

Styling a form with CSS

When creating web forms, developers tend to get tired of looking at the same dreary and dull form. Developers who are familiar with CSS are able to provide their form with a better looking interface by styling various form fields. This brings increased visual appeal to your web page that is easy to achieve with a little bit of ingenuity and CSS.

In this article, we'll examine how to style our form fields with CSS. Along the way, we'll hit a few roads bumps and learn how to account for them. As a result, we'll have a web form which looks great visually, works in all modern browsers and learn some cool CSS concepts and techniques.

If you would like to follow styling a form's step-by-step development or try your hand at styling a form yourself, you'll find the project file link helpful.

Finished Page

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_finished.html

Download Project Files

<http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform.zip>

Open the web form

For the article's purpose, we'll use the same web form which was used to examine the process involved in creating a form. You can find we're using, **styleform.html** in the project file download. The file already has an external style sheet attached:

```
<head>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">
<link href="style.css" rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" media="screen">
</head>
```

Also, inside your opening form tag you will see this:

```
<form action="" method="post" name="simple" id="simple">
```

Setting our form to an ID of simple allows us to style individual form fields. Continuing, inside your opening table tag you will see this:

```
<table cellpadding="0" id="simple">
```

Setting our table to an ID of simple allows us to style our table. Though the table is nested inside a form, we need to be specific in styling either our form or table, because we have fixes intended for one in most instances, but not the other. Before moving forward, open the style sheet, **style.css** in your text editor.

Set table width, margins and border

First, let's set our table width, assign a margin and border as well:

```
table#simple {
    width:500px;
    margin:0 auto;
    border:0;
    border-collapse:collapse;
}
```

We do the following with the rule:

- Width
 - Set to a fixed width of 500 pixels
- Margin
 - Top and bottom set to 0, left and right set to auto
- Border
 - Set to 0
- Border-collapse
 - Set to collapse

When you set an element to a fixed width, assigning left and right margins to auto will center our element, table in this case, in the browser. Setting border to collapse will collapse adjacent borders that would occur by setting a border on the td element. Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_table.html

Moving content up

You will notice in our last three cells, the left cell is pushed down and out of alignment with the right cell. The reason is the right cell has more content than the left. We'll assign a CSS rule to fix this. Add the following CSS:

```
table#simple td {
    vertical-align:top;
}
```

We use a combined descendent selector to target all td tags which reside in a table which has an ID of simple and use the following property-value:

- Vertical-align
 - Set to a value of top

This will push all table cells to the top of their cell. Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_table_moveup.html

Styling the input tag

Let's add a simple border to our input fields by adding the following code:

```
form#simple input {
    border: 1px solid #14314f;
}
```

We use a **descendent selector**. A descendent selector refers to a tag that is a descendent of a parent tag. In our case, input is a descendent (child) of our form (parent). Using this selector, we style each input tag inside our form with a solid blue border. Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_input.html

If you view this page in your browser you will see our first two input fields are correctly styled with a border. However, moving down the page we also see that our radio and checkboxes are also styled with a border. The reason is text fields, radio buttons and checkboxes are in the same group, the input tag. We don't want our radio buttons and checkboxes to have a border applied because it looks odd visually.

What to do?

The easiest solution is to create a custom class and apply to our first two text fields. This way, only the first two text fields will have a border applied and the remaining radio buttons and checkboxes will remain in their default state. Add the following CSS rule:

```
form#simple input.textbox {
    border: 1px solid #14314f;
    background-color: #c90;
    color: #14314f;
}
```

We create a custom class named textbox, which will only be applied to input tags inside a form named simple to which the class is applied. The property-values are listed below:

- Border
 - Set to 1 pixel, solid line, which is dark blue
- Background-color
 - Sets a background color of gold
- Color
 - Sets the text color to a dark blue, same as our border

When the browser reads the style sheet and the web page it does this: *“Look for input tag(s) that have a class of textbox which reside in a form named simple and apply the following styles.”* Next you need to apply the class to the first two fields:

```
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td><input name="Name" type="text" size="30" class="textbox"></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td><input name="Email" type="text" size="30" class="textbox"></td>
</tr>
```

Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_input_text.html

Select Tag

Styling our select tag will be easy because there's only one. We simply add the following rule:

```
form#simple select {
    background-color:# 14314f;
    color:#c90;
}
```

We use a descendent selector to target any select tags which reside in a form named simple. The property-values are listed below:

- Background-color
 - Sets a background color of dark blue
- Color
 - Sets a text color of gold

When the browser reads the style sheet and the web page it does this: *“Look for any select tag inside a form named simple and apply the following styles.”* Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_select.html

Text Area Tag

Styling our text area tag is also easy because there's only one. We add the following rule:

```
form#simple textarea {
    border:1px solid #14314F;
    background-color:#c90;
    color:#14314f;
    font-family:Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif;
}
```

We use a descendent selector to target any text area tags which reside in a form named simple. The property-values are listed below:

- Border
 - Set to a 1 pixel, solid line, with a dark blue color
- Background-color
 - Sets a background to a dark gold
- Color
 - Sets a text color to a dark blue
- Font-family
 - Sets a font family to Verdana

When the browser reads the style sheet and the web page it does this: *“Look for any text area tag inside a form named simple and apply the following styles.”* Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_textarea.html

You will notice your text area is a bit small in width and height. We can easily remedy this by adding the following to our existing rule:

```
form#simple textarea {
    border: 1px solid #14314F;
    background-color: #c90;
    color: #14314f;
    font-family: Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif;
    width: 200px;
    height: 100px;
}
```

Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_textarea_width_height.html

Submit and reset buttons

Styling our buttons requires a little more effort than our two previous form fields. You can't style the input tag because as you might remember this affects radio buttons and check boxes. You can't use a descendent selector because there's not one. You might be asking how you style these buttons. Remember from earlier in the article we created a custom class so that only our first two text fields would have a border, leaving our radio buttons and checkboxes preserved. We style our buttons the same way by adding the following rule:

```
form#simple input.buttons {
    background-color: #14314f;
    color: #c90;
    font-family: Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif;
    font-size: .8em;
}
```

We create a custom class named buttons, which will only be applied to input tags inside a form named simple to which the class is applied. The property-values are listed below:

- Background-color
 - Sets a background color of dark blue
- Color
 - Sets a text color to a dark gold
- Font-family
 - Sets a font family of Verdana
- Font-size
 - Sets a font size of .8em, which is 80% of 100%, a proportional unit of measurement

When the browser reads the style sheet and the web page it does this: *“Look for any input tags which are inside a form named simple that have a class of buttons and apply the following styles”* Next, inside our HTML file, add the class to our buttons:

```
<input name="submit" type="submit" class="buttons" value="submit">
<input type="reset" name="reset" value="reset" class="buttons">
```

Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_buttons.html

Styling the table

Let's make our table stand out just a bit more by adding a few additional rules to our existing style sheet. First, add the following rule:

```
body{
    font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif;
    font-size: 101%;
}
```

We set a global font family of Verdana and font size of 101%. Next, add the following to your main table rule:

```
table#simple{
    width: 500px;
    margin: 0 auto;
    border: 0;
    border-collapse: collapse;
    background-color: #CCCCCC;
    font-size: .8em;
}
```

We added the following property-values:

- Background-color
 - Sets a background of a light gray
- Font-size
 - Sets a font size to .8em, a proportional unit of measurement

Next, add the following to your td rule:

```
table#simple td{
    vertical-align: top;
    border: 1px solid #666666;
    padding: 6px;
}
```

We added the following property-values:

- Border
 - Sets a 1 pixel, solid border, dark gray color
- Padding

- Sets padding on all table cells to 6 pixels, which provides a bit of space between the cells and our table

You will notice our button text is a bit small. The reason is our font size is set at .8em. While this is normally fine, in this case, it's actually .8em of .8em (80% of 80%). The reason is because the table rule set higher in the style sheet is set to the same size. Another example of cascading and inheritance; either remove the font size set in the button class or increase it to .9em, which would be .9em of .8em (90% of 80%). You can also remove the break tag which is before the submit button. Save your file and preview the results.

http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/styleform/styleform_table_styled.html

Summary

In this article you learned how to style a web form inside a table. You also learned:

- Set a width on a table using an ID
- Style only two input tags using a custom class
- Style a select tag
- Style a text area tag with width and height
- Styling a submit and reset buttons with a custom class
- Styling the table to make the entire form aesthetically pleasing

If you have questions, please follow the link below.

<http://midwestwebdesign.net/tutorials/contact.aspx>