

FIT100 -- Project 1

Misinformation Web Site

Winter 2006

The World Wide Web contains an enormous amount of information, and most of it is true and correct. But some of it is not. How will you know if the information you find is true and correct? It's tough to be sure, because there is no simple test. To help you understand how easy it is to publish misinformation on the Web, this assignment will create a Web site that is wrong. At the end of this assignment, we'll discuss how to analyze the truth of a Web site.

Goals:

- 1) Practice writing HTML to make a Web page.
- 2) Practice manipulating a photograph to change its meaning.
- 3) See that constructing a Web page is unrelated to the truth of its content.

Preparation:

This assignment requires that you have read Chapters 4 and 5 of the text book, and reviewed Labs 4 and 5, though you can get started without completing all of that prep.

Overview of Task:

The goal is to create an informational Web site that is like an encyclopedia entry; that is, the site informs the reader about a topic. As an example of such a site, visit <http://descy.50megs.com/akcj3/bmd.html> which describes a breed of dog, the Burmese Mountain Dog, that doesn't exist. (See pp. 148-150 in the textbook for a further description.) Notice that the site does not try to be sensational or funny, but simply presents the information in a way that looks convincing and very official. (A site trying to be amusing is the dihydrogen monoxide site, www.dhmo.org.) Notice for example,

- there is a picture of the dog, which is slightly but noticeably changed from a real dog of a similar name,
- it has a link to the American Kennel Club, an official organization of dog owners,
- it is signed by one claiming official status as DVM, doctor of veterinary medicine,
- there is considerable invented information and lots of real information.

Your site will have similar persuasive information.

Specifications:

Your [mis]informational Web site must have the following features.

Topic: Like the encyclopedia, your page will furnish information about some topic such as a breed of dog, a sport, the history of some past event, or other themes that you and others would be interested in. (Inappropriate topics include disasters, crimes, genocide, personal attacks, illegal drugs, or other topics in which misinformation could be harmful or offensive; if in doubt pick a non-controversial topic.)

Source: Find an authoritative Web site that is the source of similar information; you may use this source (like the AKC site) for related or supporting information; keep the URL.

Explanation: Write a small (at least 4 paragraphs) description of the [mis]information on the topic you have chosen, which you write in your own words. Your goal is to make your page be as believable as possible; you can draw on related information from your Source site. Your Explanation should have in addition to the text the following

Required Features:

- Links to one or more sites to give it the appearance of authenticity; e.g. AKC.
- A small table of facts or statistics (some of which should be invented) comparing to similar information to add detail, e.g. a comparison with another breed of dog.
- A photograph modified to support your misinformation.
- A bulleted list to enumerate properties.

Other features or more of these features to make your page look believable can be added.

Disclaimer: Prominently at the top of your site you must display with a distinctly colored font and `<h1>` size text: THIS SITE, CREATED AS A FIT100 CLASS PROJECT (WINTER 2006), CONTAINS PURPOSELY MISLEADING INFORMATION; COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL USED FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT ONLY, UNDER FAIR USE.

Originality: You must write all of the content, you must write all of the HTML (no authoring tools this time), and you must personally modify the picture(s).

Task:

Solving this assignment will involve the following steps, in roughly this order.

- 1) Think up a topic of interest to you and research it on the Web. You will likely make some Google searches. Your goal is to locate truthful information to inform you on the topic. This will be your method of finding the Source Site and a basis of the misinformation you will create.
- 2) Plan out the topic, that is, think up what misinformation you will present, and list the ways in which you can make the topic believable. Decide which ones will be presented using Required Features.
- 3) Build a skeleton Web page with the name **project1A.html**. (You *must* use this name.) This page should have the Disclaimer at the top, a horizontal line following the disclaimer, your topic heading, and the Required Features unfilled in any order. For example, `<p>Unfilled</p>` will make a paragraph that doesn't yet have text. Also, an empty table might look like this.

Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled
Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled

Your bulleted list must list the ways you can make your topic believable, which you had decided upon in Step 2; these items will change in the second half of the project.

The goal is to work out the HTML so that all that needs to be done is to fill in the content. All of the HTML you will need is in the textbook.

- 4) Copy and paste the following text at the end of your page, just before the `</body>` tag

```
<script type="text/javascript">  
document.write("Last updated: ") ;
```

```
var modified ;
modified = document.lastModified ;
document.write(modified) ;
</script>
```

this verifies that you turned in the assignment on time.

This step concludes Part A of the project; see Figure 1 for an example. The following constitutes Part B.

- 5) Locate a digital photograph and using the knowledge from Lab 5 modify it to support the misinformation that you are presenting. When including it in your Web page, give the source of the photograph.
In general, because of copyright law you can only use photos on Web pages that you took, that are in the public domain, i.e. they are freely available to everyone, or that you have permission to use. However, there is an exception in the copyright law that permits limited free use for educational purposes, called Fair Use. (See Chapter 12, pp.353-358.) Because we are using this photo in a homework assignment that will be taken down after the grading, we will use the Fair Use for Education principle here; this allows you to use copyrighted photos if necessary but only for this one assignment. Use of photos, for example, for your personal Web page—even if its stored on UW servers—is fully covered by the copyright law; using copyrighted material without permission is illegal and when you're caught, very expensive.
- 6) Copy the completed Part A web page, and rename it **project1B.html**. Fill in the content of the page. You will be inventing misinformation, but you must be careful to make it as believable as possible. Because the skeleton has already been built in Step 3, this step will mostly require modifying the entries on the page and making it look as authentic in as many ways as you can. Avoid misspellings, weird colors, odd fonts, etc.
- 7) Remove the Disclaimer heading temporarily and show the “pure” page to a friend who is unaware of what you have done. Claim to be wondering if the page is for real, and ask them what they think. Record their comments.
- 8) After inserting a horizontal line at the end of the original **project1B.html**, i.e. the one that still has the disclaimer, add the test subject’s comments.
- 9) Finally, after the test subject’s comments, answer how you’d discover that your page was misinformation.

Turn In:

You will turn in your project online by placing it in your UW Web space in a directory named **fit100**. This allows us to access your page using, say, URL:

```
http://students.washington.edu/UWnetID/fit100/project1A.html
```

(All versions posted in your Web space must have the Disclaimer on them.) There will be two turn-ins, A and B. The deadlines are:

A: project1A.html must be placed by 5:00 PM (17:00) on Friday January 20, 2006.

B: project1B.html must be placed by 11:00 PM (23:00) on Wednesday January 25, 2006.

Place your Web page on your site by the deadline, AND DO NOT MODIFY IT AFTER THE DEADLINE. The text included in Step 4 above will timestamp your assignment so we know when it was last changed. (Notice that you can copy the whole file for Step 6 without affecting this “last modified” timestamp.)

Grading:

Each turn-in will be graded separately on a 50 point scale.

A: The “A” turn-in is mostly concerned with the structure of the Web page, i.e. the HTML. All items listed (Disclaimer, line, paragraphs, etc.) will be checked and assigned points. (The photo can be unaltered, but should display.) Of the 50 points, 20 are allocated for the bulleted list showing your Step 2 plans. (See tasks above.)

B: The “B” turn-in is mostly concerned with the content and your efforts to make it appear authoritative. Items to be checked include the topic, title, paragraphs of presentation, photo, table, etc., spelling and other features that contribute to its believability, and the comments at the end.

The Lesson:

You have created a credible-looking Web page that is filled with misinformation. If you can do it easily, then others can. What prevents people from putting misinformation on the Web? Nothing! There is no central authority to check what is posted, as you’ve seen.

So, when we find information on the Web, we must always be skeptical about whether it is true and correct. How do we decide?

- Check other sources. Almost anything we are interested in will have multiple sources, and they should be able to affirm the information we have found. This is very easy to do with search engines, so it is always a good thing to do.
- Check the source. Is the information coming from a reputable organization (check to be sure that the site isn’t faked, as explained in Chapter 5)? Reputable sites try to publish true and correct information. We can trust them.
- Follow up on the “authoritative” information included in the site. Is the author a real person with a real address and a real job; are the author’s credentials verifiable?
- If there is a photograph purporting to support the information, can you find other images that show the same thing, but from different sources?

Almost all information is intended to be truthful, but not everything is. If the information we seek is important to us, it is an easy task to check it. And we should. Skepticism is our best friend when using the WWW to gather information.

**THIS SITE, CREATED AS A FIT100 CLASS PROJECT (WINTER 2006),
CONTAINS PURPOSELY MISLEADING INFORMATION;
COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL USED FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT ONLY,
UNDER FAIR USE.**

Burmese Mountain Dog

(This example assumes the misinformation page is about the Burmese Mountain Dog, yours, especially the bulleted items, will be different.)

unfiled

unfiled

unfiled

unfiled

unfiled	unfiled	unfiled
unfiled	unfiled	unfiled



- I will modify a picture of a dog
- I plan to modify the characteristics of a real dog
- I sign my page by a made-up person with DVM credentials
- I will display a map showing Burma
- I will make up a history about the dog

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Figure 1.