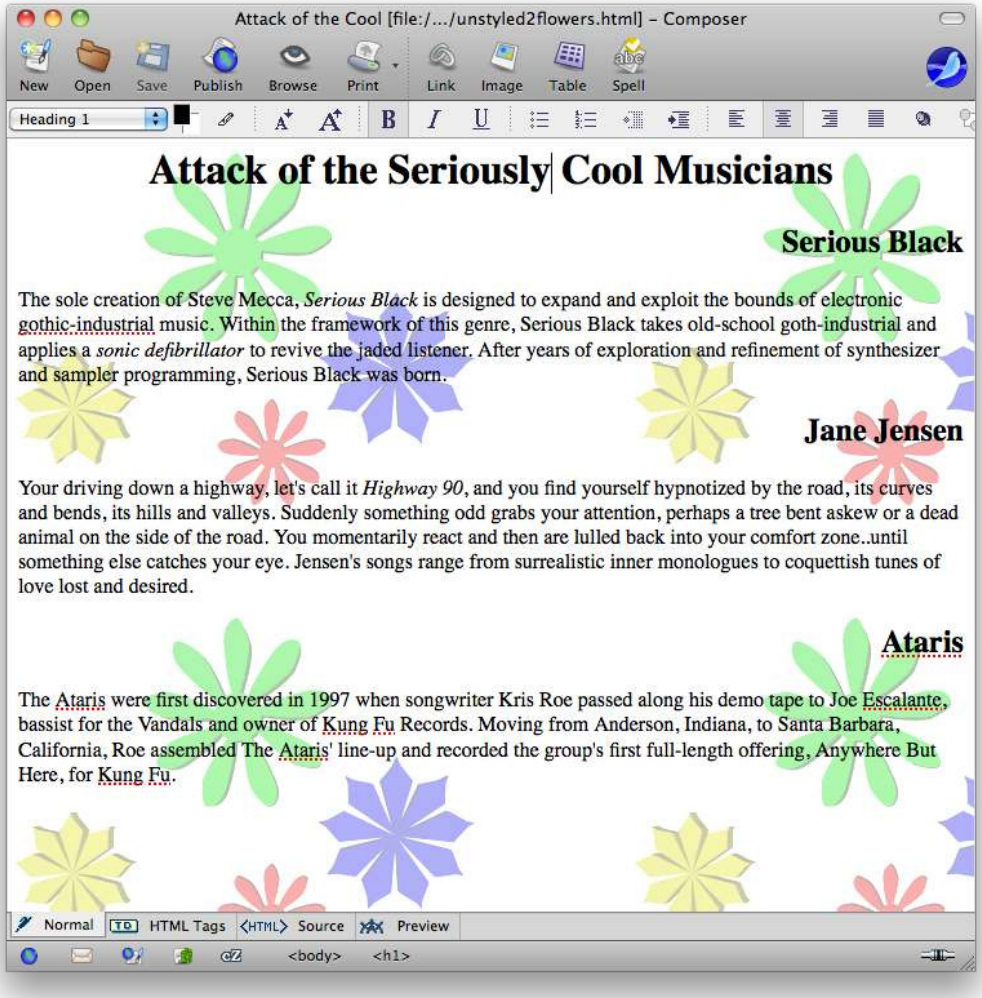
Easy Web Design

Using Netscape Composer 7.2/SeaMonkey Composer



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http://www.hoboes.com/NetLife/WebSimple/

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Why SeaMonkey?

SeaMonkey Composer is a powerful web page editor. It allows you to easily create web pages, and it allows you to easily switch between different modes of editing as your needs advance. If you never want to see any HTML tags, you can edit all of your pages in Preview. If you want to occasionally switch to seeing only your HTML tags, you can quickly switch to HTML Source or to HTML Tag view, make your change, and then return to the familiar Preview or Edit views.

It is also free. You can download it from *http://www.seamonkey-project.org/*. You'll probably want a fast connection.

This tutorial is designed around Netscape Composer; I have not yet updated it for SeaMonkey. However, a cursory look indicates that the software hasn't changed much. The screenshots that I had to recreate because I couldn't find the old ones are almost the same, and the basic concepts should be similar in any web page editor.

You can always switch from one good web editor to another good editor. Almost all web page editors (and all good web page editors) use HTML, or HyperText Markup Language. This means that you can use one web page editor now and later decide to switch to another editor without losing any work. It's all HTML, and they can all read each other's work.

Why Not Netscape?

Netscape has come a long way, but it still has some problems that might make it less useful for you.

Line Break Love Affair: Netscape's love affair with the line break is somewhat annoying if you don't edit your HTML directly, and very annoying if you do. The default unit of sentences in a web page should be paragraphs, but Netscape appears stuck in a seventies line-editing time-warp. When you press return on your keyboard, you don't get a new paragraph, you just break the line in the current set of text. What looks like a paragraph to you does not look like a paragraph to web browsers or other automated web page tools. Even when you switch a line to a paragraph using the style menu, the line break remains stuck on the end of your paragraph like a useless appendix.

In SeaMonkey, you may be able to fix this by checking "Return in a paragraph always creates a new paragraph".

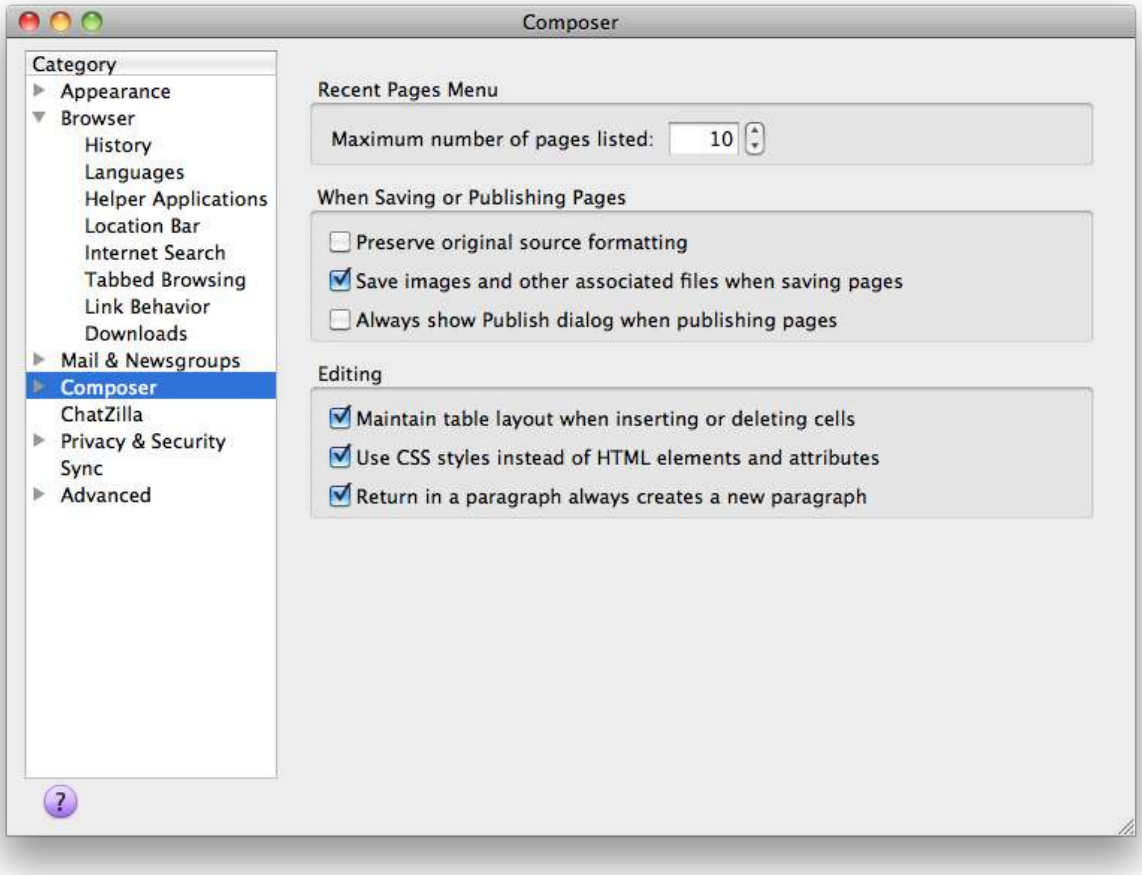
Insecure File Uploads: Netscape does not support secure file uploads. It uses the old FTP instead of secure FTP or secure copy. This means that every time you upload a file to your web site, your password is sent over the net in plain text.

Dynamic Web Code: Netscape throws out certain kinds of dynamic web code. If you use PHP or ASP, for example, Netscape completely throws out the dynamic portions of your web site.

Indentation: Netscape does not support any automatic indentation tools. You probably don't care about this if you don't edit HTML, but if you do edit your HTML directly, this makes it difficult to maintain readable HTML. All you can use for indentation are spaces, and you need to indent every single line individually.

Preferences

In Netscape Composer's Preferences, there is a section for "Composer".



I recommend setting "use CSS styles instead of HTML elements and attributes". This doesn't affect the editing functionality of Netscape's editing toolbar, but it does allow you to more reliably add much greater stylistic variation to your web pages.

"Retain original source formatting" or "Reformat HTML Source" controls whether Netscape reformats any HTML you type in. As a beginner, you may wish to have Netscape reformat your source; later, you may wish to change this to retain your own formatting.

Create a New Web Page

Create a new web page by pulling down the “File” menu, choosing the “New” submenu, and then the “Composer Page” item. This brings up a blank page.

You can also choose “Composer” from the “Window” menu and then use the normal “File:Open” menu item to open an existing file. If you wish to start from a page on the web, you can view that page using Netscape’s browser, and then choose “Edit Page” from the “File” menu. This will open the page in Netscape Composer, where you can make whatever changes you wish and then save it to your local hard drive.

Paragraph Tags

Netscape allows you to have “unstyled” text, text that doesn’t belong to any “paragraph-level” formatting. It calls this “Body Text”. In general, you shouldn’t do this. All of your text should be part of a paragraph, a heading, a list, a table, or some paragraph-level style. You should avoid the “Body Text” feature in HTML if you are creating professional web pages.

HTML tags “mean” something about the text that they enclose. Paragraph tags do not specify line breaks. They specify that the enclosed text is a paragraph. Different browsers will display paragraphs in different manners. Similarly, for headlines you do not specify a large font with bold as you do in a word processor, but simply that the text is a headline. There are a large variety of browsers available. A cell phone might display headlines differently than a larger browser, and an audio reader will likely display headlines in a completely different, non-visual manner.

By using tags that impart meaning to the text they enclose, browsers can more effectively display your information to a wider variety of readers, whether those readers speak the language the text was written in, whether they are viewing it on tiny or large displays, and whether they are viewing it at all instead of listening to it or touching it.

The typographical command to indent some text by three spaces and use a smaller font for quoted text means nothing to an audio reader, and if followed slavishly by a personal digital assistant could render a document unreadable. But the tag that specifies that the text is quoted text can be rendered appropriately according to the viewer’s needs.

Paragraphs

Set a paragraph by highlighting some text in a paragraph and choosing “paragraph” from the style menu.

Headlines

The “Heading” styles are levels of headlines for your pages. In most visual web browsers, headlines will be shown as bold in large text, with extra space above and below.

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