



Lesson #36

Common IE Problems And How To Fix Them

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Introduction

All this while, we have been developing and editing our theme using Fire fox. It is too bad we do not all use the same browser. Despite everything, Internet Explorer still has a big user share online. Chances are, your client will be checking your work using IE too. Like it or not, we are forced to make sure our designs work well on it.

Because every theme and your customizations make each scenario different, it is not possible for me to cover all the fixes and quirks that you may encounter. The good news is, there are many issues that occur on a regular basis. This week, we will look into those common problems and how to fix it.

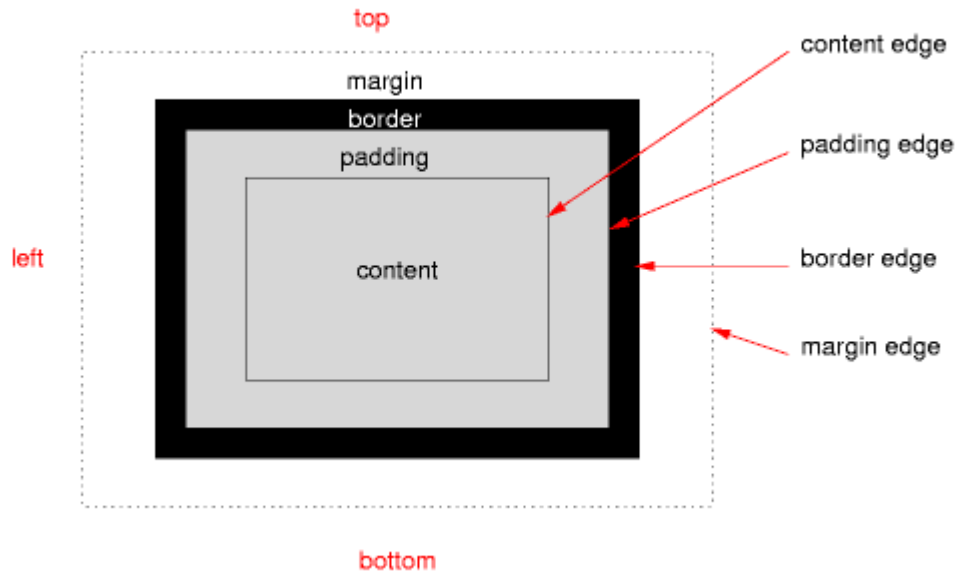
Please keep in mind these fixes are suggestions only and they do work most of the time. However, a lot also depends on the theme you are working with. If you encounter any of the problems below, try these solutions first. If it still does not work, Google is your best friend.

While I love Google and have certainly learned many things from the information put out there by our generous peers, you have to admit this can sometimes get very time consuming.

Be sure to check out my announcement at the end of this lesson for a great resource.

The Box Model

Before we look into troubleshooting, let's get a basic understanding of what is commonly called the box model. This will give you a much needed basis for understanding CSS based designs.

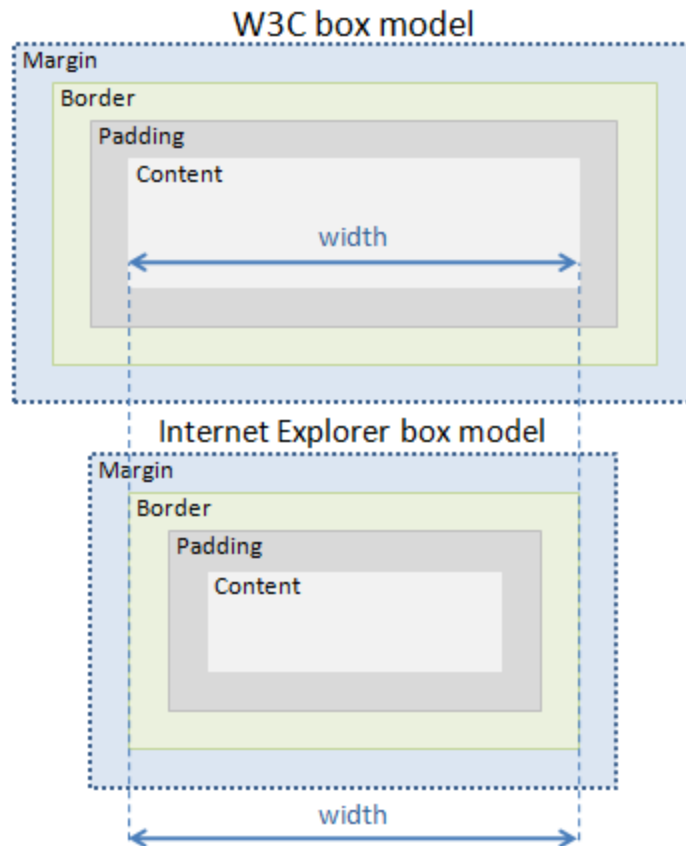


W3C Box Model, Image Courtesy W3C

The diagram above illustrates how boxes work in browsers. Each DIV can be considered a 'box'. Margin is the space outside the box, border is the line around the box and padding is the space inside the box. This illustration also clearly demonstrates to us when and where to use padding and when and where margins might be a better choice instead.

In the past, meaning IE versions 4, 5 and below did not interpret the box model correctly. When those browsers calculated the box width, they included the border and padding widths as well, making the actual content area much smaller and creating a load of havoc for developers.

This illustration below courtesy of Wikipedia should give you a good graphical representation of the IE bug.



Thankfully, this problem has been taken care of beginning IE 6 and above so you probably won't encounter too much problem from this bug today. Still, there is a reason for bringing up this box model because it can really help you understand why or where things go wrong in your theme.

Common Issue #1- Sidebar Or Text Column Pushed Down

This problem usually happens when one of the columns is set too wide or the contents in one of the columns is too wide. The normal conclusion would be to change the width. Trouble is, the fix may not always lie in the DIV's width.

If you take look at the box model again, you'll see that a 150 px wide box can in reality be wider than 150px depending what the size of the padding, border or margin is.

Let's do some math. Let's say your DIV is 150 px wide, and you have a 10px padding all around it, plus a 5px border, that means your box is in reality 180 px wide.

Which means, if the column is only wide enough to accommodate a 160px DIV, this box is too wide and it's going to force something down. Usually, the DIV next to it to make make room for itself.

Your solution is to either reduce the border, padding or the box width or both all of them. This is also one reason why I use and recommend Firebug. When you inspect a box with Firebug, it will highlight the box, the padding and margin so you can see visually if a box is too wide.

Also, in the Firebug CSS panel, you can temporarily change the widths, colors or anything in the style sheet to test your theories, see if you are on the right track before even editing anything in the actual style sheet file.

If none of the CSS issues work, try taking away some of the text or images in each column it could be that. You can quickly check that by inspecting images, Javascripts, widgets etc with Firebug too.

Common Issue #2 - Images Appearing As Black Box

This is an easy one. Whenever an image is only a black block in IE, that means your image is most likely a .png format with transparent background. Internet Explorer 6 and below do not work well with certain .png image files. Your solution is to use .jpg or .gif.

What happens if you don't want to or cannot change the image into a .gif or .jpg? You can try using [this](#) work around as suggested by Microsoft.

Common Issue #3 – DIV Does Not Center But Text Does

Sometimes you want a DIV to be centered in a column or in the page. But when you do this, it doesn't work.

```
div.old { text-align: center;}
```

That's because in CSS, text-align only applies to the text inside the DIV. Not the actual DIV box itself. Your fix, go to the DIV that is one level above. If there is none, you can create your own. So it will be like this in HTML

```
<div class="new">  
<div class="old">Your content in here</div>  
</div>
```

In the style sheet:

```
.new {  
text-align: center;  
margin: 0 auto;  
}  
  
.old {  
text-align: left;  
}
```

What happens here, is the 'new' DIV aligns the content inside center this will affect the 'old' DIV and center the box. Margin: 0 auto; is to center align in other browsers like Firefox because IE does not understand it. This may be different for IE 8.

Common Issue #4 – Margin Appears Much Larger

Sometimes a DIV margin appears doubly wide. Reportedly, this happens when the DIV is 'floated' or has a 'float' element to it. To fix this for IE, add to the DIV the code below into your DIV in the style sheet.

```
display:inline;
```

Common Issue #5 – DIV Can't Be Smaller Than 12px

Sometimes you want the DIV to be really thin but in IE 6 it won't get any smaller no matter what you try. Try adding a line-height to the DIV in your style sheet.

```
line-height: 0px;
```

Common Issue #6 – Height 100% Doesn't Work

So you want a column to be full height and when you enter height: 100% it does not obey you in IE6. What's happening is, IE6 needs something to compare it to. It wants to know 100% relative to what? So you need to go to the DIV one level up (the parent DIV) and add a height to it. Example, this is the old CSS.

```
.body {  
}  
.box {  
height: 100%  
}
```

Try this instead.

```
.body {  
height: 100%  
}  
.box {  
height: 100%  
}
```


Common Issue #7 – I Added All These Fixes Now Firefox Is Messed Up

Ah, it is certainly difficult to please two masters but we web developers try our best regardless. What you can try is create two style sheets. One is the default for all other browsers and one is for IE with the fixes. In your <head> where the style sheet is called, add this.

```
<!--[if lt IE 7 ]>
    <link href="<?php bloginfo('template_url'); ?
    >/iecss.css" rel="stylesheet" type="text/css">
<![endif]-->
```

That would tell only IE browsers to load that style sheet if the version is 6 and lower.

Conclusion

Each IE version has it's quirks. That is why it is so difficult to fix IE issues across the board and make every theme compatible to IE because designs come and go and CSS technology advances. Hopefully, this has given you a good basis to start from.

As mentioned earlier, Google is your best friend. On the same token, it can also be time consuming looking for fixes on Google because you may not want to charge your clients for finding a fix that would expand your skill OR if you do charge your client, they may end up getting sticker shock at the hours you've spent and wondering where that time went to. It is almost useless to explain how difficult one small fix can be at times.

If you've ever felt that way, you may want to consider coming on board [TechTrainingHall](http://TechTrainingHall.com). This is a site run by yours truly. It is designed to help VA's or anybody in the business of web design to increase and/or sharpen their technical skills. We carry one time tutorials and mini-courses you can zero in on or you can join us on a monthly subscription basis where you will receive access to new tutorials at a lower price plus the advantage of asking and getting technical help in our member's area*.

Because members are unlikely to be clients, you get a safe, environment where you can freely discuss issues with your peers. This will also save yourself the embarrassment of asking questions on public forums and social networks where your clients will likely witness them and lead them losing confidence in you.

Here's the URL again, come check us out.

<http://TechTrainingHall.com>

*Note: Exact details of the site subject to change.

Next Lesson...

Is it possible to have two themes in one? Technically no but we can certainly get creative with Page Templates. Next is a case study in creating sales pages using your existing theme.

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