

Lesson 4: Working with Style Sheet Rules

This is part of a distance class on Dreamweaver. Dreamweaver CS3 was used for the screen captures, but this material would be applicable for the most part to people using Dreamweaver MX 2004 or Dreamweaver 8. Created by Linda Ffolliott, ECAT, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Arizona.

What are style sheets?

Style sheets, which are often referred to as CSS for Cascading Style Sheets, are a way to separate content on web pages from formatting. The term cascading refers to how styles are implemented, when you have multiple references to the same rule or property in the same web document.

Style sheets are found in other applications, such as in many word processors and page layout programs like inDesign. The concept of style sheets was introduced to the web by the World Wide Web Consortium in 1996. This is the group that creates the standards for HTML coding used on the web. The Consortium wanted a way to stop browser manufacturers from introducing more HTML tags which were really formatting. The concept of separating content from formatting (or the look) is vividly demonstrated by the sample pages that appear on the Zen Garden site at <http://www.csszengarden.org>.

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Normally you cannot really tell by looking at a web document if style sheets have been used for formatting, but sometimes you might see effects such as the boxed text to the left. This text box is not a graphic but is regular text with a special style applied

to it. There is certainly no command in the Properties panel or regular menus of Dreamweaver that let you create a box around text. The video [Examples of Class Selectors](#) shows creating a style sheet rule for a box similar to the example above.

We have looked briefly at using templates, and there will be material in Lesson 7 about creating a template, if you want to pursue that. Templates can be used without styles, styles can be used without templates, and both features can be used in the same documents and on the same site. Templates control the layout of the web page, with parts of the page protected and other parts editable. Style sheets are used for formatting. It is the style sheet, thus, that controls the use of a color red and a font size and font type for a header in your document. The template dictates where the "header" will be on the page and if it can be changed or not.

Why use style sheets?

The video **What Are Style Sheet Rules?** shows some of the advantages of using style sheets.

One of the reasons to use style rules is to provide consistency in terms of elements on a page and elements found on different pages. For example, if you have three or four traits for a heading that you use throughout your site, by placing those into a style rule and then referencing the style rule, you don't have to remember all the specific traits each time you use the header. This is also an advantage if you have others creating documents for your site. It is easier to tell them to apply a particular style from a listing of styles than to provide the detailed instructions to create the header.

A second advantage is that changes in formatting can be made in one document and all documents using that style sheet are updated. This is similar to one of the advantages of using templates on a site. The changes don't have to be significant; you might only be changing the type of font used on your pages. However, if a central style list is not used for a site, then each document must be opened individually and changed. This is perhaps the major practical reason that site managers decide to use style sheets on their site.

A third reason for using style rules is that through properties and values associated with rules, that can only be done in a style sheet, you can create effects not found in the Properties panel nor normal Dreamweaver menus. One example is changing the spacing used between paragraphs. The default is to put a "blank line" but through style rules you can remove all spacing between paragraphs or reduce the spacing. You can also add spacing between lines. You can add indentations to paragraphs, and you can add elements like a line border around parts of your document.

As we have already seen in Lesson 2, when you create page properties using the Page Properties or when you apply text traits to selected text using the Properties panel, you are creating an internal style sheet rule in that document. This feature was added with the MX 2004 release and continues to be found in later releases of Dreamweaver.

Another reason to use style sheets is that it is expected. The World Wide Web Consortium that creates the rules and standards for web pages wants site managers to use style sheets, to separate content from formatting. Their standards are outlined in great detail at <http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/>

Yet another reason to use style sheets is that with the same content, you can alter the appearance of the document for different devices. The two most common are to have a layout for the screen, which might include a navigation area and use of colors in many places, but when the document is printed, color headers can be changed to black and white and navigation areas on the page can be turned off. This is also shown in the video **What Are Style Sheet Rules?**

The structure of style sheets

```
h1 {  
    font-size: 165%;  
}
```

A style sheet is basically a collection of rules (or selectors), and each rule controls some aspect of formatting in the document. A rule is a statement made up of an HTML tag or a "made up" style.

To the left is an example of the simplest rule. It is a rule (or

selector) for how the h1 tag will be displayed, and there is only one property in this rule. It is a property for the font size with a value of 165% (of the size of the base font, whatever that is).

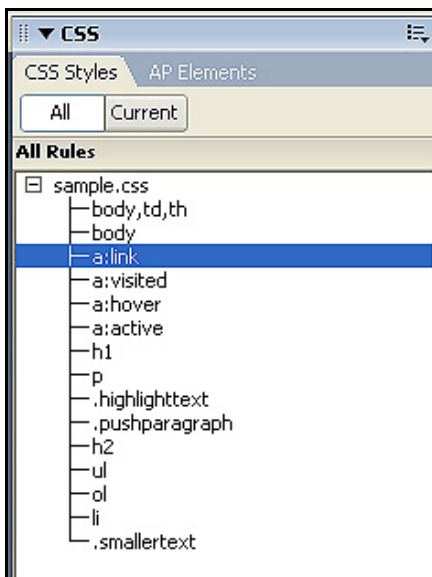
```
h1 {
  font-size: 165%;
  font-weight: bold;
  color: #000066;
  margin: 0px 0px 5px;
  background-color: #FFFFFF;
}
```

Most often, however, a rule has more than one property, such as the one to the left. This is called grouping of properties. This rule has five properties: one for font-size, one for font-weight, one for color (font color), one for margins around this element, and one for the background color.

Most of the time, especially when you first start to create and edit rules, you will work with the CSS Rule Definition dialog box in Dreamweaver to select the properties and values for a particular rule or selector. The examples above show how to code is actually stored in either the HTML document or the style sheet listing.

Several types of selectors

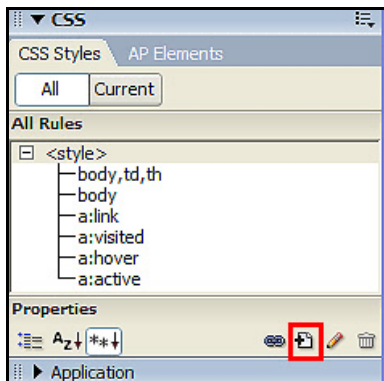
There are several types of selectors. They are a **tag selector** (called also an element selector); a **class selector**, a **pseudo-class selector**, an **ID selector**, and a **descendant** (or contextual) **selector**. As a beginner you will create selectors for regular HTML tags, as is shown in the video **Examples of Tag Selectors**. Another common type of selector you will use is class selectors, which you apply to elements on a page. This is shown in the video **Examples of Class Selectors**. The pseudo-class selectors you will initially use are those that apply to types of links. ID selectors are most often created to define parts of a web page, such as #header, #navigationarea, #footer, or #content. Descendant selectors occur when particular combinations of rules/selectors have different traits. The most common example of this is that links in a header or footer area might be white (to show up against a dark blue background) and links in the content might be dark blue or black, since the background there could be white. We will look more at ID selectors and descendant selectors in Lesson 7.



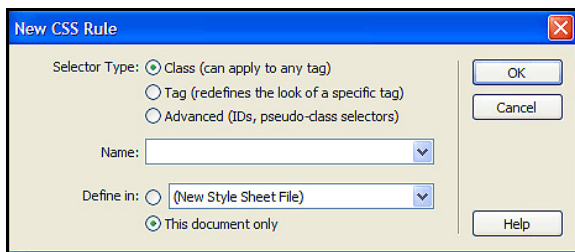
The style listing to the left has both tag selectors and class selectors and some pseudo-class selectors (the selectors affecting the four types of links). These can be created by using the Page Properties panel, by using the CSS Rule Definition dialog box or by applying text traits using the Properties panel. Rules that start with a dot like **.smallertext** or **.highlighttext** are class selectors.

In the current screen capture, there are no ID selectors nor any descendant selectors. ID selector names start with a # symbol, like #header, #uaheader, #content, or #highlightbox.

Creating new rules using the CSS panel



The video **Examples of Tag Selectors** shows creating styles through the CSS Style Panel. The CSS panel has to be displaying. If it is not, you have to turn on the display by going to **Window** on the Menu bar, then clicking on **CSS**. The icon boxed in red in the screen capture to the left is the New CSS Rule button to create a new rule.



The New CSS Rule dialog box shown to the left appears. Here you select the type of rule, give it a name, and indicate if the rule is to be put in the open document or be placed in an external style sheet. Dreamweaver categories rules as **class**, **tag**, and **advanced**. The videos **Examples of Tag Selectors** and **Examples of Class Selectors** shows using both the class and the tag option.

We will look at Advanced when we look at ID selectors for layout in Lesson 7. Initially you will define the rules for the current document. This means they are placed in the <head> area of the open HTML document.

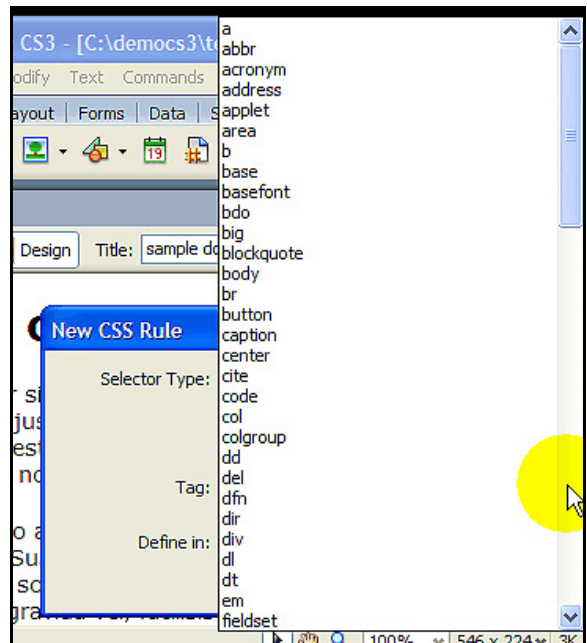
If you create a tag selector, you have to select the particular HTML tag you are modifying. The drop down list is found by clicking on the arrow for the Name window.

The list of tag names are legitimate HTML tag names. Many of these you may not use. And it does not matter if you don't know what these are all for.

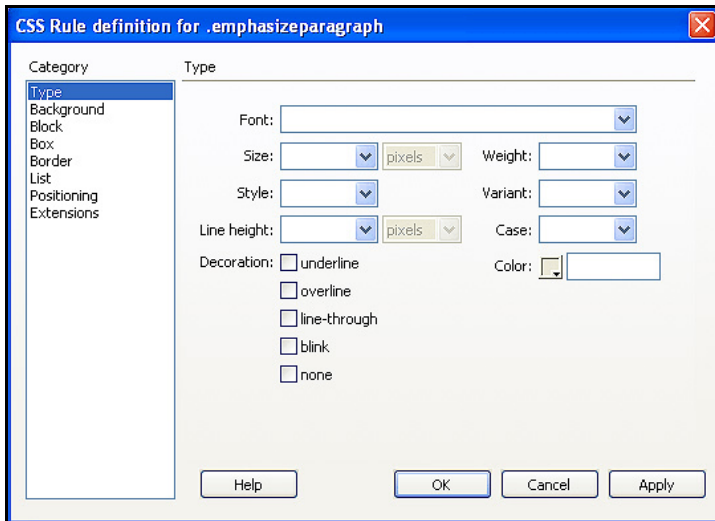
You can create tag selectors (rules) for tags you plan to use, or create one after you use the tag. If you do not create a rule for a tag, then the default effects for that tag are applied by a browser. For example, the default spacing around a paragraph <p> tag makes paragraphs look like there is a blank line between them.

Besides defining tag selectors, you will also probably create some class selectors. It is hard to image a situation where you would not need at least one class selector for a website. Class selectors allow you to apply formatting to particular (selected) parts of your document. This is demonstrated in the video **Examples of Class Selectors**.

If you use the New CSS Rule dialog box to create a class selector, you assign the name in that dialog



box. The name is a single word preceded by a dot.



No matter what type of selector you are creating, after giving a name and type, you see the CSS Rule Definition dialog box showing to the left.

The properties and values created for a selector (or rule) are based on standards of the World Wide Web Consortium. The categories and the options associated with a category that are shown in Dreamweaver are devices to help create the selectors. For example, a common category used is Text, for picking selected properties for text.

Just a few examples of categories you might want to use are shown in the videos [Examples of Tag Selectors](#) and [Examples of Class Selectors](#). Type, background, block, box and border are categories you might want to use, even as a beginner.

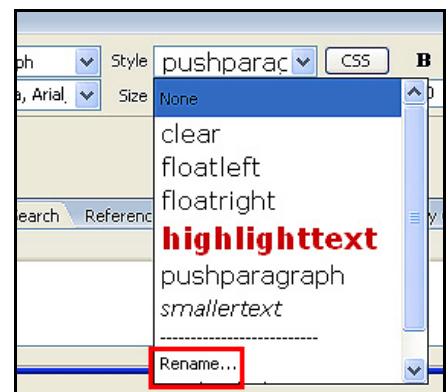
Tag selectors are applied or used when that particular HTML tag is used in the document. There are different ways to apply a class selector, but typically it is applied by selecting an item (like text) and then selecting that class selector from the drop down list of styles in the Properties panel. This is demonstrated in the video [Examples of Class Selectors](#).

Dreamweaver creates class selectors

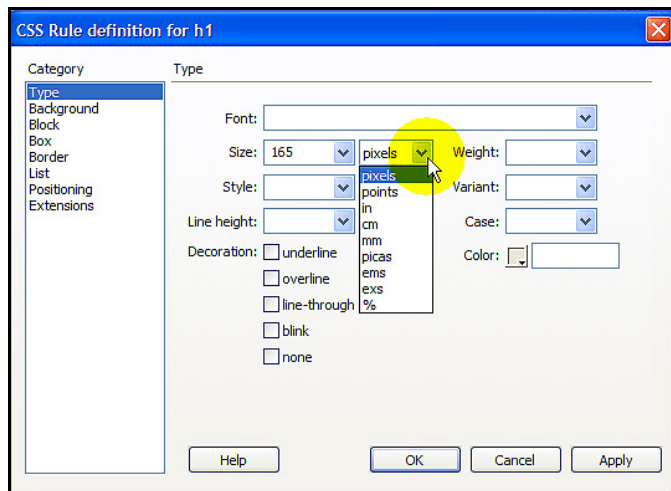
As was shown in Lesson 2, and in the video [Examples of Class Selectors](#), when you select text and apply text traits using the Properties panel, Dreamweaver creates a class selector with those traits. This was a feature that was added with the release of Dreamweaver MX 2004, and has continued with later releases of Dreamweaver. These rules initially have a meaningless name, such as .style1, .style2, .style3, and so forth.

To facilitate use of these class selectors, they should be renamed. One way to rename a class selector is to click once on that selector name in the CSS panel, right click and pick Rename from the options. This is demonstrated in the video [Examples of Class Selectors](#).

Another way to rename a class selector is to click so you are sitting inside an area that is using that class selector, then from the Properties panel select the option of Rename.



Font size measurements

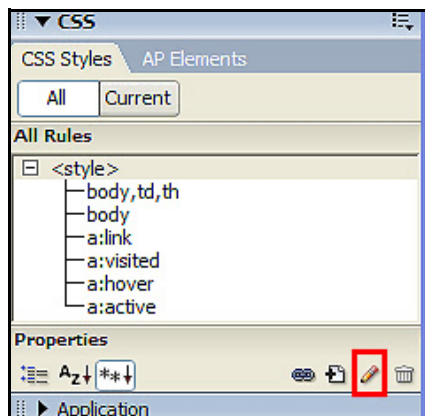


In the video **Examples of Tag Selectors** when I select font sizes for the H1 and H2 tags, I mention that font measurements can be fixed measurements or relative measurements. The three most common measurements used for the web are pixels (which would be a fixed measurement) and percentage and ems. Percentage is percentage of the base font, which might be controlled by the visitor's browser if you have not given a specific font size in Page Properties. Keep in mind, however, that browsers may not exactly interpret your percentage, but may round to another percentage. Still statements like 90 percent, or 125 percent, or 200

percent give you a sense of the size of the text, compared with the base font. Changing the base font, if you have a base font size declared, means you don't have to change these font sizes.

Em is another relative measurement. Originally the term came from typography and was the full width of the capital M character. But because of different styles of fonts, and the fact that some alphabets do not have a M character, em now commonly means the height of your base font. A measurement of 1.5 em is one and a half size of the base font. A measurement of 0.75 em is three-fourths of the base font.

Editing existing rules

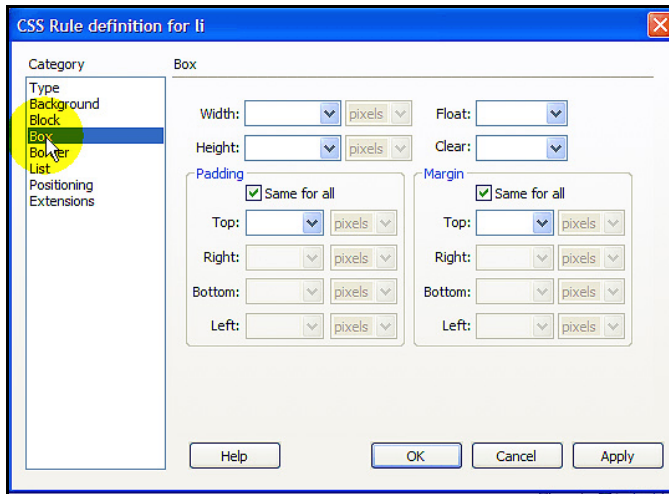


There are two ways to edit (thus change) rules in a style sheet.

1- You can edit the code directly in the rule. I will discuss this more in Lesson 7.

2- Another way is to use the CSS Rule Definition dialog box. First you would select (click once) on the rule you want to edit, and then you would click on the Edit CSS Rule button (icon), boxed in the screen capture to the left. This is shown in both videos **Examples of Tag Selectors** and **Examples of Class Selectors**. There are some properties not available through the Rule Definition dialog box, but many that you will need as a beginner are there.

Exploring the Dreamweaver categories for style rules

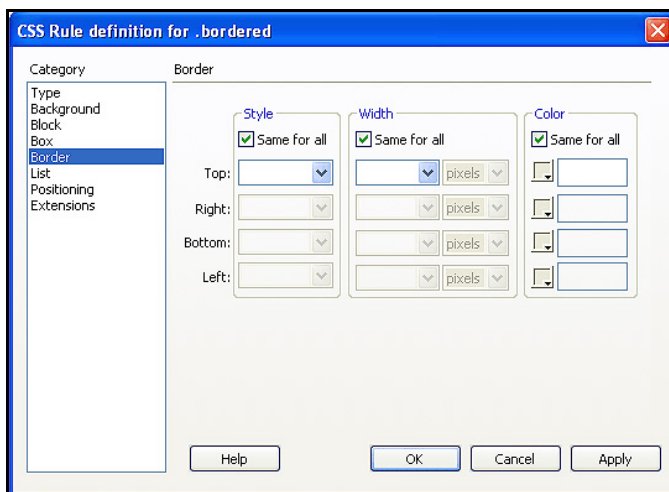


There are several useful properties found under the category of box. We will look at some of these like width, height, and float in some other lessons.

But even as a new rule creator, you should explore the options for padding and for margin.

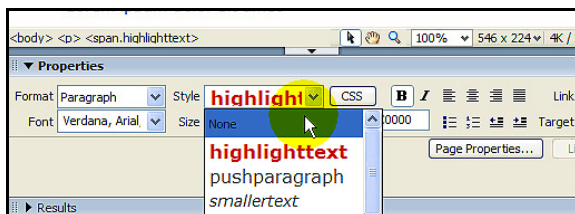
Padding refers to space **within an element**. In the video **Examples of Class Selectors**, when I create a border for a paragraph area, I add padding for this class selector, so there is more space between the border and the text that is contained inside the border.

Your use of margins will require some experimentation. Margins deal with spacing between elements. If you make margins for paragraphs 0, as is shown in the video **Examples of Tag Selectors**, you can see no spacing between paragraphs, but adjacent elements like a list of bulleted items or a header tag carry their own margins. Probably initially you will use padding more than margin properties, but both have their usefulness



In the video **Examples of Class Selectors** I create a border for one of the classes that is applied to a selected paragraph. The properties for the border example were for a border on all four sides, with the same width and color on all sides. You can experiment with borders on just two sides with different thicknesses and different colors. An example of a page which uses borders only on two sides is the CALS homepage at <http://cals.arizona.edu/> for both the headers, footers and links to the left of the page.

Deleting a selector versus removing effects



It is not unusual to create a class selector, and apply it, and then want to remove that selector. If you have applied a class selector to a part of your document and don't want to use it there anymore, position your insertion point inside that text area, so that the class name is showing in the Style window in the Properties panel. Simply pick from the window's listing the option of **None** and the coding for the class selector is removed in that location. This is demonstrated in the

video [Examples of Class Selectors](#).

If you have a rule that is a tag selector, and you want to remove the effect of that rule in one location, you have to remove the tag itself. For example, if you had used an h2 tag and did not want it there anymore, you would need to pick None from the Format listing in the Properties panel or pick another option (like paragraph rather than h2). Or you might have to remove the tag itself by editing the HTML coding.

You also have the option to delete a rule. Simply click on the rule in the Style listing, then right click with your mouse and pick from the options Delete.

This removes the EFFECT of the rule, not the coding for the rule. If you had used h1 tags in your document and created a rule making them green in color, deleting that rule removes the green color effect, but it does not remove the h1 coding itself. Similarly if you had applied a class selector to parts of your document and then you delete that selector in the list of rules, the EFFECT is deleted. The reference to the class name is still showing in the code itself. But since you don't have a rule telling browsers how to display that "class selector," that text will look like other text in your document.

Location of rules



A style sheet is a collection of rules that control formatting. Style sheets can be internal and, if internal, then the rules are found in the <head> area of the document. You can see the rules by selecting either Split or Code in the Dreamweaver document window, and scrolling to the top of the document. Typically the <head> area has coding used by the browsers. The <body> is the part of the HTML document with the content itself.

An internal style sheet only affects that single web document. An external style sheet is a special (web) document that ONLY contains rules. There is no content in this document. External style sheets are much more popular, since making format changes in an external style sheet affects all the documents using that style sheet. Although you can have both internal and external style sheets being used by the same web (html) document, you have to be careful to not give conflicting instructions about the same tag.

Changing an internal style sheet to an external style sheet

You have seen already that anytime you use the Properties panel for text traits, Dreamweaver creates a class selector with that "coding." Initially these are placed internally in the <head> area. When you first start to create style sheets, using internal sheets can be easier.

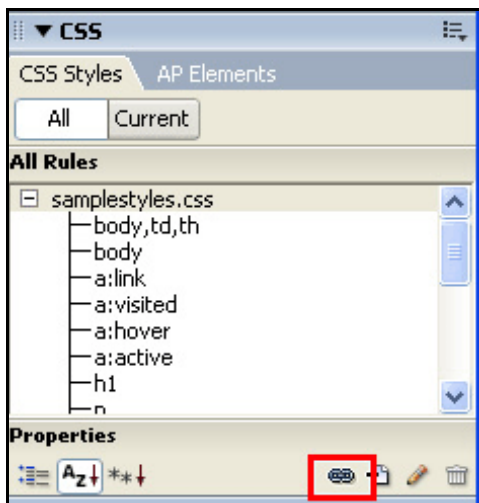
However, you want to use an external style sheet for formatting documents on your entire site, so all the formatting (or all the common formatting) is in one document. Editing that external style document changes all documents using that style sheet. If you rely on internal style sheets, then every document has to be opened and edited, defeating one of the reasons for using style sheets on a site.

The video **Exporting Internal Rules to an External Listing** shows the process of moving or exporting rules from the <head> area to an external style sheet. The procedure is a little different with Dreamweaver CS3 since with that release the option is labeled **move**, which means that you can add rules to an existing external style sheet, if you want. For Dreamweaver 8 and earlier releases, the terminology is export, and you cannot directly take rules from an internal style sheet and add them to an existing external style sheet.

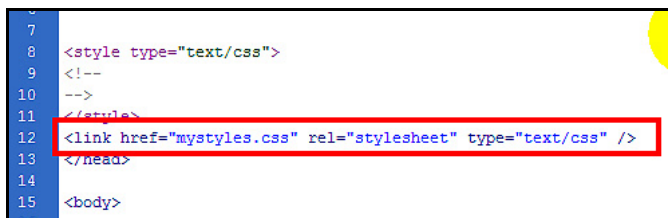
When you export a list of rules, be sure to save it in your main folder area. It actually does not matter where it is saved on your site, but it makes sense that it is in the main folder where your index.html document is located. Style sheets have an extension of .css which Dreamweaver will assign as you export the style sheet. Some site managers like to create a folder called css for all style sheets, but that is judgement call.

Don't use another extension and don't use as an extension css for anything that is not a style sheet.

You don't want to leave the rules as an internal style sheet in your document after you have exported them. This will cause problems if you edit the external style sheet, because the internal style sheet will override the external style sheet references, in most cases. You are apt to edit the external style sheet and forget that the "coding" is still there as an internal style sheet and you will wonder why the revised rules are not being followed in your document.



Thus after exporting the rules, I can delete the reference to the internal rules showing in the CSS panel, as is shown in the video **Exporting Internal Rules to an External Listing**. For the Dreamweaver MX 2004 or Dreamweaver 8 release, deleting the reference to the rules will result in the document losing its formatting. You now have to click on the icon for **Attaching a style sheet**. As is shown in the video, then you have to link to the external style sheet.



No matter if you used Dreamweaver CS3, Dreamweaver 8 or Dreamweaver MX 2004 to export or move your style sheet, once you have referenced an external style sheet, you can see coding similar to what is showing in the screen capture to the left. You should see a reference to the style sheet in the CSS Styles panel, and you

can also find a reference to it in the <head> area of your document, if you look at the coding. This screen capture is showing part of the <head> area of the HTML document.

This external style sheet needs to be uploaded to a server, for people viewing your pages to see the

styles in effect.

A quick comment about browser limitations

Although the World Wide Web Consortium came up with the specifics of how properties and values can be used to create various effects, it is the browsers themselves that have to interpret the coding. The W3C comes up with the standards, but they don't create any browsers. Keep in mind that browsers vary in how well they can interpret style sheets. Not everyone is using the same browser nor the same release of a browser. As you create effects in style sheets and you don't see an "effect" appearing, be sure to check to see how the document actually displays in your browser. The Design mode of Dreamweaver does not always accurately reflect how the document will appear in a browser.