HOW SOFTWARE WORKS · BEGINNER · 12 MIN READ

HTML and CSS basics: how a web page is built

HTML is the structure, CSS is the look. Learn the handful of tags and styles you'll see in every AI-built page, and how to inspect any site.

Pass the check (4 of 5) online to earn the “Page Builder” badge:
https://digitalbuilders757.com/university/study/html-and-css-basics

Structure and style

Every web page is HTML (what's on the page: headings, text, images, buttons) styled by CSS (how it looks: colours, fonts, spacing, layout). AI builders write both for you, but knowing the basics lets you make quick fixes yourself and describe changes precisely.

HTML in a few tags

- Headings h1 to h6 and paragraphs p: <h1>Sam's Bakery</h1> Fresh bread daily.
- Links and images: Menu and <img src="rolls.jpg" alt="Tray of cinnamon rolls">
- Buttons and forms: <button>Book now</button>, <input>, <label>
- Containers like section and div group things so CSS can lay them out.
- Tags nest inside each other, and attributes (href, src, alt, class) add details.

CSS in a few ideas

A selector picks elements and rules style them: h1 { color: navy; font-size: 32px; }. Every element is a box: padding is space inside its border, margin is space outside. Flexbox and grid arrange boxes in rows and columns, and media queries change the layout on small screens (responsive design). Tailwind classes like p-4 or text-lg are shortcuts for CSS rules.

Inspect any page

In Chrome, Edge, Firefox or Safari, right-click anything and choose Inspect to open the developer tools. You'll see the HTML for that element and the CSS styling it, and you can change values live to experiment. Nothing you change there is saved, so it's a safe sandbox. It's also the fastest way to find the exact element to describe to your AI builder.

Key terms

HTML
The language for a web page's structure: headings, paragraphs, buttons, images.

CSS
The language for how a page looks: colours, fonts, spacing, layout.

Selector (CSS)
The part of a CSS rule that picks which elements to style, like h1 or .button.

Box model
Every element is a box: content, then padding, then border, then margin.

Flexbox
A CSS layout tool for arranging items in a row or column and spacing them out.

Developer tools (Inspect)
Browser tools that show a page's HTML and CSS and let you experiment live; changes aren't saved.

Responsive design
Layouts that adapt to any screen size, from phone to desktop.

Alt text
A short description of an image for screen readers and search engines.

Try it: Take a page apart

1. Open any website, right-click a heading and choose Inspect.
2. Find its tag and one CSS rule; change the colour or text live and watch it update.
3. Reload the page and notice your change is gone.
4. Ask your AI builder for one change using the element's class or tag name you found.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

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5 questions. Circle one answer for each; 4 or more correct passes. Answers are at the back.

1. What does CSS control?

A. What content is on the page and in which order it appears
B. The database
C. The domain name
D. How the page looks: colours, fonts, spacing and layout

2. Which HTML makes a link to the menu page?

A. Menu
B. <link rel="page" href="/menu">Menu</link>
C. <url>/menu</url>
D. <button href="/menu">Menu</button>

3. Why give an image an alt attribute?

A. To make it load faster
B. So screen readers can describe it, and something shows if it fails to load
C. To change its colour
D. It's only for search engines

4. What's the difference between padding and margin?

A. They're the same, but margin is the newer CSS name for padding
B. Margin only works on phones
C. Padding is inside the border; margin is outside it
D. Padding is for text and margin is for images, buttons and other elements

5. You change a heading's colour using Inspect, then reload. What happens?

A. The change is saved to the site's files, so every visitor now sees it
B. The website breaks
C. The change is emailed to the site owner
D. The change disappears; developer tools edits are only temporary

Official sites

MDN: HTML: https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTML
MDN: CSS: https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/CSS

Last reviewed 2026-11-25. AI tools change fast; check each tool's own site for current features, plans and prices.

ANSWER KEY

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1. D: How the page looks: colours, fonts, spacing and layout
HTML is the structure; CSS is the presentation.

2. A: Menu
The a (anchor) tag with an href attribute makes a link.

3. B: So screen readers can describe it, and something shows if it fails to load
Alt text makes images accessible; describe what matters on that page.

4. C: Padding is inside the border; margin is outside it
Think of the box model: content, then padding, then border, then margin.

5. D: The change disappears; developer tools edits are only temporary
Inspect is a safe sandbox for experimenting. Real changes go in your code.