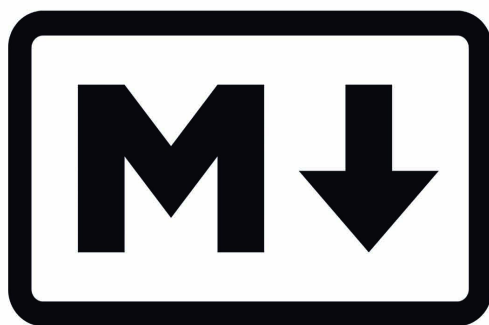


# LEARNING MARKDOWN

SCOTT NESBITT



# **Learning Markdown**

A Guide to Quickly Formatting Content for  
the Web

Scott Nesbitt

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# Introduction

Whether you realize it or not, you write for the web. You might be a journalist, a content strategist, a technical writer, a copywriter, a blogger, or even a software developer. Your thoughts and ideas, in written form, probably find their way on to the web in the form of blog posts, articles, or tutorials.

At it's core, most of what you find on the web is formatted with something called HTML. Short for *HyperText Markup Language*, HTML tells a web browser how to display a web page and all the various bits and pieces on that page — things like headings, lists, images, and text. It does that using *tags*. Tags tell the web browser what, for example, is a paragraph or a heading or a list on a page.

Working with HTML can be cumbersome. To format anything with HTML, you need to type tags surrounded by angle brackets. Or, you have to continually click buttons on a toolbar to apply formatting.

A better and more efficient way of formatting documents for the web is Markdown.

## Enter Markdown

Markdown is a simple way to format plain text that was created by John Gruber. Markdown gives you a way to quickly format a document for the web, then later convert it into HTML.

Instead of relying on tags, Markdown uses the symbols on your keyboard to denote formatting. Hash symbols (#), for example, indicate headings. Single asterisks (\*) surrounding text make it italic; double asterisks make it bold. You can even create lists,

indented text, and more with Markdown. Doing that beats typing out a bunch of HTML tags!

Markdown's not limited to the web. There are converters, which I discuss in the chapter **Converting Your Markdown Files to a Usable Form**, that can create word processor or PDF files.

## Why Markdown?

Markdown has a number of advantages. It's plain text, which means you can work with documents on any computer, on any mobile device, or even on the web itself. Markdown is easy to use and easy to remember — I learned it in an hour. Want a point of comparison? It took me days to learn basic HTML back in the early 1990s.

So, what about saving a word processor document as HTML, or copying and pasting text directly into a web editor? A lot of people do both. The problem is that the formatting is never quite right. There's a lot of cruft in an HTML file that a word processor spits out. Often, simple things like lists and links break. Badly.

Using Markdown, you can write and format documents with efficiency and with less effort. When working with HTML, you need to move your fingers around a lot to type the tags. That slows you down. With Markdown, you're using keyboard symbols. There's less moving around. You can type Markdown formatting symbols faster than you can HTML tags.

This quote sums up Markdown for me:

*Rather than taking the author out of the mindset of thinking about a subject, Markdown keeps them in a train of thought where they can simply get the ideas onto paper.*

— John O’Nolan, creator of the blogging platform Ghost

## What This Book is About

My goal is to teach you Markdown. While there are dozens of Markdown cheatsheets available on the web, they just show you the formatting. This book goes a bit further. I'll teach you not only the syntax of Markdown, but also how to use it to properly structure your documents. This book explain not just the *how*, but also the *why* of Markdown.

For better or for worse, Markdown lets you apply certain kinds of formatting in a number of ways. I'll teach you the formatting that I find most efficient.

Each chapter in this book ends with an exercise. The exercise is an opportunity for you to practice what you've learned. The exercise in each chapter builds on the previous one. Work through each exercise and you'll quickly master Markdown. You'll be comfortably using it before you know it.

So, are you ready to begin? Great! Let's get started.