

How to lay out a web page with CSS

A CSS page layout uses the Cascading Style Sheets format, rather than traditional HTML tables or frames, to organize the content on a web page. The basic building block of the CSS layout is the *div tag*—an HTML tag that in most cases acts as a container for text, images, and other page elements. When you create a CSS layout, you place div tags on the page, add content to them, and position them in various places. Unlike table cells, which are restricted to existing somewhere within the rows and columns of a table, div tags can appear anywhere on a web page. You can position div tags *absolutely* (by specifying x and y coordinates), or *relatively* (by specifying their distance from other page elements). You can also position div tags by specifying floats, paddings, and margins—the preferred method by today’s web standards.

Creating CSS layouts from scratch can be difficult because there are so many ways to do it. You can create a simple two-column CSS layout by setting floats, margins, paddings, and other CSS properties in a nearly infinite number of combinations. Additionally, the problem of cross-browser rendering causes certain CSS layouts to display properly in some browsers and improperly in others. Dreamweaver makes it easy for you to build pages with CSS layouts by providing 16 pre-designed layouts that work across different browsers.

Using the pre-designed CSS layouts is the easiest way to create a page with a CSS layout, but you can also create CSS layouts by using absolutely-positioned elements (AP elements). An *AP element* in Dreamweaver is an HTML page element—specifically, a div tag or any other tag—that has an absolute position assigned to it (**Figure 1**). The limitation of Dreamweaver AP elements, however, is that since they are absolutely positioned, their positions never adjust on the page in relation to the size of the browser window.

Once you become more experienced you will be able to create page layouts by inserting div tags manually and applying CSS positioning styles to them.

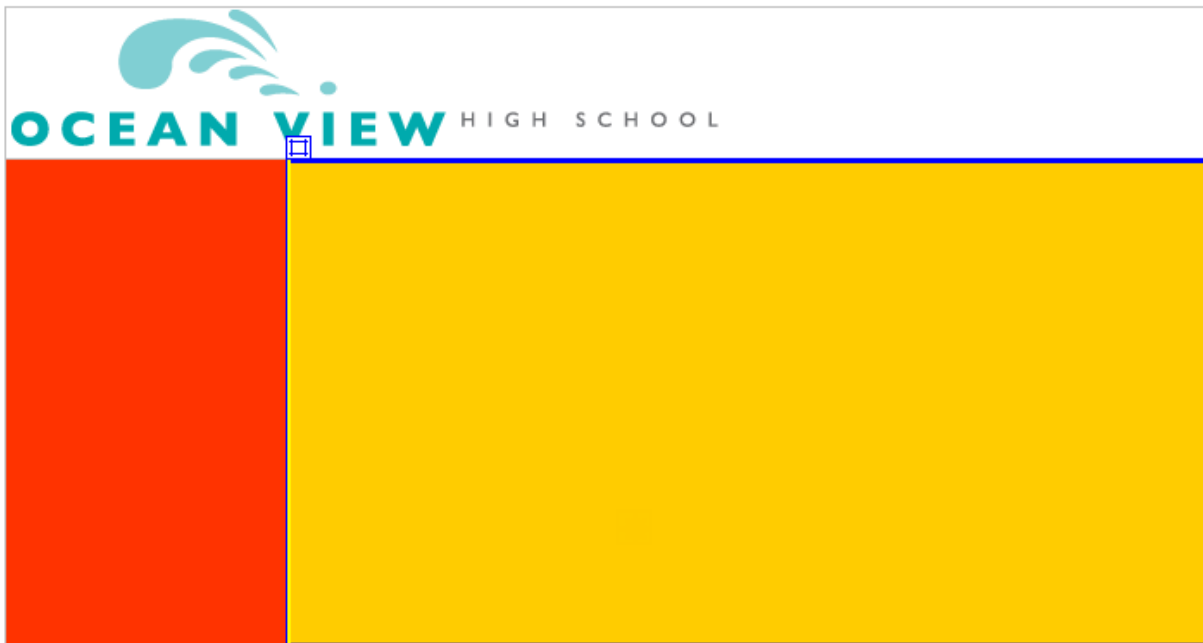


Figure 1 AP elements in the Dreamweaver Document window

Inserting an AP div tag

Start this activity by creating a new, blank page and inserting an AP div tag. AP elements can contain text, images, or any other content that you can place in the body of an HTML document.

To insert an AP div tag:

1. Start Dreamweaver.
2. Select File > New.

The New Document dialog box opens (**Figure 2**).

3. With the Blank Page category selected, click HTML under Page Type and <none> under Layout.
4. Click Create.

A new untitled HTML document opens.

5. Save the new page.

The new file is added to the Files panel.

6. Select the Layout category in the Insert panel and confirm the Standard mode button is selected (**Figure 3**).
7. Click the Draw AP Div button.

The mouse pointer changes to a cross when you move it over the Document window.

8. To create the div that will define an area of your page, drag a rectangle in the Dreamweaver document.
9. Click the border of the div to select it.

Handles appear along the border (**Figure 4**) and the div properties appear in the Properties panel.

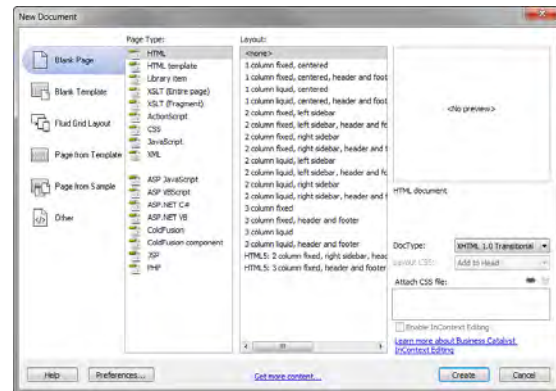


Figure 2 New Document dialog box

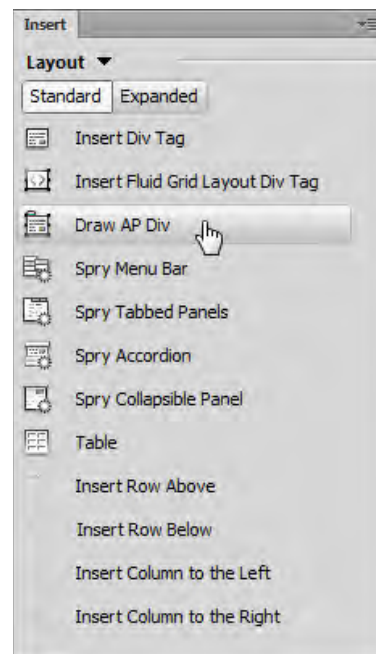


Figure 3 Insert panel, Layout category

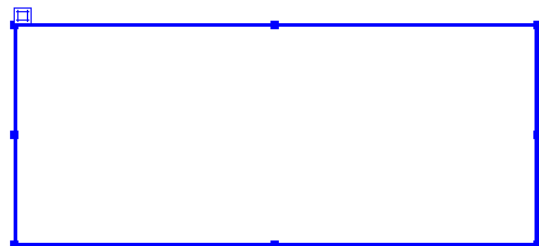


Figure 4 Div inserted and selected

10. Make sure the Properties panel is open (**Figure 5**).

It is docked at the bottom of the screen. If the Properties panel is not open, select Window > Properties.

11. Click in the CCS-P Element ID box and enter a name for the div.

Choose a unique name that will help you remember the div’s contents, such as *header* or *navigation*.

Note: “CSS-P” is a commonly accepted abbreviation for “CSS Positioning”.

12. Click the Bg Color box and select a color in the color picker.

The div changes to the selected color.

13. Click once outside the new div to deselect it.

A thin black line appears around the div. This line does not appear in a browser. If you do not see the line, select View > Visual Aids > CSS Layout Outlines.

14. Continue adding divs for all the sections on your page. You can place divs directly alongside one another (**Figure 6**).

15. Open the AP Elements panel (Window > AP Elements).

You’ll see that Dreamweaver has added the new divs to the list of AP Elements (**Figure 7**).

Note: Select Prevent Overlaps to constrain the positions of AP elements when they are created, moved, and resized, so that they don’t overlap.

16. Save your page.

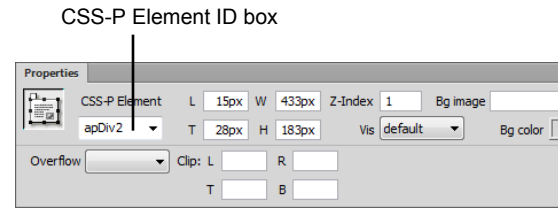


Figure 5 Properties panel

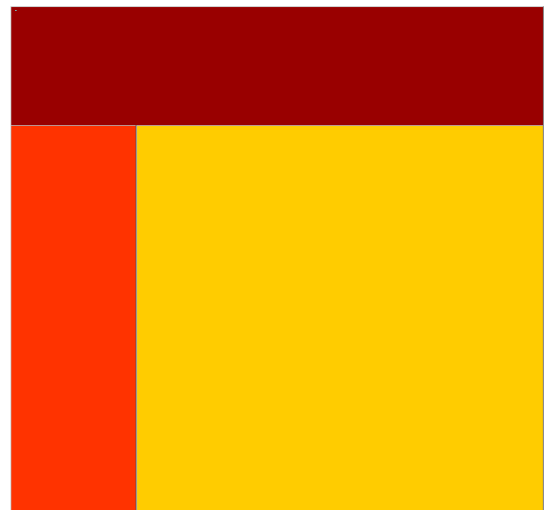


Figure 6 Multiple divs on page

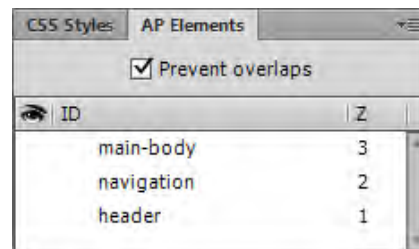


Figure 7 AP Elements panel

Resizing divs

You can resize an individual div or simultaneously resize multiple divs to make them the same width and height.

Note: If the Prevent Overlaps option is selected in the AP Elements panel, you will not be able to move a div so that it overlaps another div.

To resize a div:

1. Select a div by clicking its border or by clicking the div's name in the AP Elements panel.
2. Do one of the following to resize the div:
 - To resize by dragging, drag any of the div's resize handles (**Figure 8**).
 - To resize one pixel at a time, hold down Control (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) while pressing an arrow key.

Note: The arrow keys move the right and bottom borders of the div; you can't resize the top and left borders with this technique.

 - In the Properties panel, type values for width (W) and height (H).

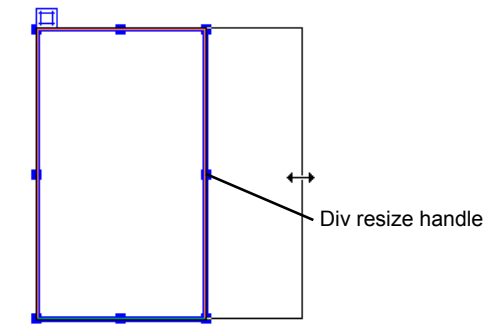


Figure 8 Resize by dragging

Moving divs

You can move divs in Design view in much the same way you move objects in most basic graphics applications.

Note: If the Prevent Overlaps option is selected in the AP Elements panel, you will not be able to move a div so that it overlaps another div.

To move a div:

1. Select one or more divs.
2. Do one of the following:
 - To move by dragging, drag the div's selection handle (**Figure 9**).
 - To move one pixel at a time, use the arrow keys.

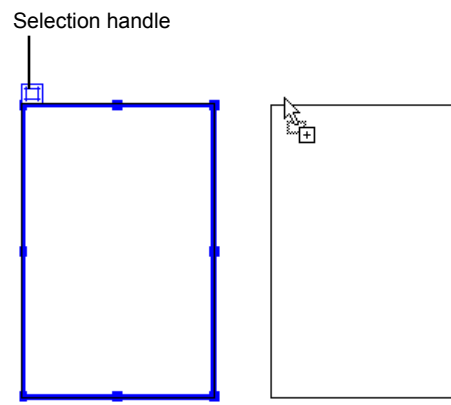


Figure 9 Moving a div

Adding content to divs

You can add images, text, and other content (such as Flash movies) to your divs just as you would elsewhere in a web page.

To add content to a div:

1. To insert an image in a div, click in the div and select Insert > Image.

Note: Make sure the div is sized large enough to hold the image or other content. If the div is sized smaller than the image, the div may not display correctly in all browsers.

2. In the Select Image Source dialog box, locate and select an image to insert (such as a page banner). Then click OK (Windows) or Open (Mac OS).

The image appears in the div (**Figure 10**).

3. To format the image in the div, select the image and select formatting elements in the Properties panel.
4. To add text to a div, click in the div and type text or paste text copied from another document.



Figure 10 Div with image added

Viewing div tags by using Live view

You can use a feature called Inspect mode in Live view to view the code generated by adding the div tags.

To view div tags using by using Inspect mode in Live view:

1. Click the Live button in the Control panel (**Figure 11**).
Live view is enabled. This means that the page appears as it will in a web browser.
2. Click the Live button again to deactivate Live view.
3. Click the Split button.
Code and Design view (Split view) view is enabled. This lets you see the code alongside the design display.
4. Click the Live button again to activate Live Code view.
5. In the Design view, click on a div's selection handle, or an image placed within a div and observe that the div tag is highlighted in the Code view (**Figure 11**).

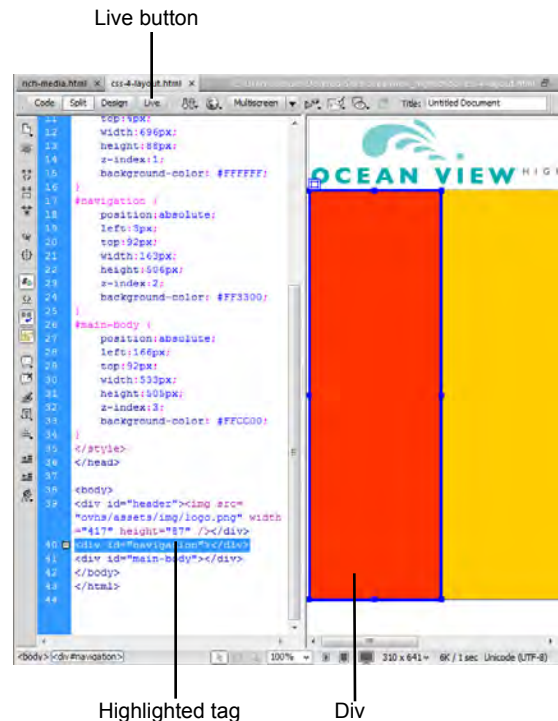


Figure 11 Split Code/Live view