

HTML Formatting Guide for Amazon Book Descriptions

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HTML Basic Concepts

HTML is just a fancy term for what your web browser downloads from every web page that you visit so that it can know what to do when displaying that web page to you. It can look difficult to follow, especially for heavily formatted pages, but the simple concepts you are about to learn will make it so that you can make some simple updates to your Author Central book listings on Amazon so that your book descriptions will stand out compared to the average listing that just looks like one big blob of text.

I recommend taking a look at the next 3 sections and understanding the concepts you'll find there because this will help you not only with your Amazon listings but anywhere you have to deal with HTML. There is a lot more to it than what is in this document, of course, but these are the concepts you need in order to work with the simplified version of HTML that Amazon allows you to use.

If you want to test any of the following concepts, just use a simple text editor such as notepad and save the text in the examples below into a file with an html extension, which you can then open in your browser.

For example, you could create a file name **test.html** and open that file in your browser. Every time you make a change to the file, refresh your browser window to see the effects of that change.

Part 1 – HTML Tags

The first concept to understand are tags. A tag is a wrapper that formats a specific piece of text, and each tag needs to be opened and closed. For example, if I wanted to make the following line of text bold, I would type:

```
<b>This line of text is bold.</b>
```

Note that I open the the bold tag like this by typing `` and I close it by typing `` and everything that appears in between those two tags will be bold, even if they appear in the middle of a paragraph.

Each tag will appear in between the less than (`<`) and greater than (`>`) symbols. When you open a tag, you will just type the tag name in between those symbols, and when you close them you will include a forward slash (`/`) before the tag name.

There are some special tags that don't need a separate closing tag because they just tell the browser to do something rather than formatting a specific piece of text. For example, line breaks are created by using this tag: `
`

Notice how the closing forward slash appears at the end? That means that that tag is already closed. By placing that in your text, it will force a line break. For example, if you were to type: `This line is bold
but this line is not` then it would appear like this in your web browser:

```
This line is bold  
but this line is not
```

The last thing you need to know about HTML tags is that they need to be nested properly, which means that if you open multiple tags, you have to close them again in reverse order. For example, the tag to make text italics is `<i></i>` so if you wanted something to be `bold <i>and</i>` italic, you would format it this way:

```
<b><i>This text is bold and italic</i></b>
```

Note that because you bold the text, and then make it italics, you need to stop making it italics before you stop making it bold. Alternatively, you could type it this way:

```
<i><b>This text is bold and italic</b></i>
```

You can not type it this way, however, this would be wrong:

```
WRONG: <b><i>The tags are closed in the wrong order</b></i>
```

Now you understand the basics of HTML tags.

Part 2 – Displaying Special Characters

The next concept is how you display special characters in HTML. If you wanted a less than or greater than symbol to appear on the page, you can't just type it in your HTML because then the browser would think that you are trying to open an HTML tag. There is a special way to force special characters to appear on the screen, and in fact this method can be used for every character whether it has a special meaning or not.

The way to display special characters is by using their character code, and there are multiple ways that you can do that, all of which begin with an ampersand (&) and end with a semi-colon (;). These are special instructions to the web browser to display a special character instead of the literal text.

In between the ampersand and semi-colon you would type either the ANSI number (a set of numerical values for each character defined by the American National Standards Institute), the ANSI hex value (a mathematical way of describing the numbers in a different base unit and beyond the scope of what you need to know to use them) or the HTML entity code (which is a more human readable format.)

While you will certainly memorize the more common codes that you use frequently, it isn't important to try. There are numerous websites that list all of the different codes that you can reference. For example, just visit www.LookupTables.com for a full list that is easy to look at all at once, or alanwood.net/demos/ansi.html for a list that is formatted so you can cut & paste the codes.

Here are some common codes you might want to use:

< will display as a less than sign: <

> will display as a greater than sign: >

& will display as an ampersand: &

" will display as a double quotation mark: "

(note that there is no "e" at the end of the code, just ")

Wherever those codes appear in the HTML of a page, it will just be replaced by the symbol for what the reader sees when viewing the page through a browser.

Part 3 – Paragraphs and Spacing

The last concept you need to understand to be able to create basic HTML is that there is no concept of paragraphs or spacing in what you type. For example, if you type the following into an HTML file you will wind up with a big blob of text:

```
This is  a strangely
formatted bit
of  text with  lots  of  random spaces
```

```
and  line breaks.
```

All you will see in the web browser is the following:

```
This is a strangely formatted bit of text with lots of random spaces and line
breaks.
```

When you are typing in HTML, all spaces and line breaks that fall next to each other are combined into a single space, which means that all line breaks are also combined into a single space. That's why most self-published authors have a big blob of text rather than paragraphs.

As mentioned above in part 1 of HTML basics, you can create line breaks through using the line break tag to force it to be where you want it to be: `
`

I like to place line break tags where the end of the line will be to make it easier to spot where I might be missing one, including if I want a space between paragraphs.

To force there to be multiple spaces in a row, you need to use a special character as described in part 2 of HTML basics, which is the non-breaking space code: ` `;

To get something closer to the above example, you'd want to type the above example using the codes. Alternatively, because you are using codes, you could also type it all in one line and it will come out looking exactly the same. For example:

```
This is &nbsp; &nbsp; a strangely<br />formatted bit<br />
of &nbsp; &nbsp; text with &nbsp; lots &nbsp; &nbsp; of &nbsp; random
spaces<br />
<br />
and &nbsp; &nbsp; line breaks.<br />
```

You probably wouldn't *want* something to look that way, but if you did, that is a good example. Note how the line breaks don't need to actually appear in the HTML to show up in the final text (as you'll see in the first line up above) but also how I included a blank line with just a `
` tag on it to help me notice where I needed 2 `
` tags in a row to create a blank line between paragraphs? That isn't necessary; I could just put the tags next to each other like this: `

`

I find however that by formatting the text similar to how I want it to appear on the website it will be easier for me to find mistakes and fix them. Look in the examples at the end of this report for some good samples of how to use this concept with real-world applications.

Allowable HTML in Amazon Author Central

Amazon Author Central only allows a few simple tags and will reject all other tags with an error.

These are the published tags acceptable in Author Central that you can be sure will always work:

HTML Tag	Explanation	Sample Usage	Sample Display
<code>
</code>	Line break , creates a new line wherever it appears, doesn't require a closing tag	First line Second line Fourth Line	First line Second line Fourth Line
<code></code> <code></code>	Bold text , you can use either the <code></code> or the <code></code> tag and they will display the same.	<code></code> This text is bold <code></code> but this text is not and <code></code> this text is. <code></code>	This text is bold but this text is not and this text is .
<code><i></i></code> <code></code>	Italic text , you can use either the <code><i></code> or the <code></code> tag and they will be emphasised	<code><i></code> This text is italic <code></i></code> but this text is not and <code></code> this text is. <code></code>	<i>This text is italic</i> but this text is not and <i>this text is</i> .
<code></code>	List Item , this creates each separate item in an ordered or unordered list and can not be used on it's own. It will always be a nested tag inside of <code></code> or <code></code> tags, as you can see below.		<i>See below for an example – this tag can not be used by itself.</i>
<code></code>	Ordered List made up of list item tags (above)	<code>Item 1Item 2Item 3</code>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Item 1 2. Item 2 3. Item 3
<code></code>	Unordered List made up of list item tags (above)	<code>Item 1Item 2Item 3</code>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item 1 • Item 2 • Item 3
Lists can also be nested as long as you properly close them in the	<code>Item 1Item 2Sub-Item 1Sub-Item 2Item 3</code>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item 1 • Item 2 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sub-Item 1 2. Sub-Item 2

right order.		• Item 3
--------------	--	----------

If you stick to using the above tags, you know your listing will always appear the way you want it to and that future behind-the-scenes updates from Amazon will not affect the layout of your listing.

Additional HTML Tricks in Author Central

The table in the previous section are the publicly allowed tags that you can use. However, there are a few tricks that have been found for formatting your text that you can currently add but there is no guarantee that these will continue to be supported.

First, you can use any of the character codes from part 2 of the HTML basics. Here’s a more thorough listing codes and the characters that they will display:

Code	Character	Name
<	<	less than symbol
 		non-breaking space
"	"	double quotation mark
‘	‘	left single quotation mark
“	“	left double quotation mark
™	™	trade mark

Code	Character	Name
>	>	greater than symbol
—	—	em dash
'	'	single quotation mark
’	’	right single quotation mark
”	”	right double quotation mark
®	®	registered

Second, you can create the “Amazon Gold” effect through the use of the heading 2 tag in your Kindle books, but **this trick does not work for print books**, only for digital books from KDP. The tag itself is the `<h2></h2>` tag, with whatever text you want to appear in between. However, if you type it that way, Amazon will reject it, so you need to enter it in HTML mode by using the special character codes for the less than and greater than signs, as so:

`<h2>This Will Appear in “Amazon Gold”</h2>`

One of the side effects of using the heading 2 tag is that it will automatically create line breaks above and below that text, so you don’t need to worry about adding them yourself. If you want something to appear as that heading, just copy and paste the following opening and closing tags before and after your heading:

`<h2>`

`</h2>`

Remember to only use this trick for digital books, or else your listings will not appear correct for your print books.

Listing Example

The following example shows a live listing complete with the actual HTML code as of the time this report was put together, and how that will appear on the Amazon website for that book. For the sake of brevity, I've cut some of the text content out where there is no change in the HTML text but you'll be able to see enough for how to achieve the various effects.

You can view the kindle version of this listing here:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006CB19R4/>

You can view the paperback version of this listing here:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1467991066/>

The book is called Twisted Vengeance by Jeff Bennington.

Sample HTML

The text below is what would be typed, with the HTML code elements highlighted in red and the normal text in black.

```
<b>A <i>Ghost Story</i> to the Core - A <i>Supernatural Thriller</i> That Will  
Keep You Guessing.... From the #1 Bestselling Author of Reunion and  
Creepy.</b><br />  
<br />  
<i>Rick Burns is thrust into a supernatural whirlwind while investigating several  
unsolved murders. In the process, this text was shortened until he is the next  
victim.</i><br />  
<br />  
<b><i>&quot;From the clean streets of Circle City to the darkest corners of the  
human heart... A brutal, emotional thriller that earns its  
stripes.&quot;</i></b>~Kirkus Reviews<br />  
<br />  
&lt;h2&gt;SIZZLING HOT REVIEW FROM KIRKUS REVIEWS:&lt;/h2&gt;  
&quot;<i>In Bennington's [Twisted Vengeance, 2011] latest supernatural thriller,  
we cut the text of this paragraph until we get to more than Rick can handle.<br  
</i>  
<br />  
Propping him up are his father--and the rest of this paragraph is cut out.<br />  
<br />  
Pops has a point; this paragraph has been cut until it earns its stripes.</i>&quot;  
~ <b>Kirkus Reviews</b><br />  
<br />  
&lt;h2&gt;MORE HOT REVIEWS:&lt;/h2&gt;
```

Sample - Kindle Book Description

Here is the listing as it appears for the Kindle Edition, complete with the special formatting and the "Amazon Gold" heading 2 displaying properly:

Book Description

Publication Date: November 22, 2011

A Ghost Story to the Core - A Supernatural Thriller That Will Keep You Guessing.... From the #1 Bestselling Author of Reunion and Creepy.

Rick Burns is thrust into a supernatural whirlwind while investigating several unsolved murders. In the process, a ghostly boy who may know the killer, takes Rick on a haunting chase through the streets of Indianapolis. What Rick discovers is a maniac bent on vengeance that is unbelievably sick and twisted. The detective has his past and love interest to deal with, but he'll need to solve the case and free his demons before he is the next victim.

"From the clean streets of Circle City to the darkest corners of the human heart... A brutal, emotional thriller that earns its stripes."~Kirkus Reviews

SIZZLING HOT REVIEW FROM KIRKUS REVIEWS:

"In Bennington's [Twisted Vengeance, 2011] latest supernatural thriller, Detective Rick Burns has spent a lot of years on the Indianapolis police force, but he's never seen anything like this. When a man is found gruesomely murdered in his own home, it's just another case in a two-year streak of unsolved homicides afflicting the Indiana capital. One more case, one more headache for the troubled detective. Without any clues, leads or anything to link the cases together--except for the particularly brutal ways they were carried out--it's getting to be more than Rick can handle.

Propping him up are his father--a retired cop moonlighting as the station's janitor--and Rick's plucky sister-in-law, Stella. Together, they form a pretty good support group, or so they think. What they don't realize is that they're half of Rick's problem: Rick promised his late older brother, Roger, that he wouldn't let Stella remarry a cop; that's getting to be a problem, seeing as Rick is falling in love with her. And while it's nice to have Pops nearby for help when the going gets tough, Rick's dad is just as likely to remind him that his brother was a better detective.

Pops has a point; Rick is often willing to let good police work and common sense take a backseat for the sake of dramatic plot twists. Although that unprofessionalism makes it hard to strictly classify the book as a gumshoe novel, it doesn't make it any less compelling as a mystery--thanks, in particular, to the appearance (and subsequent disappearance) of a young boy. Rick spots the pale, sickly youth at the scene of the latest crime. Driven by the desperation of only having one lead, Rick decides to follow it, no matter where. Bennington's simple yet forceful style will keep readers guessing as the investigation takes Rick from the clean streets of Circle City to the darkest corners of the human heart. The truth leads Rick to places he never would have expected--and to questions he might not want answered. A brutal, emotional thriller that earns its stripes." ~ Kirkus Reviews

MORE HOT REVIEWS:

"Jeff Bennington is an extremely talented writer and storyteller and he pulled me right in" ~ Kelly Gamble, award

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Sample - CreateSpace Book Description (Paperback)

Here is the paperback screenshot for the same listing. Notice how the formatting is the same, *except* that the “Amazon Gold” heading 2 trick does *not* work for the paperback version and instead you just see the HTML code on the live listing (because we are using the special character codes and it isn’t being interpreted as a tag by the browser):



Book Description

Publication Date: **June 9, 2012**

A Ghost Story to the Core - A Supernatural Thriller That Will Keep You Guessing From the #1 Bestselling Author of Reunion and Creepy.

Detective Rick Burns is thrust into a supernatural whirlwind while investigating a case that takes Rick on a haunting chase through the streets of Indianapolis. What Rick doesn't know is that his detective has his past and love interest to deal with, but he'll need to solve the case first.

"From the clean streets of Circle City to the darkest corners of the human heart..."

<h2>SIZZLING HOT REVIEW FROM KIRKUS REVIEWS:</h2>*"In Bennington's [17] years on the Indianapolis police force, but he's never seen anything like this case. It's a two-year streak of unsolved homicides afflicting the Indiana capital. It leads to anything to link the cases together--except for the particularly brutal..."*

Propping him up are his father--a retired cop moonlighting as the station's janitor support group, or so they think. What they don't realize is that they're half of it. Stella remarks a cop; that's getting to be a problem, seeing as Rick is falling in it tough, Rick's dad is just as likely to remind him that his brother was a better detective...

Pops has a point; Rick is often willing to let good police work and common sense unprofessionalism makes it hard to strictly classify the book as a gumshoe novel. The appearance (and subsequent disappearance) of a young boy. Rick spots the pattern, having one lead, Rick decides to follow it, no matter where. Bennington's simple the clean streets of Circle City to the darkest corners of the human heart. The not want answered. A brutal, emotional thriller that earns its stripes." ~ Kirkus

<h2>MORE HOT REVIEWS:</h2>*"Jeff Bennington is an extremely talented author"*

"I really like Jeff's idea of scary. It suits me. Nothing is more frightening than..."

So feel free to make use of the special character codes for your digital books, but eventually Amazon *may* close that trick down, and whatever you do, don't use it for your print books as it definitely does not work for those ones.