

Make a Joomla Template in 5 Easy Steps

A Beginners Guide

By Gary Reid
<http://clubtvk.com>

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Published 2006 by Gary Reid
in the United Kingdom

<http://garyreid.co.uk>
Phone +44 (0)141 530 8654 • Email gary@garyreid.co.uk

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I'm Gary Reid, I run a few Internet based companies and they all use Joomla. <http://theventurekit.com> which provides free Joomla templates, <http://combtail.com> which provides web consultancy and design and <http://m.utiny.com> which provides blog hosting.

I'm no designer, but having locked my designers in a small darkened room I decided to go through the absolute easiest way to create a template for Joomla. It's not perfect and it's not neat and tidy, but it does the job. I had to lock them up to stop them leaning over my shoulder and saying 'actually you should do it like this'. Their way is good, but not so easy for us beginners to get a handle on.

You want it simple? Well, it doesn't get much simpler than this. I get a lot of emails through The Venture Kit asking about a 'how to' guide for templates so decided to sit down and write it.

I'm not going to expect you to know anything about design or html, in fact it's a prerequisite to be a complete beginner to use this book. If you are a design expert put it down now!

I think you will find it an enjoyable journey, we'll create three templates a single column, two column and three columns so you should have a good working knowledge of the Joomla template system when we are done.

My wife just pointed out 'what if someone writes 4 steps to make a template'. Hmm hadn't thought of that!

Anyway, enough of this introduction stuff, let's get onto the good stuff, let's get hacking.

Who's This For?

This guide is for absolute beginners, duffers, people like you and me who have no design training but need to get a design that looks good enough to unleash upon the world.

It's not about graphics, because trust me layout, clarity and usability are much more important.

So, you don't need to learn any graphics for this to work. If you have just installed Joomla, taken a look at the templates and thought 'nothing quite right for me here' then this book should help.

What You Will Need

Obviously you'll need Joomla installed on your website. This book has been based upon Joomla version 1.0.8. But the details will work well with any of the 1.0.x versions and unless the Joomla guys go mad should work on all future versions. You will also need a HTML editor, although we use DreamWeaver here I realise this costs a few hundred dollars so I got hold of PHP Designer 2006, it's free. So, if you don't already have a HTML editor go get your copy now.

Get hold of it from here <http://www.mpsoftware.dk/phpdesigner.php>. This piece of software is just a touch more reliable to use than say notepad.

Finally you will need FTP access to your Joomla install and an FTP program to upload/download files. You can grab hold of a free FTP program from here <http://www.coffeecup.com/free-ftp>

Preamble

Before we get into the actual work I want to point out to all W3C people that we are going to use tables for layouts not DIV's. The reason for this is that Joomla is XHTML Transitional anyway, in other words Joomla uses tables for modules, so we couldn't use strict. Plus it's just damn plain easier for us normal folk to use a table.

Important Stuff!

Throughout the book we'll be using bits of PHP code and HTML, you can try and just type it in straight from the book, but just cut and paste for the best results, I have put all of the code into appendices to make it easier. Other files can be grabbed from the <http://clubtvk.com> downloads section. You'll have access to this if you bought this e-book

Hopefully cutting and pasting the PHP bits from this e-book will cut down on mistakes that can happen when trying to type this stuff in.

Chapter 2: The Basics of a Joomla Template

Before we get into actually making the template it's probably worth getting an understanding of the template system Joomla uses.

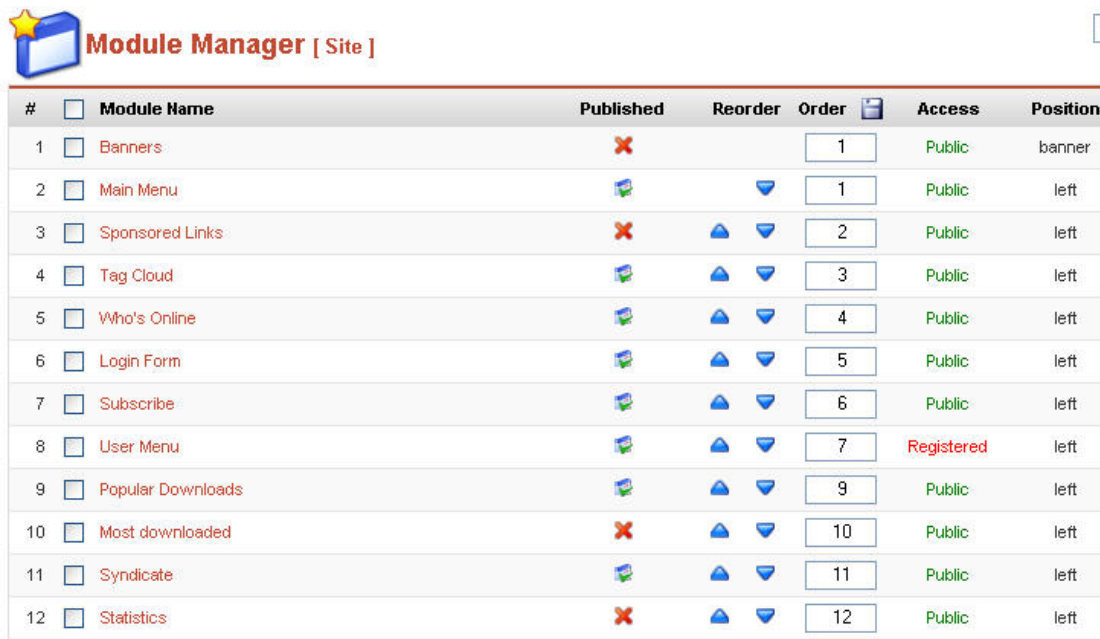
In fact it's quite simple, lets examine the `rhuk_solarflare_ii` template that is shipped as standard with Joomla.

If you FTP into your Joomla powered site you will see a folder called `'templates'` go into this folder and you will see another folder called `'rhuk_solarflare_ii'` inside this folder you will find the template files.

Let's take a look at each of the important files we will work with today.

The `index.php` file

This file is the wire frame of your template. It holds the information that allows Joomla to create the layout for your site. If you look in your Joomla administrator section under `'modules > site modules'` you will see each module has a position, as shown below.



The screenshot shows the Joomla Module Manager interface. At the top left is a star icon and the text "Module Manager [Site]". Below this is a table with the following columns: #, Module Name, Published, Reorder, Order, Access, and Position. The table lists 12 modules with their respective settings.

#	Module Name	Published	Reorder	Order	Access	Position
1	Banners	✘		1	Public	banner
2	Main Menu	✔	▼	1	Public	left
3	Sponsored Links	✘	▲ ▼	2	Public	left
4	Tag Cloud	✔	▲ ▼	3	Public	left
5	Who's Online	✔	▲ ▼	4	Public	left
6	Login Form	✔	▲ ▼	5	Public	left
7	Subscribe	✔	▲ ▼	6	Public	left
8	User Menu	✔	▲ ▼	7	Registered	left
9	Popular Downloads	✔	▲ ▼	9	Public	left
10	Most downloaded	✘	▲ ▼	10	Public	left
11	Syndicate	✔	▲ ▼	11	Public	left
12	Statistics	✘	▲ ▼	12	Public	left

Using `index.php` we set the positions that Joomla can use for modules and the main body text. We will do this using some PHP code, but I will be giving you all of the PHP code to cut and paste into this file, you don't really need to understand what it does other than act as a placeholder for your modules.

The templateDetails.xml file

This file is used by Joomla when installing the template from the administrator panel. It looks like this:

templateDetails.xml

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="iso-8859-1"?>
<mosinstall type="template" version="1.0.0">
  <name>rhuk_solarflare_ii</name>
  <creationDate>10/20/05</creationDate>
  <author>rhuk</author>
  <copyright>GNU/GPL</copyright>
  <authorEmail>rhuk@jamboworks</authorEmail>
  <authorUrl>http://www.jamboworks.com</authorUrl>
  <version>2.2</version>
  <description>SolarFlare II is a simple and stylish template. The clean
design of this template makes it very lightweight and fast. This is a
significatn upgrade for the original SolarFlare template in that is has a
completely revised layout that uses an alternate box model hack that makes
it easier to modify. Also a table has been introduced in the main content
area that better constricts layout causing less problems with 'problematic'
components. New headers and menu elements give this template a 'fresher'
look.</description>
  <files>
    <filename>index.php</filename>
    <filename>template_thumbnail.png</filename>
  </files>
  <images>
    <filename>images/advertisement.png</filename>
    <filename>images/arrow.png</filename>
    <filename>images/button_bg.png</filename>
    <filename>images/contenthead.png</filename>
    <filename>images/indent1.png</filename>
    <filename>images/indent2.png</filename>
    <filename>images/indent3.png</filename>
    <filename>images/indent4.png</filename>
    <filename>images/header_short.jpg</filename>
    <filename>images/menu_bg.png</filename>
    <filename>images/powered_by.png</filename>
    <filename>images/spacer.png</filename>
    <filename>images/subhead_bg.png</filename>
    <filename>images/title_back.png</filename>
  </images>
  <css>
    <filename>css/template_css.css</filename>
  </css>
</mosinstall>
```

It contains information about the actual template, it's name, author, version and the graphics files associated with the template.

If you take a look at Figure 3 below you can see how Joomla uses information in this file to tell you about the template.



The screenshot shows the Joomla! Template Manager interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for Default, Assign, Delete, Edit HTML, Edit CSS, New, and Help. Below this, the status 'Failed' is displayed. The main heading is 'Template Manager [Site]' with a 'Preview Template' checkbox checked. A table lists the following templates:

#	Name	Default	Assigned	Author	Version	Date	Author URL
1	js_SIFRSTAIN			JoomlaShack	1.0		http://www.joomlashack.com
2	blue_energy			Ivo Apostolov	1.0.x	04.01.2005	www.joomla-bg.com
3	gary			Gary Reid	1.3	29 12 2005	http://www.theventurekit.com
4	gary2			Gary Reid	1.0	29 12 2005	http://www.theventurekit.com
5	gary3			Gary Reid	1.0	29 12 2005	http://www.theventurekit.com
6	gary4			Gary Reid	1.0	29 12 2005	http://www.theventurekit.com

Figure 1 Template Details

Although we won't be using the administrator panel to install our templates I will detail how you can package your template so you can share it with friends later in the book.

The images folder

As the name suggests this folder contains all of the images used in your template. We will be using a couple of images and this is where we will be putting them. The vast majority of the images we will use are already in the standard template.

The css/template_css.css file

This is a cascading style sheet and is used to apply a theme to your template. It sets the font, colours and various other elements for the template. The reason a CSS file is used is to separate these factors from other parts of the documents layout. You don't need any CSS knowledge as I will step you through the basics you will need to understand the Joomla CSS file.

These are the only files we will be looking at today and with these we can build a really unique template easily. So, let's get started with step one.