

How directories work

To understand how two pages can be linked together within a web site, it helps to understand directories.

Here is a folder on my hardrive, called "site", containing my web site (fig. 3.1). There are two ways of specifying the location of any file on the site: the location can be absolute or relative.

Absolute locations

If we want to specify the absolute location of the file named "resume.html", we would describe it with the following path: ben/site/resume.html. The absolute location of the file named "ducky.jpg" is the path /ben/site/images/ducky.jpg. Technically, since every person's computer has a unique identifying number called an I.P. (internet protocol) address, I might more accurately say something like 208.155.65.8/site/images/ducky.jpg (which might also be called a URL, or Universal Resource Locator).

This way of describing a location is called a path. The slashes represent folders. Each time you see a folder in a line like ben/site/images/ducky.jpg, you should imagine a folder. Absolute locations exist on their own, independent of other file's locations; if I tell a file the absolute location of another file, it' like telling my neighbor I live at 109 Ashland Ave., Buffalo, NY, 14222.

Relative locations (fig. 3.2)

I would tell my neighbor I live three houses down on the left if I was using a relative location. A file's relative location is useless without other files or folders to which it relates. Relative locations are a file or folder's location in relation to another's.

The relative location in my site of index.html to resume.html is simply index.html; that's all the information resume.html needs to know if it wants to locate index.html; simply look around for index.html, silly resume.html! However, it's not that easy if resume.html wants to find article.html. It needs to know the name of the folder, which is news/, and then it can look for article.html. How does article.html find resume.html? By going to ../ (or up one directory) to resume.html. We don't need to type in a folder name; ../resume.html is all article.html needs to know, because a directory can contain multiple files, but a file be contained in only one directory.

Relative Paths

Think of directories as a tree, with the roots of the tree contain the files that are in your "Root directory", and branches that contain files that are in other folders. Or think of directories as a road that forks in various locations, each fork being a folder. Or think of it as my lovely "tree highway" illustration (fig. 3.3).

Fig. 3.1

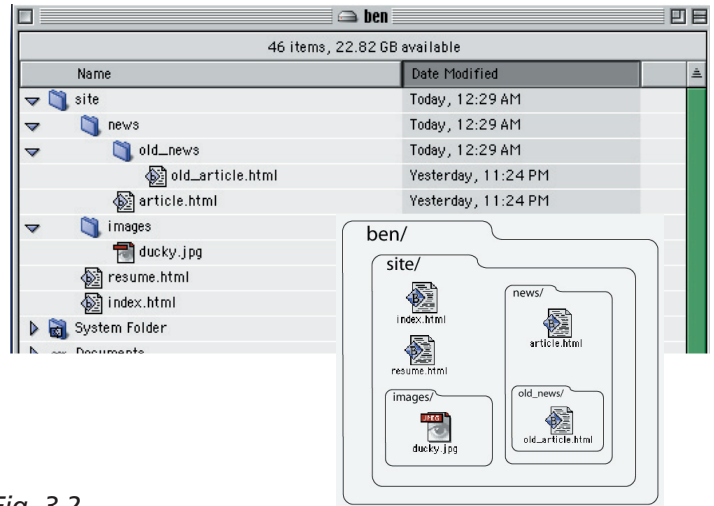


Fig. 3.2

Filename	Relative Location	To link to...	...use this relative path
index.html	ROOT	resume.html	resume.html
		article.html	news/article.html
		old_news.html	news/old_news/old_article.html
		ducky.jpg	images/ducky.jpg
resume.html	ROOT	index.html	index.html
		article.html	news/article.html
		old_news.html	news/old_news/old_article.html
		ducky.jpg	images/ducky.jpg
article.html	news/article.html	index.html	../index.html
		resume.html	../resume.html
		old_news.html	old_news/old_article.html
		ducky.jpg	../images/ducky.jpg
old_article.htm	news/old_news/old_article.html	index.html	../../index.html
		resume.html	../../resume.html
		news.html	../news.html
		ducky.jpg	../images/ducky.jpg

Fig. 3.3

