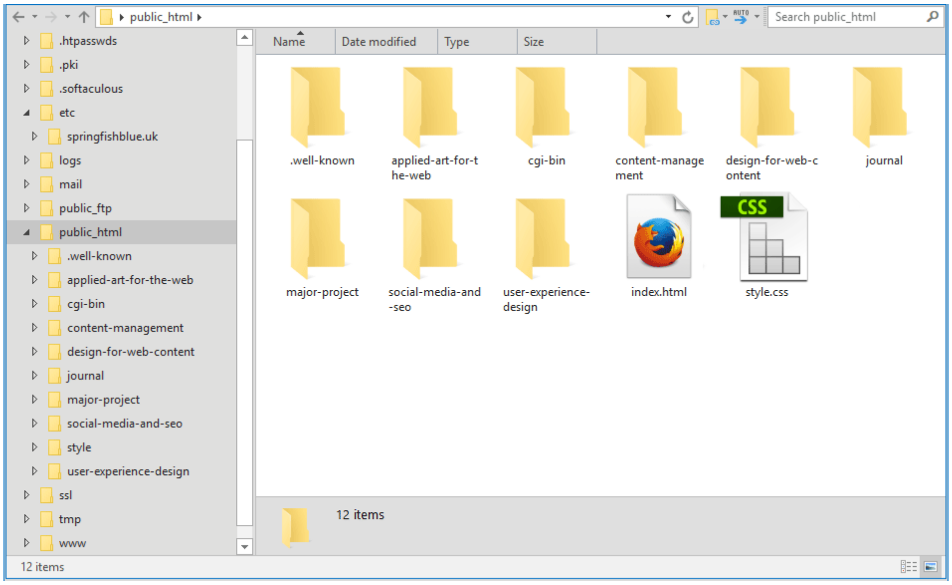
File and folder organisation

MA Web Design + Content Planning

Web design requires very careful organisation of your files and folders (directories) because most sites are made up from hundreds or thousands of individual files. Developing such sites can become very difficult if you don't have a file and folder strategy in place. The information below describes how you *might* want to organise the files and folders on your coursework website.

public_html



Above is a typical view of the *public_html* folder (sometimes referred to as the *web root folder*) for your coursework website viewed in an FTP client. All files in the web root are publicly accessible over the Web, that's why it's called ***public**_html*. Files and folders *above* the web root are not accessible to the public.

There are several files and folders in this view. The *index.html* file is the homepage for this domain. Typically, this file will show a list of all your coursework when displayed in a browser. The *style.css* file contains the CSS rules for the homepage.

Each module has its own folder, and this is the first level of organisation. So, for example, all the coursework you have done for the Design for Web Content module will be placed in the *design-for-web-content* folder. Note that all file and folder names are in **lower-case**, and the **hyphen** character is used in place of spaces between words. This is a general rule you should follow.

In addition to the 6 module folders, you may see some others. In the view above, there is a folder called *journal*. That's the folder where the WordPress blog is installed (yours may be called something different). You may look at the files in the WordPress folder but don't change anything or WordPress may not function correctly.

The *.well-known* folder is required for the SSL certificate, which is used for https encryption. The folder is empty but must remain in your web root folder.

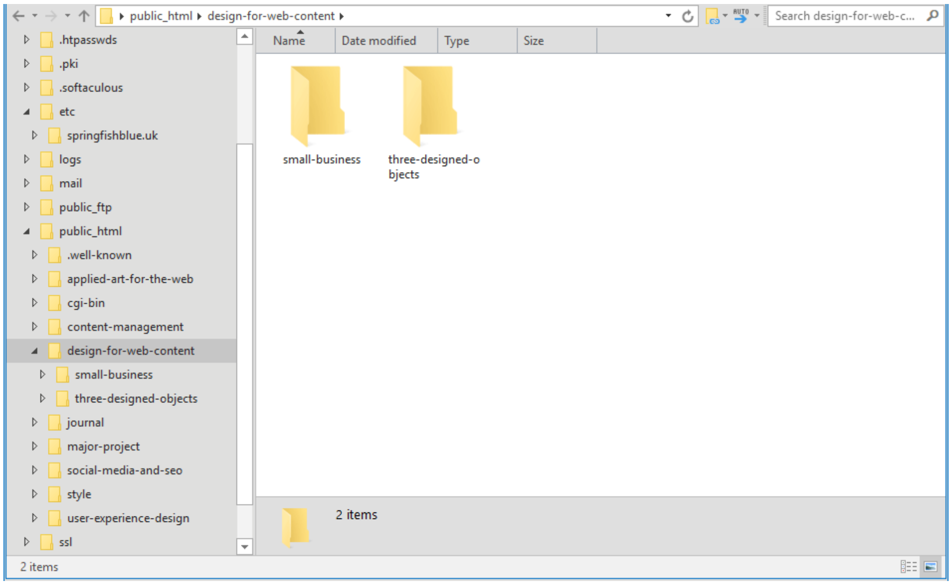
The *cgi-bin* folder (if you have one) is also empty and is not usually required for modern websites. This folder may be deleted if you wish.

You may see a file called *.ftpquota*. This file contains information about your FTP account and should **not** be removed.

Finally, the *.htaccess* file (if you have one) performs various functions and should **not** be removed. We will learn more about this file in due course. Don't worry if your root folder doesn’t have a *.htaccess* file.

Although we are looking at the file and folder structure on the web server, using FTP, the arrangement of files and folders should be identical on your laptop. In effect, what you see on your web server should be a copy or mirror of what you see locally (see page 5 for more details).

public_html / **design-for-web-content**



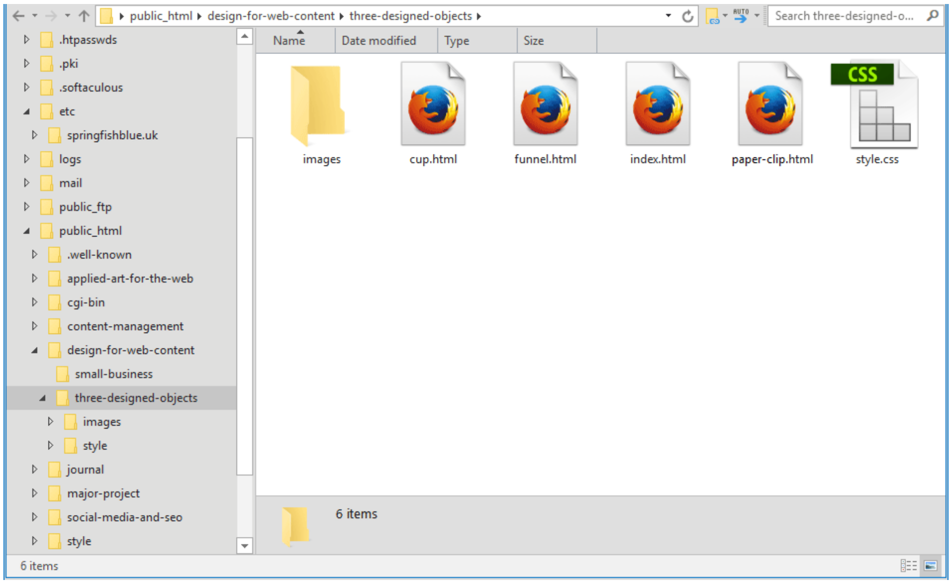
This view shows the contents of the *design-for-web-content* folder. It contains just two folders, one for each of the two projects in this module. There is no need for an *index.html* file in this folder because each of the two folders will have their own *index.html* file and the projects will be linked directly from the domain homepage we saw in *public_html*.

For example, if we want to add a link on our coursework homepage that links to our Three Designed Objects project homepage, we would do it like this:

```
<a href="design-for-web-content/three-designed-objects/">Three Designed Objects</a>
```

Note that we don’t need to include the name of the file (*index.html*) because that is a special name. If we don’t specify a name, the web server will always look for a file called *index.html*.

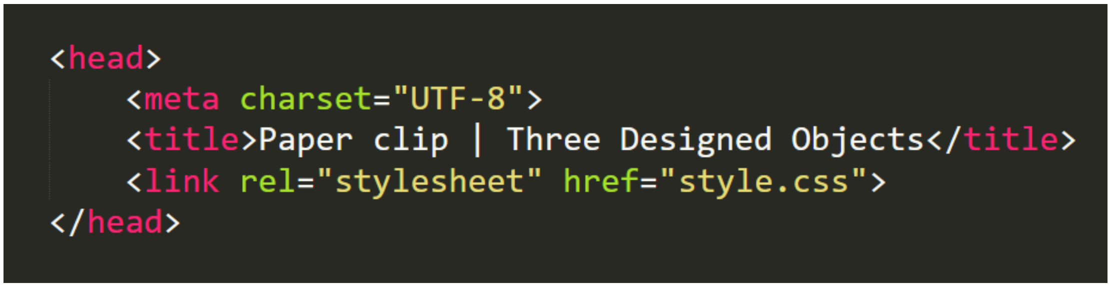
public_html / design-for-web-content / **three-designed-objects**



This view shows the contents of the *three-designed-objects* folder (we could call this the *project* folder). The brief for this project specifies that you should create a small, 4-page site. The four *.html* files are those four pages, with *index.html* being the homepage. The other .html files will display the information about each of the three designed objects. The *index.html* file will contain links to the other three files so that they form a website of linked pages. Think of each project as being a different website. Each website needs its own folder and sub-folders and the homepage for each project will be called *index.html*. This means you will have several *index.html* files on the server, one for your coursework homepage, and one for each project.

Each project will also have its own *.css* file, which adds a unique style to that project. The *style.css* file contains the CSS reset followed by our own CSS rules that describe how our 4-page website will look. The file is linked to from the *<head>* section of each of the four *.html* files in the project folder.

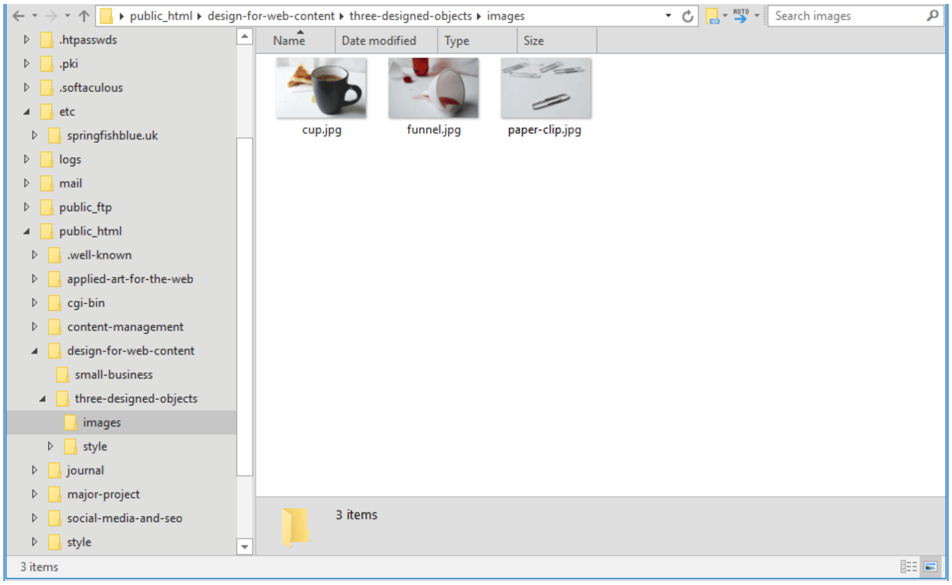
The *<head>* section of each of the *.html* files will look something like the code snippet shown below. Note that the value of the **href** attribute is the path from the *.html* file to the *.css* file. In this case, both files are in the same folder, so only the CSS filename is required.



```
<head>
    <meta charset="UTF-8">
    <title>Paper clip | Three Designed Objects</title>
    <link rel="stylesheet" href="style.css">
</head>
```

In addition to the *.html* and *.css* files in this project folder, there is a sub-folder, *images*…

public_html / design-for-web-content / three-designed-objects / **images**



This is the view of the *images* folder, it contains three *.jpg* files. These are the images that will be shown on each of the corresponding *.html* files when viewed in a browser. Typically, images are stored in their own folder, usually called *images*, but you could call it something else if you wish.

```
<img src="images/paper-clip.jpg" alt="Paper clips on a white surface" width="400" height="300">
```

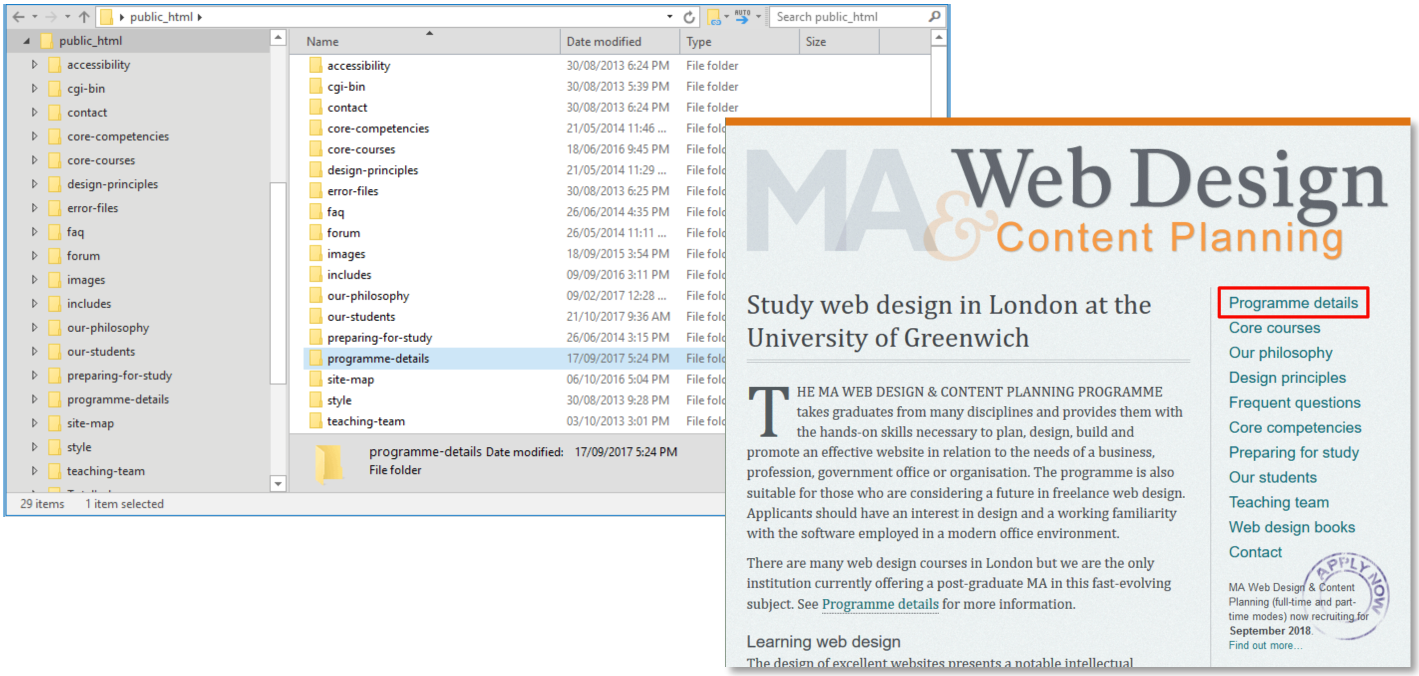
The images in the images folder can be displayed in the browser by adding the *<img>* element to the corresponding *.html* file. Notice that the value for the **src** (source) attribute is the path from the *.html* file to the image file, so it includes the name of the folder, “images” as well as the name of the file.

Every project will have its own folder, and in that folder there will be an *index.html* file, a *style*.css file, and an *images* folder.

Structure and navigation (information architecture)

Website structures vary a lot, so you always need to work out how best to organise your files and folders for any given project. The example above will work well for your coursework site, but you may need to use a different approach depending on the nature and complexity of the website you are building. In general, you should always attempt to devise a system for organising your folders that is consistent with the primary navigation of your site. This is often referred to as *information architecture*.

In the example below, you can see that there is one folder in the web root corresponding to each link in the primary navigation. For example, all files used for the "Programme details" section of the site are stored in the *programme-details* folder.



Name	Date modified	Type	Size
accessibility	30/08/2013 6:24 PM	File folder	
cgi-bin	30/08/2013 5:39 PM	File folder	
contact	30/08/2013 6:24 PM	File folder	
core-competencies	21/05/2014 11:46 ...	File fold	
core-courses	18/06/2016 9:45 PM	File fold	
design-principles	21/05/2014 11:29 ...	File fold	
error-files	30/08/2013 6:25 PM	File fold	
faq	26/06/2014 4:35 PM	File fold	
forum	26/05/2014 11:11 ...	File fold	
images	18/09/2015 3:54 PM	File fold	
includes	09/09/2016 3:11 PM	File fold	
our-philosophy	09/02/2017 12:28 ...	File fold	
our-students	21/10/2017 9:36 AM	File fold	
preparing-for-study	26/06/2014 3:15 PM	File fold	
programme-details	17/09/2017 5:24 PM	File fold	
site-map	06/10/2016 5:04 PM	File fold	
style	30/08/2013 9:28 PM	File fold	
teaching-team	03/10/2013 3:01 PM	File fold	

programme-details Date modified: 17/09/2017 5:24 PM
File folder

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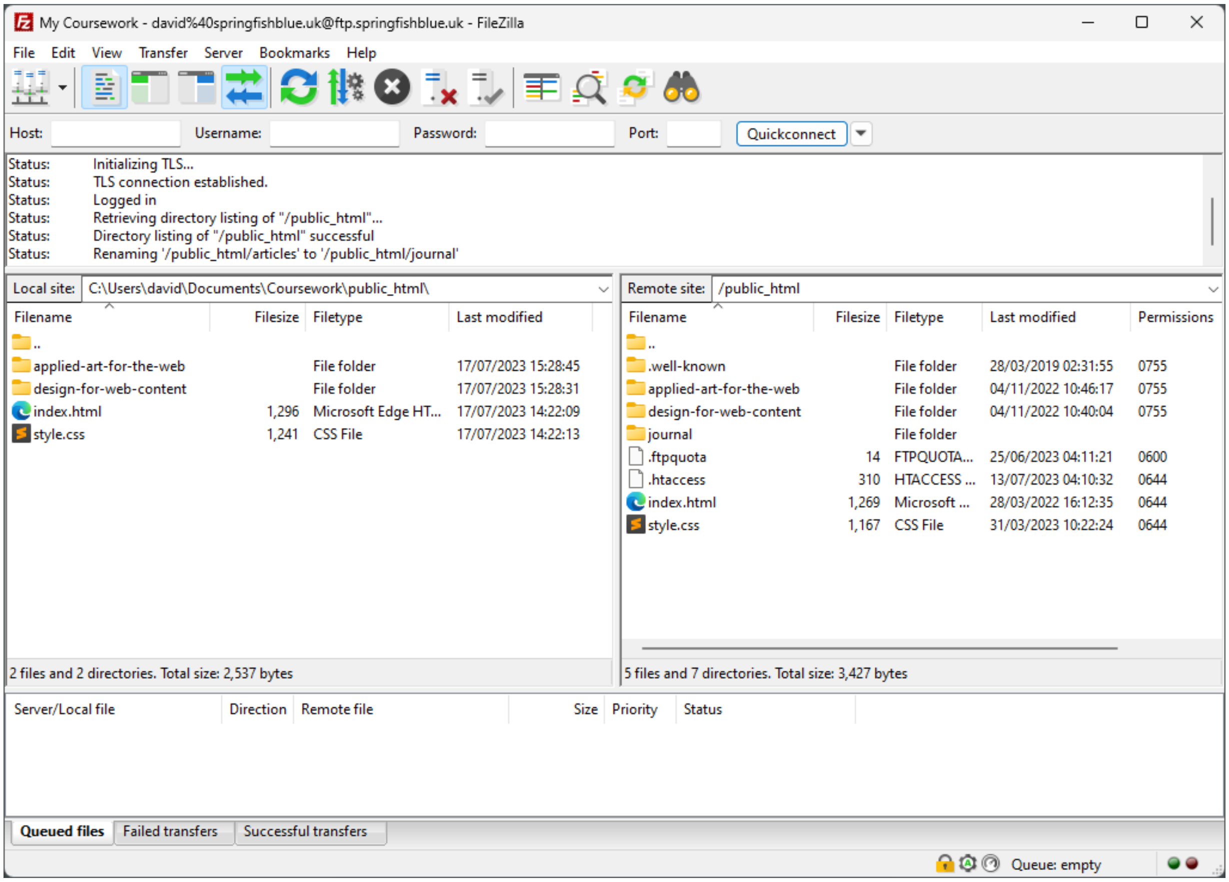
Maintaining a local "mirror" and backing up

Whatever scheme you devise for your files and folders, it's very important to maintain a local mirror of your online files. This will allow you to edit your files locally (on your laptop) and then upload them only when you are confident everything is working correctly. Always keep your local files synchronised with your online files (hence "mirror").

In addition to the local mirror of your work, you should also keep a separate backup of your files and folders. Ideally, this is on an external drive or a cloud drive (such as Dropbox or OneDrive) or both – you can't have too many backups!

In the event of your laptop being damaged or stolen or of your local and online files being accidentally deleted or overwritten, you always have a saved version of your work elsewhere. Ideally, take a backup of your work at least once per week or at the end of each day if you are making lots of changes. I promise you will never regret doing this.

Your web host will also take backups of your online files, but you can't always rely on the fact that they will have the version of your files that you need, so take responsibility for your own backups.



```
Status:   Initializing TLS...
Status:   TLS connection established.
Status:   Logged in
Status:   Retrieving directory listing of "/public_html"...
Status:   Directory listing of "/public_html" successful
Status:   Renaming '/public_html/articles' to '/public_html/journal'
```

Local site: C:\Users\david\Documents\Coursework\public_html\

Filename	Filesize	Filetype	Last modified
..			
applied-art-for-the-web		File folder	17/07/2023 15:28:45
design-for-web-content		File folder	17/07/2023 15:28:31
index.html	1,296	Microsoft Edge HT...	17/07/2023 14:22:09
style.css	1,241	CSS File	17/07/2023 14:22:13

2 files and 2 directories. Total size: 2,537 bytes

Remote site: /public_html

Filename	Filesize	Filetype	Last modified	Permissions
..				
.well-known		File folder	28/03/2019 02:31:55	0755
applied-art-for-the-web		File folder	04/11/2022 10:46:17	0755
design-for-web-content		File folder	04/11/2022 10:40:04	0755
journal		File folder		
.ftpquota	14	FTPQUOTA...	25/06/2023 04:11:21	0600
.htaccess	310	HTACCESS ...	13/07/2023 04:10:32	0644
index.html	1,269	Microsoft ...	28/03/2022 16:12:35	0644
style.css	1,167	CSS File	31/03/2023 10:22:24	0644

5 files and 7 directories. Total size: 3,427 bytes

Server/Local file	Direction	Remote file	Size	Priority	Status

The FileZilla FTP client can display both your local files (on your laptop), shown in the left-hand pane, and your remote files (on the server), shown in the right-hand pane. In the example above, you can see the *index.html* and *style.css* files for the coursework homepage (in the root folder), and two module folders where your project sub-folders will be stored. It's important to ensure that you keep all your live files synchronised so that all the project files and folders on your laptop are mirrored on your server. When one or more files is updated on your laptop, you can update (overwrite) the corresponding file on the server to keep everything in synch.

You'll notice that the local and remote directory listings above are not identical. That's because some server files and folders do not need to be saved locally. Generally, you should mirror only those files and folders that you have created on your laptop. However, it's always a good idea to back up everything.

See Dealing with files at MDN Web Docs for more information about organising and naming your files and folders.

Now that you've organised your folders, it's time to create some files. See the Your coursework homepage helper for the next step in getting ready for learning.

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