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WEB
PUBLISHING
WITH HTML 4
IN 21 DAYS

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SECOND EDITION
Includes coverage of XHTML

Laura Lemay

“If you’re going to read
only one book on HTML,
make it this one.”

—Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

SAMS **Teach Yourself** **Web Publishing** **with HTML 4**

in 21 Days

SAMS

Laura Lemay
With revisions by Denise Tyler



SAMS
Teach Yourself

Web Publishing with HTML 4

in 21 Days

SECOND EDITION

SAMS
A Division of Macmillan USA
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Sams Teach Yourself Web Publishing with HTML 4 in 21 Days, Second Edition

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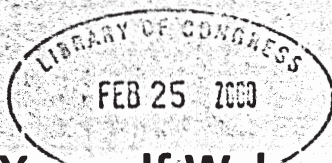
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Dedication

For Ed, a constant source of inspiration and support in my attempts to follow my dreams.
—Denise

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—Denise Tyler

PART 5

DAY 14

Designing Forms

Up to this point, you have learned almost everything you need to know to create functional, attractive, and somewhat interactive Web pages. If you think about it, however, the pages you've created thus far have an information flow that is one-way. Your HTML documents, images, sounds, and video have been traveling, with no return ticket, to the people viewing them in their Web browsers.

Today's lesson is about creating HTML forms in order to collect information from people visiting your Web site. Forms enable you to gather just about any kind of information for immediate processing by a server-side script or for later analysis using other applications. If you've spent much time browsing the Web, you undoubtedly have run across forms of various flavors. Many forms exist: simple forms that perform searches, forms that log you in to Web sites, forms that enable you to order products online, and so on. They all share one thing in common: accepting input from a Web page visitor.

If you're one to worry about compatibility, you can set your mind at ease. HTML forms have been around virtually since the beginning of the HTML language, and are widely supported by all leading Web browsers. I'll make sure to point out any possible compatibility problems along the way.

Don't be intimidated by forms! While they may look complex, they actually are very easy to code. The hardest part is formatting them. In today's lesson, the following topics are covered, which will enable you to create any type of form possible with HTML:

- How HTML forms interact with server-side scripts to provide interactivity
- Creating simple forms to get the hang of it.
- Learning all the types of form controls you can use to create radio buttons, check boxes, and more
- Using more advanced form controls to amaze your friends and coworkers
- Form planning so that your data matches any server-side scripts you use

Understanding Form and Function

Right off the bat, you need to understand a few things about forms. First, a form is part of a Web page that you create using HTML elements. Each form contains a **form element** that has special controls, such as buttons, text fields, check boxes, submit buttons, and menus. These controls make up the user interface for the form (that is, the pieces of the form users see on the Web page). When people fill out forms, they are interacting with the controls of the forms. In addition, you can use many other HTML elements within forms to create legends, provide additional information, add structure, and so on. These elements are not part of the form itself, but can enhance your form's look or improve its usability.



An *HTML form* allows you to gather information from a person visiting your Web page. You can take the information you collect and send it to a script residing on your Web server to manipulate or store it.

When a person fills out an HTML form, he or she enters information or makes choices using the form controls. The final step is submitting it, at which time several things happen. First, the form identifies the controls within the form that contain data and builds a form data set to contain it. Next, the data set is encoded and sent to the Web server to be processed.

It is very important that you understand the implications of this final step. The data, after all, is what you are after! This is the reason you've chosen to create a form in the first place. After a user clicks the Submit button, the process ceases to be one of pure HTML and becomes reliant upon scripts (called *Common Gateway Interface*, or *CGI* scripts, most often written in a scripting language called Perl) that are resident on the Web server. In other words, for your form to be successful, you must already have a script on the server that will take the data and store it or manipulate it in some manner.