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How To Use Links Properly

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The World Wide Web as we know it owes a great deal of its success to the humble hyperlink. Hyperlinks, which are usually referred to simply as *links*, are everywhere on the web. Without them - well, we'd have to call it the 'World Wide Repository of Random, Unsorted and Unclassified Documents'.

What is a URL?

Before we examine links, it is important to first understand URLs. A URL, or Uniform Resource Locator, is an address which identifies a resource on the Internet. To locate resources, you need the following information:

1. Protocol (e.g. http) - how to fetch the resource
2. Username & password (e.g. sunburnt:passwd) - optional information for authentication
3. Host (e.g. www.example.com) - the name of the computer where the resource resides
4. Port (e.g. 80) - optional information about how to access the resource
5. Path (e.g. /images/logo.jpg) - the location of the resource on the host
6. Query (e.g. ?search=red+cars) - more optional information used to fetch the resource

Put them all together and you get a URL in the following format:

```
protocol://username:password@host:port/path?query
```

Most people would be familiar with URLs for web documents which are actually created using the generic pattern described above. For example:

```
http://www.example.com/images/logo.jpg
```

Absolute vs Relative URLs

The above examples describe *absolute* URLs. An absolute URL always begins with a protocol (e.g. http://). A relative URL is any URL which is not absolute. They can only be used in contexts where they can be resolved.

For example, if I have a document at <http://www.example.com/products/jelly>, I can create a link in this document using the *relative* URL [/articles/recipes](#) which will be resolved to <http://www.example.com/articles/recipes>.

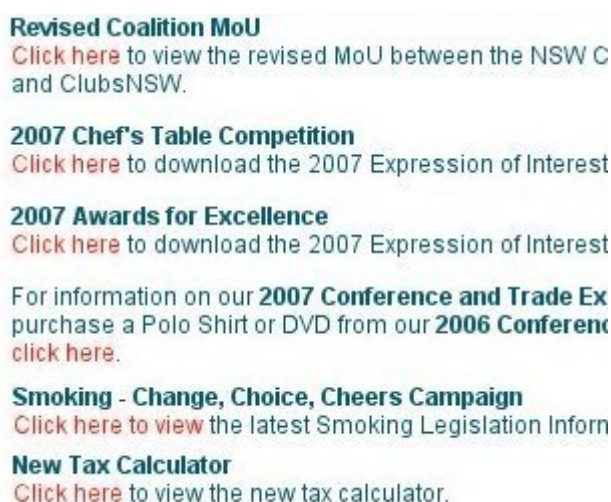
Types of Links

Links enable us to conveniently refer users to other resources. Different terminology has been adopted to distinguish between the types of resources linked to:

- Internal links direct the user to other pages on the same site.
- External links direct the user to a different site.
- Anchor links direct the user to a specific section of a page.
- Backlinks are links to *your* site, from other sites.
- Email links prompt the user to write an email to a specified recipient.
- Javascript links cause some script to be executed in the browser (for example, to open a popup window

Tips for Utilizing Hyperlinks

- Don't CLICK HERE. Not only does this look terrible when overused (see below), but it tells search engines nothing about the content on your website - unless you are targeting the terms *click* and *here*! If you must use the words 'click here' in your link, use it as the start of a verb phrase.



- Use verb or noun phrases for links. A descriptive phrase is far more likely to encourage users to traverse links. Use verb phrases for call-to-action links ('*Contact us today for a free quote*'), and noun phrases in elsewhere, including titles ('*Rain continues as big chill looms*') and mid-paragraph.
- Make links readable when printed. If you've created your links according to the two guidelines above, you should be able to read a printed version of your document naturally.
- Send external links to a new window. By setting the target of external links to `_blank`, the page will open in a new window or tab. This will make it easier for visitors to return to your site after they have viewed the content at the external site.
- Use absolute URLs in email. Email clients can't always be relied on to know where a document comes from, so a relative URL like `"/home/about"` may not be resolvable. It is better to always use absolute URLs when sending documents by email.

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