

# Understanding Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

Before you learn about CSS, you should have a very basic understanding of HTML, the programming language used to create web pages.

The structure and appearance of a web page is controlled by its underlying code. The predominant programming language used to write this code for web pages is *Hypertext Markup language*, or *HTML*.

If you view the code for most web pages, you will see line after line of ordinary text, surrounded by short commands called HTML *tags*. These tags are placed in brackets before and after blocks of text and tell a web browser how to display or interact with information on a web page. **Figure 1** shows two HTML tags that tell a web browser when a paragraph of text begins and ends. You will learn more about HTML tags in a later activity.

Paragraph starting tag

Paragraph ending tag

```
<p>This is a paragraph of text.</p>
```

**Figure 1** Sample HTML tags

When you create a web page by using Dreamweaver in Design view, the HTML code is created automatically.

Although HTML includes tags for displaying text, images, tables, and other page elements, it also has its limitations when it comes to precise page layout and formatting – a frustration for many designers. *Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)* are the answer to this problem. CSS provides great control over the layout and design of web pages. Using CSS, you can format text, add margins, create columns, add borders to images, control the look and behavior of links, and much more.

If you have worked with styles in other programs, such as a word processor, you are already familiar with the basic function of CSS. In CSS, a style is simply a rule describing how to format content on a web page. A CSS (style sheet) is a collection of these rules.

Once you create a CSS rule and apply it to text or images, any changes to the style are reflected in your documents automatically. This can be a tremendous time saver and ensure consistency across your entire website.

## Creating a new CSS

The most basic way to create CSS in Dreamweaver is to apply formatting by using the Property inspector. When you do, you are prompted to create a new CSS rule. You need to name the new rule and define the type of CSS.

There are three main types of CSS:

*Class style:* Similar to the styles you use in word processing and page layout programs. For example, you may want to format all body text in 10-point, Arial, dark green type. You can create a Class style with these attributes and then apply this style to all body text in your website.

*Tag style:* Applies global formatting to individual HTML tags rather than to individual selections. Suppose you want to modify the Heading 1 paragraph style to appear always in purple text. Instead of creating a class style and applying it to every heading in the document, you can create an HTML Tag style with these attributes and apply it to the Heading 1 `<h1>` tag. In effect, you are redefining the HTML tag.

*ID style:* A unique identifier (ID) for a style applied to headers, banners, menus, and other elements present in only one location in the document. Used once within a document or page.

In this guide, you use the Property inspector to create a simple CSS Class rule to format a block of text.

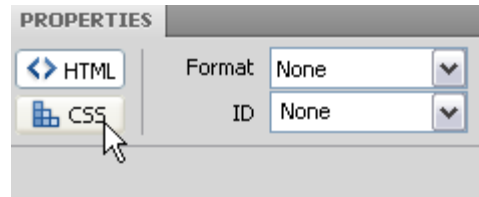
**To create a new CSS Class rule in the Property inspector:**

1. Start Dreamweaver and open a new HTML document.
2. Add two short lines of text to the document.  
To do this, type a line of text, press Enter (Windows) or Return (Mac OS) and type a second line of text.
3. Click to place the insertion point anywhere in the first line of text. (Do not highlight the text).
4. In the Property inspector, click CSS to change to the CSS formatting options (**Figure 2**).
5. Display the Font menu in the Property inspector (**Figure 3**), and select a font group.

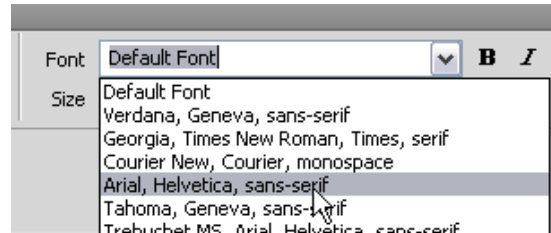
The New CSS Rule dialog box appears (**Figure 4**).

**Note:** A good practice is to assign a font combination instead of a single font. This ensures that most page visitors will view page text the same way. A browser uses the first font in the combination that is installed in the visitor's system. If none of the fonts in the combination is installed, the browser displays the text as specified by the visitor's browser preferences.

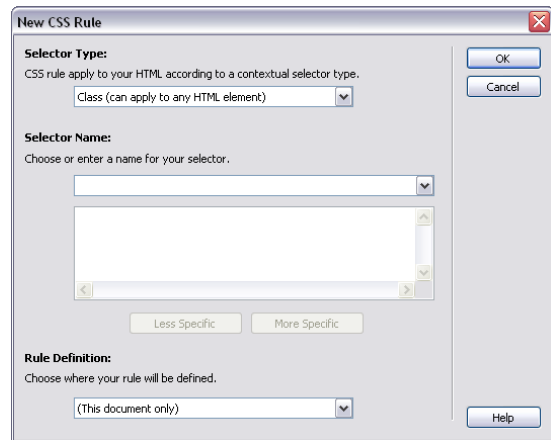
6. Display the Selector Type menu, and select Class (Can Apply To Any HTML Element) (**Figure 5**).



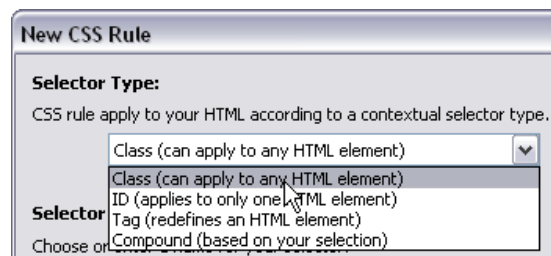
**Figure 2** Property inspector



**Figure 3** Font menu in the Property inspector



**Figure 4** New CSS Rule dialog box



**Figure 5** Selector Type menu

- Click in the Selector Name box and type **.mystyle** (Figure 6).

**Note:** CSS rules must begin with a period and cannot contain spaces or special characters.

- Display the Rule Definition menu, and select (This Document Only) (Figure 7).

This tells Dreamweaver to create and store the CSS (style sheet) in the current document only. The new style will not be available for use in other documents.

To create a CSS for your entire website, you would choose (New Style Sheet File). This is discussed in a later activity.

- Click OK.

The new font is applied to the first paragraph. The name of the style appears in the Targeted rule box in the Property inspector.

**Note:** Because you didn't highlight a specific word or character, you can continue to define this rule by applying additional formatting.

- In the Property inspector, change the size to **18**.

- Click the Color box in the Property inspector and select a new color for the text.

The Property inspector shows the targeted rule (.mystyle) and its formatting (Figure 8). The targeted rule is applied to the first paragraph (Figure 9).

You can use this CSS rule to format additional text in your document.

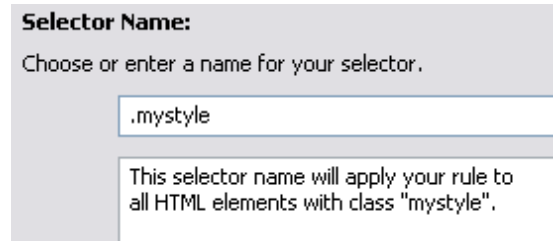


Figure 6 Selector Name

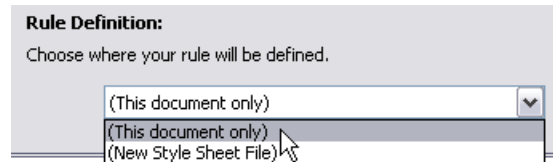


Figure 7 Rule Definition

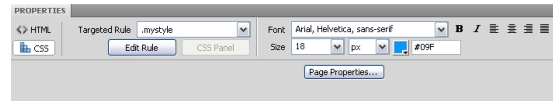


Figure 8 Targeted rule in the Property inspector

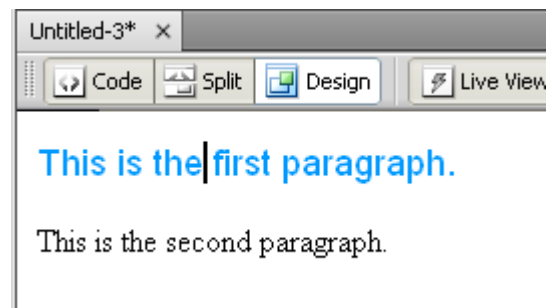


Figure 9 Formatted text

## Applying CSS styles

After you create a CSS rule, you can use it to give your entire document or website a consistent appearance. You can apply a CSS rule to text by using the Property inspector.

### To apply a CSS style:

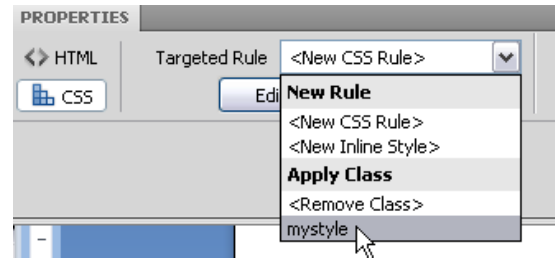
1. Click anywhere in the second paragraph.

**Note:** To format a single word or character, highlight the text by dragging.

2. In the Property inspector, display the Targeted Rule menu, and select the CSS Class rule you just created (**Figure 10**).

The new style is applied to the second paragraph (**Figure 11**).

**Note:** If you edit the CSS style, both paragraphs will be updated automatically and consistently. You will learn more about creating and modifying CSS in a later activity.



**Figure 10** Targeted Rule menu



This is the first paragraph.

This is the second paragraph.

**Figure 11** CSS style applied to both paragraphs