS Styles Panel to Add a New Style

Now that the external style sheet directs the appearance of your file, you need to stay away from the Property inspector. Well, ok... not completely. But you do not want to change color of text with it. Doing so will create a new style, again in the head of the



document.

Using the CSS Styles panel to add a new style.

1. Click to the right of the last line on the page, and click Enter/Return to create a new paragraph.
2. Notice that the paragraph is preceded with a brown line (because the new paragraph has assumed the class style of the previous paragraph). With your cursor still in the new paragraph, choose None from the Style pop-up menu in the Property inspector.
3. Type: *Bulleted lines should look nice, too.*
4. With your cursor still in the same line of text, click the Unordered list button in the Property inspector to set the paragraph as an unordered list.
5. In the CSS Styles panel, click the New CSS Style button.
6. In the New CSS Style dialog box, choose Tag from the Selector Type list, then choose UL from the Tag pop-up menu at the top. Before you click OK, make sure the Define in is set to `css_sampler.css`. This ensures that the new style code will be written to the external style sheet rather than to the head of the document.
7. Click OK. The CSS Style Definition dialog box will appear.
8. In the Type category, set Style to italic. In the List category, set Type to circle.
9. Click OK.
10. Unlike with earlier versions of Dreamweaver, Dreamweaver MX 2004 opens the external CSS file any time you edit a style in an external style sheet. This exercise is no exception. Notice that `css_sampler.css` is open and has an asterisk next to the file name indicating that it has been changed and needs to be saved.
11. Save `css_sampler.css`.
12. The actual bullet will not display differently in Dreamweaver, but you can see a circle in some browsers. The sentence will be italicized.

As you become accustomed to working within the Tag inspector, you may realize you prefer that environment for editing styles. Next, you are going to use the Relevant CSS panel to quickly change the appearance of our existing page.

## Use the Tag Inspector for Changing and Creating Styles:

1. Click in the first line of the page. The Tag inspector will show there are two rules affecting this item.
2. Click the `body,td,th` line in the Applied Rules column. The lower part of the panel will show the styling that affects these tags. Make the following changes:
  - o Change **color** to `#333333`.
  - o Change **font-size** to 12 points (much more readable, huh?)
3. Click the `body` line in the Applied Rules column. Make the following changes:
  - o Change **background color** to `#CCCCCC`.
4. On the page again, click in the "different color" text. The Relevant CSS panel should indicate both classes: `dullndark` and `highlight`. Choose the `dullndark` class.
5. Remove all three border stylings by clicking to the right of `border-left-color` and the others, and, when the input field appears with the value, click the delete button.
6. Still in the `dullndark` class, add the following color to the `background-color` setting: `#666666`. Also set the color field to `#FFFFFF`.
7. Select the `highlight` class and change the color to `#FFFF00`.
8. Click within the text set to Heading 1 and click the Tag inspector's options menu (in the top right corner).
9. Choose New Rule.
10. In the New CSS Style dialog box, set Selector type to Tag, and choose `H1` from the Tag pop-up menu. Define in should already be set to `css_sampler.css`. Click OK.
11. Choose the Block category, and set Text Align to center.
12. Click OK.

You have now made changes to your external CSS style sheet and have seen how you can add new styles using the CSS Styles panel and the Tag inspector. In practice, it is likely you will use both methods to add and manipulate CSS styles. In fact, before you even realize it, you will discover that implementing CSS within your sites is as easy as adding font tags (and a lot more fun!).

## About the author

Julie Hallstrom is a content coordinator for the Macromedia Dreamweaver Technical Support staff. Formerly a designer who hand-coded websites for small companies, she is now the number one fan of Dreamweaver. In addition to writing TechNotes, reviewing Dreamweaver documentation, and designing training materials for Macromedia, Julie has been a technical editor for several books on Dreamweaver and Fireworks.



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