MS Word to Web Page:
The Syllabus
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Download MS Word to Web Page in PDF Format

NOTE: If you are using Office X for Mac to create your pages, you must have installed the Microsoft Office Updater 10.1.5. Otherwise, your pages will not display properly in IE 5-6 on Windows machines.

Like most academics, historians work primarily with text. One of the tasks that they face is transferring a syllabus to the Web—without devoting hours to the process. Even, historians who are skilled HTML writers may also want a "quick and dirty ," web page and avoid the inevitable editing involved in moving a manuscript to an HTML editor. Using MS Word's Save as Web Page (File > Save as Web Page) looks like it should work, and does—after a fashion. But the sprawling web page that results from using the command on a raw text manuscript is often a disappointment.

But MS Word can create very nice web pages entirely from within the program. (This mini-site, for example, is an MS Word product.) Because MS Word writes its web pages in XML, historians and other practitioners have much more control over the appearance of the text than they might have using an HTML editor. They are, moreover, working in a familiar environment, albeit with a few tools that they might not use on a regular basis. All is not "beer and skittles," however. Older browsers will not be able to cope with Microsoft's XML, so instructors should advise their clientele to use IE 5+ and NN 6+. A MS Word syllabus will display in older browsers but may not be very attractive and contain strange characters. Microsoft's XML implementation also adds a good deal of proprietary code to the web page, resulting in a larger page, a bit longer download time, and purists's disdain. With these constraints in mind, the goal of this tutorial is to provide the steps toward creating a well-designed, visually interesting, web-based syllabus entirely within MS Word.

A caveat. Be aware that there are a number of different ways and shortcuts—as is the case with most software applications—to make a web page out of a MS Word document. This tutorial focuses one of the simplest and most accessible. The steps follow the conventions of menu > selection. So, "Choose View > Normal" translates into pulling down the View Menu from Menu Bar and selecting Normal. The tutorial should take you about 30 minutes, depending on how much preparation you undertake. With a little practice, turning a manuscript into a nicely formed web page should take about 10 minutes, again depending on how much tweaking you want to do. Guaranteed.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Although it may seem self-evident, the Web differs from word processing in a number of ways, so we'll begin by cleaning up the syllabus copy so that it is more webcentric. If you are working on an existing syllabus, do not use an original ms for experimentation. Make a duplicate so that you have a hedge against inevitable software misfortunes. These steps are not entirely necessary, but working through them will prevent confusion later on and demonstrate several of MS Word's capabilities. (You can view a sample MS Word syllabus to obtain an idea of the possibilities.) Move on to ,"Designing the Syllabus for the Web" if you want to get right to work. If you have your copy made and want to "take it from the top," open your document and do the following:

1. Choose Edit > Select All.
2. Choose Normal from the "Style" drop-down menu on the Formatting Palette

On a Mac using MS Office X, once you have Selected All, choose Clear Formatting > Formatting Palette and then choose Normal. > Formatting Palette.

1. Click the 1 and 1/2 button from "Line Spacing" on the Formatting Palette.
2. Select a line of text that you want as a subhead.
3. Choose Heading 1 or Heading 2 from "Style" drop-down menu on the Formatting Palette.
4. Repeat for Steps 4 & 5 for all lines of text that you want as subheads. (To speed up the process, use COMMAND + Y (Mac) or CONTROL + Y (PC) to repeat the last action.)
5. Remove any tabs.

Tabs are troublesome on the Web; you'll spend more time trying to make them work on your web page than is worthwhile, so get rid of them early on.

Now we'll add some specifically webcentric elements: rules and bulleted lists to the syllabus by doing the following:

1. Select a place between sections for a horizontal rule.
2. Choose Insert > Picture > Horizontal Rule.
3. Navigate to Clip Art Folder > Lines Folder.

4. Select Default Line and click Open.
5. Select some text for a list. (The book list or readings for a particular day are good candidates for lists.)
6. Choose Format > Bullets and Numbering.
7. Click the Bulleted tab.
8. Click on one of the bullet options.
9. Click OK.

For the purposes of experimentation, it is sometimes advantageous to work from scratch by dummying up a two- or three-page syllabus that includes the following:

- Several subheads
- An illustration or two
- A bulleted list or two
- Generous white space
- Horizontal rules to set off sections
- Define three styles: Normal, Heading 1, Heading 2

If you are unsure about how to define a style, consult MS Word's online help facility. Styles are a great timesaver for academics, and it pays to put some effort into mastering styles.

Web visitors "read" differently on the web; they scan rather than read, and subheads and bulleted lists aid scanning. Be sure that the manuscript follows standard word processing typographic conventions. Do the following:

- Be sure that only one space follows a period, colon, and question mark
- Change all quotation marks to "curly quotes"
- Select a web-centric font (Verdana, Arial, or Comic Sans for sans serif and Georgia or Trebuchet for serif—anything but Times New Roman) and a size of 10 points.
- Set the line spacing or leading to 1 1/2 spaces

Why? For a thorough discussion of typographical rules for word processing (as opposed to typing), consult the "Rules of Typography" in the Archives at Fontsite.com. (You'll have to scroll down to find the section.)

DESIGNING THE SYLLABUS FOR THE WEB

Now that the manuscript has been "massaged," it's time to begin the actual construction. In this section, we'll turn the text into a single-cell table and set the table's width to accommodate a good, readable line length.

1. Choose View > Normal.

2. Choose Edit > Select All.
3. Choose Table > Convert > Text to Table.
4. Type 1 in Number of Columns.
5. Type 5 in Initial Column Width.
6. Click OK.
7. Select File > Web Page Preview.

The table is now narrower, but it has unsightly black lines separating paragraphs. The table is also flush against the left side of the browser window. To remove the table grid lines, do the following:

1. Choose Table > Select > Table.
2. Choose Format > Borders and Shading.
3. Click None under Setting.
4. Click OK.
5. Select File > Web Page Preview.

To center the page, so that it floats gracefully to the center of the browser window, do the following:

1. Choose Table > Select > Table.
2. Choose Table > Table Properties.
3. Click Center in Alignment.
4. Click OK.
5. Select File > Web Page Preview.

The page no longer has a border and centers itself in the web browser window. But the page is rather plain.

In this section, we'll add a theme. Be careful to select a theme that promotes high legibility and readability. In other words, choose a theme with high contrast—dark text on a plain or muted background. Like the "little black dress with pearls" black text on white background is always in style. For pages containing large blocks of text, avoid light text on a dark background—what designers call "reversed out" text. It is difficult to read and scan and may cause printing problems. "Kids" (for the whimsical at heart) "Blocks" and "Loose Gesture" are good choices.

1. Choose Table > Select > Table.
2. Choose Format > Theme.
3. Click Active Graphics and Background Image.
4. Scroll to Blocks (or a theme of your choice) in the Theme pane.
5. Click Blocks (or a theme of your choice).
6. Click OK.
7. Choose File > Web Page Preview.

If you discover that you have few themes to choose from, install additional themes from your original CD or go to Microsoft's website Mactopia (Mac) and download additional themes. When you are satisfied with your layout and formatting, do the following:

1. Choose File > Save As Web Page.
2. Click "Save entire file into HTML."
3. Click Web Options.
4. Type a tile in the "Web page title" box.
5. Type several keywords in the "Web page keywords" box.
6. Click the Files tab.
7. Click "Update links on save."
8. Click the Picture tab.
9. Choose "1024x768. . . ." from the "Screen Size" drop-down menu.
10. Click the Encoding tab.
11. Choose "Unicode (UTF-8)" from the "Save this Web Page as" drop-down menu.
12. Click OK.
13. Click Save.

Essentially, the web page is ready to upload to a server. To upload your syllabus, you will need an FTP program. Although there are many FTP programs, many Wintel users find WS_FTP serviceable, and Mac users find Fetch equally useful. You should also check with your university IT department to see if your institution maintains a site license. In the event, the software will be available for you to download. When you do FTP your syllabus, remember to upload the folder associated with the web page. Once it is on the server, be sure to check it in your web browser.

TROUBLE-SHOOTING

If you put your pages on the server and notice that your quotation marks, apostrophes, and em dashes have disappeared, you have problem but not one that is difficult to solve. Some versions of MS Word fail to translate these special characters into Unicode. The solution is to use Find and Replace in a text editor. Tex-Edit, a shareware program for the Mac (not TextEdit that is included with OSX) or SimpleText for the Mac and Notepad for Wintel are good tools. The most common candidates for Find and Replace are:

- Left double quotes “
- Right double quotes ”
- Em dash —
- Apostrophe ’
- Ellipsis …

If you need to replace other special characters, see one of the Unicode pages, such as Alan Wood's Web Site. Click on Character Entity References in HTML 4.0 to find codes for any other special characters.

1. Choose File > Open and open you syllabus.htm file.
2. Choose Edit > Replace.
3. Type OPT + [(Mac) or ALT + [(Wintel) for the left "curly quote" in the Find What box and “ in the Replace box. Note that the Unicode entity ends in semi-colon.
4. Click Replace All.
5. Type OPT + SHIFT + [(Mac) or ALT + SHIFT + [(Wintel) for the right "curly quote" in the Find What box and ” in the Replace box. Note that the Unicode entity ends in semi-colon.
6. Click Replace All.
7. Type the apostrophe OPT + SHIFT +] (Mac) or ALT + SHIFT +] (Wintel) in the Find What box and ” in the Replace box. Note that the Unicode entity ends in semi-colon.
8. Click Replace All.
9. Continue using Find and Replace until all your special characters are accounted for.
10. Choose File > Save.

Upload your page to the sever once more and check it in your browser.

FINISHING TOUCHES

There are, however, some editing or additions that you may wish to make to so that the manuscript looks more "at home" on the web. Some of these might be:

1. Changing the color or formatting of the subheads and so forth. To change the color or formatting of a subhead, modify its style. Choose Format > Style. Click the desired style (Heading 1, Heading 2, or Normal) in the Styles pane. Click Modify. Choose Font from the Format drop-down menu and make your selections.

2. Change the theme altogether. You can try out themes endlessly until you find one that works best for you and for your material. Choose Format > Theme and experiment away. Remember to click Background Image to get an idea of the background's effect on the page. If the background is not one you want or one that interferes with reading the text, unclick Background Image.

3. Put in tabs that may have disappeared or that may be necessary. In a table, pressing the tab key moves from cell to cell. Type OPT + TAB (Mac) or ALT + TAB (PC) to insert a tab in a table cell.

4. Single-space double-spaced items or bring together lines that need to be kept close. Use a soft return by pressing SHIFT + RETURN (Mac) or SHIFT + ENTER (PC) to keep lines close together.

A FEW LAST WORDS

There's a great deal more that you can do within MS Word to increase the sophistication of your web page. Some but not all of your experiments will transfer successfully from MS Word to the web. Spend a few hours learning and ins and outs of tables and styles; getting a handle on tables and styles is helpful for not only for web page construction but also for standard word processing. And to think that a Microsoft product makes it all so easy fairly boggles the mind.