

Hyperlinking Files in HTML Documents

In HTML documents you can link text and/or images to another document or to another section of the same document. The anchor tag `<a> ` surrounds (or “contains”) the linked text or image. Within the anchor tag, the **path to the target file** must be specified. The pathname gives the full list of directories that must be traversed to get from the current directory containing the hypertext link to the linked file in the target directory. There are two kinds of path links you generally make when hyperlinking with the anchor tag – document-relative path links and absolute path links.

Absolute paths give the complete path to the file being linked. Absolute links remain accurate unless the target file has changed locations. There will be a slight difference between specifying paths when you are at the Unix command line or in an HTML document. [The HTTP (**h**ypertext **t**ransfer **p**rotocol) program that interprets the HTML code hides part of the Unix directory structure.] You will not be using absolute paths to link objects on your own site.

You must use a complete URL when linking to a file that is not on your site. For example, this is the path to MasonLink, <http://www.gmu.edu/>.

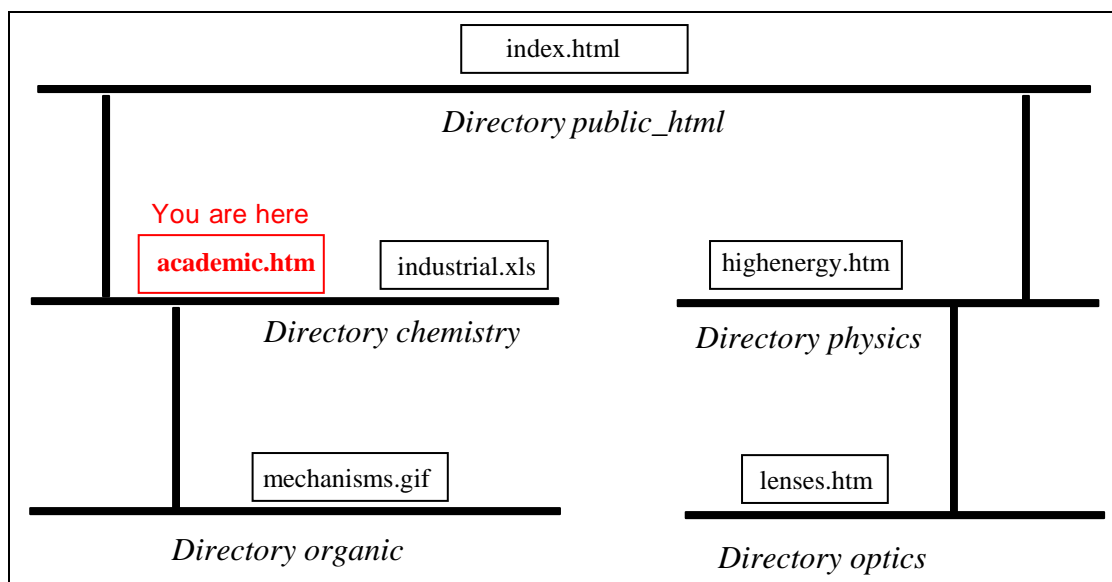
Do not use your own URL to hyperlink to objects on your own site (although you can) because it takes longer to make the connection than with relative path links. For example, I would not use the URL <http://mason.gmu.edu/~sslayden> to link to my home page from somewhere else in my site. Notice that even though the Unix command line path to my home page is `/home/u1/sslayden/public_html/index.html`, the path used by the browser replaces all of that by `~/sslayden/index.html` (you can specify `index.html`, but it is also found by default if it exists). If you wanted to link to a graphics file that is in the `pics` directory under `public_html` within my site, the path would be <http://mason.gmu.edu/~sslayden/pics/asparti3.gif>. (This actually works if you want to try it.)

Document-relative paths define the path starting from the directory of the source file containing the document link to the linked target file. Thus, the path that is followed is relative to where the starting point is.

The following are examples of written descriptions of relative paths from the current directory:

- the target file is **in** the current directory;
- the target file is in a directory **below** the current directory;
- the target file is in a directory **above** the current directory;
- the target file is in a subdirectory of another directory at the **same level** as the current one.

How might these descriptions be translated into path syntax? Except for the change directory command, *cd*, the path link will be written exactly as it would be at the Unix command line. As you look at the following examples, remember two things: the “dot dot”, *..*, means the parent directory (one level up) of the current directory and the “front slash” separates the names of directories or files in the path.



Suppose the current working directory and file is

/home/u1/username/public_html/chemistry/academic.htm

and you want to specify the pathname from this current **source file** to another **target file** on the same web site in order to make a link in the source file. Examples of document- relative paths from the current working file to each of the files in the directory diagram above are:

<i>industrial.xls</i>	[file is contained in the same directory – no up or down]
<i>organic/mechanisms.gif</i>	[directory below is <i>organic</i> , and then the contained file that is the link target is specified]
<i>../index.html</i>	[directory above (..) is specified (but not explicitly named), and then the contained file that is the link target is specified]
<i>../physics/highenergy.htm</i>	[directory above (..) is specified (but not explicitly named), and then the directory below that is <i>physics</i> and then the contained file that is the link target is specified]
????? <i>/lenses.htm</i>	[fill in]

Each relative path above would appear between the quotation marks in the tag ` `. The text or image you want to be a clickable hyperlink appears between the opening and closing anchor tags.

To get from one file to another, think about what **one-step, straight-line** paths you would have to take, and write the path directions in "Unix".