



Joomla! (templates)

Angie Radtke



Joomla!® Templates

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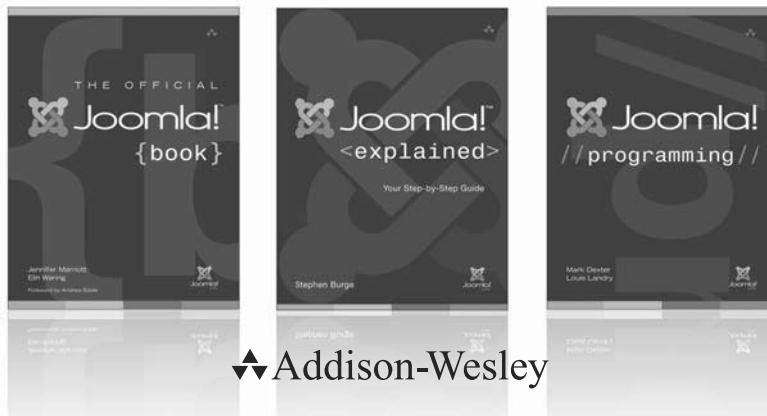
Joomla!® Templates

Angie Radtke

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A Message from Open Source Matters

Since Joomla! launched in September 2005, it has grown to become one of the most popular content management systems in the world. As this book goes to press in July 2012, Joomla! has been downloaded over 32,000,000 times and provides support for 64 different languages. Joomla! has received multiple awards, and estimates indicate that approximately 2.8% of all Internet Web sites are using Joomla!.

The key to Joomla!'s success has always been the help and contributions freely given by a large and diverse group of volunteers from all over the world. The Joomla! project isn't backed by venture capital firms, and it isn't led by a single individual or corporation. It is volunteers who write the code and then test it, translate it, document it, support it, extend it, promote it, and share it.

Volunteers are also continually planning and organizing events all over the world where people come together to learn, connect, and share about Joomla!. These events include hundreds of local user groups, as well as national and international conferences. The first Joomla! World Conference will take place in November 2012 in San Jose, California (go to <http://conference.joomla.org> for more information).

Work is underway on many improvements and new ideas aimed at keeping Joomla! on a path of continued growth and innovation. Our community is open to all. If the idea of working alongside a diverse group of bright and passionate volunteers from all over the world who are helping to make Joomla! better sounds fun and rewarding to you, then I invite you to join us. To learn more, please go to <http://www.joomla.org>.

Best regards,

Paul Orwig
President, Open Source Matters

Open Source Matters is the nonprofit organization that provides legal, financial, and organizational support for the Joomla! project.

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Contents

Introduction	xvii
Acknowledgments	xxi
About the Author	xxiii
1 The Basis: Designing the Content and Visual Concept	1
It All Starts with the Structure	1
Recognizing User Expectations	2
Page Layout—Visually Structuring Content	3
Designing with Grids	3
Implementation	5
Push to Front Principle	7
The Graphical Layout—Visual Appearance Matters	7
Colors—A Central Element	8
Designing the Navigation—The Core of the Design	12
Content Design—To Make It Fun to Read	12
Font Design—We Do Not Have Many Options	13
Fixed and Fluid Layouts	16
2 Accessibility—What Is It?	19
The Legal Basis	20
Visual Impairment	21
Initial Situation and Findings	21
Technical Aids	22
What Can We Do?	28
Motor Disabilities	29
Initial Situation and Findings	29
Technical Aids	30
What Can We Do?	30
Deafness	31
Initial Situation and Findings	31
Technical Assistance	31
What Can We Do?	31
Learning Disabilities	31
Initial Situation and Findings	32
What Can We Do?	32

Seniors 33**Initial Situation and Findings 33****What Can We Do? 34****3 CSS and HTML—Getting the Basic Structure
into Shape 35****A Few Words about the History 35****Which Version of HTML Should I Use? 36****HTML 4.01 and XHTML 1.0 36****HTML5 37****The Basic HTML Structure 38****A Brief Introduction to CSS 38****Adding CSS Statements 38****CSS Selectors 40****Inheritance 44****Using Multiple Classes Together 44****Positioning and Box Model 47****CSS Hacks and Browser Problems 52****Conditional Comments 52****The * Hack 52****Internet Explorer Again: hasLayout 53****CSS Tuning 54****CSS3—A Brief Overview 55****Vendor Prefixes 55****Overview of the Three Most Useful CSS Statements 56****border-radius 56****box-shadow 56****linear-gradient 57****4 Responsive Web Design 59****But How Does It Work? 59****CSS3 Media Queries 60****Option 1—Integration into the Main Stylesheet 60****Option 2—Integrating Separate Stylesheets 61****Adapting Graphics and Videos 61****Using HTML5 Apps 62**

5 PHP and Joomla!	63
Integrating PHP	63
Comments	65
echo	65
Outputting Strings	65
Outputting Variable Values	65
Conditions: if Statements	66
if Statement	66
else Statement	68
For Pros: Accessing Objects and Their Values	68
Parameter Basics	68
Using Parameters	69
6 MooTools	71
Why MooTools?	72
MooTools Quick Start—Dollar Functions and Events	73
The MooTools Core in Action	74
The Class System	76
The MooTools Principle	79
Related Links	81
7 Tools	83
HTML Validator and CSS Validator	83
Web Developer Toolbar	84
Firebug	85
Helpful Tools for Accessibility	86
Colour Contrast Analyser	86
Accessibility Extensions for Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox	87
Wave	88
WCAG 2 Checker of the University of Toronto	89
Tilt 3D	89
8 Now for the Details: A First Look at Templates	91
Atomic	91
beez_20 and beez5	91
The Template Manager: Styles	92

The Template Manager: Templates	94
The Template Preview	95
Template Details	97
Installing Templates	99
9 The Underlying Structure	101
The Heart of the Matter, the index.php	102
The css Folder	102
templateDetails.xml	103
The images Folder	103
The html Folder	103
The javascript Folder	103
The language Folder	103
component.php	103
error.php	104
template_thumbnail.png and template_preview.png	104
favicon.ico	104
The fonts Folder	105
The index.html	105
10 The index.php: The Heart of the Matter	107
The Document Head	107
Safety First: Security	107
Which Document Type?	108
HTML Language Indicator	108
jdoc: include type:head	109
Integrating CSS and JavaScript	112
Integrating MooTools	113
Reading Direction from Right to Left	113
And Off We Go: The Body	114
11 The XML File and the Template Parameters	117
templateDetails.xml: General Information	117
Customizing Template Names	119
Integrating Files and Folders	123
Defining Module Positions	123
The Language Files	124

Template Parameters: config	124
Adding Your Own Form Fields and Accessing Them	126
Adding Form Elements	129
12	The Language Files 135
How Joomla! Translates Constants to Multiple Languages	135
Adding Your Own Languages	136
Joomla! Conventions for Using Language Strings	137
Language Files in index.php Using the Examples of Skip Links	137
13	Modules—Dynamics within the Presentation 139
jdoc:include	139
The name Attribute	140
The style Attribute and the Default Styles	144
Beez Styles	146
Integrating the Module Flexibly into the Layout	149
Adapting ID and CSS	150
The Module Class Suffix	151
The Menu Module	155
Horizontal Navigation with Subnavigation	156
Folded Out Menu	157
Styling Individual Menu Items via Individual Classes	159
Link Image	159
Allocating Individual Link Titles	160
14	Designing Default Output Individually 161
Inspecting the Default Output	161
The Page Class Suffix	162
Template Overrides	165
Model-View-Controller	166
Shifting Output to the Template	168
Adapting Output	169
New—A View with Different Output	170

- 15** The System Template: Adapting and
Modifying Output **173**
System Notices **173**
 Integrating the Messages into the index.php File **176**
 Adapting the Language **176**
 Error Messages **176**
Replacing System Graphics **179**
component.php and How to Do Magic with It **179**
 Component View with Search Engine-Friendly
 URLs **181**
 The component.php File as the Basis for
 Custom Views **182**
offline.php **183**
- 16** Advanced Template Customization Tricks **185**
When the Reading Direction Changes: Right-to-Left
Languages **185**
 Integrating RTL CSS **186**
 Testing RTL Mode **187**
PHP Browser Switch **187**
PHP Tricks **189**
 Structuring the Homepage Differently—Access
 to the Views **190**
 Outputting the Current Date with PHP **190**
- 17** The Default Templates
and Their Features **193**
beez_20 and beeze5 Templates **193**
 Accessibility in General **194**
 beez_20: Selectable Design **196**
 Position of the Navigation Column **197**
 JavaScript and WAI-ARIA **199**
 beeze5: Using HTML5 **205**
 Atomic Template **207**
- 18** Practical Implementation **211**
Concept of the Beez Templates **212**

19	Step by Step to a New Layout	217
	Step 1: Positioning the Navigation	218
	Problem	218
	Action	218
	Step 2: Filling the Center Column with Content	218
	Problem	218
	Action	218
	Optimizing Step 2: More Meaningful Names for Module Positions	219
	Step 3: Adjusting the Number of Articles	223
	Problem	223
	Action	223
	Step 4: Visually Designing the Header	223
	Problem	223
	Actions	223
	Result	234
	Step 5: Integrating the Module Position for the Header Picture	235
	Problem	235
	Action	235
	Step 6: Adapting the Footer	239
	Problem	239
	Action	240
	Step 7: Adapting the Minimum Height of Content	240
	Problem	240
	Step 8: The First Tests	241
	Font Enlargement	241
	Keyboard Operation	242
	Browser Check	243
	Step 9: Customizing Typography	245
	Problem 1	245
	Action 1	245
	Problem 2	246
	Action 2	246
	Step 10: Formatting Module Headings	246
	Problem	246
	Action	246

Step 11: Assigning the Background Image to the Homepage Article	249
Step 12: Final Tests	253
Validating CSS	253
Validating HTML	253
Browser Check	255
Accessibility Checks	257
20 Integrating Custom Features	259
The Header Image—A Background Image?	259
Editing Module Content	261
Adapting CSS	262
Background Images in the Module’s Own HTML	264
Browser Check	264
Using HTML5 Effectively	265
Adding the HTML5 Overrides	267
Adapting index.php	269
Adding the JavaScript File to Deal with Internet Explorer	271
Adapting CSS	271
21 Final Tasks: Fine-Tuning and Creating an Installable Zip Archive	273
Fine-Tuning	273
Creating a Print Stylesheet	273
Adjusting error.php and offline.php	274
Right-to-Left View	274
Removing Superfluous Files	274
Creating Previews	274
Changing Favicon	275
Optimizing index.php	275
Adapting the XML File	277
Creating a Zip Archive	278
Appendix	279
Useful Links	279
Joomla!	279
Assistive Technologies	279
CSS	279

HTML5	280
Design	280
Typography	280
Colors	281
Icons	281
JavaScript	281
WAI ARIA	281
Checker Tools	281
Helpful Functions	282
CSS Classes Used and Their Elements	283
Templates	283
Components	287
Modules	305
Index	315

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Introduction

Joomla! is one of the best known Open Source content management systems with many hundreds of thousands of applications in the most varied areas of use. It offers the best possible conditions for implementing a comprehensive and accessible Web presence. Thousands of extensions for almost any purpose are freely available. The developer and user community is huge. On the Internet you can find many different platforms for exchanging information with other users and developers. That's an advantage you should not underestimate! But a Web site without individual design is inconceivable. After all, it's not just the content that makes a Web site truly unique; above all, it's the individual design. This design is the job of the Joomla! templates. In addition to the design aspect, they are also responsible for structuring the content. They create the framework and are basically a template for the content. So they control not only what something looks like but also where the content is located within the document. Joomla! template designers are responsible not only for the design but also for the architecture of the information. When designing a Web site, you need to take into account all requirements of the client as well as the expectations of the visitors.

A small, but important part of these requirements is accessibility. With Joomla!, it's really easy to create accessible Web pages.

To develop Joomla! templates, you need some knowledge of different areas of Web technology, much of which has little to do with Joomla! itself. In our time of increasingly manifold technical possibilities, it is difficult to be an expert in all available Web technologies, so we tend to specialize in certain areas. For instance, you have the front-end developer who knows all there is to know about HTML and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), the designer who can use Photoshop with all its functions, the PHP specialist, and the JavaScript expert. To develop Joomla! templates, you need some of all this specialized knowledge.

Why This Book Is Unique

This book does not replace a specialized reference work on usability, CSS design, information architecture, PHP, JavaScript, accessibility, or HTML5, but it discusses certain aspects of these topics and others. The aim of this book is to give you the required basic knowledge you need to develop Joomla! templates.

I offer you a readily comprehensible guide that makes it easier for Web designers and programmers to develop their own Joomla! template by working through practical examples. All topics mentioned in this book are condensed to their essence, which was

particularly hard to achieve because I could easily have written whole books on each topic. I hope I succeeded and that you find my book helpful.

How This Book Is Organized

My first aim is to show you how Joomla! templates are constructed and how you can create an accessible, standards-compliant template by using the technical possibilities offered by Joomla! in combination with the most modern forms of technology.

In the opening chapters of the book, you will find general basic information on the individual Web technologies, comments on design, and a list of helpful tools. In principle, the things I describe in this part are the basic requirements you need to build a template in the first place. They are meant to help you get started with these topics. If you are a Web designer, you will probably already be familiar with most of the information contained in this part. In that case, you can move straight on to the second part.

The subsequent chapters discuss the technical background of constructing templates. Using concrete examples, I show you the technical options and internal interrelations.

The final chapters are more practical and presented in the form of a workshop. I demonstrate how to turn a template created in Photoshop to a Joomla! template, step by step.

As happens with any vigorous, ongoing project, Joomla! is always evolving. This book contains the most recent information available at the time of publication but see informIT.com/title/0321827317 for bonus chapters on future releases.

What You Need to Know Before Using This Book

This book is not a “click instruction” but aims to explain contexts and encourage working independently. It is not a CSS book either, although CSS is an important component in building your Joomla! template and is discussed frequently. Photoshop, JavaScript, and PHP are also important tools for your Web design. This book doesn’t provide tutorials on these tools, so you may find it helpful to consult textbooks on these topics.

When you start reading this book, keep these hints in mind.

- As an Open Source project, Joomla! is subject to constant changes. In some chapters I refer to code by specific line numbers. It may well be that these lines move about a bit during the development, because code sections are inserted or removed. I added the references anyway to help you get close to the right place. So if you look something up and it’s not on the specified line number, please just look a bit above or below it.

The potential changes that affect the line references usually result from new features being integrated or old ones removed in different Joomla! versions. Most of what I describe here should apply to older versions as well, and major changes are not expected in the newer versions. But please do not be surprised if there are some slight differences.

- To get the most out of the book, you should install Joomla! (with the sample data that comes with it) onto a Web server. You need to have full access to the file system. The best option is to install a local Web server on your computer, such as XAMPP (www.apachefriends.org/en/xampp.html). This is especially important by the time you get to Chapter 8, “Now for the Details: A First Look at Templates.”
- You will also find it very helpful if you can work with Firefox and install the extension Firebug, which will make your work much easier. You can find out what Firebug is and where to get it when you get to Chapter 7, “Tools.”

Joomla! templates is a wide topic. I have tried very hard to cover all the important points in sufficient detail, but I may have missed something. If you do notice anything, I would be grateful if you could get in touch. Just e-mail me at a.radtke@derauftritt.de. I hope you have fun reading and working your way through this book!

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Acknowledgments

In 2010, Joomla! was at the center of my creative activities. I spent much time using—and greatly enjoying—Joomla!. Working with the templates and the default output has helped me both professionally and personally. I have learned so much and am happy with the outcome of my work. This book was created as a result of it.

Those people with whom I spent a large amount of my time chatting on Skype were also involved. We worked out concepts, made plans, and contrived specific solutions. This includes the always prepared Jean-Marie Simonet, whose commitment I can only admire. Then there is Andrea Tarr, who turned out to be a fellow campaigner for accessibility. There is also Elin Waring, who never seems to sleep. My gratitude goes to Mark Dexter, who always remains calm, and Bill Richardson, the good spirit of bug tracking, who sometimes had to test my patches twice. And I should not forget to mention my “rubber ducky,” Sam Moffat, who was able to solve my problems just by listening to me (maybe he has magic powers?). I also owe thanks to Mahmood and Ofer, who took care of the RTL-CSS of the templates, and to Henk van Cann for listening, to Ian MacLennan, Andrew Eddy, Louis Landry, Jennifer Marriott, and many others.

Special thanks to my colleague and friend Michael Charlier, who supported me with many helpful tips and important advice. I would also particularly like to thank my friend Biggi Mestmäcker for having the *patience of a saint, for providing the linguistic fine polish, and for the fact that she still answers the phone when I call*. Also I would like to thank the editor of the German edition, Boris Karnikowski, for his encouraging words and his trust in me.

I am very happy that my book has also been translated into English and would like to thank the U.S. team at Pearson for their wonderful work. Special thanks are due to Almut Dworak, the translator, whose valuable feedback has certainly helped improve this edition significantly.

But my biggest thanks go to my family. I am very grateful to my husband, Markus Kummer, for having strong nerves and quietly suffering my temper. I would like to apologize to my daughters, Malou and Joelle, for not listening to them and sometimes not being quite sure what I just agreed to. And last but not least, I want to thank my parents-in-law, who always made sure that I also got a bit of the Sunday roast.

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About the Author

Angie Radtke, along with her colleagues at her communications agency, Der Auftritt (www.der-auftritt.de), has been conceiving, designing, and implementing targeted communications solutions since 1999, primarily in the areas of Internet and print. She specializes in marketing-oriented, accessible Web presences and tends to use the open source content management system Joomla!, depending on the customer's wishes.

Appealing design, accessibility, and use of a content management system are not mutually exclusive, and therein lies the basis of Radtke's work. She invests a lot of time and energy in further developing Joomla!. Radtke was actively involved in promoting accessibility in the previous version, Mambo, and her dedication continues today. She developed the two default templates, Beez 2.0 and Beez 5, and she sees herself as an interface between Joomla!'s program logic and its actual output of contents.

Radtke is increasingly involved in passing on her knowledge to others—for example, in training sessions, presentations, and workshops on Joomla! and through accessible Web design. In 2006, she and coauthor Michael Charlier published *Barrierefreies Webdesign: Zugängliche Websites attraktiv gestalten* (München: Addison-Wesley), a book on designing attractive, accessible Web sites.

Angie Radtke is married, has two children, and lives in Bonn, Germany.

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Now for the Details: A First Look at Templates

You are using Joomla! now and would like to know more about its template functions. This chapter gives you an overview of the structure of the templates—knowledge that will help you develop your own individualized template based on the default templates.

Templates determine the general structure of a page. Apart from the design, they determine where the content is within the document, where and when certain modules are shown or hidden, whether to use your own error pages, and which HTML version you should use.

The standard version of Joomla! currently contains three templates for the front end and two for the back end. The frontend templates are two versions of Beez and one Atomic template. In the back end are the standard template Bluestork and the accessible template Hathor by Andrea Tarr. We are going to ignore the backend templates for now.

First and foremost, the frontend templates should be captivating. You can adapt templates according to how you want your Web site to look and feel to the outside world. All templates differ not just in their visual design but also in their range of technical functions. Here is a brief overview of the frontend templates.

Atomic

The focus of the Atomic template is on using the Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) framework Blueprint. Prepared CSS classes help you create complex layouts. If you select this template in the back end and look at the page, it initially seems to have no design. It only appears this way, though, because it is not designed to work with the current sample data. Once you adapt it, you will have a very nice design. More on Atomic a bit later.

beez_20 and beez5

A template usually contains more than you can see at first glance. Apart from the design, it distinguishes itself by how it is implemented in technical terms.

You may be familiar with the Beez template version 1.5. When I created it, I wanted to build a standards-conforming, easily accessible and adaptable template. I chose to use the color purple to make it obvious that you were meant to customize the template to fix your style rather than use it as it was. I hoped that many designers would use the code, modify it creatively, and make it available for free use. I was counting on a multitude of new templates. Sadly, this has not happened. Many users did not understand how to modify the template, and many others did use the code but did not publish their templates.

I made another mistake in not communicating clearly what I had in mind. The output was structured in such a way that almost any design could be achieved with it, simply and without complications. Easy modifications could also be made in the CCS code. I have kept to this principle with each new version of Beez, while making some important changes. There is now more accessible JavaScript. beeze5 has a small portion of HTML5, and beeze_20 manages without template overrides because the default output has been adapted to the output of the old Beez templates, so overrides are not required.

In beeze5 you will find HTML5 code in the overrides.

The Template Manager: Styles

The Template Manager in the back end has the task of managing existing templates in an organized way. It shows you the installed and available frontend and backend templates in a clear list. You can find the template manager in the back end at Extensions → Template Manager.

If you open the Template Manager, you will first notice the selected (in-use) styles of the installed templates, as shown in Figure 8.1. Styles are variations of the same template.

Style	Location	Template	Default	Assigned	ID
Atomic - Default	Site	atomic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3
Beeze5 - Default-Fruit Shop	Site	beeze5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6
Beeze2 - Parks Site	Site	beeze_20	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	114
Beeze2 - Default	Site	beeze_20	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4
Bluestork - Default	Administrator	bluestork	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2
Hather - Default	Administrator	hather	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		5

Figure 8.1 Template Manager in the back end

The term *style* is probably confusing for some people. Style here refers to different versions of the same template. These versions may differ in both CSS styling and HTML markup. The use of styles is further explained in Chapter 11, “The XML File and the Template Parameters.” But let’s get back to the Template Manager.

In addition to viewing the selected styles, you can use the Template Manager to see whether it is a frontend or backend style, which template the selected style relates to, or if it has been assigned to specific page areas. The gold star indicates the selected, and therefore currently active, default style.

By clicking on the checkbox in front of each style and selecting Make Default at the upper right, you can change the default style.

At the top right are also two checkboxes for filtering styles. This function is helpful if you are using many different styles and different templates. The styles can be filtered through the front end or back end or by the template they belong to.

Each template can have different properties, called parameters, that can be configured. By copying a style, you can assign it to different pages or areas with different properties. You can do it both in the Template Manager and via the menu items.

Here is a little example to make things clearer. In the beeze_20 template you can choose between two different design variations: *Personal* and *Nature*. Personal is the default display option with the blue header image. Nature is in all green. Both variations differ only in that they use a different CSS file for certain elements of the template.

If you want to use the default variation on some pages and the green version on others, you can do so very easily. You can copy the styles from the Template Manager and save them under a different name.

If you then click on the style beeze_20, you will see the image shown in Figure 8.2.

Tip

Creating multilingual content was not yet possible in Joomla! version 1.5. Now, Joomla! offers a small but smart method of managing content even in different languages. The solution offered is not appropriate for all cases. Sites with a lot of content must fall back on external solutions. But for smaller pages, it is a simple and quick solution.

On the right you can see the parameters, here called Advanced Options. The selection of parameters actually constitutes a style. You have a range of selection options. At the bottom under Template color are the styles *Personal* and *Nature*. Here you can make your selection and choose the desired display variation.

Under Details you will find the name of the relevant style. You can choose any name, but you should make sure it’s a meaningful title to avoid confusion later. The name will help you distinguish between styles, especially if you are using several copies of a style.

You can also see which template the selected style relates to, which unique ID it has, and whether it should be used only when a certain language is selected.

Below the Details panel you will find the Menus assignment panel. Each menu item is listed there, and the style can be assigned to the relevant menu item by enabling

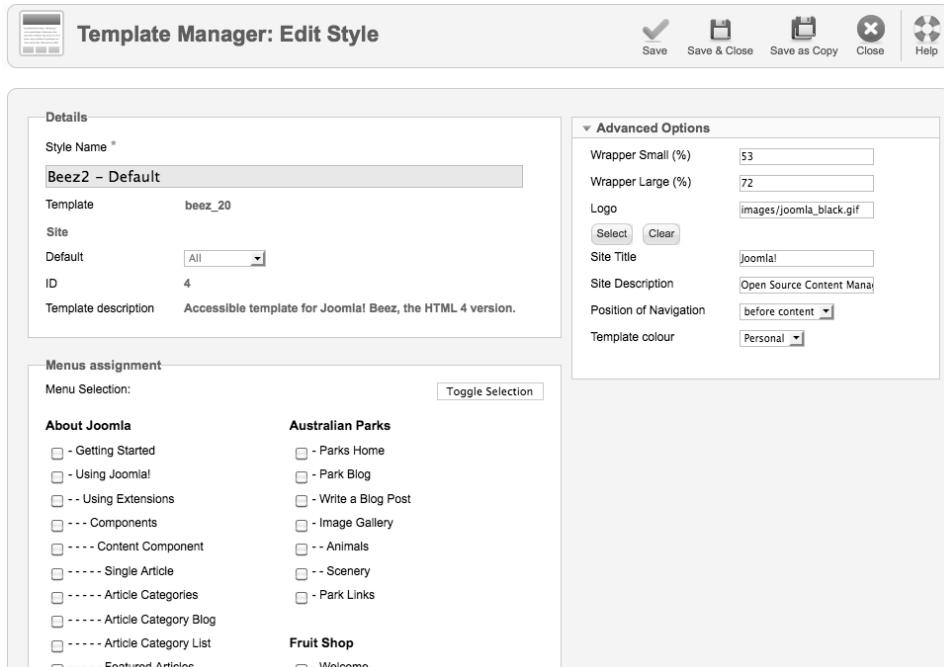


Figure 8.2 Default style beeze_20

the corresponding checkbox. By selecting Toggle Selection, you can disable all the checkboxes.

Once you have made your selection, you can save your style by clicking on Save as Copy at the top right. Joomla! automatically creates a copy of the default style with the options you have selected. And that's it!

Here is a summary of all the steps.

1. Select default style.
2. Change title or name of style.
3. Adapt parameters to your preferences.
4. Assign menu items.
5. Save template as copy.

The Template Manager: Templates

If you select the tab Templates in the horizontal navigation, you will get straight to the installed templates, as shown in Figure 8.3. At first glance, this view does not seem very spectacular, but it is clearly a very different picture than in Joomla! version 1.5.

Template	Location	Version	Date	Author
angle Details No preview available	Site	1.6.0	25 November 2009	Angie Radtke a.radtke@der-aufritt.de http://www.der-aufritt.de
atomic Details No preview available	Site	1.6.0	10/10/09	Ron Severdia contact@kontentdesign.com http://www.kontentdesign.com

Figure 8.3 Template Manager

The templates are still listed with a screenshot, their name, their location (site for front end or Administrator for back end), their date of creation, and their author. By clicking on the template name, you get to the really interesting information.

The Template Preview

You will notice that under the template name in Figure 8.3 there is a note that says “No preview available.” If you have already been working with Joomla!, you know that you can assign modules, which usually output dynamic contents, to certain positions. In the template itself you control where a module should be placed within the document. Its position is then determined by using CSS. The template preview gives you an overview of the position used for the module.

For security reasons, you have the option of enabling or disabling the preview. You can find the Template Options in the top right corner. When you click on the Options icon, you will see the screen shown in Figure 8.4.

Here you can enable the preview function and configure the permissions management. Once you enable the preview function, you will see, as shown in Figure 8.5, that the preview is now available.

Where in Figure 8.3 it said “No preview available” under the template name, you will now see “Preview,” which is a link that takes you directly to the preview (if Preview does not appear after you change the options, try reloading the page). If you then click on Preview, a new window pops up with the preview. All module positions assigned in the template are displayed clearly.

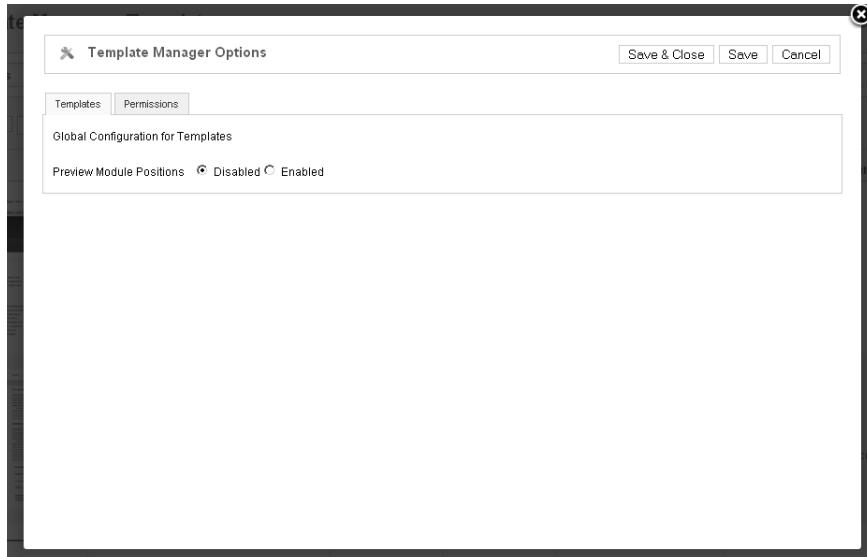


Figure 8.4 Template Manager Options

angie Details Preview		Site	1.6.0	25 November 2009	Angie Radtke a.radtke@der-auftritt.de http://www.der-auftritt.de

Figure 8.5 The preview is now available.

The latter part of the URL is particularly important: `?tp=1&template=beez5`. This helpful function can be used not only in the back end but also in the front end, where it is even more helpful. See Figure 8.6.

Particularly with large sites, you may see a module displayed in the front end but, for the life of you, cannot remember which module position it uses. In the Module Manager, modules can be sorted by type and position, but sometimes you still cannot find a specific module.

If you now go the relevant page in the front end and append `?tp=1` to the URL, you get a preview (of the assigned template) of the corresponding page, which tells you the position of the module you are interested in. This is shown in Figure 8.7.

You may wonder why you can enable and disable this rather useful function. Wouldn't it be great if it was available all the time? The flexibility of the function makes it necessary to have the option of enabling and disabling it, because anyone who knows about

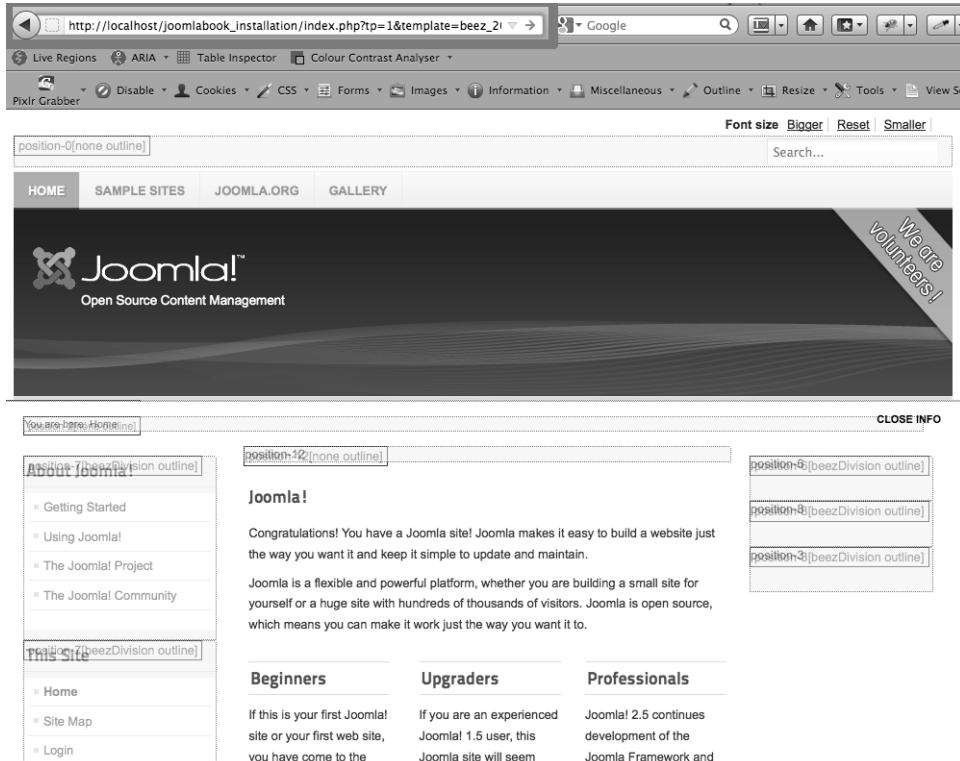


Figure 8.6 Template preview

this method can look up this information. And only rarely would you want them to. So, if you require this function: *enable, look it up, disable!*

Template Details

As you can see in Figure 8.8, the Template Details view also differs slightly from the previous version of Joomla!.

On the right is a list of all CSS files used in the template.

With just one click, you can edit from the administrator back end. The same goes for the internal control files in the template. Here you can edit the index.php file, the heart of the template, the error page, and print preview.

This function is useful while running the operation if you want to change something quickly. But I have to admit that I prefer editing these files directly in an editor and then uploading them to the server via FTP.

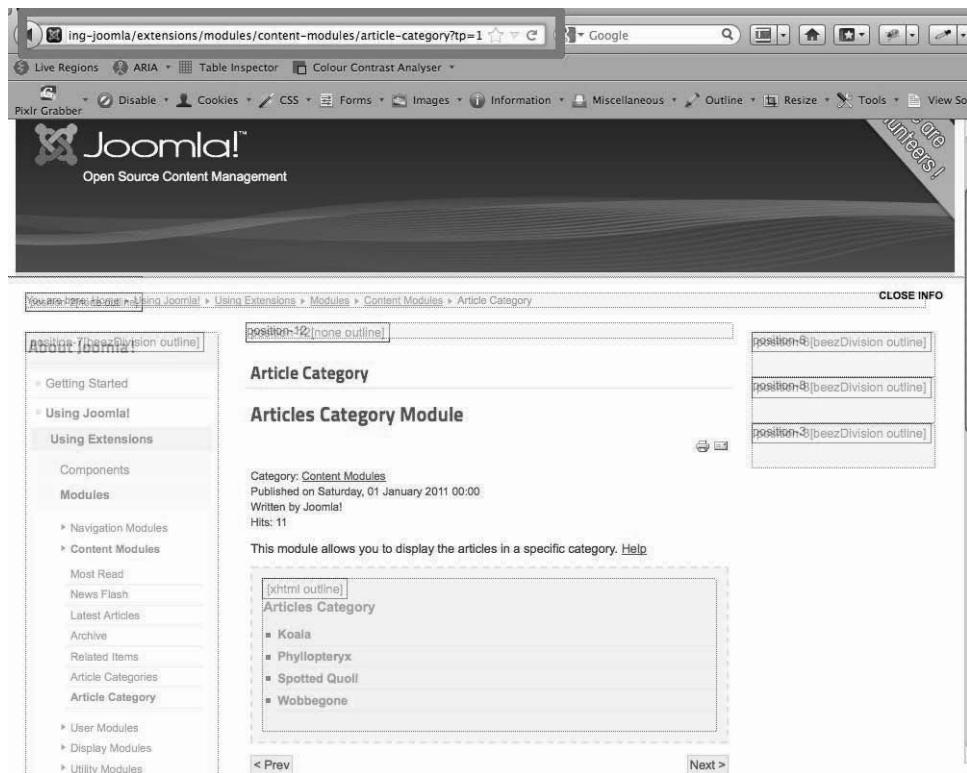


Figure 8.7 Preview in the front end

The screenshot shows the Joomla! Administration Panel with the 'Template Manager: Customise Template' page. The top navigation bar includes links for Site, Users, Menus, Content, Components, Extensions, Help, and a user status indicator. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'Template Master Files' on the left showing a preview of the 'beez_20' template and its file structure, and 'Stylesheets' on the right listing various CSS files with 'Edit' links. The 'Stylesheets' list includes: edit.cssblock.css, edit.cssgeneral.css, edit.cssgeneral_jonqueror.css, edit.cssgeneral_mobile.css, edit.cssgeneral_opera.css, edit.cssIE7only.css, edit.cssIEonly.css, edit.csslayout.css, edit.cssnarrow.css, edit.csspersonal.css, edit.cssposition.css, edit.cssprint.css, edit.csstemplate.css, and edit.csstemplate_ie.css.

Figure 8.8 Template Details gives access to template page HTML and CSS files.

Installing Templates

When people start getting into Joomla!, they often do not build their own template right away but instead use one of the many templates available on the Internet and adapt it to their needs. Quite a number of templates are now available. In addition to free templates, various templates can be purchased on the Web. The templates differ not just in their design but also in their range of functions, quality, and price.

If you are considering one of these, you should look at the templates very closely. Most of them offer a whole range of functions in addition to the pure design and try to be as generic as possible to fulfill as many wishes as possible. For that reason, these templates are often very hard to adapt, because the more complex they are, the more complicated they are to change.

Now that Joomla! 2.5 has been out for a while, the number of templates offered is extensive.

Templates are managed by Joomla! in the same way as any other extension; that is, they are installed in the same way as any other extension, via the extension manager. Your template is probably in the form of a ZIP archive. You can install this archive, as is, via the extension manager. Joomla! takes care of unzipping the archive. How to create such archives yourself and which rules you need to follow are explained in Chapter 11, “The XML File and the Template Parameters.” So to install a template you go to Extensions → Extension Manager on the Install tab, as shown in Figure 8.9.

If the template is well formed and follows all the Joomla! guidelines, there should not be any problems in the installation, and the template should appear in the Template Manager.

Starting with version 1.6, there has been a considerable change in template handling: they are now stored in the database. In version 1.5 you were still able to simply copy templates into the Joomla! template folder. They were fully functional and automatically detected by the system. This is no longer possible, which does not necessarily mean that it is more complicated. The Extension Manager’s *Discover* function, shown in Figure 8.10, is available to help.

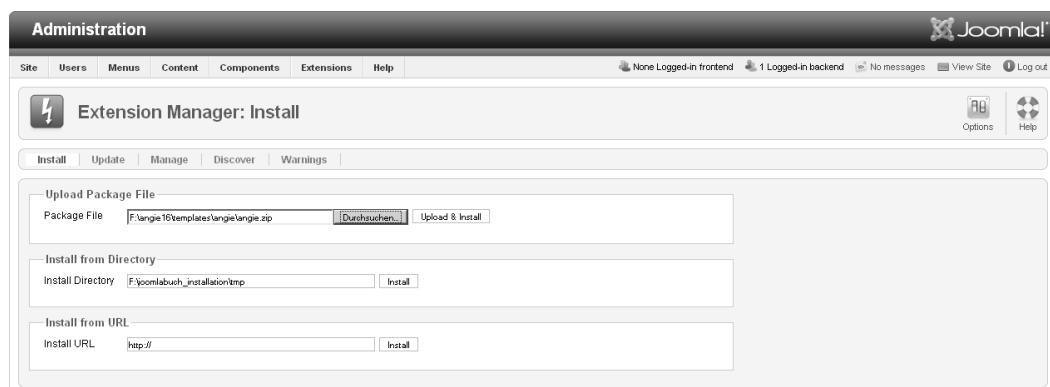


Figure 8.9 Extension manager

The screenshot shows the Joomla! Administration interface with the 'Extension Manager: Discover' tab selected. The top navigation bar includes Site, Users, Menus, Content, Components, Extensions, and Help. On the right, there are links for None Logged-in frontend, 1 Logged-in backend, No messages, View Site, and Log out. Below the navigation is a toolbar with icons for Install, Discover (which is highlighted), Purge Cache, Options, and Help.

The main content area has tabs for Install, Update, Manage, Discover, and Warnings. The Discover tab is active. A table lists discovered extensions:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Name	Type	Version	Date	Folder	Client	Author	ID
<input type="checkbox"/>	angle	Template	1.6.0	25 November 2009	N/A	Site	Angie Radtke	10001

Below the table, a note explains the discover function: "This screen allows you to discover extensions that have not gone through the normal installation process. For example, some extensions are too large in file size to upload using the web interface due to limitations of the web hosting environment. Using this feature you can upload extension files directly to your web server using some other means such as FTP or SFTP and place those extension files into the appropriate directory. You can then use the discover feature to find the newly uploaded extension and activate it in your Joomla! installation. Using the discover operation you can also discover and install multiple extensions at the same time." A dropdown menu indicates "Display # 20".

Figure 8.10 The Template Manager's Discover function

Once you have manually inserted the template into the Joomla! template directory, go to the Extension Manager on the Discover tab. Click the Discover icon, and the system will detect your template. Check the box in front of your template and click the Install icon. It will then be listed in the Template Manager next to the default templates.

Of course, the question is why the templates are now saved in the database. Templates have, as previously mentioned, parameters: properties that can change under certain circumstances. Like the template name, these properties are also saved in the database, which in turn enables extensions such as modules or components to directly access these properties. This method of storage makes it possible to design a very flexible template.

Index

- * (asterisk)
 - asterisk hack, 52–53
 - wildcard character, 42–43
- : (colon), ending if statements, 67
- , (comma), in CSS element selectors, 40
- . (period), in CSS class selectors, 41
- \$(), dollar sign function, 73–74
- \$ (dollar sign), PHP variable indicator, 66
- \$\$(), double dollar function, 73–74
- < (left angle), less than operator, 67
- <= (left angle, equal sign), less than or equal to operator, 67
- <% ... %>, PHP section delimiters, 64
- <? ... ?>, PHP section delimiters, 64
- <?PHP ... ?>, PHP section delimiters, 64
- “ (double quote), in PHP variables, 66
- = (equal sign), assigning values to PHP variables, 66
- == (equal signs), equal operator, 67
- ==== (equal signs), identical operator, 67
- != (exclamation, equal sign), not equal operator, 67
- !== (exclamation, equal signs), not identical operator, 67
- # (pound sign), CSS ID indicator, 44
- > (right angle), greater than operator, 67
- >= (right angle, equal sign), greater than or equal to operator, 67
- ' (single quote), in PHP variables, 66
- /*...*/ (slash asterisk), PHP comment delimiters, 65

// (slashes), PHP comment delimiter, 65
 { } (curly brackets), in CSS element
 selectors, 40
 ; (semicolon)
 in CSS element selectors, 40
 ending PHP statements, 65
400 – 500 error codes in messages, 178
404 (File not found) messages, 104. See
 also **Error messages; System notices.**

A

Accessibility

Beez template features, 194–196
 government sector, 20–21
 overview, 19–20
 private sector, 21
 testing, 257

Accessibility, tools and utilities

CCA (Colour Contrast Analyzer),
 86–87
 Firebug, 86–90
 for Firefox, 87–90
 for Internet Explorer, 87–90
 Juicy Studio Accessibility extension,
 86
 rules checkers, 88–89
 Wave, 88
 WCAG 2 compatibility checker, 89

Accessibility Evaluation Toolbar, 88**Accessibility Overview, 279****Accessibility Toolbar Mozilla/Firefox,**

281

Acoustic output, 27
 addEvent() method, 73
AIS Web Accessibility toolbar, 87–88
Ajax, MooTools, 76
Animations, 73, 75–76
archive view, com_content component,
 293

article view, com_content component,
288–289

Articles

archived, 308
 changing number of, 223
 headings, 309
 latest, 309
 listing, 309, 312
 most popular, 309
 Read More links, 309
 separators, 309

<aside> element, 270

Assistive technologies, 279

Asterisk (*)
 asterisk hack, 52–53
 wildcard character, 42–43

Asymmetrical curvatures, creating, 56**Atomic template**

Blueprint framework, 207–209
 overview, 91
 reference summary, 286–287

Attribute selectors, 44**Audiodata, 27****Author, specifying**

com_content component, 288–290,
 292–293
 mod_articles_category, 308
autocomplete attribute, 130–131
Autocompletion, enabling, 130–131

B

Background images, 249–253, 260

background-color property, 259
background-image property, 259
background-position property, 259
background-repeat property, 259
Banners, 309

Barrier-free design. See Accessibility.

BAUM Retec AG, 27

Beez templates

music store example, 212–216
overview, 212–216
styles, 146–148

Beez templates, most important features

accessibility, 194–196
custom font sizing, 205
heading hierarchy, 195–196
hiding/showing page elements, 199–200
HTML5, 205–207
index.php file, 206
JavaScript, 199
landmark roles, 199–200
linearization, 194–196
positionable navigation column, 197–199
selectable design, 196
semantically logical structure, 194–196
separation of content and layout, 194
summary of, 193
tab presentation, 204–205
WAI-ARIA specification, 199–200

beez5 template

Chrome Template, 307–308
overview, 91–92
reference summary, 284–286

beez_20 template. See also **index.php file.**

Chrome Template, 305–306
overview, 91–92
reference summary, 283–284
renaming, 119–123

beezDivision style, 305–306, 307**beezHide style, 147–148, 306, 307****beezTabs style, 147–148, 306, 307–308****Berners Lee, Tim, 35****Blindness.** See **Visual impairment.****Blindows screen reader, 27****blog view, com_content component, 291–292****Blokland, Eric van, 14****Blooming, 11****Blueprint framework, Atomic template, 207–209****Books and publications.** See also **Useful links.**

Bulletproof Web Design, 36
Cascading Style Sheets, 35
HTML5 & CSS3 Visual QuickStart Guide, 36
Pro JavaScript with MooTools, 81
Responsive Web Design, 59
Sam's Teach Yourself Web Publishing..., 36
Transcending CSS: The Fine Art of Web Design, 5

border-radius statement, 56**Borders, 47–51****Box model, 47–51****box-shadow statement, 56–57****Braille displays, 26–27****Browser check, 243–245, 255–256, 264–265****Browser problems.** See also **specific browsers.**

* (asterisk), asterisk hack, 52–53
conditional comments, 52
display problems, avoiding, 55
hasLayout property, 53–54
vendor prefixes, 55

Browser windows, determining height and width, 60**Browsers**

detecting, 187–189
icons in. *See Favicons.*
passing values from PHP, 65

Bulletproof Web Design, 36**Buttons, music store example, 228–230**

C

-
- Cascading Style Sheets**, 35
- Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)**. See **CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)**.
- Castro, Elizabeth**, 36
- Categories, listing**, 308
- categories view**
- com_contact component, 295
 - com_content component, 289
 - com_newsfeeds component, 299
 - com_weblinks component, 301
- category view**
- com_contact component, 295–297
 - com_content component, 289–292
 - com_newsfeeds component, 299–300
 - com_weblinks component, 301–302
- CCA (Colour Contrast Analyzer)**, 86–87, 281
- Cederholm, Dan**, 36
- Character set, specifying**, 110
- Charlier, Michael**, 7
- Checker tools**, 281
- Child elements, getting**, 75
- Child selectors**, 42
- Chrome, Beez styles**, 146–148
- Chrome Template beeze5**, 307–308
- Chrome Template beeze_20**, 305–306
- Clarke, Andy**, 5
- class attribute**, 130
- Class selectors**, 41
- Class system, MooTools**, 76–79
- Classes**. See also **CSS classes**.
- JForm, 126–129
 - modulatable class, 144
 - Request, 76, 80
 - Request.HTML, 76, 80
 - Request.JSON, 76, 80
- Class() function**, 77
- clear property**, 51
- Colburn, Rafe**, 36
- Colon (:), ending if statements**, 67
- Color gradients**, 260
- Color perception, simulating**, 87
- Colorblindness**
- definition, 8
 - men *vs.* women, 21
 - in the population, 21
 - simulating, 8, 10, 87
- Colors**
- background images, 259
 - blooming, 11
 - complimentary, finding, 8
 - contrasts, 11–12
 - effects of, examples, 9
 - effects on learning disabilities, 32
 - influence on accessibility, 12. *See also Colorblindness*.
 - inverting screen color, 26
 - linear gradients, 57
 - links, specifying, 43–44
- Colour Contrast Analyzer (CCA)**, 86–87, 281
- Column layout**
- examples, 214–216
 - visual structure, 3
- Columns**
- borders, 287
 - combining, 149–151
 - empty, hiding, 150, 282
 - filling with content, 218–222
 - hiding/showing, 200–202
 - for low resolution devices, 59–60
 - number of, determining, 44–47, 287
 - rows containing, 287
 - scaling, 16
 - specifying in percentages, 59–60
 - three-column design, example, 6
 - width, fluid page layouts, 16
- com_contact component**, 294–299
- com_content component**, 287–294

Comma (,), in CSS element selectors, 40
Comments, PHP, 65
com_newsfeeds component, 299–301
Complimentary colors, finding, 8
component.php file
 customizing views, 182–183
 replacing system graphics, 179–183
 search engine-friendly URLs,
 181–182
 as template component, 103
Components. See also **CSS components.**
 dynamic content, 114–115
 vs. modules, 114
com_search component, 303
com_users component, 304–305
com_weblinks component, 301–302
com_wrapper component, 305
Conditional comments, browser
 problems, 52
Conditional processing, PHP
 else statements, 68
 if statements, 66–67
 relational operators, 67
<config> element. See also **Template parameters.**
 file and folder lists, adding, 134
 form elements, adding, 129–134
 form fields, adding, 126–129
 images, adding, 132–133
 menu items, creating, 134
 overview, 125–126
 radio buttons, adding, 132
 select boxes, adding, 131–132
 spacers, adding, 133–134
 text editing, 134
 text fields, adding, 129–131
 text fields, validating, 130–131
 time zone selection box, creating,
 134
Consistent layout, user expectations, 5–6

contact view, com_contact component,
 297–299
Content, separating from layout, 194
Context selectors, 41–42
Contrasts, effects of, 11–12
Core component, MooTools, 73
Corner radii, specifying, 56
Counting modules, 282
countModules() function, 149–151
CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). See also
 HTML (HyperText Markup Language);
 Templates.
 assigning to specific media types,
 59
 Cascading Style Sheets, 35
 file folder, 102
 history of, 4–5, 35–36
 HTML5 & CSS3 Visual QuickStart Guide, 36
 integrating with JavaScript,
 112–113
 for low resolution devices, 59–62
 vs. module styles, 144
 RTL (right-to-left) views, 186–187
 Sam’s Teach Yourself Web Publishing...,
 36
 Transcending CSS: The Fine Art of Web Design, 5
 useful links, 279–280
 validation, 83–84, 85–86, 253
CSS classes
 class selectors, 41
 grouping, 44–47
CSS classes, reference summary
 Atomic template, 286–287
 beez5 template, 284–286
 beez_20 template, 283–284
 components, 287–305. See also *specific components*.
 modules, 305–313

CSS components

com_contact, 294–299
 com_content, 287–294
 com_newsfeeds, 299–301
 com_search, 303
 com_users, 304–305
 com_weblinks, 301–302
 com_wrapper, 305

css folder, 102**CSS selectors**

attribute, 44
 child, 42
 class, 41
 context, 41–42
 element, 40
 ID, 41
 inheriting properties, 44
 pseudoclass, 43–44
 universal, 42–43

CSS selectors, selective formatting

direct child of a body, 42
 document elements, 40
 HTML attributes, 44
 individual page areas, 41–42
 link color, 43–44
 with pseudoclasses, 43–44
 selected paragraphs, 41
 with wildcards, 42–43

CSS statements, adding

in the document head, 39
 in external files, 38–39
 as inline styles, 39–40

CSS statements, most useful

border-radius, 56
 box-shadow, 56–57
 corner radii, specifying, 56
 linear-gradient, 57
 min-width, 60
 radii of corners, specifying, 56
 shadows, adding to elements, 56–57

CSS3, 55, 60

CSSTidy, CSS tuning tool, 55
Curly brackets ({}), in CSS element selectors, 40
Curvatures, creating, 56
Customizing views, 182–183
Cynthia Says, 281

D**Dates**

of creation, 288, 289
 current, getting, 282
 formatting, 191–192
 of modification, 288, 289
 outputting, 190
 of publication, 288, 289

Deafness. See **Hearing impairment.**

Deprecated attributes, 36

Design, 280

Developer Toolbar for Internet Explorer, 281

Devices. See also **Media.**

maximum width, determining, 61
 orientation, determining, 60
 testing on, 61

Direct child of body, 42

Disabilities. See also **Hearing impairment;**

Learning disabilities; Physical

disabilities; Visual impairment.

contextual disabilities, 19–20
 effects of aging, 33–34

Discovering templates, 99–100

Display problems, avoiding, 55

Displaying values. See **\$this object.**

div container, music store example, 236

Document body, index.php file, 114–115

Document head, index.php file, 107–113

Document properties, loading, 282

Document title

getting, 282

specifying, 111

Document type, selecting, 108

document.id() function, 73

Dojo framework, 72

Dollar sign (\$), PHP variable indicator, 66

Dollar sign function, \$(), 73–74

Double dollar function, \$\$(), 73–74

Double quote ("), in PHP variables, 66

Drop-down menus, 157–158

Dynamic content. See *also* **Modules;**

MooTools.

error messages, 114–115

Joomla! components, 114–115

modules, 114–115

system notices, 114–115

Dynamic screen design. See **Responsive Web design.**

E

echo() function, 65

Elderly people, disabilities of. See **Users, age and accessibility.**

Element selectors, 40

else statements, 68

Equal signs

=, assigning values to PHP variables, 66

==, equal operator, 67

==>, identical operator, 67

Error messages. See *also* **System notices.**

400 – 500 error codes, 178

404 (File not found), 104

beez5 template, 286

beez_20 template, 284

dynamic content, 114–115

incorrect password, 114–115

“The template for this display is not available.”, 119–120

error.php file, 104, 273

Events, 73–74

Examples. See **Music store example.**

Exclamation, equal sign

!=, not equal operator, 67

!==, not identical operator, 67

Extends property, 77

Eye-tracking experiments, 6

F

Faulkner, Nils, 86

favicon.ico file, 104

Favicons, changing, 112, 275

featured view

com_contact component, 294–295

com_content component, 287–288

Fields. See **Form fields.**

File lists, adding, 134

Files, removing superfluous, 274

filter attribute, 130

Firebug, 85–90, 281

Firefox

Accessibility Evaluation Toolbar, 88

custom style sheets for visual

impairment, 23–24

Mozilla Accessibility toolbar,

87–88

Tilt 3D extension, 89–90

Web Developer toolbar, 84–85

Web page inspection tool, 89–90

Fixed page layouts, 16

float property, 49

Floated elements, 49–51

Fluid page layouts, 16

Folded out menus, 157–158

Folder lists, adding, 134

Fonts. See also **Text**.

browser support for, 14–15
 custom sizing, 205
 designing for the visually impaired, 29
 enlarging, 241–242
 Google Font API, 15–16
 serif *vs.* sans serif, 13
 size. *See* Scaling, fonts.
 typography, 280–281
 Web, 13–16
 WOFF (Web Open Format Font),
 14–15

fonts folder, 104–105**<footer> element, 270****Footers**

adjusting, 239–240
 copyright information, 310
 copyright notes, 287
 enclosing, 283, 284
 <footer> element, 270
 license information, 310
 specifying, 284, 286

Form elements, adding, 129–134**Form fields, adding, 126–129****form view**

com_content component, 293–294
 com_weblinks component, 302

Formatting selected areas, 151–155. *See also* **Classes; CSS selectors, selective formatting.**

400 - 500 error codes in messages, 178**404 (File not found) messages, 104****Freedom Scientific, 27****Functions**

`$()`, dollar sign, 73–74
`$$()`, double dollar, 73–74
`Class()`, 77
`countModules()`, 149–151
`document.id()`, 73
`echo()`, 65

`getChildren()`, 75
`getNext()`, 75
`getParent()`, 75
`modChrome`, 202
 MooTools, 73–74
`print_r()`, 69
 reference summary, 282
`var_dump()`, 69

Fx.Morph object, 75–76**Fx.Tween object, 75–76**

G**getChildren() function, 75****getNext() function, 75****getParent() function, 75**

Getting values. *See* **\$this object**.

Golden ratio, 3, 16

Google Font API, 15–16

Graphical structure. *See* **Page layout, graphical structure**.

Graphics. *See also* **Images**.

optimizing for specific devices, 61–62
 system, replacing, 179–183

Greater than operator (>), 67

Greater than or equal to operator (>=), 67

Grids, 3–4

GUI (graphical user interface). *See* **Chrome**.

H

hasLayout property, browser problems, 53–54

Header area

`beez5` template, 284
`beez_20` template, 283

<header> element, 269

Header pictures, module position, 235–239

Headers

background images, 259–265
<header> element, 269
transparent, 29
visual design, 223–234

Heading hierarchies

Beez template features, 195–196
modules, 146–148

Hearing impairment

effects of aging, 34
overview, 31
sign language videos, 31

Height

browser windows, 60
content, minimum, 240–241
content, music store example, 240–241
line-height property, 13
media, 60

Hemberger, Frederic, 61**hide.js file, 201–202**

Hiding/showing elements. See also

Invisible.

Beez template features, 199–200
beeZHide style for, 306, 307
collapsing content, 306, 307
columns, 200–202, 284, 286
elements outside the viewport, 283, 285
modules, 148, 202–204
page elements, 199–200
parameter return values, 70

Hit counter, 288, 289**Holzschlag, Molly, 5****Homepage structuring, 190**

HTML (HyperText Markup Language). See also **CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)**.
choosing a version, 36–38. See also
specific versions.
codes for special characters, 128

history of, 35–36

HTML5 & CSS3 Visual QuickStart

Guide, 36

mixing with PHP, 63–64

Sam's Teach Yourself Web Publishing..., 36

validation, 83–84, 85–86, 253–254

HTML 4.01

deprecated attributes, 36
overview, 36–37
Strict version, 36–37
Transitional version, 36–37

html folder, 103**HTML language indicator, 108–109****HTML5**

<aside> element, 270
Beez template features, 205–207
<footer> element, 270
<header> element, 269
index.php file, 269
<nav> element, 270
outputting content as, 205–207
overriding, 267–269
overview, 37–38
sample of sites using, 37
using effectively, 265–271
vs. XHTML, 266

HTML5 & CSS3 Visual QuickStart Guide, 36

**Icon list, 288****Icons**

edit, 288
e-mail, 288
favicons, 104
print, 288
useful links, 281

ID selectors, 41

- Identical operator (====), 67**
 - if statements, 66–67**
 - Images.** See also **Graphics.**
 - adding, 132–133
 - background, accessibility, 260
 - background, examples, 249–253
 - color gradients, 260
 - random, 312
 - images folder, 103**
 - implement() method, 77**
 - index.html file, 105**
 - index.php file**
 - accessing views, 190
 - Beez template features, 206
 - character set, specifying, 110
 - CSS, integrating with JavaScript, 112–113
 - current date, formatting, 191–192
 - current date, outputting, 190
 - definition, 102
 - describing site contents, 110–111
 - document title, specifying, 111
 - document type, selecting, 108
 - favicons, specifying, 112
 - HTML language indicator, 108–109
 - HTML5, 269
 - integrating modules into, 139–148
 - jdoc: include type:head statement, 109
 - language files, 137–138
 - metadata for search engines, specifying, 110–111
 - MooTools, integrating, 113
 - music store example, 221–222
 - optimizing, 275–277
 - reading direction, changing, 113
 - restricting access to, 107–108
 - RSS feeds, enabling, 111–112
 - search engine-friendly URLs, generating, 109
 - stopping robots, 110–111
 - structuring the homepage, 190
 - UTF-8 character set, specifying, 110
 - index.php file, structure of**
 - document body, 114–115
 - document head, 107–113
 - Inheritance, CSS selectors, 44**
 - Installing**
 - Joomla!, 123
 - templates, 99–100
 - Internet Explorer**
 - * (asterisk), asterisk hack, 52–53
 - AIS Web Accessibility toolbar, 87–88
 - browser check, 243, 264–265
 - conditional comments, 52
 - CSS child selectors, 42
 - custom style sheets for visual impairment, 23–24
 - hasLayout property, 53–54
 - HTML5, 37–38, 271
 - max-width property, 17
 - optimizing for visual impairment, 23
 - rounding corners, 145–146
 - Invisible elements, 29.** See also **Hiding/showing.**
 - iPad, customizing views for, 182–183**
 - iPhone, customizing views for, 182–183**
-
- J**
- JavaScript**
 - Beez template features, 199
 - experimentation tools, 81
 - integrating with CSS, 112–113
 - useful links, 281
- javascript folder, 103**
- JavaScript frameworks, 72.** See also **MooTools.**
- JAWS (Job Access with Speech), 27, 279**
- jdoc: include type:head statement, 109**

jdoc:include, 139–148
JForm class, 126–129
Joomla!, 279
jQuery framework, 72
JSFiddle, 81
Juicy Studio Accessibility extension, 86

K

Kew, Jonathan, 14

Keyboards

navigation problems, 230–234
 onscreen, 25–26
 testing, 242

Keyword spamming, 110

Kröner, Peter, 72

L

Landmark roles, 199–200

Language file

folder for, 103, 137–138
 location, 136
 music store example, 222, 234
 path to, specifying, 124
 renaming, 124
 rules for, 143

language folder, 103

Language strings

conventions for using, 137
 music store example, 234

Languages. See also **RTL (right-to-left)**

languages.

adding, 136
 changing, 310
 file folder, 103
 getting, 282
 multilingual content, 93
 reading direction, changing, 113
 RTL (right-to-left) reading, 113

simplifying for learning disabilities, 33
 translating constants, 135–136

Layout. See **Page layout**.

Learning disabilities

accommodating, 32–33
 colors, effects of, 32
 overview, 32
 simplifying language, 33

Left angle, equal sign (<=), less than or equal to operator, 67

Left angle (<), less than operator, 67

Legal definition of blindness, 22

Legal mandate for accessibility, 20–21

Lemay, Laura, 36

Leming, Tal, 14

Less than operator (<), 67

Less than or equal to operator (<=), 67

Line spacing, 13

Linear gradients, 57

linear-gradient, 57

Linearization, 194–196

line-height property, 13

Links. See also *specific links*.

breadcrumbs, 310
 color, specifying, 43–44
 images as, 159–160
 nonvisual. *See Skip links*.
 to open and close, 306, 307
 push-to-front principle, 7
 text, 284, 286
 titles, 160

Login form, 311

login view, com_users component, 304

Logos

alternative text, 232–233
 beeZ5 template, 285
 beeZ_20 template, 283
 formatting, 225–228
 template parameters, 124

Logout button, 311

M

Mac OS X accessibility aids, useful links, 27

Magnifying

fonts. *See* Scaling, fonts.
screen magnifiers, 24–25

Marcotte, Ethan, 59

margin property, 49

Margins, 47–51

max-device-width property, 61

max-width property, 17

Media. *See also* Devices.

automatically adapting to, 59–62
height and width, determining, 60
querying, 59–62

Media Manager, selecting images from, 132–133

Media queries

CSS3, 60–61
HTML5 applications, 62

Menu items

creating, 134
wrapper type, 183

Menus

displaying, 155
drop-down, 157–158
folded out, 157–158
horizontal navigation, 156–157
invisible, 181–182
music store example, 223–225
navigation, positioning, 218
split, 158
styling, 159
subnavigation, 156–157

Messages, types of, 173. *See also* Error messages; System notices.

Metadata for search engines, specifying, 110–111

Methods. *See also* Functions.

addEvent(), 73
displaying. *See* \$this object.

implement(), 77
tween(), 73

Meyer, Eric, 35

min-width statement, 60

mod_articles_archive module, 308

mod_articles_categories module, 308

mod_articles_category module, 308

mod_articles_latest module, 309

mod_articles_news module, 309

mod_articles_popular module, 309

mod_banners module, 309

mod_breadcrumbs module, 310

modChrome functions module, 202

mod_custom module, 310

Model-view-controller principle, 166–172

mod_feed module, 310

mod_footer module, 310

mod_languages module, 310

mod_login module, 311

mod_menu module, 311–312

mod_random_image module, 312

mod_related_items module, 312

mod_search module, 312

mod_stats module, 312

mod_syndicate module, 313

Module Class Suffix

formatting selected page areas, 151–155

music store example, 236–239

Module contents, beeZDivision style for, 305–306, 307

Modules

arranging in tabs, 147–148

boxes for, 284, 286

Chrome Template beeZ5, 307–308

Chrome Template beeZ_20, 305–306

vs. components, 114

counting, 282

dynamic content, 114–115

editing content, 261

formatting selected page areas, 151–155
 heading hierarchy, 146–148
 hiding/showing, 148, 202–204
 integrating into index.php file, 139–148
 link images, 159–160
 link titles, 160
 mod_articles_archive, 308
 mod_articles_categories, 308
 mod_articles_category, 308
 mod_articles_latest, 309
 mod_articles_news, 309
 mod_articles_popular, 309
 mod_banners, 309
 mod_breadcrumbs, 310
 mod_custom, 310
 mod_feed, 310
 mod_footer, 310
 mod_languages, 310
 mod_login, 311
 mod_menu, 311–312
 mod_random_image, 312
 mod_related_items, 312
 mod_search, 312
 mod_stats, 312
 mod_syndicate, 313
 mod_users_latest, 313
 mod_weblinks, 313
 mod_whosonline, 313
 mod_wrapper, 313
 most widely used, 139
 naming, 140–144
 for page layout, 149–151
 positioning, 284, 286
 positions, defining, 123–124

Modules, for menus

displaying menus, 155
 drop-down menus, 157–158
 folded out menus, 157–158

horizontal navigation, 156–157
 split menus, 158
 styling individual menus, 159
 subnavigation, 156–157

Modules, positioning

with Module Manager, 143
 by name, 140–144

Modules, styles

Beez template, 146–148
 beezHide, 147–148
 beezTabs, 147–148
 Chrome, 146–148
vs. CSS, 144
 default, 144–146
 for menus, 159

moduletable class, 144

mod_users_latest, 313
mod_weblinks, 313
mod_whosonline, 312–313
mod_wrapper, 312–313
moo.fx plug-in, 72

MooTools

Ajax block, 76
 animations, 73, 75–76
 child elements, getting, 75
 class system, 76–79
 Core component, 73
 creating and manipulating elements, 74–75
 documentation, 73, 81
 events, 73–74
 functions, 73–74
 integrating, 113
 More component, 73–74
 overview, 72
 parent elements, getting, 75
 principle of, 79–81
Pro JavaScript with MooTools, 81
 selecting elements, 73–74
 sibling elements, getting, 75

MooTools, continued

transferring function between projects, 79–81
useful links, 81
XML HTTP requests, 76

More component, MooTools, 73–74

Motor disabilities, 30

Mozilla Accessibility toolbar, 87–88

Mozilla Firefox. See **Firefox.**

Multilingual content, 93

Music store example

- adding a div container, 236
- background images, 249–253
- with Beez templates, 212–216
- buttons, 228–230
- column layouts, 214–216
- creating a template, 211–216
- customizing typography, 245–246
- filling columns with content, 218–222
- footers, adjusting, 239–240
- header pictures, module position, 235–239
- headers, visual design, 223–234
- index.php file adaptations, 221–222
- keyboard navigation problems, 230–234
- language file adaptation, 222, 234
- language string adaptation, 234
- logo, alternative text, 232–233
- logo area, formatting, 225–228
- main menu adaptations, 223–225
- menu navigation, positioning, 218
- minimum content height, 240–241
- Module Class Suffix, 236–239
- module headings, formatting, 246–249
- navigation, positioning, 218
- number of articles, changing, 223
- order of content, 233–234

Read More link, 252–253

renaming module positions, 219–221
semantics check, 230
site description, 231–232
spacing adjustment, 238–239
templateDetails.xml file adaptations, 222

Music store example, testing

accessibility checks, 257
browser check, 243–245, 255–256
CSS validation, 253
font enlargement, 241–242
HTML validation, 253–254
keyboard operation, 242

N**name attribute, 140–144****Naming**

beez_20 template, 119–123
language files, 124
module positions, 219–221
modules, 140–144

Nature design, 93**<nav> element, 270****Navigation**

menus, 156–157
<nav> element, 270
positioning, 218
separating from content, 12

Navigation columns, positioning, 197–199, 283, 285**newsfeed view, com_newsfeeds component, 300–301****Newsfeeds, listing, 310****Newton, Aaron, 81****nofollow keyword, 110****noindex keyword, 110****Not equal operator (!=), 67**

Not identical operator (`!==`), 67

Notices. See **System notices.**

O

Obcena, Mark Joseph, 81

Object values, displaying. See `$this object`.

Offline mode, 183

offline.php file, 183, 273

Online resources. See **Useful links.**

Onscreen keyboards, 25–26

Operability, 20–21

Ordering content, 233–234

Orientation of a device, determining, 59–62

Output

default, 161

as HTML5, 205–207

model-view-controller principle,

166–172

overriding templates, 165–166,
170–172

Page Class Suffix, 162–165

shifting to templates, 168–169

Output, adapting

overview, 169–170

system notices, 173–178

Overriding

HTML5, 267–269

templates, 165–166, 170–172

P

padding property, 48

Padding screen elements, 47–51

Page Class Suffix, 162–165

Page Heading parameter, 66–67

Page layout. See *also* **Components;**

Fonts; Modules; Text.

column width, 16

fixed *vs.* fluid, 16

golden ratio, 16

scaling text, columns, etc., 16

separating from content, 194

Page layout, graphical structure. See *also*

Colors.

esthetics, 12–13

line spacing, 13

navigation, separating from content,
12

spatial arrangement, 7–8

Page layout, visual structure

column layout, 3

golden ratio, 3

grid patterns, library of, 4

grids, 3–4

implementing, 5–7

push-to-front principle, 7

table layout, 3

three-column design, example, 6

visual cues to more information, 7.

See also **Links.**

Page numbers, specifying, 288

Page titles

beez5 template, 285

beez_20 template, 283

Pages. See **Web pages.**

Pagetitle parameter. See **Page Heading parameter.**

Papst, Eva, 27–28

Parameters. See *also* **Template**

parameters.

PHP, 68–70

templates, 93

Parent elements, getting, 75

Parse errors, PHP, 65

Password input field, 311

Passwords, error messages, 114–115

Perceivability, 20

Period (.), in CSS class selectors, 41

Personal design, 93

PHP

- accessing objects, 68–70
- comments, 65
- `echo()` function, 65
- mixing with HTML, 63–64
- output, 65–66
- overview, 63
- parameters, 68–70
- parse errors, 65
- passing values to the browser, 65
- variables, displaying, 69

PHP, conditional processing

- `else` statements, 68
- `if` statements, 66–67
- relational operators, 67

Physical disabilities, 30**Pictures. See Images.****Positioning modules**

- with Module Manager, 143
- by name, 140–144

Positioning screen elements

- borders, 47–51
- box model, 47–51
- floated elements, 49–51
- margins, 47–51
- space padding, 47–51
- useful links, 51
- width, 47–51

Pound sign (#), CSS ID indicator, 44**Previewing**

- `print`, 273
- sizing previews, 274–275
- templates, 94–97, 104

Print preview, 273**Print stylesheets, 273****`print_r()` function, 69*****Pro JavaScript with MooTools, 81*****profile view, com_users component, 304****Proiette, Valerio, 72****Properties**

- `background-color`, 259
- `background-image`, 259
- `background-position`, 259
- `background-repeat`, 259
- `clear`, 51
- displaying. *See \$this object.*
- `Extends`, 77
- `float`, 49
- `hasLayout`, 53–54
- `line-height`, 13
- `margin`, 49
- `max-device-width`, 61
- `max-width`, 17
- `min-width`, 60
- `padding`, 48

Prototype framework, 72**Pseudoclass selectors, 43–44****Push-to-front principle, 7**

R**Radii of corners, specifying, 56****Radio buttons, adding, 132****Read More links, 288, 308–309****Reading direction. *See also RTL (right-to-left) languages.***

- changing, 113, 185–187

- displaying, 282

registration view, com_users component, 304–305**Rehabilitation Act Amendment, 20–21****Relational operators, 67****remind view, com_users component, 305****Renaming. *See Naming.*****Request class, 76, 80****Request.HTML class, 76, 80****Request.JSON class, 76, 80****required attribute, 130****reset view, com_users component, 305**

- Resizing screen elements dynamically.** See **MooTools; Responsive Web design.**
- Resolution.** See **Screen resolution.**
- Responsive Web design, 59–62**
- Responsive Web Design, 59**
- Right angle, equal sign (>=), greater than or equal to operator, 67**
- Right angle (>), greater than operator, 67**
- Robots, stopping, 110–111**
- Robustness, 21**
- Rounding corners, 144–146**
- Rows, separators, 287**
- RSS feeds, enabling, 111–112**
- RTL (right-to-left) languages.** See also **Languages; Reading direction.**
changing direction, 185–187, 274
planning proportions for, 113
-
- S**
- Sam's Teach Yourself Web Publishing..., 36**
- Sans serif fonts vs. serif, 13**
- Scaling**
columns, 16
text, 16
- Scaling, fonts**
accommodating visual impairment, 22–23
custom sizing, 205
small *vs.* large, 16
- Screen magnifiers, 24–25**
- Screen readers, 26–28**
- Screen resolution**
adjusting for visual impairment, 22
designing for low resolution devices, 59–62
detecting and adapting to, 59–62
- Screen width**
minimum, specifying, 60
specifying in percentages, 59–60
- Search engine-friendly URLs, 109, 181–182**
- Search feature**
creating, 312
with filters, 290
- search view, 303**
- Security**
restricting access to index.php file, 107–108
restricting folder access, 105
- Security checks, 282**
- Select boxes, adding, 131–132**
- Selectable design features, 196**
- Selecting elements with MooTools, 73–74**
- Selectors.** See **CSS selectors.**
- Semantically logical structure, 194–196**
- Semantics check, 230**
- Semicolon (;**
in CSS element selectors, 40
ending PHP statements, 65
- Separators**
articles, 309
items, 288
rows, 287
- Serif fonts vs. sans serif, 13**
- Shadows, adding to elements, 56–57**
- Sharing your Web sites with others, 183**
- Showing/hiding.** See **Hiding/showing.**
- Sibling elements, getting, 75**
- Sidebars, 270**
- Sign language videos, 31**
- Single quote ('), in PHP variables, 66**
- Site descriptions**
beez5 template, 285
beez_20 template, 283
music store example, 231–232
- size attribute, 130**
- Skip links**
anchors, 284, 286
beez5 template, 285

-
- Skip links, continued**
- beeze_20 template, 283
 - example, 137–138
- Slash asterisk (/*...*/), PHP comment delimiters, 65**
- Slashes (//), PHP comment delimiter, 65**
- Space padding, 47–51**
- Spacers, adding, 133–134**
- Spacing adjustment**
- music store example, 238–239
 - print stylesheets, 273
- Spatial arrangement, page layout, 7–8**
- Special characters, converting to HTML codes, 128**
- Split menus, 158**
- Strict version, 36–37**
- Strings, PHP output, 65**
- Structure of Web sites, importance of, 1–2. See also Page layout.**
- style attribute, 144–146**
- Style sheets, customizing for visual impairment, 23–24**
- Styles**
- beezeDivision, 305–306, 307
 - beezeHide, 147–148, 306, 307
 - beezeTabs, 147–148, 306, 307–308
 - inline, avoiding, 39–40
 - menus, 159
 - modules *vs.* CSS, 144
 - templates, 92–94
- Subnavigation menus, 156–157**
- System graphics, replacing, 179–183**
- System notices. See also Error messages.**
- adapting, 173–178
 - beeze5 template, 286
 - beeze_20 template, 284
 - dynamic content, 114–115
 - modifying, 173–178
-
- T**
- Table layout, visual structure, 3**
- Tabs**
- arranging modules in, 147–148
 - Beeze template features, 204–205
 - beezeTabs style for, 306, 307–308
- Telecommunications Act, 21**
- Template Manager**
- previewing templates, 94–97
 - Styles tab, 92–94
 - template details, 97–98
 - Templates tab, 94–98
- Template parameters. See also <config> element.**
- accessing, 282
 - for logos, 124
 - optional template width, 124
 - uses for, 124–126
- templateDetails.xml file**
- adapting, 277–278
 - customizing template names, 119–123
 - definition, 103
 - integrating files and folders, 123
 - language files, 123
 - music store example, 222
 - overview, 117–119
- template_preview.png file, 104**
- Templates. See also Atomic template; beeze5 template; beeze_20 template; Music store example.**
- backend, location, 101
 - control files, 102, 104. *See also* index.
 - php file.
 - creating, 211–216
 - current, displaying. *See* Template Manager.
 - detail view, 97–98
 - discovering, 99–100
 - displaying as thumbnails, 104

- fonts folder, 104
- frontend, location, 101
- installing, 99–100
- names, customizing, 119–123
- Nature design, 93
- overriding, 165–166, 170–172
- parameters, 93
- Personal design, 93
- previewing, 94–97, 104
- shifting output to, 168–169
- width, specifying, 124
- Templates, components**
 - component.php file, 103
 - css folder, 102
 - error.php file, 104
 - favicon.ico file, 104
 - fonts folder, 105
 - html folder, 103
 - images folder, 103
 - index.html file, 105
 - index.php file, 102
 - javascript folder, 103
 - language folder, 103
 - overview, 102
 - table of contents for, 103. *See also* templateDetails.xml file.
 - template control files, 102, 104. *See also* index.php file.
 - templateDetails.xml, 103
 - template_preview.png file, 104
 - template_thumbnail.png file, 104
- template_thumbnail.png file, 104, 274–275**
- Text. *See also* Fonts.**
 - editing, in text boxes, 134
 - scaling, 16
- Text fields**
 - adding, 129–131
 - validating, 130–131
- “The template for this display is not available.”, 119–120**
- \$this object, 69**
- Thumbnails, displaying templates as, 104, 274–275**
- Tiling images, 260**
- Tilt 3D extension, 89–90**
- Time zone selection box, creating, 134**
- Titles. *See* Page titles.**
- Tools and utilities**
 - CSS validator, 83–84
 - Firebug, 85–86
 - HTML validator, 83–84
 - JavaScript frameworks. *See* MooTools.
 - Tilt 3D, 89–90
 - Web Developer toolbar, 84–85
- Tools and utilities, accessibility**
 - CCA (Colour Contrast Analyzer), 86–87
 - Firebug, 86–90
 - for Firefox, 87–90
 - for Internet Explorer, 87–90
 - Juicy Studio Accessibility extension, 86
 - rules checkers, 88–89
 - Wave, 88
 - WCAG 2 compatibility checker, 89
- Transcending CSS: The Fine Art of Web Design, 5**
- Transitional version, 36–37**
- Translating constants to other languages, 135–136**
- Transparent elements, 29. *See also* Hiding/showing elements.**
- tween() method, 73**
- Typography, 280–281. *See also* Fonts.**

U

-
- Understandability, 21**
 - Universal selectors, 42–43**

- U.S. Legal Activities on Web Accessibility, 21**
- Usability, eye-tracking experiments, 6**
- Useful links.** See *also Books and publications.*
- accessibility, private sector, 21
 - Accessibility Overview, 279
 - Accessibility Toolbar Mozilla/Firefox, 281
 - assistive technologies, 279
 - checker tools, 281
 - color, 281
 - colorblindness, 10
 - Colour Contrast Analyzer, 281
 - CSS, 279–280
 - CSSTidy, CSS tuning tool, 55
 - Cynthia Says, 281
 - design, 280
 - Developer Toolbar for Internet Explorer, 281
 - device testing, 61
 - Firebug, 281
 - HTML5, 37, 280
 - icons, 281
 - JavaScript, 81, 281
 - JAWS (Job Access with Speech), 279
 - Joomla!, 279
 - JSFiddle, 81
 - linear gradients, 57
 - Mac OS X accessibility aids, 27
 - MooTools, 81
 - responsive Web design, examples of, 59
 - typography, 280–281
 - Validator, 281
 - Virgo, 279
 - Vischeck, 281
 - VoiceOver, 27
 - WAI-ARIA, 281
 - Wave, 281
- Wcag2-Checker, 281
- Webdeveloper Toolbar, 281
- Windows eyes, 279
- User expectations**
- goals and motivations, 2–3
 - layout consistency, 5–6
 - recognizing, 2–3
- User name, input field, 311**
- Users**
- age and accessibility, 33–34
 - latest, listing, 313
 - online, listing, 313
- UTF-8 character set, specifying, 110**
-
- V**
-
- Validation**
- CSS, 253
 - HTML, 83–84, 85–86, 253–254
 - text fields, 130–131
- Validator, 281**
- van Blokland, Eric, 14**
- var_dump() function, 69**
- Variables, PHP**
- displaying, 69
 - outputting, 65–66
- Vendor prefixes, browser problems, 55**
- Videos, optimizing for specific devices, 61–62**
- Views**
- accessing, 190
 - archive, com_content component, 293
 - article, com_content component, 288–289
 - blog, com_content component, 291–292
 - contact, com_contact component, 297–299
 - current, getting, 282

customizing, 182–183
 definition, 69
 integrating from other sites, 183
 iPad, customizing for, 182–183
 iPhone, customizing for, 182–183
 login view, com_users component, 304
 model-view-controller principle, 166–172
 newsfeed, com_newsfeeds component, 300–301
 profile, com_users component, 304
 registration, com_users component, 304–305
 remind, com_users component, 305
 reset, com_users component, 305
 search, 303
 wrapper, 305

Views, categories

com_contact component, 295
 com_content component, 289
 com_newsfeeds component, 299
 com_weblinks component, 301

Views, category

com_contact component, 295–297
 com_content component, 289–292
 com_newsfeeds component, 299–300
 com_weblinks component, 301–302

Views, featured

com_contact component, 294–295
 com_content component, 287–288

Views, form

com_content component, 293–294
 com_weblinks component, 302

Virgo screen reader, 27, 279

Vischeck, 281

Visual cues to more information, 7. See also **Links.**

Visual impairment. See also

Colorblindness.

accommodating, 29
 acoustic output, 27
 adjusting screen resolution, 22
 braille displays, 26–27
 color perception, simulating, 87
 custom style sheets, 23–24
 effects of aging, 34
 inverting screen color, 26
 legal definition of blindness, 22
 onscreen keyboards, 25–26
 outputting screens on nonvisual devices, 27
 overview, 21–22
 scaling font size, 22–23
 screen magnifiers, 24–25
 screen readers, 26–28
 separating content from layout, 28–29

Visual structure. See **Page layout, visual structure.**

VoiceOver, useful links, 27

W

W3C accessibility recommendations, 21

WAI-ARIA (Web Accessibility Initiative–Accessible Rich Internet Applications), 199–200

Wave, 88, 281

WCAG 2

compatibility checker, 89
 guidelines for accessibility, 20–21

WCAG1.0 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0), 20–21

Wcag2-Checker, 281

Web Developer toolbar, 84–85

Web fonts, 13–16. See also **Fonts; WOFF (Web Open Format Font).**

Web links. See **Links.**

Web Open Format Font (WOFF), 14–15

Web page inspection tool, 89–90

Web pages. See also **Page**.

- basic structure elements, 205
- switching to offline mode, 183

Web sites

- describing site contents, 110–111
- sharing yours with others, 183

Web sites of interest. See **Useful links**.

Webdeveloper Toolbar, 281

WebFormator plug-in, 27

Width

- browser windows, 60
- columns, fluid page layouts, 16
- devices, determining, 61
- Internet Explorer considerations, 17
- max-device-width property, 61
- max-width property, 17
- media, determining, 60
- min-width property, 59–60
- positioning screen elements, 47–51
- screen, 59–60
- screen elements, 47–51
- specifying with template parameters, 124
- windows, specifying, 60

Wildcards, selective formatting with, 42–43

Windows, specifying minimum width, 60

Windows eyes, 279

WOFF (Web Open Format Font), 14–15

Wrapper component, 305

Wrapper type menu items, 183

wrapper view, 305

X

XHTML 1.01

- deprecated attributes, 36
- overview, 36–37
- Strict version, 36–37
- Transitional version, 36–37

XHTML vs. HTML5, 266

XML file. See **templateDetails.xml file**.

Y

YUI framework, 72

Z

Zip archive, creating, 278