

Creating Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

CSS are a collection of rules that define the style of a document. You can use them in several different ways, but I'm going to recommend the External method of creating style sheets.

With this method, you create an external file that defines all your style choices (fonts, backgrounds, colours, keylines, etc.) -- and this document can be used by all your html files in your website. Or you can have different style sheets used for different pages.

Like templates, style sheets give you a great deal of flexibility and control over you site. If you decide at a later date to change the body type of your website from verdana to arial, you can do it in one step by changing the style sheet. If you coded your type in html, you'd have to go through hundreds -- thousands -- of lines of code an change it paragraph by paragraph.

To use an external style sheet you "attach" the style sheet to the html document. To do this, you embed a link to the style sheet in the <head> part of the document like this:
<Link Rel=stylesheet href="style.css" Type="text/css">

The other kinds of style sheets are embedded and inline. Embedded defines the styles in the <head> part of the document, and will only work for that document. Inline is inside the <body> tag, and is much less useful.

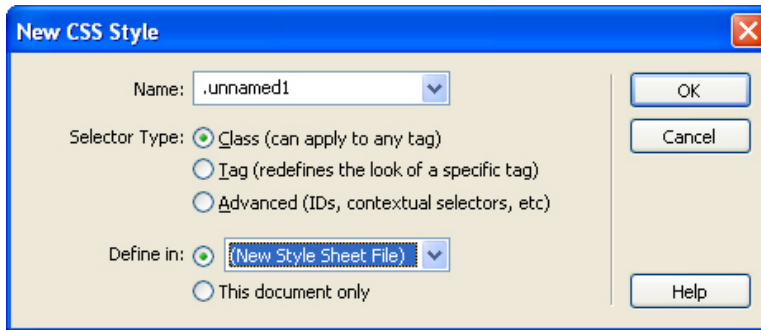
Using Dreamweaver to Create Styles

Create a style sheet.

Open an html document, or create a blank one to experiment with.

In the design palette, click on the css styles tab. On the bottom of the palette you will see a series of little buttons. Click on the one that says "New CSS Style" (a little page with a plus sign (+) on it).

IN the dialog box, you'll get see something that looks like this:



You will notice there are three main sections:

- Name
- Selector Type
- Define In

Custom Style Class

When you create your first style, Dreamweaver helps name the style sheet. Remember to save it into your file structure so your web pages can access it.

Under name, you will see there that it has a period in front of it (.name). This is the format for the Class (can apply to any tag) kind of style. I like to use this form, called a Custom Style Class, for body text and visual elements that I might create.

Redefined HTML Tags

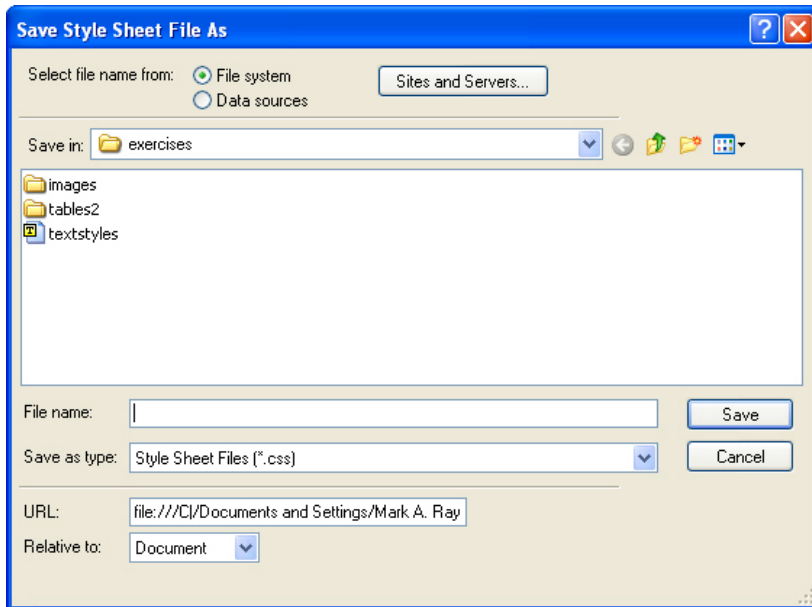
The other kinds of CSS REDEFINE html tags. If you choose that radio button in the dialog, the pulldown above it will change and give you a long list of html tags that you can use.

I usually only use these tags on H1-H6 tags, though there are lots of other inventive ways to use them.

Advanced

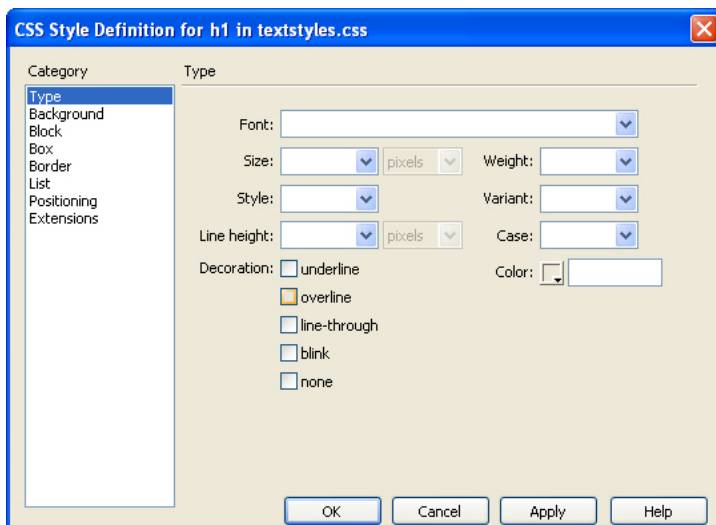
This will let you change some interactive elements on your page. If you choose this radio button, the pulldown lets you access a:hover, a:visited, a:link, a:active. These styles will let you change the way that your links look inside CSS. (The a:hover is particularly useful, as it lets you create rollover effects, without the additional download time of graphics and javascript.)

Once you create the first stylesheet, Dreamweaver lets you name it. You'll see a dialog that looks like this:



Make sure you give it a filename and that you save it into your root folder somewhere that makes sense. (I usually create a separate folder for my style sheets.)

When you click save, you will get this dialog:



On the right is a list of categories -- from type to such things as backgrounds and how to create borders.

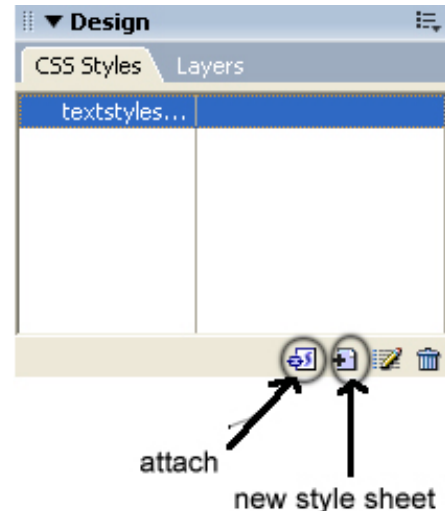
To create a type style, all you have to do now is choose your font, size, color and any other style choices you'd like to on this screen.

When you click okay, you will return to your document and then you can use it in your html file.

Attach the Style Sheet

Next, you need to ensure that the style sheet is attached to your document. To do this, simply click on the "attach style sheet" button (a little page with an s and a chain on it, to the right of the "new style sheet" button).

The dialog will ask you to browse to the style sheet. Simply browse to the one you just created in your file structure, and click okay.



Important Note:

If you are using templates, I highly recommend that you create your style sheets at the same time that you make the template. Also, ensure that you attach the style sheet to the template (then you won't have to attach it later for every single page you use creating the template).

Once you've created a style sheet and attached it to your document (or template), now you can add as many styles as you'd like.

Using your style sheet

The latest version of Dreamweaver makes this easier than before. As you create new styles, you will see them appear below in the Property Inspector, in a pulldown next to the word "style".

To apply a style, you can either highlight the words you'd like to change, and then use the Property Inspector to choose the one you want; you can apply styles directly in the code view, and this is advisable for design elements such as background colors and so on.