



# Preparing the Faculty Homepage: Having a Web Presence Without Being a Computer Geek

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The days of simple paper handouts for students are over. Modern students expect more from their professors, and thus assume that web-based course materials will be made available.

This translates into additional work for the professor. It means creating a homepage, adding course syllabi and other related documents, as well as a Vita, research papers, and anything else the professor deems important.

Fortunately, one does not need to be a computer programmer or web developer. While these tools are certainly nice to possess, they are not needed to be able to have a basic web presence. The University has given each faculty member sufficient server space and authoring tools that a personal web site can be developed and maintained quite easily.

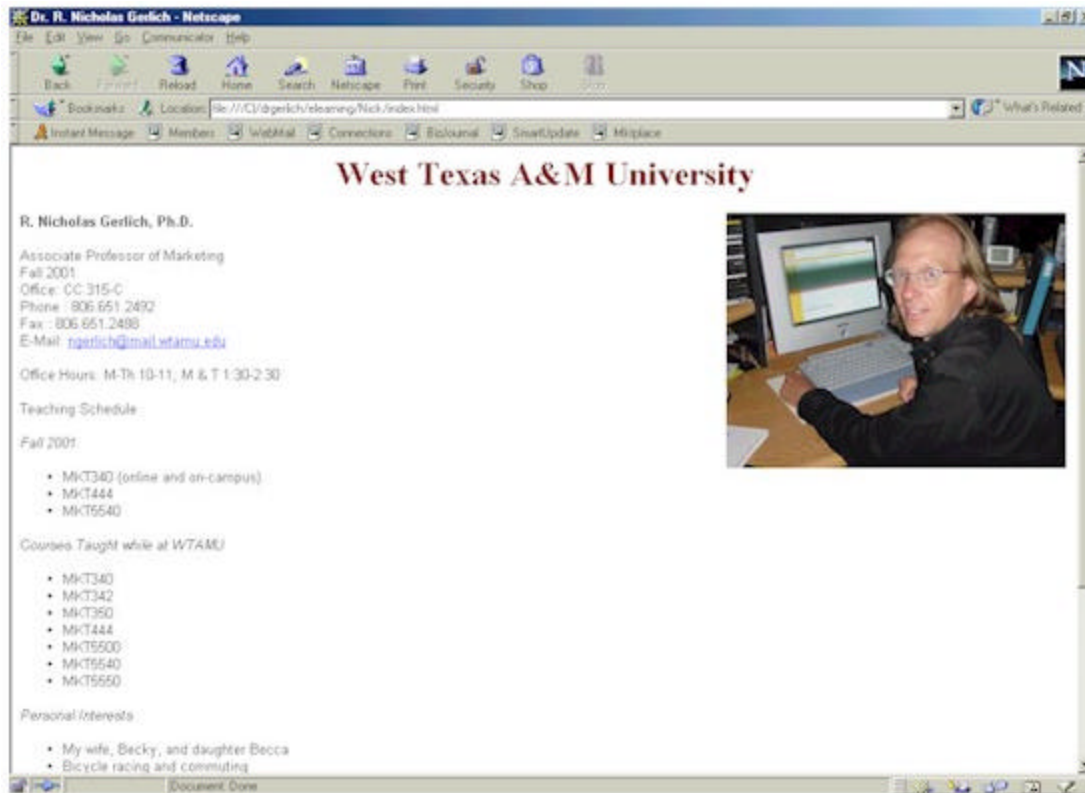
The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how faculty can develop, modify, and supplement their personal web pages on the WTAMU server. By the end of this short paper, readers should be able to attend to the most basic functions of their web page, and be able to include other documents that have been saved as PDFs that can be loaded to the web server and viewed easily by students. Given the length of this presentation, only basic web page authoring will be covered.

## Getting Started

It is assumed that, for the purposes of this demonstration, you will be working from the basic faculty web page that we have already created for you. If you were to create your own page, the directions would not be much different.

The tool for editing/creating your web pages on campus is Netscape Composer. This is “standard equipment” in the version 4.x Netscape browsers. All of your files will reside in the “U” drive accessible through your faculty account. In your “U” drive you have a folder called “homepage.” This is where all of your web documents must reside.

The University computer staff has set up this folder to function as if it were your personal web address. Anyone from the “outside” can view your personal page by going to <http://www.wtamu.edu/~ngerlich>, for example (using first initial + last name as the convention).



However, for the purposes of editing your web page, you should use your browser to open the file that resides in your homepage folder. The image above shows what a prototype homepage looks like.

Upon launching Netscape, click **File** → **Open Page** from the upper-left corner. A dialog box will pop up; select **Choose File**. Then locate your **U drive** and **homepage** folder. Once in the homepage folder, click on **index.html**. The index page is your default homepage; whenever you are creating a web site for yourself, the homepage must be called index.html.

Once you have done this, click **Open**, and your homepage will appear on your screen.

To begin editing, you must now launch Composer. Click **File → Edit Page**. This will open another window in which you can do your editing.

From this point forward, you may view your work by saving your changes in Composer by clicking **File → Save**, and then returning to your original Netscape window. On the tool bar click **Reload**, and the newly-updated page will appear.

When you are finished, make sure your last changes have been saved in Composer. You will likely go back and forth between Composer and Netscape several times to view the intermediate changes in your page.

## Font and Text Effects

Adding font and text effects is done quite easily from Composer. The basic sequence is to highlight the text you wish to alter, which can be done by click-dragging your mouse across that text. This will cause that text to become highlighted in blue; while it is highlighted, you should then select your effect from the toolbar above.

Text can be made into headers by selecting the first dropdown menu from the left. Headers come in six sizes, with 1 being the largest, and 6 the smallest. By default, headers are rendered in bold-face type. Headers generally are size 2 through size 4.

The next dropdown menu controls the font face. While you can select any of the fonts that are loaded on your PC, it is wise to stick with only the most common fonts. If the font you selected is not available on a user's PC, the browser will default to Times New Roman. For this reason, I usually restrict my fonts to either a serif face (like Times New Roman), or a sans serif face like Arial. These fonts are loaded on nearly every machine.

The third dropdown menu controls the font size. There are seven options, ranging from 8pt to 36pt. It is considered "shouting" to use anything larger than 12pt for text. It should be noted that the font sizing menu can also be used to create headers, but these will not automatically appear in bold face.

The fourth dropdown menu is for selecting the font color. A wide range of colors is available, but text is traditionally displayed in black. If, however, a dark background color is used, it may be advisable to use a different font color.

Next are three buttons for adding text effects. In order, these are bold, italic, and underline. They may be used separately or in combination.

The next button is for bulk removal of font and text effects. Clicking this button will remove any and all effects that have been applied to the highlighted text.

## Lists

There are two basic types of lists available in HTML: ordered lists and unordered lists. The former are lists that have a numerical or alphabetic “counter” before each line item; the latter are “bulleted” lists. Both can be effective for presenting lists of information so that they are easy to read.

Generally speaking, some type of text or header will precede a list. This should be typed first. Hit “Enter” when done with this, and then select which type of list you would like. The two selection buttons are on the tool bar following the “Remove All Styles” button.

Either a bullet or number will appear below your text, after which you should type your first entry. Hit Enter, and you’ll be ready to type the second one, and so on. After your last line item, hit Enter. This will create yet another bullet or number. Do not type anything, however, for you should then click once more the same button you used to start the list. This will turn it off and allow you to resume normal typing.

You can change some aspects of your list quite easily. By click-dragging (i.e., highlighting) the list, you can then right-click on the highlighted area. From the subsequent pop-up menu, select Paragraph/List Properties. You can then select which type of bulleted or ordered list you would like. It is possible to use discs, circles, or squares for bullets, and a variety of alpha/numeric or Roman numerals for ordered lists. For ordered lists, you can even specify at which element the counting begins. Alignments can also be selected from this menu.

## Alignment

Text can be aligned using the far right button on the toolbar. There are three options: left, right, and center. The default is left, so this does not need to be specified. Again, highlight the text you wish to align, and then select the appropriate alignment.

## Horizontal Rules

A horizontal rule (line) can be inserted at any point in the text. These are often used to denote sections. These can be formed by clicking the **H. Line** button on the top of the toolbar. Once the line appears on the screen, you can adjust the line’s properties by placing the pointer of the mouse on the line, and then right-clicking. From the menu select **Horizontal Line Properties**. You can then select the thickness of this line, the width, and the alignment. It is not considered good form to use this feature many times in a page. A subtle line that is centered and

perhaps running only 50% of the width is much better looking than a full-width line.

## Links (Internal)

Internal links are also called relative links, and refer to links made to other documents in the same folder. For example, a professor may wish to provide links to course syllabi as well as a Vita. These documents must be created separately. They can be saved as either HTML files, or as PDFs. PDFs allow you to create camera-ready versions of word-processed documents that are really images. Most computers have the Adobe Acrobat Reader for PDF files. However, software must be purchased for converting files to this format. PDFs are perfect if you want your users to be able to download exact replicas of existing hard-copy documents.

To create the link, simply type the text that you wish to become a link. Then click the **Link** button on the toolbar. From the menu you must type the **page location**. Since these are in the same folder on your U drive, you need only type filename.html or filename.PDF (depending on which type of document it is).

If you create additional HTML documents and link to them, it is important that you also provide links on those pages back to the homepage. Poor navigation of your site will confuse your users and cause them to evacuate. Thus, if you have five documents on your site (a homepage, three syllabi, and a Vita), it is important to at minimum provide links back to the homepage, and preferably links between all the pages so that users can move around easily.

Note: file and image names are case-sensitive on most web servers! They must be specified exactly the way they were created.

## Links (External)

Creating links to external sites is nearly as easy as it is to link to internal documents. The only difference is that the full URL (Uniform Resource Locator) must be typed.

One option to consider when linking to external sites is to have the link open in a new window. This helps you retain visitors at your site. This is done by specifying "new" in the **Target** window of the **Link** menu.

A second type of external link is the e-mail link. It is made the same way as all the other links: highlighting the desired text, and clicking the **Link** button. Instead of typing a URL, though, simply type the following:

mailto:[yourname@server.com](mailto:yourname@server.com). This will create an active link that, when clicked, will spawn an email form addressed and ready to send to you.

# Images

It is easy to add images to your page. From the top of the toolbar, select **Insert**. In the resulting menu, you can specify the name of the **image** you wish to add. It is important to add this image to the **homepage** folder on your U drive. If you have created a special **Images subdirectory**, then you need to specify this at this time. An alternative is to use the **Choose File** button to help locate and select your image.

There are numerous options for your images. You can leave their size to be whatever the original was, but you can also resize using the height and width options. However, when resizing, it is important to keep your new size proportional to the original. Also, never try to increase the size of an original, because pixelation will occur.

Next, you can add a buffer around your image by adding space on either the horizontal or vertical planes. This space is measured in pixels, which are little “dot” of light. Buffers of 5-10 pixels create a nice amount of “white space” around your images.

A border around the photo can also be specified at this time. For dark photos, no border is necessary. Lighter photos should have a 2-pixel border added.

Finally, it is important to specify image alignment and how you would like text to wrap around the image. The default shows text starting at the bottom of the image, but other options exist. I prefer to use the two right options, so that my text can literally wrap around the image, much like in a magazine article.

To have an image centered on the page, a slightly different approach must be used. Add the image, and then highlight the image and/or accompanying text. Click the **Format** tab along the top of the toolbar, and select **Align**. You can then opt for right or center (left is the default).

# Page Characteristics

It is important to establish some characteristics of the page. This is done by clicking on the **Format** tab along the top of the toolbar. From the resulting menu, first enter a **Title** for your page. This is what users will see in the horizontal blue bar across the very top of their screen when they are visiting your page. Next, insert your name as the **author**, and provide a brief **description** of the page. Finally, if you wish for your page to be indexed by search engines in a favorable way, insert some **Key Words** that best describe you or your teaching and research interests.

You can then select the **Colors and Background** tab to make a lot of other subtle and not-so-subtle changes to your page. You can select to let the user's chosen colors prevail, or you can override them by selecting your own. I always choose this option.

You can then select your **text** color, as well as the colors for **link text**, **active links**, and **“followed” links**. The default colors automatically appear in this pop-menu, but you can click on any of the color samples and spawn a color grid from which you can make your selection.

Also included in this array of choices is a **background color**. The most common choice is to use white, although virtually any color can be used. However, unless you are doing a particularly artsy site, it is often considered amateurish to use anything other than white.

Finally, you can add a **background image**, which you can specify by name at the bottom of the pop-up. Background images are tiled across and down the page, so use this choice wisely. Generally speaking, I use background images sparingly, because they often look

## Creating Your Own Files

Instead of editing documents that already exist, it is possible to use Composer to create new ones from scratch. I have found it is easiest to first enter most of the text first, and then go back for text and font effects, etc. Lists should be entered only by using the appropriate **List** button, because it is not worth trying to convert existing text to a list format.

When saving new documents, be sure to click **File→Save**, and then save to the **homepage** folder in the U drive. If you do not have a homepage, the file should be called **index**. If you are creating other documents, they can be called any file name you wish. The “.html” suffix will be added automatically.

## Summary

Editing or creating web pages using Netscape Composer is fairly simple. The more experience you have with it, these easier it will become. However, there are limitations to Composer. It is not designed for professional web site developers. It is an easy-to-use tool for those wishing to have a web presence, but without becoming a programming ace. The preceding notes will give the novice sufficient knowledge for keeping their site current.