

Video Title: “Introduction: What is Markdown?” <https://youtu.be/hdM8gyxGjE>

Transcript:

What is markdown? Markdown is a markup language like latex, xml, or html—which you are probably familiar with. As Wikipedia explains, a markup language is “a system for annotating a document in a way that is syntactically distinguishable from the text.” What does that mean “syntactically distinguishable?” Well, if we look at a comparison of markdown and html provided by Wikipedia’s markdown page, we see with html it is very easy to distinguish the tags from the text. This is a very powerful system. It allows html to interact with other languages such as JavaScript and CSS. It allows html to produce dynamic web pages and web applications. Yet, it is also a very difficult environment to write within. It does not look like what we expect a written page to look like while we are working within it. Now certainly, this is a more complicated page that is more finished. But, nonetheless, it is very difficult to write within html for (when producing) a multimodal document. Now, there are plenty of people that that are comfortable with this—with writing with html, and there is nothing wrong with that.

But, for many of us, and many people who are still relatively new to web design, something close to a WYSIWYG is what we’re used to writing within. WYSIWYG stands for “what you see is what you get.” And that usually means something like Microsoft Office, or in this case Libre Office, or some other word processor like Google Docs, where, while you’re writing, the actual what you see on the screen is very close to the final document, or the final thing you will produce. So, this is very comfortable for writing, but it is not very powerful for adding in-line text, or code, or tags, or things of that nature. So, markdown attempts to be a compromise between the two. Where, on one end you have html tags and all the power that is provided by that as one example on the far extreme, and on the other you have the full WYSIWYG environment, where “what you see is what you get.” With markdown, as you see here on the left, the tagging is still very readable—it is still a writer-friendly environment—but you get things like the ability to put an in-line link in text or to put the formatting for italics, or strike-through, or changing the font in text. But, what you see here on the right hand side, while cleaner and rendered in what it would look like if the html was put right in the browser, it is not all that different from the markdown that is over here on the left hand side.

If we go to daringfireball.net, the site owned by John Gruber—the original creator of markdown—we see that this was his original design intention when creating markdown. As he explains on his site, “The overriding design goal for Markdown’s formatting syntax is to make it as readable as possible. The idea is that a Markdown-formatted document should be publishable as-is, as plain text, without looking like it’s been marked up with tags or formatting instructions.” And as he explains in the second part of the paragraph: “While Markdown’s syntax has been influenced by several existing text-to-HTML filters, the single biggest source of inspiration for Markdown’s syntax is the format of plain text email.” So, you’re probably thinking: how powerful can it be for something that is just made to look like a plain text document or email, for web design or the creation of a web text? Well, that is what this website will try to show you. One the “Resources Page” there will be a full range of resources with everything from showing you how to basically learn markdown and get involved, to things like using markdown to making full webtexts, websites, blogs. Markdown is actually very powerful once you combine it with other conversion tools, but at the outset it is meant to be a very approachable way to learn markup—in a way that takes the writer’s influence into account. Someone who cares about a writerly environment while coding. That is what markdown is meant to do.

This website is also an application—at any point in time you can click on “Try Markdown” and actually edit markdown on the left side and it will change on the right side. So, you can actually delete all of this text and play with markdown yourself. Anything that you type on the left will get rendered on the right. You can add a little bit of “bold.” And you see it renders automatically on the right. So this website actually provides a way for you to learn markdown while you are here. You can click “Markdown Help” if you forgot some of the formatting instructions. And, of course, at any time—if you want—you can come back again and the original text that was there will be available for you to look at.

So, thank you for visiting this site, and I hope it is useful. Good luck!