



Lesson #13

# Using Firebug A Crash Course

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## Short Detour

As promised, this week we are going to take a short detour off theme development to learn a bit more about Firebug. I'll readily admit, when I first discovered Firebug, I un-installed it immediately. Just didn't quite understand how it worked plus the fact that no manuals were out there didn't help.

I relented when it came up again and again on web design blogs, forums and web sites I visited. This time, I dug in and took time to watch the video where the creator of Firebug, Joe Hewitt gave a talk about the benefits of it. That video can be found [here](#) if you want to watch it – be warned, it is about 48 minutes long not exactly a tutorial and he's talking about the older version 1.0.

Today, there's a lot more documentation on this fantastic tool. While I can't cover everything here, I want to point out the most frequently used features. This thing has truly saved my behind so often it's almost scary. Without it, development and troubleshooting time would take twice as long.

Alright, enough gushing. Let's get on with it already.

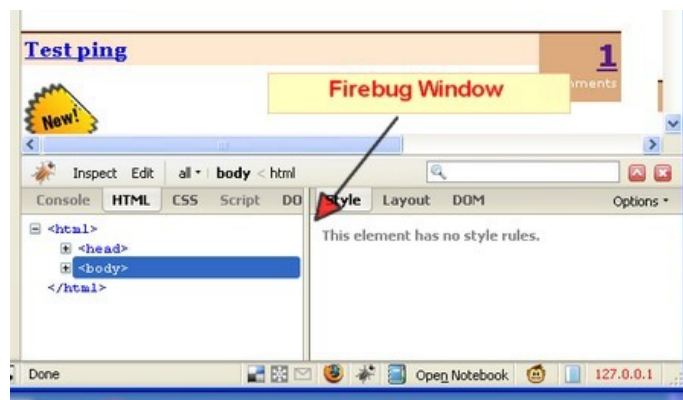
## Firebug Basics

Let's familiarize ourselves how to launch Firebug and the different areas of the plugin. I assume by now you have installed it on Firefox. If not, please do so.

After installation, you should see a bug at the bottom right corner when you open Firefox. If you are using an older version, you will see a green check icon. If you're the keyboard type of person, press F12 on your keyboard.



You'll know it is opened because a window appears from below like this.



You'll see that the window is split into two sections the HTML on the left and the Stylesheet on the right. If you do not like it taking up space at the bottom of your screen, you can undock it by clicking the arrow button to the top right of the Firebug window.



When you click that, a new window will open that is also split into two – the HTML and the Stylesheet. Undocking is sometimes very convenient when you put the browser and the Firebug window side by side to view the changes as you work.

This HTML/CSS split screen is the one you will be using 99% of the time when troubleshooting.

## ***Determining The Layout***

When working with clients, most of the time you will be given themes and templates that you didn't create yourself. Since every web designer has their own style, it can be difficult to figure out how they laid things out. What you see in your browser and the HTML can be very different. This is especially true of designs that are pure HTML/CSS with no tables.

Take our own blog theme bootcamp theme. If you wanted to find out which <div> in the HTML holds the menu links on the top, here's what you do.

Open Firefox, visit your Sandbox blog home page. Launch Firebug.

In Firebug, click the Inspect menu item.

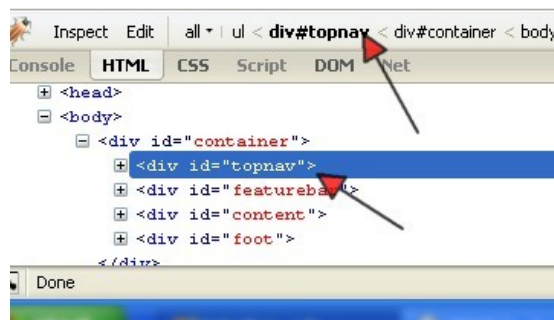


Hover your mouse over the menu links or whichever area you are interested to look at. As you move your mouse you may notice a blue box highlighting different parts of the design. This helps you figure out where the 'boxes' are in a design.



Once you reached the area you're interested to examine, click on it. In this case, the area we are interested in is the menu links. After clicking on the element, take a look at the Firebug window – in the HTML side of the window.

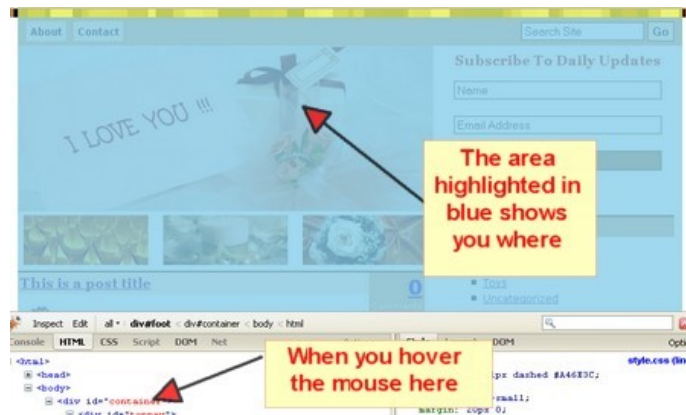
The topnav div in the HTML is highlighted for you. On the top of the Firebug window, you also see div#topnav being bolded.



This tells you that the div (or box) that holds the menu links and the search box for that matter is the topnav div.

You can also do this in reverse. Sometimes you are looking at the HTML and find something funny but you don't know what that div is being used for. You know the HTML, but you don't know where it is in the browser. In this case, in the Firebug window, hover over the HTML divs.

For example, in the screen shot below. I hovered my mouse over the 'container' div. The content part of the page is highlighted in blue. This tells me that the 'container' div is the one that holds all the content area together.

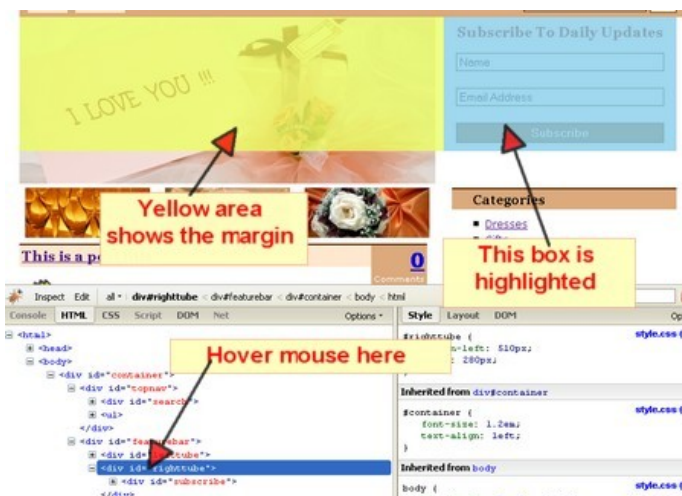


Let's do another one to be sure. Hover your mouse over the 'righttube' div. By the way, if you don't see all the HTML just click the little '+' icons. That will expand the code. Clicking '-' will collapse the code.



When I hover my mouse over the 'righttube' div, the Subscription box is highlighted in blue. You will also see a big yellow area over the image. The blue shows me the box that holds the content and how wide it is. The yellow tells me that this div has a margin and how wide it is.

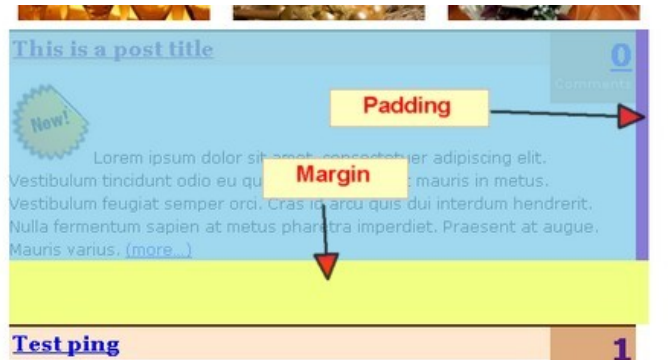
This is all just visuals. We will look at the CSS shortly. For now, experiment hovering your mouse over a few areas. They don't have to be boxes. You can hover your mouse over the <p>, <a>, inputs etc. You should see the layout exposed. In each area.



In some areas, you will also find a purple color around the blue box. Sometimes it's only on one side or 2-3 sides. Since yellow is margin, purple indicates padding. So if a box has purple on its sides, you know it has a padding.



If it has both purple and yellow, you know that it has both margins and padding.



If it is only solid blue, it has no padding or margins.



This is super useful when you are trying to figure out how to reduce the width of a page or its boxes. Sometimes you might reduce the box width itself but find out that the layout is still too wide causing the box to be pushed down – very common in IE. By using Firebug, you can quickly determine if the box has margins or padding and whether it is better to reduce the margins or padding.

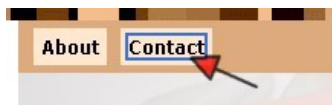
## ***Match That To The Style Sheet***

Now that we know how to figure out where everything is placed, the layout or margins of each element, let's check out the style sheet.

For most of us, finding things in the style sheet can be a nightmare. So often I hear cries for help when people try to change the link color in the style sheet but not all links are changed. Or worse, everything changes including the links you didn't want to change. But where in the style sheet? Depending on the theme you are using, some style sheets are huge, running into over 1000 lines of code.

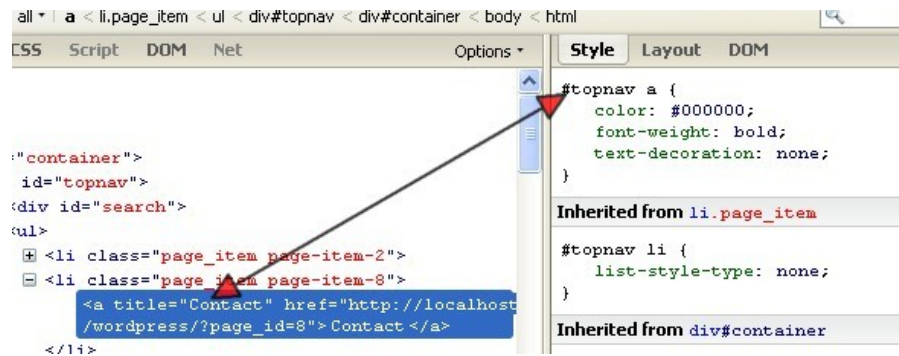
Thankfully, we have Firebug to tell us and not only tell us the name of the style sheet element, I tells you exactly where it is. Here's an example how.

In the Firebug window, click Inspect, then click on one of the links in the top menu bar.

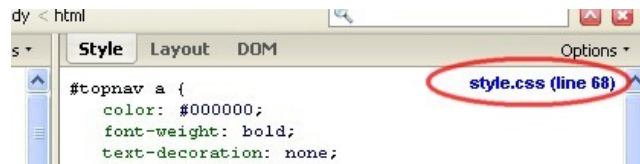


On the left side of the Firebug window, you will see the link HTML code being highlight. Now look to the right pane (or the bottom pane if you have undocked Firebug). On the very top of that pane, you should see #topnav a.





That tells you the name of the style and its settings. Look further to the right, you should see this.



That tells you that you can find it in the style.css file and it is on line 68. Aha! Line numbers. If you open style.css in PsPad now, scroll down to line 68, you should see that style element exactly where it says it is. Remember, your line numbers may not be 68 – go to the line number Firebug tells you it is at.

What a blessing. No more poking around your style sheet for hours on end. Or blindly doing a search and replace (which can sometimes do more harm than good). This helps you laser target the elements you want to edit.

A note of caution. This is accurate for 95% of the themes I've worked with. There are a rare few – namely [WP Remix](#) theme – where the line numbers sometimes are not accurate because it uses so many style sheets. Then, you'll have to resort to old fashioned search. But like I said, that would probably only be 5% of the time. Minor issue not worth losing sleep over.

## Editing Without Changing Files

Before I let you go this week, there's one really cool feature in Firebug that you should know about. You can actually edit the HTML or style sheet without making changes to your theme files.

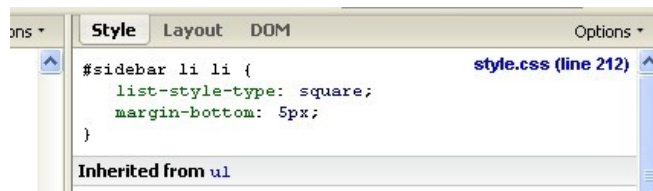
Why this is useful. Because sometimes, you just want to test out a color. Sometimes you just want to see how things look if you change the position of one or two small areas and other times you just want to make sure that the element you are thinking of editing is the right one. Like a test environment that doesn't harm the theme files.

In the past, what you would do is probably save a copy of the style sheet or theme file as a backup, change the code, refresh your browser to check your work. With Firebug, you don't have to.

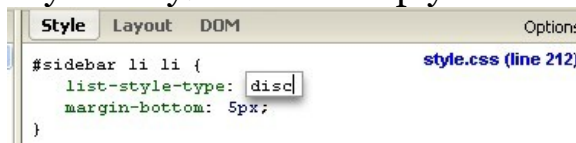
Supposing I want to see how our theme will look like with rounded bullets instead of square. First, we figure out where the bullet style is configured. We click Inspect on Firebug, then hover over one of the bullet items.



Look over to the right side of Firebug, it should tell you the style applied.



Click on 'square'. It should turn into an editable field. Replace 'square' with 'disc' or 'circle'. Press Enter on your keyboard or simply click anywhere outside.

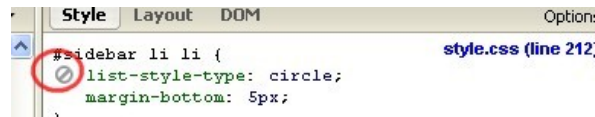


In your browser, if you typed in 'disc', then you should immediately see rounded bullets. If you typed 'circle' you should see rings next to the bullets.



Is that cool or what? Go ahead. Try changing other things like margins, padding etc.

You can also turn styles on and off. Maybe you want to see how the design looks like without bullets. In Firebug, hover your mouse to the left side of the style like this.



See the greyed out circle with a line running through it? Click on it. The bullets disappear, the style is greyed out and the circle is red.



Click on the circle again and the style and bullets return. This is so very helpful when you're trying to figure out what would happen if you removed a particular code. Or just to check if you're on the right track.

Nothing is changed in your files. Your theme has not been over-written at all so you are safe. Yet you now know exactly where you must go and what you should do when you finally edit your theme file and style sheet.

That's the beauty of having Firebug on your side. Just make sure you test and then edit your file one or two elements a time. Don't go crazy and do the whole design in Firebug because it doesn't keep a record of what you've changed which makes it difficult for you to remember everything you have done. To make it worse, if you refresh your browser, all changes are abandoned and the original design returns. So take things one at a time.

Also, certain plugins may interfere with this feature. If it doesn't work, please seek help over at [Firebug's group support forum](#).

If you wish to explore the other features of Firebug and how to use them, there are also more documentation and screen tutorials for Firebug [on their site](#).

## ***Go Experiment***

I bet you'll never look at another web site design in the same light again after you know what you can do with Firebug. I know I don't. It has been one of the ways I used to help me learn new CSS tricks – or spy on their code. Sometimes you find sites that are just beautiful and you want to know how they did it. You can pop open Firebug to see exactly how the style sheet is coded.

Don't however copy other people's coding verbatim. Learn from there and try it on your own. Have at it. Inspect our theme's code to see how the layout is done, the style sheet and so on.

### **Next Lesson...**

We'll be going back to building up our theme, the single.php

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