



Creating Web Pages with

Netscape Composer

Plano Independent School District
Instructional Technology Department
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Creating Web pages with Netscape Composer

Netscape Composer *is the Web editing component* of Netscape Communicator. *When you do a typical installation of Communicator, Composer will automatically be installed.*

Most people find that Composer is very user friendly. Though it lacks some of the fancy features included in such programs as Front Page, it provides most of the features you will need. Using Composer, teachers and students can quickly learn basic principles of Web design. The skills learned by using Composer are easily transferable to use in other Web editing programs.



Starting your Web page

Before creating your Web pages, set up a folder on your computer to contain your Web files. Save all your images and Web page files into this same folder.

While in *Netscape Navigator* (hereinafter referred to as “the browser”), choose FILE>New>Blank Page. *Composer* will open so that you can get right to work creating your Web page.



Saving your work

Name your Web files with short file names (maximum of 8 characters, no spaces). Though *Windows 95* will accept longer file names, you may encounter problems on some Web servers. Again, *be sure to save your page and all the images you will use for it into the same folder.*



Previewing your page

Composer is a WYSIWYG (“What You See Is What You Get”) editor. However, you will often find differences when you actually view your pages in a Web browser. Consequently, you should preview your pages frequently. Be sure to use the **Preview** button to check your pages in the browser. Do not switch to the browser by using the *Windows '95* task bar. (If you do, you won’t see the changes you have made since last saving the page.)

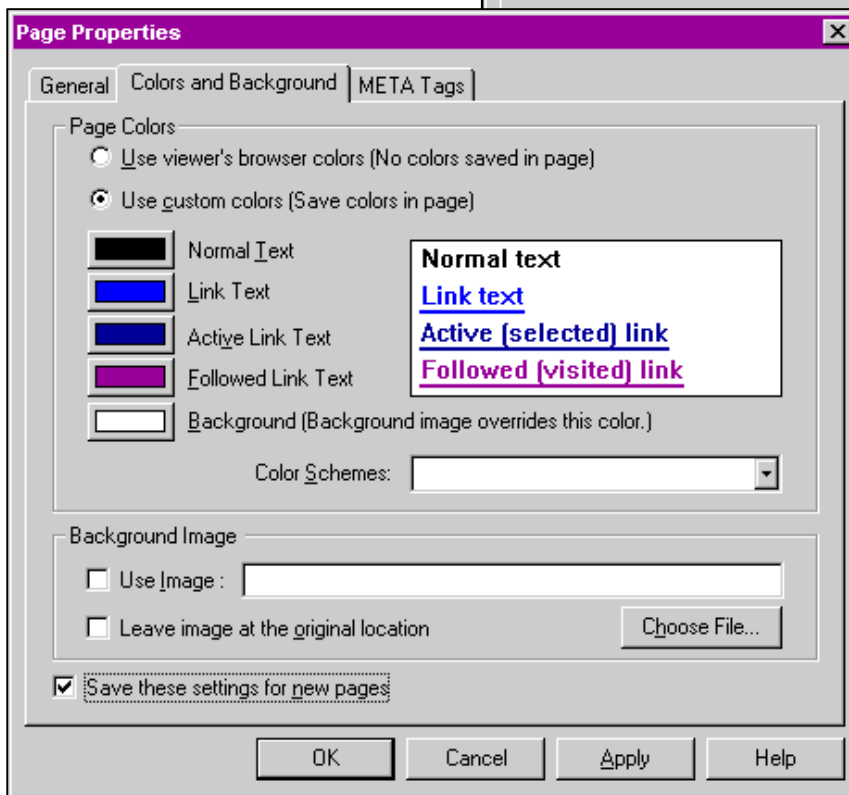
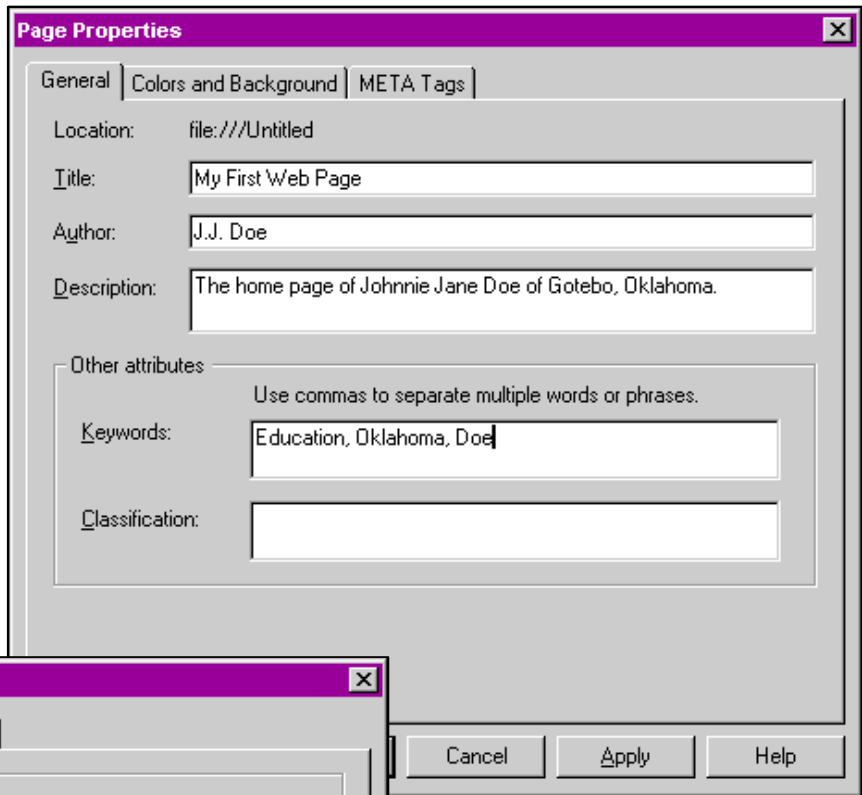
It’s important to preview your pages in a number of scenarios. Different browsers on different computers using different settings may yield dramatically different and unexpected results. Try to check the following alternatives:

- Different browsers – check *Netscape* and *Internet Explorer*
- Different operating systems – check on *Windows* and *Macintosh*
- Different screen resolutions – check 640 x 480 pixels and 800 x 600 pixels
- Different color resolutions – check in 256 colors (If it’s OK in 256 colors, it’ll be fine in millions. The reverse isn’t necessarily true.)

Defining page properties

Title your page

- Select **FORMAT>Page Colors & Properties** from the menu.
- Click the **General** tab at the top of the window.
- Enter a title for your page. This title will appear in the title bar at the top of the viewer's browser window, in bookmark lists and as the name listed by search engines.
- *Description, Keywords and Classification* are used by search engines to describe, identify and categorize your page.

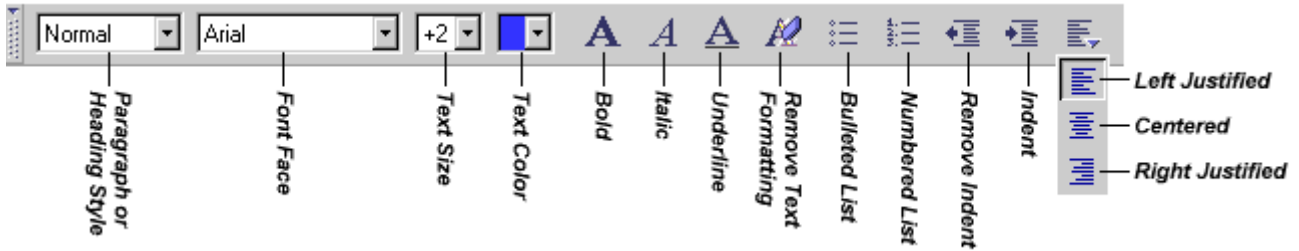


Set your colors

- Click on the **Colors and Background** tab at the top of the window. By clicking in each of the rectangles, you can specify colors for text, links and page background.
- To use a background image on your page, click on the **Choose File** button. When the navigator window opens, select an image from your Web page folder. Click open. The file name and path will be added on the line after *Use Image*.
- Click **OK**.

Formatting text

Start by just typing in your text. Feel free to copy and paste if you are recreating text from an existing word processing document. After entering your text, you are ready to begin formatting. Highlight the text and then apply formatting using the text toolbar.



Guidelines for text formatting

Though *Composer* functions much like a word processor, you will find some limitations.

- HTML documents use relative font sizes. This means that the font sizes will vary depending on the font settings specified in the user's browser. Though *Composer* will allow you to use standard "point sizes" (such as 10, 12, 14), *Internet Explorer* will ignore those settings. To be safe, choose from the relative font sizes (such as -2, 0, +1). A size of "0" is considered normal body text.
- If you use unusual fonts, don't expect them to show up on other computers. The safe fonts to use are Arial, Times New Roman and Courier. Virtually every *Windows* computer will have those three fonts installed. (Macintoshes will substitute equivalent fonts.) To use other fonts for specific purposes (such as creating titles and headings), use a graphics program to create that text and then insert it as an image.
- Spacing is unpredictable. If you put multiple spaces between words, or add additional line breaks with the **Enter** key, you may get unexpected results and lots of frustration.
- Select text colors that strongly contrast with the background. If you choose light colored text, be aware that it may not show up when the page is printed.



Working with Images

How images work on the Web

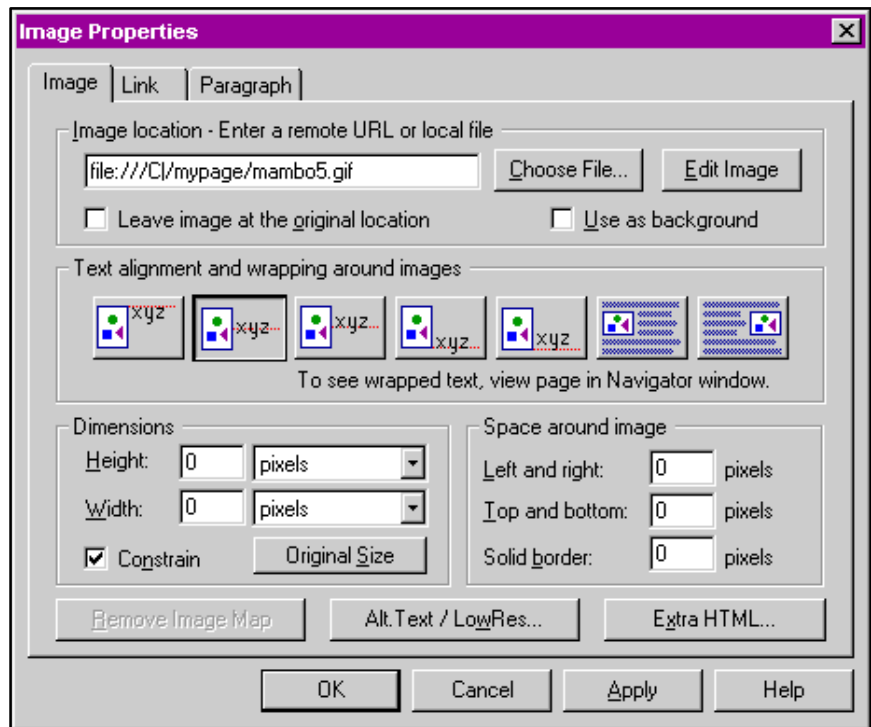
Currently only two graphics file formats are commonly supported on the Web. All images must be either GIF files or JPG files. These file formats are highly compressed so that the images will download more quickly.

When you insert an image into a Web page, the image doesn't actually become a part of the HTML file. Rather, the HTML file includes instructions telling the computer where to display the image on the page and what size to display it at. Consequently, there are important considerations to keep in mind:

- When putting your pages on a Web server you must also upload all the image files to the server. The files must be in the same location in relation to the HTML file as when that Web page was created. (The easiest way to do this is to make sure all your image files and HTML files are always in the same folder.)
- Download time for an image is based on the file size of the image. If you take a large photo and resize it in *Netscape Composer* so that it is very small, it will still take a long time to download. To make large adjustments to an image, use an image editor such as *Photoshop* or *Paint Shop Pro*.

Inserting an image

- Click on the **Image** button and select the **Image** tab at the top of the dialog box.
- Select the **Choose File** button. Navigate to the image file, select it and click **OK**. You will be returned to the Image Properties" dialog box. The current file path will be placed on the *Image location* line.
- Select the appropriate button under *Text alignment and wrapping*. (Experiment to see the effect each button will have on your image. Unfortunately, you must preview the page in the browser to see the results of your text alignment choice.)
- Click the **Alt.Text** button and enter a few words describing the image. This text will display in place of the image before the image loads and for viewers who choose to turn image viewing off. It is also an aid for the visually impaired whose browsers read this alternate text to them.
- Click **OK** and the image will appear on the page. If you wish to alter its alignment in relation to text, the image size, or space around the image, double click on the image and the "Image Properties" dialog box will open. You will then have the opportunity to adjust these image properties.

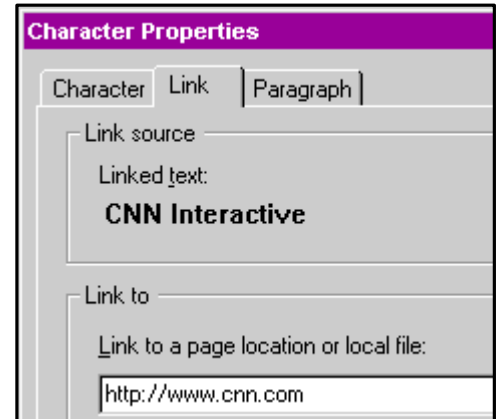




Making the Link

Linking to another site on the WWW (absolute link)

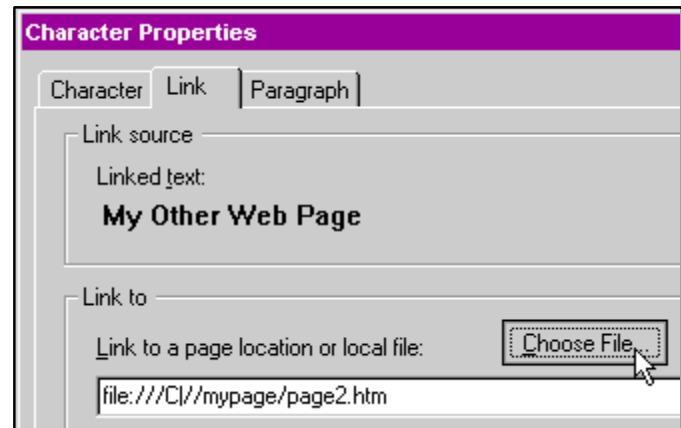
- Highlight the text or image that you wish to link.
- Click the **Link** button.
- Type in the URL (Internet address) of the site you are linking to in the *Link to* box.
- Click **OK**.



Linking to another page on your site (relative link)

- Highlight the text or image that you wish to link.
- Click the **Link** button.
- Click on the **Choose File** button in the *Link to* box. From the navigation window, choose the file you will link to. The file name and path will be inserted in the dialog box.
- Click **OK**.

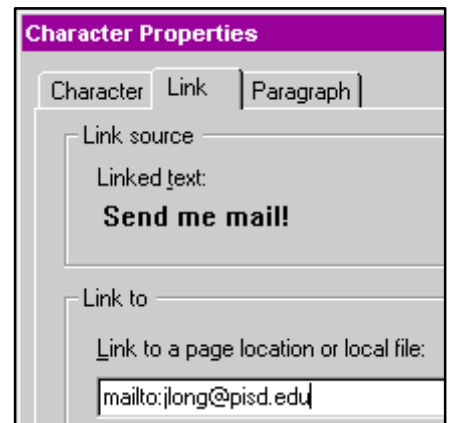
Caution: relative links can get tricky. To be safe, make sure that both the page you are linking **from** and the page you are linking **to** are in the same folder when you create them. They must then be put in the same folder on the server. Otherwise, the link will not function.



Mailto links

You can add a link that includes an e-mail address so that the person viewing your page can easily contact you.

- Highlight the text or image that you wish to link
- Click the **Link** button.
- In the *Link to* box, type in **mailto:** followed by the e-mail address you will link to.
- Click **OK**.



Test your links

Click the **Preview** button and then test each of your links. If a link doesn't work, return to the editor, highlight the entire link and click the **Link** button again. Check the URL and make any necessary corrections.

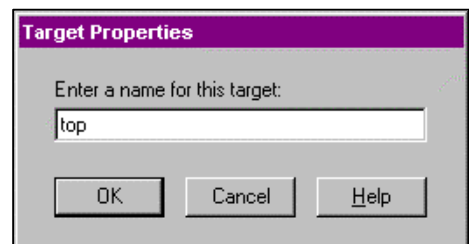


Linking to another place on the same page

It is often helpful to build links within a single page to help the reader locate information quickly. This is most useful if the page requires extensive scrolling. You may wish to list contents of the page with links to specific information that is located farther down on the page.

Create a target

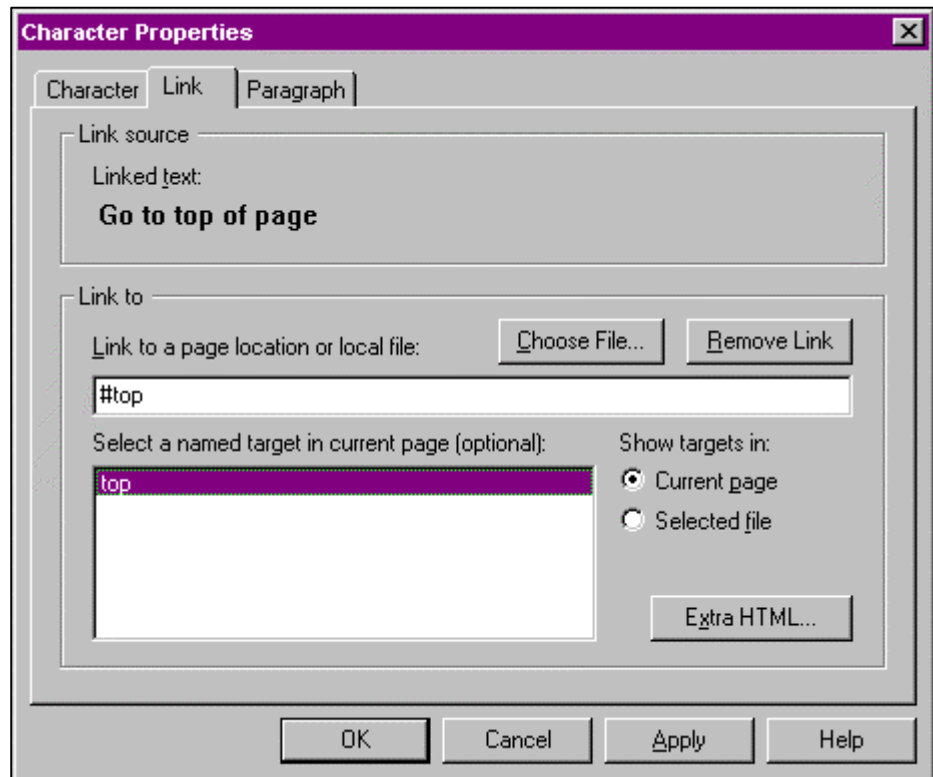
- Before you can link to another spot within the page, you must create a “target” to link to. (For example, if you will provide a link that will say “Return to top of page,” place a target at the top of the page.
- Select a place to “target” in the page.
- Click on the **Target** button on the toolbar.
- You will be asked to enter a name for the target. In this example, you would enter “Top” since it will bring the user back to the top of the page.
- A target symbol will show on the page to remind you that a target has been placed there. (This only shows in *Composer*. When you preview the page, you will see that there is no indication of the target on the Web page itself.



Make the link

After you have created the target, you can create a link to that target. This works in much the same manner as creating any other type of link.

- Highlight the text you wish to link from. (e.g. “Go to top of page.”)
- Click the **Link** button.
- Instead of typing in the name of a file or page to link to, click on the name of a target in the bottom box.
- Click **OK**.





Building Tables

Tables are an important part of Web design. No doubt you have noticed many tables on Web pages. However, you will find that tables are not only valuable when putting items in rows and columns. Tables enable you to use complex formatting to create more appealing page layouts and to dictate placement of text and objects in ways that are otherwise impossible.

Insert a table

- Click the “Table” button.
- Specify the number of rows and columns.
- Indicate whether the table should be aligned to the left, center or right of page.
- Indicate the desired width of table borders. If you do not want visible borders on your table, uncheck the box.
- Specify the space between cells and the padding within the cells. Padding gives some “breathing room” between cell boundaries and the data inside the cell.
- You may specify width and minimum height of the table either by percentage of window width or by specific number of pixels.
- By default, columns will be equal in width. Uncheck this box if you do not want equal columns.
- To make the table’s background another color, click on the box next to “Use Color” and pick a color.
- Click **OK**.

The image shows the 'New Table Properties' dialog box in Netscape Composer. It has a purple title bar. The 'Number of rows' is set to 1 and 'Number of columns' is set to 2. Under 'Table Alignment', 'Left' is selected. 'Include caption' is unchecked, with 'Above table' selected. 'Border line width' is 1 pixel, 'Cell spacing' is 1 pixel, and 'Cell padding' is 1 pixel. 'Table width' is 100% of window, and 'Table min. height' is 100% of window. 'Equal column widths' is checked. Under 'Table Background', 'Use Color' is checked with a blue color swatch. 'Use Image' is unchecked. 'Leave image at the original location' is unchecked. There is a 'Choose Image...' button. At the bottom, there is an 'Extra HTML...' button and 'OK', 'Cancel', 'Apply', and 'Help' buttons.

The table will appear on the page. You may now either enter text and graphics within the cells, or you may make additional alterations to the table’s format.

Refining your tables

After inserting a table, you will often need to make modifications to some parts of it.

- Click inside the table using the secondary mouse button (“right-click”) and choose *Table Properties*. A familiar-looking dialog box will appear.
- Select the appropriate tab at the top of the box to format a specific cell or row (the cell or row where you just right-clicked), or select the **Table** tab to alter formatting for the overall properties for the table.

Guidelines for table formatting

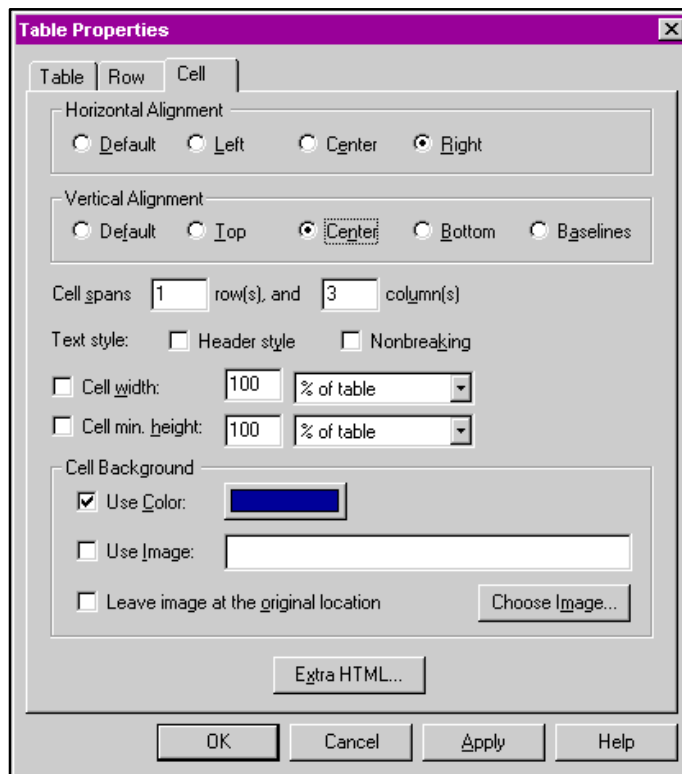
Table formatting is a very powerful tool in page design. It will, however, require lots of experimentation on your part. Here are some tips to guide you in that experimentation.

- To use invisible tables for advanced page layout, turn borders off. Table boundaries will be indicated with dotted lines while working in *Composer*, but they will not show in the browser.
- Sketch out complex tables in advance. Creating advanced tables on the fly will lead to lots of frustration.
- Add and delete cells, rows and columns by right-clicking.
- In order to format a cell to be wider than one column, you must first delete a cell on that row.
- Cells without content will collapse. You must have some content in each row and column that you are using. If you need an empty column, use a pixel shim (also known as “the single pixel GIF trick”).

Insert a 1 pixel by 1 pixel transparent GIF in the cell you need to hold open. In the *Page Properties* window, adjust the dimensions of the image to the desired height or width. For example, if you need to hold a column open 100 pixels wide, insert the single pixel and change the image size to 1 pixel by 100 pixels.

- A productive way to learn more about table formatting is to look at good pages on the Web. When you find a page you like, choose **FILE>Edit Page**. The page will then be displayed in *Composer*. The invisible borders for the table will be indicated with dotted lines. By right-clicking in the table, you can view *Table Properties* and learn much about the underlying structure of the tables.

A good example page is the *Dallas Morning News* at www.dallasnews.com. It uses tables with borders turned on, invisible tables, and tables inside other tables.

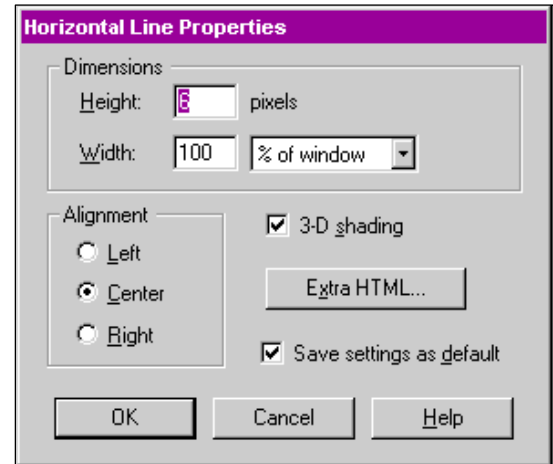


Miscellany



Adding horizontal lines

- It's easy! Just click the **H.Line** button.
- To format the line, right-click exactly on top of the line and choose *Horizontal Line Properties*.



Right-click is your friend

If you aren't familiar with the secondary mouse button, now is the time to learn. By right clicking anywhere on your page, a context-sensitive menu will pop up giving you choices of actions that are appropriate. You'll find it very useful in learning the program, and it will prove a great time saver.

What you can't do with Composer

Composer has some limitations. It does not allow you to create pages using frames or cascading style sheets. It has no site management features. It doesn't create forms. There is no image mapping utility within the program. If you wish to use image maps on your pages, check out *Live Image* at www.liveimage.com. It's a terrific shareware program that's simple to use.

Create your own graphics

As you become proficient at creating pages, you'll want to start creating your own images. Try downloading a 30-day trial of *Paint Shop Pro* at www.jasc.com.

Resources

For links to a variety of resources about Web page development, go to k-12.pisd.edu/techs/jiml/webmarks.htm.

As you have questions, feel free to e-mail me at jlong@pisd.edu or reach me by phone at extension 18087.