Web Site Development: Design Considerations

The following was adapted from Macromedia Dreamweaver 4: Using Dreamweaver.

A web site is a set of linked documents with shared attributes, such as related topics, a similar design, or a shared purpose.

You should consider the following steps in developing your Web site:

1. **Determine Your Goals**
   Goals help you focus and target the Web site to your particular needs. Decide what you would like to accomplish with your Web site, and *write down these goals* so that you remember what they are throughout the design process.

2. **Consider the Target Audience**
   *Decide who you want to visit your site.* Remember that it is difficult to create a site that everyone will be able to use. However, think about the people who will be attracted to your Web site, or who you hope to attract. Also consider the kinds of computers they will be using, i.e., the dominant platform (e.g., Windows, Mac, Linux, etc.). You may not know the answer to these questions beforehand, but it’s still a good idea to consider them.

3. **Create Sites for Browser Compatibility**
   As you create your site, be aware of the variety of Web browsers that are available. Where possible, *design your site for maximum browser compatibility*. Also, the more sophisticated your site is, in terms of layout, animation, multimedia content, and interaction, the less likely it will be cross-browser compatible. A solution to this problem in more sophisticated web sites is to provide multiple versions of important pages such as your site’s Home Page. You can then have the page loaded that is compatible with the browser.
4. Organize the Structure of Your Site.

Organize your site carefully from the start. In setting up your site you should create a folder on your local disk that contains all of the files for your site; you can then create and edit documents within these folders. Also, break down your site into categories (i.e., put related pages or items in the same folder). This will make your site easier to maintain and navigate. You may, for example, want to place all of your images in one location (an images folder) and other media such as sound files in another location (a media folder). Finally, use the same structure for the local and remote (server) sites so that it is easy to update the remote site.

5. Create Your Design Look

You will save a lot of time later on if you plan the design and layout of your site before you begin to develop it. You can do this simply by creating a mock-up drawing of how you want the site layout to look on a piece of paper. The drawing should show how you plan to link and navigate between pages of your site. It is also important is to maintain some level of consistency in your page layout and design. You want to be able to move through the pages of your site without getting confused because all of the pages have a different look, or the navigation is in a different place on each page.

6. Design a Navigation Scheme

As you design your site, you should be thinking about the experiences you have had with sites that were well-designed and also with those that had poor navigation. Think about the experience you want visitors to your site to have. Navigation should be consistent throughout the site. You should make it easy for visitors

(a) To know where they are in your site and how to return to the top-level page or the page they last visited (i.e., there should be no orphan pages on your site),

(b) To find any information they are looking for (by using searches and indexes), and,

(c) To contact the webmaster if something is wrong with the site. Always include some type of contact information and date stamp.
There are several navigation tools available to help users navigate through your site. These include Rollover Images, Flash Text, Navigation Bar, Jump Menu, Hot Map, and Text Links (see figure).

Remember that all of the methods, except the Text Links rely on graphics or some type of animation, which may not be available or compatible on all browsers. Therefore, it is a good idea to always include Text Links even when one of the other navigation tools is used.

7. Plan and Gather Assets
Once you have figured out the design and layout of your site, you can begin to create and gather the assets (images, colors, fonts, text, media, etc.) to develop the site. You should try to gather all or most of your assets before you begin developing your site.