

Using Dreamweaver Templates

Let's face it: Web design is a combination of glory and grunt work. Creating the initial design for a Web site can be fun and exciting, but when you have to implement your wonderful new design on 200 or more pages, the excitement fades as you try to figure out the quickest way to finish the work. Enter templates. Properly using templates can be a tremendous time-saver. Moreover, a template ensures that your Web site has a consistent look and feel, which, in turn, generally means that it's easier for users to navigate.

In Dreamweaver, new documents can be produced from a standard design saved as a template, as in a word processing program. Furthermore, you can alter a template and update all the files that were created from it earlier; this capability extends the power of the repeating element Libraries to over-all page design. Templates also form the bridge to one of the hottest technologies shaping the Web — XML (Extensible Markup Language).

Dreamweaver makes it easy to access all kinds of templates — everything from your own creations to the default blank page. This chapter demonstrates the mechanism behind Dreamweaver templates and shows you strategies for getting the most out of them.

32 CHAPTER



In This Chapter

Working with
templates

Building your own
templates

Working with
editable and locked
regions

Modifying the default
Web page



Understanding Templates

Templates exist in many forms. Furniture makers use master patterns as templates to create the same basic design repeatedly, using new wood stains or upholstery to differentiate the end results. A stencil, in which the inside of a letter, word, or design is cut out, is a type of template as well. With computers, templates form the basic document into which specific details are added to create new, distinct documents.

Dreamweaver templates, in terms of functionality, are a combination of traditional templates and updateable Library elements. Once a new page is created from a template, the new document remains attached to the original template unless specifically separated or detached. Because the new document maintains a connection to previous pages in a site, if the original template is altered, all the documents created from it can be automatically updated. This relationship is also true of Dreamweaver's repeating elements Libraries. In fact, templates can even include Library elements.



Library items can work hand-in-hand with templates. See Chapter 33 for a detailed discussion of Library items.

Templates are composed of two types of regions: *locked* and *editable*. Every element on the Web page template falls into one category or the other. When a template is first created, all the areas are locked. Part of the process of defining a template is to designate and name the editable regions. Then, when a document is created from that template, the editable regions are the only ones that can be modified.

Naturally, templates can be altered to mark additional editable areas or to relock editable areas. Moreover, you can detach a document created from a template at any point and edit anything in the document—you cannot, however, reattach the document to the template without losing newly inserted content. On the other hand, a document based on one template can be changed to a completely different look but with the same content, if another template with identical editable regions is applied.

Dreamweaver ships with a tutorial that illustrates the power of templates. The tutorial, found in the Dreamweaver\Tutorial folder, is based on an example Web site for a travel company called Compass. Previewing the site in a browser shows that all the sample pages for the different trips in the Destinations section are basically the same—only the destination title, description, and Flash movie vary. The layout, background, and navigation controls are identical on every page. Each of these pages was created from the template page shown in Figure 32-1. Notice the highlighting surrounding certain areas; in a template, the editable regions are highlighted, and the locked areas are not. A tab further identifies each editable region to make it easier to add the right content in the right area.

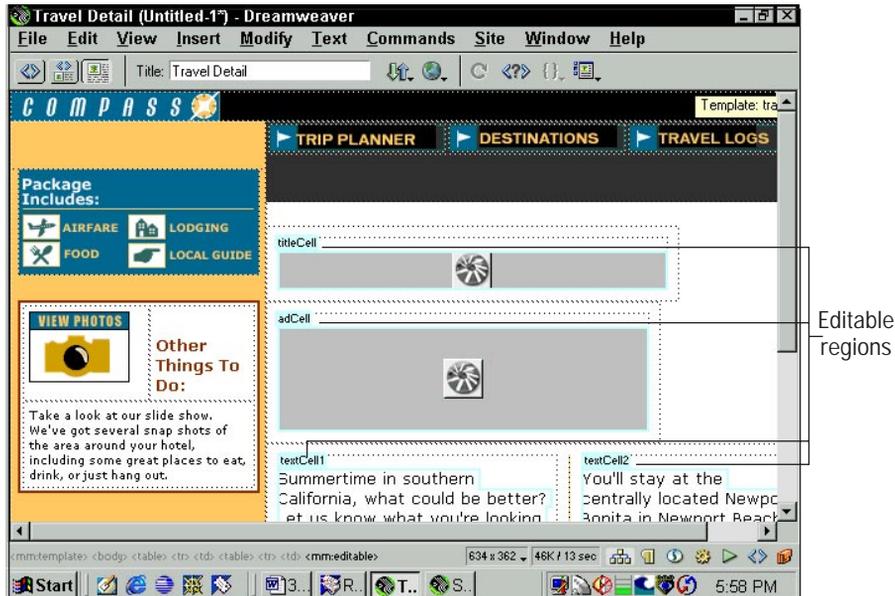


Figure 32-1: In this sample template from the Dreamweaver tutorial, editable regions are highlighted.

Creating Your Own Templates

You can use any design that you like for your own template. Perhaps the best course to take is to finalize a single page that has all the elements that you want to include in your template. Then, convert that document to a template and proceed to mark all the changeable areas—whether text or image—as editable regions.

Before saving your file as a template, consider these points when designing your basic page:

- ♦ **Use placeholders where you can.** Whether it's dummy text or a temporary graphic, placeholders give shape to your page. They also make it easier to remember which elements to include. If you are using an image placeholder, set a temporary height and width through the Property Inspector or by dragging the image placeholder's sizing handles; of course, you can also just insert a sample graphic.
- ♦ **Finalize and incorporate as much content as possible in the template.** If you find yourself repeatedly adding the same information or objects to a page, add them to your template. The more structured elements you can include, the faster your pages can be produced.
- ♦ **Use sample objects on the template.** Often you have to enter the same basic object, such as a plug-in for a digital movie, on every page, with only the file-

name changing. Enter your repeating object with all the preset parameters possible on your template page as an editable region, and you only have to select a new filename for each page.

- ◆ **Include your <meta> information.** Search engines rely on <meta> tags to get the overview of a page and then scan the balance of the page to get the details. You can enter a Keyword or Description object from the Head panel of the Objects palette so that all the Web pages in your site have the same basic information for cataloging.

Note

You cannot enter separate <meta> tag information into template-derived pages without inserting it directly into the code. Dreamweaver defines one editable area for the title—your hand-entered <meta> tags should go in this region. This procedure is described in detail later in this chapter.

- ◆ **Apply all needed behaviors and styles to the template.** When a document is saved as a template, all the code in the <head> section is locked. Because most behaviors and CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) styles insert code here, documents created from templates cannot easily apply new behaviors or create new styles.

You can create a template from a Web document with one command: File ⇨ Save As Template. Dreamweaver stores all templates in a Templates folder created for each defined site, with a special file extension, .dwt. After you've created your page and saved it as a template, notice that Dreamweaver inserts <<Template>> in the title bar to remind you of the page's status. Now you're ready to begin defining the template's editable regions.

Note

You can also create a template from an entirely blank page if you like. To do so, open the Assets panel and select the Templates category. From the Templates category, select the New Template button. You can find more information on how to use the Assets panel's Templates category later in this chapter.

Using Editable Regions

As noted earlier, when you convert an existing page into a template via the Save As Template command, the entire document is initially locked. If you attempt to create a document from a template at this stage, Dreamweaver alerts you that the template doesn't have any editable regions, and you cannot change anything on the page. Editable regions are essential to any template.

Marking existing content as editable

Two techniques exist for marking editable regions. First, you can designate any existing content as an editable region. Second, you can insert a new editable region anywhere you can place your cursor. In both cases, you must give the region a unique name. Dreamweaver uses the unique name to identify the editable region when entering new content, applying the template, and exporting or importing XML.

**Note**

As noted, each editable region must have a unique name, but the names need only be different from any other editable region on the same page. The name could be used for objects or JavaScript functions, or for editable regions on a different template.

To mark an existing area as an editable region, follow these steps:

1. Select the text or object that you wish to convert to an editable region.

**Tip**

The general rule of thumb with editable regions is that you need to select a complete tag pair, such as `<table>...</table>`. This has several implications. For instance, while you can mark an entire table or a single cell as editable, you can't select multiple cells, a row, or a column to be so marked. You have to select each cell individually (`<td>...</td>`). Also, you can select the content of a layer to be editable and keep the layer itself locked (so that its position and other properties cannot be altered), but if you select the layer to be editable, you can't lock the content.

2. Choose **Modify** ⇨ **Templates** ⇨ **New Editable Region**. You can also use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+Alt+W** (Command+Option+W), or right-click (Control+click) the selection and choose **Editable Regions** ⇨ **New Editable Region** from the shortcut menu. Dreamweaver displays the **New Editable Region** dialog box.

**Tip**

If you want the flexibility of adding returns to your editable region, make sure it includes at least one return. The easiest method is to select the `<p>` tag in the Tag Selector. If just text is selected, Dreamweaver does not allow any returns, although line breaks are accepted.

3. Enter a unique name for the selected area. Click **OK** when you're done or **Cancel** to abort the operation.

**Caution**

While you can use spaces in editable region names, some characters are not permitted. The illegal characters are the ampersand (&), double quote ("), single quote ('), and left and right angle brackets (< and >).

Dreamweaver outlines the selection with the color picked in Preferences on the Highlighting panel. The name for your newly designated region is displayed on a tab marking the area; the region is also listed in the Modify ⇄ Templates submenu. If still selected, the region name has a checkmark next to it in the Templates submenu. You can jump to any other editable region by selecting its name from this dynamic list.

**Tip**

Make sure you apply any formatting to your text—either by using HTML codes such as ``, or by using CSS styles—before you select it to be an editable region. Generally, you want to keep the defined look of the content while altering just the text, so make just the text an editable region and exclude the formatting tags. It's helpful to have the HTML Inspector open for this detailed work.

Inserting a new editable region

Sometimes it's helpful to create a new editable region where no content currently exists. In these situations, the editable region name doubles as a label identifying the type of content expected, such as `{CatalogPrice}`. Dreamweaver always puts new region names in curly braces as just shown and highlights the entry in the template.

To insert a new editable region, follow these steps:

1. Place your cursor anywhere on the template page.
2. Choose Modify ⇄ Templates ⇄ New Editable Region. You can also use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+V (Command+Option+V), or right-click (Control+click) the selection and choose New Editable Region from the shortcut menu.

Dreamweaver displays the New Editable Region dialog box.

3. Enter a unique name for the new region. Click OK when you're done or Cancel to abort the operation.

Dreamweaver inserts the new region name in the document, surrounded by curly braces, marks it with a named tab and adds the name to the dynamic region list (which you can display by choosing Modify ⇄ Templates).

**Tip**

One editable region, the Web page's title, is automatically created when you save a document as a template. The title is stored in a special editable region called `doctitle`. To change the title (which initially takes the same title as the template), enter the new text in the Title field of the Toolbar. You can also use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+J (Command+J) to open the Page Properties dialog box. Finally, you can select View ⇄ Head Elements and choose the Title icon to enter the new text in the Property Inspector.

Creating Links in Templates

A common problem that designers encounter with Dreamweaver templates centers on links. People often add a link to their template and discover that it does not work when the new page is derived from the template. The main cause of this error stems from linking to a nonexistent page or element by hand—that is, typing in the link rather than using the Select File dialog box to choose it. Designers tend to set the link according to their final site structure without taking into account how templates are stored in Dreamweaver.

For example, when creating a template, let's say that you have links to three pages, `products.htm`, `services.htm`, and `about.htm`, all in the root of your site. Both `products.htm` and `services.htm` have been created, so you select the folder icon in the Property Inspector and select those files in turn. Dreamweaver inserts those links like this: `../products.htm` and `../services.htm`. The `../` indicates the directory above the current directory—which makes sense only when you remember that all templates are stored in a subfolder of the site root called `Templates`. These links are correctly resolved when a document is derived from this template to reflect the stored location of the new file.

Let's assume that the third file, `about.htm`, has not yet been created, and so that link is entered by hand. The common mistake is to enter it as it should be when it's used: `about.htm`. However, because the page is saved in the `Template` folder, Dreamweaver converts that link to `/Templates/about.htm` for any page derived from the template—and the link will fail. This type of error also applies to dependent files, such as graphics or other media.

The best solution is to always use the folder icon to link to an existing file when building your templates. If the file does not exist, and if you don't want to create a placeholder page for it, link to another existing file in the same folder and modify the link manually.

Locking an editable region

Inevitably, you'll mark a region as editable that you'd prefer to keep locked, or you may discover that every page constructed to date has required inputting the same content, so it should be entered on the template and locked. In either event, converting an editable region to a locked one is a simple operation.

To lock an editable region, follow these steps:

1. Place your cursor in the editable region you want to lock.
2. Choose **Modify** ⇨ **Templates** ⇨ **Remove Editable Region**. The **Remove Editable Region** dialog box, shown in Figure 32-2, appears with the selected region highlighted.

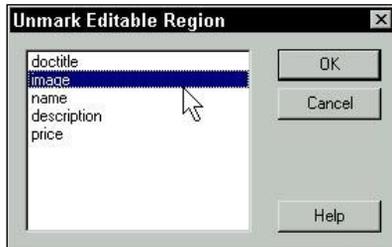


Figure 32-2: Convert an editable region to a locked one with the Remove Editable Region command.

Note

You don't have to preselect the editable region to unmark it. If you don't, the Remove Editable Region dialog box opens but doesn't highlight any selection; you have to choose it by name.

3. Click OK in the Remove Editable Region dialog box to confirm your choice.

The editable region highlight is removed, and the area is now a locked region of the template.

Caution

If you are removing a newly inserted editable region that is labeled with the region name in curly braces, then the label is not removed and must be deleted by hand on the template. Otherwise, it appears as part of the document created from a template and won't be accessible.

Adding Content to Template Documents

Constructing a template is only half the job — using it to create new pages is the other half. Because your basic layout is complete and you're only dropping in new images and entering new text, pages based on templates take a fraction of the time needed to create regular Web pages. Dreamweaver makes it easy to enter new content as well — you can even move from one editable region to the next, much like filling out a form (which, of course, is exactly what you're doing).

To create a new document based on a template, follow these steps:

1. In the Template category of the Assets panel, select the desired template and choose the New from Template from the panel's context menu. Alternatively, choose File ⇨ New from Template.

If you chose the command from the File menu, the Select Template dialog box, shown in Figure 32-3, appears.

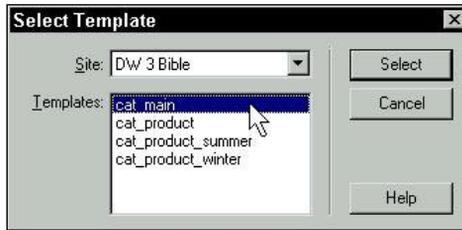


Figure 32-3: Create a new document based on any template listed in the Select Template dialog box.

2. If you wish to create a template from a local site other than the current one, select it from the Site drop-down list.
3. Select the desired template from those in the Templates list box.
4. Click OK when you're done.

When your new page opens, the editable regions are again highlighted; furthermore, the cursor is only active when it is over an unlocked region. If you have the Code view open, you will also see that the locked region is highlighted in a different color as shown in Figure 32-4. The highlighting makes it easy to differentiate the two types of regions.

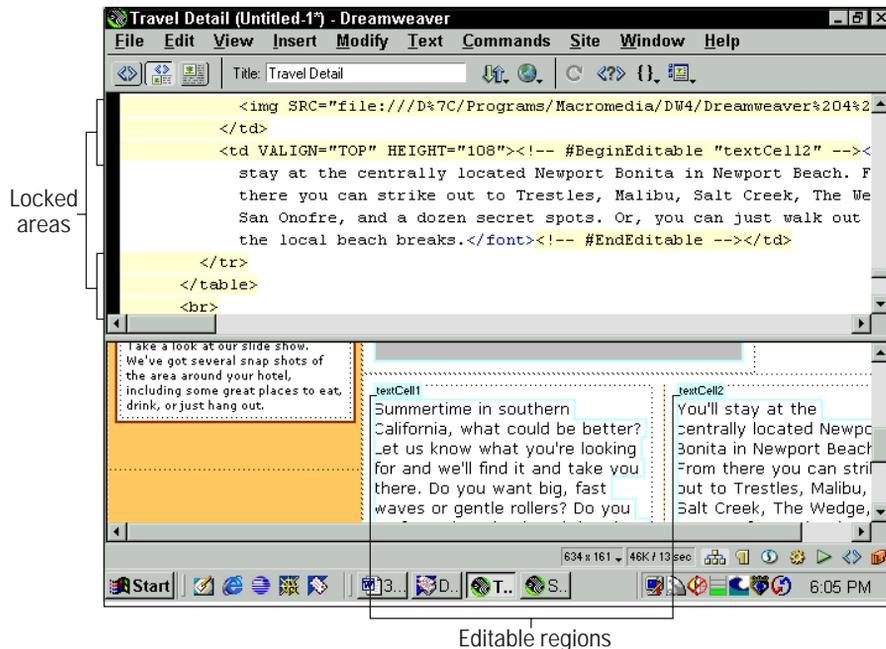


Figure 32-4: In a document based on a template, the editable regions are clearly marked, as are the locked portions in the Code view.

Generally, it is easiest to select the editable region name or placeholder first and then enter the new content. Selecting the editable regions can be handled in several ways:

- ◆ Highlight each editable region name or placeholder with the mouse.
- ◆ Position your cursor inside any editable region and then select the `<mm:editable>` tag in the Tag Selector.
- ◆ Choose Modify ⇄ Templates and then select the name of your editable region from the dynamic list.

Note

If all your editable regions are separate cells in a table, you can tab forward and Shift+Tab backward through the cells. With each press of the Tab key, all the content in the cell is selected, whether it is an editable region name or a placeholder.

Naturally, you should save your document to retain all the new content that's been added.

Adding behaviors to template-derived documents

The current implementation of Dreamweaver templates does not enable behaviors to be added to any document created from — and still linked to — a template. If you try, Dreamweaver plays a single note, as it does anytime that you try to select a locked region. With behaviors, the `<head>` section — where the code needs to go — is locked in a template.

You have three ways to handle the problem, however. First, if you're just using the template to get the basic layout of the page and don't need to maintain its link for updating, you can detach the Web page from the template by choosing Modify ⇄ Templates ⇄ Detach from Template. Second, if all your pages require the same behavior, as in a navigation bar, for example, you can simply add the behavior to the template itself.

The final method is the most involved, but also the most flexible. By adding some code to the original template, new behaviors can be attached, either to the template or to any template-based document. Here are the steps required for the modification:

1. Open the template for editing.
2. Display the HTML Inspector and scroll to the closing `</head>` tag.

If you select the `<body>` tag from the Tag Selector, the closing `</head>` tag is just above the selected region.

3. Enter this code above the `</head>` tag:

```
<mm:editable>  
<script>  
</script>  
</mm:editable>
```

```
<mm:editable>
<!-- Dummy comment, to be deleted by Dreamweaver -->
</mm:editable>
```

4. Choose File ⇨ Save and update any documents linked to the template.

When a document is derived from this modified template, Dreamweaver removes the dummy comment but maintains the `<script>...</script>` pair, enabling behaviors to be added.

Inserting meta tags in documents based on templates

With the exception of the `<title>` tag, Dreamweaver locks the entire head section when a template is made. Therefore, a special procedure must be used to add page-specific `<meta>` tags to a document derived from a template. While it is considered a best practice to include as many `<meta>` tags as possible in the general template, often special keyword or description `<meta>` tags must be included on a page-by-page basis. If you try to add any item from the Head category of the Objects panel, Dreamweaver notifies you with a beep that the insertion is not allowed.

To work-around the locked `<head>` region, the `<meta>` tag is added within the editable region surrounding the title. Here's the most direct method for accomplishing this task:

1. Choose Show Code and Design Views or Show Code View from the Toolbar.

You also have the option of selecting the Code Inspector button from the Launcher or pressing the keyboard shortcut F10.

2. In the Code view, scroll up to the top of the document until the `<!-- #BeginEditable -->...<!-- #EndEditable -->` tags surrounding the `<title>` tag are visible.

3. Place the cursor behind the closing `</title>` tag.

4. From the Head category of the Objects panel, choose the desired `<meta>` tag: Insert Meta, Insert Keywords, Insert Description, or Insert Refresh.

The appropriate dialog box opens.

5. Enter the desired attributes for the `<meta>` tag in the dialog box and select OK when you're done.

Dreamweaver inserts the completed `<meta>` tag behind the `<title>` tag, but within the editable region.

By using this technique, any updates to the general template will still be reflected in the derived document and you'll have the added advantage of unique `<meta>` tags where necessary.

Working with Templates in the Assets Panel

As a site grows, so does the number of templates it employs. Overall management of your templates is conducted through the Templates category of the Assets panel. You can open the Templates palette by choosing **Windows** ⇨ **Templates** or by pressing the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+F11** (Command+F11). The Templates category, shown in Figure 32-5, displays a list of the current site's available templates in the lower pane and a preview of the selected template in the upper pane.

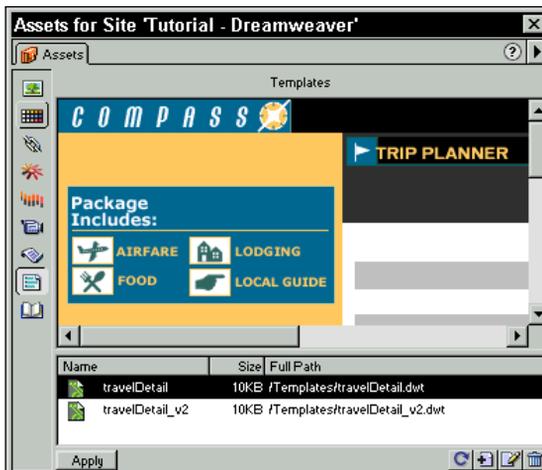


Figure 32-5: Use the Templates category of the Assets panel to preview, delete, open, create, or apply your current site's templates.

The Templates palette has five buttons along the bottom of its window:

- ◆ **Apply.** Creates a document derived from the currently selected template if the current document is blank, or if the current document is based on a template, changes the locked regions of the document to match the selected template.
- ◆ **Refresh Site List.** Displays the list of all the templates currently in the site.
- ◆ **New Template.** Creates a new blank template.
- ◆ **Edit.** Loads the selected template for modification.
- ◆ **Delete.** Removes the selected template.

The Assets panel's context menu offers all of these options and more as explained in Table 32-1.

Table 32-1
Template Category Context Menu

| <i>Command</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|---------------------|---|
| Refresh Site List | Displays the list of all the templates currently in the site. |
| New Template | Starts a new blank template. |
| New from Template | Creates a new document based on the currently selected template. |
| Edit | Opens the current template for modifying. |
| Apply | Creates a document derived from the currently selected template if the current document is blank, or if the current document is based on a template, changes the locked regions of the document to match the selected template. The same effects can also be achieved by dragging the template from the Assets panel to the current document. |
| Rename | Renames the selected template |
| Delete | Removes the selected template. |
| Update Current Page | Applies any changes made in the template to the current page, if the current page is derived from a template. |
| Update Site | Applies any changes made in any templates to all template-based documents in the site. |
| Copy to Site | Copies the highlighted template, but none of the dependent files, to the selected site. |
| Locate in Site | Opens the Site window and highlights the selected template. |

Creating a blank template

Not all templates are created from existing documents. Some Web designers prefer to create their templates from scratch. To create a blank template, follow these steps:

1. Open the Templates category of the Assets panel by selecting its symbol or by choosing Window ⇨ Templates.
2. From the Templates category, select New Template. A new, untitled template is created.
3. Enter a title for your new template and press Enter (Return).
4. While the new template is selected, press the Edit button. The blank template opens in a new Dreamweaver window.
5. Insert your page elements.

6. Mark any elements or areas as editable regions using one of the methods previously described.
7. Save your template.

Deleting and opening templates

As with any set of files, there comes a time to clean house and remove files that are no longer in use. To remove a template, first open the Templates category of the Assets panel. Next, select the file you want to remove and choose the Delete button.



Be forewarned: Dreamweaver does not alert you if files exist that were created from the template that you're about to delete. Deleting the template, in effect, "orphans" those documents, and they can no longer be updated via a template.

You can edit a template — to change the locked or editable regions — in several ways. To use the first method, choose File ⇨ Open and, in the Select File dialog box, change the Files of Type to Template Files (*.dwt) on Window systems and choose Template Files from the Show drop-down list on Macintosh systems. Then, locate the Templates folder in your defined site to select the template to open.

The second method of opening a template for modification uses the Templates category of the Assets panel. Select a template to modify and choose the Edit button. You can also double-click your template to open it for editing.

Finally, if you're working in the Site window, open a template by selecting the Templates folder for your site and open any of the files found there.



After you've made your modifications to the template, you don't have to use the Save As Template command to store the file — you can use the regular File ⇨ Save command or the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+S (Command+S). Likewise, if you want to save your template under another name, use the Save As command.

Applying templates

Dreamweaver makes it easy to try a variety of different looks for your document while maintaining the same content. Once you've created a document from a template, you can apply any other template to it. The only requirement is that the two templates have editable regions with the same names. When might this feature come in handy? In one scenario, you might develop a number of possible Web site designs for a client and create templates for each different approach, which are then applied to the identical content. Or, in an ongoing site, you could completely change the look of a catalog seasonally but retain all the content. Figure 32-6 shows two radically different schemes for a Web site with the same content.

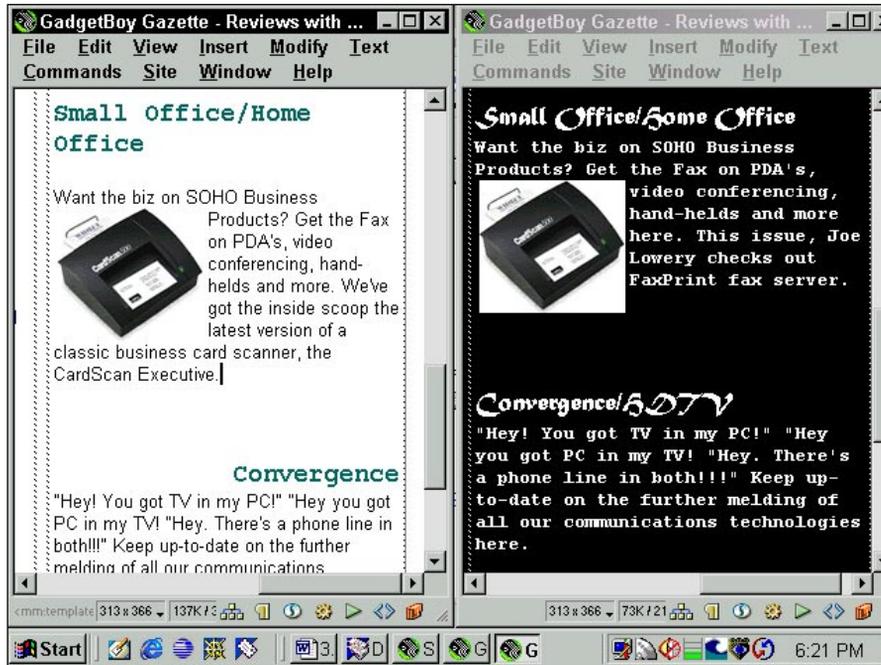


Figure 32-6: You can apply a template to a document created from another template to achieve different designs with identical content.

To apply a template to a document, follow these steps:

1. Open the Templates category of the Assets panel.
2. Make sure the Web page you want to apply the style to is the active document.
3. From the Templates category, select the template you want to use and click the Apply button.



Tip

You can also drag onto the current page the template you'd like to apply or choose **Modify** ⇨ **Templates** ⇨ **Apply Template to Page** from the menus.

4. If content exists without a matching editable region, Dreamweaver displays the Choose Editable Region for Orphaned Content dialog box. To receive the content, select one of the listed editable regions from the template being applied and click OK.

The new template is applied to the document, and all the new locked areas replace all the old locked areas.

Updating Templates

Anytime you save a change to an existing template — whether or not any documents have been created from it — Dreamweaver asks if you'd like to update all the documents in the local site attached to the template. As with Library elements, you can also update the current page or the entire site at any time. Updating documents based on a template can save you an enormous amount of time — especially when numerous changes are involved.

To update a single page, open the page and choose **Modify** ⇨ **Templates** ⇨ **Update Current Page** or select the same command from the context menu of the Assets panel. Either way, the update is instantly applied.

To update a series of pages or an entire site, follow these steps:

1. Choose **Modify** ⇨ **Templates** ⇨ **Update Pages**.

The Update Pages dialog box, shown in Figure 32-7, appears.

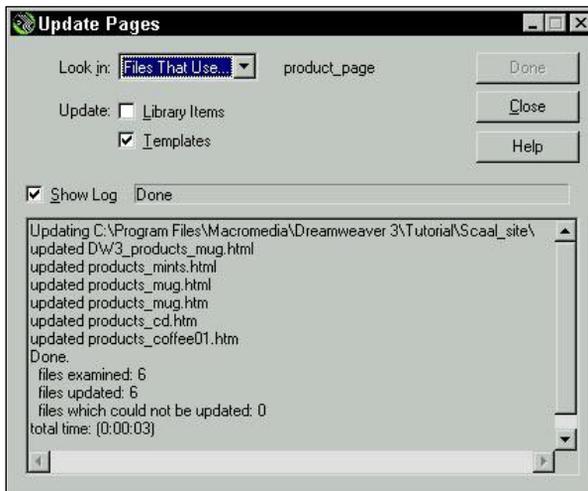


Figure 32-7: Any changes made to a template can be automatically applied to the template's associated files by using the Update Pages command.

2. To update all the documents using all the templates for an entire site, choose **Entire Site** from the Look In option and then select the name of the site from the accompanying drop-down list.

3. To update pages using a particular template, choose Pages Using from the Look In option and then select the name of the template.
4. To view a report of the progress of the update, make sure that the Show Log option is enabled.
5. Click Start to begin the update process.

The log window displays a list of the files examined and updated, the total number of files that could not be updated, and the elapsed time.

Changing the Default Document

Each time you open a new document in Dreamweaver — or even just start Dreamweaver — a blank page is created. This blank page is based on an HTML file called Default.html that is stored in the Configuration\Templates folder. The default page works in a similar fashion to the templates in that you can create new documents from it, but no editable or locked regions exist — everything in the page can always be altered.

The basic blank-page document is an HTML structure with only a few properties specified: a document type, character set, and white background for the body:

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Untitled Document</title>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">
</head>

<body bgcolor="#FFFFFF">

</body>
</html>
```

Naturally, you can change any of these elements — and add many, many more — after you've opened a page. But what if you want to have a <meta> tag with creator information in every page that comes out of your Web design company? You can do it in Dreamweaver manually, but it's a bother, and chances are that you'll forget. Luckily, Dreamweaver provides a more efficient solution.

In keeping with its overall design philosophy of extensibility, Dreamweaver enables you to modify the Default.htm file as you would any other file. Just choose File ⇨ Open and select the Configuration\Templates\Default.htm file. As you make your changes, save the file as you would normally. Now, to test your modifications, choose File ⇨ New — your modifications should appear in your new document.

Summary

Much of a Web designer's responsibility is related to document production, and Dreamweaver offers a comprehensive template solution to reduce the workload. When planning your strategy for building an entire Web site, remember that templates provide these advantages:

- ◆ Templates can be created from any Web page.
- ◆ Dreamweaver templates combine locked and editable regions. Editable regions must be defined individually.
- ◆ After a template is declared, new documents can be created from it.
- ◆ If a template is altered, pages built from that template can be automatically updated.
- ◆ The default template that Dreamweaver uses can be modified so that every time you select File ⇨ New, a new version of your customized template is created.

In the next chapter, you learn how to streamline production and site maintenance with repeating page elements from the Dreamweaver Library.

