

Introduction

PHP4 is the latest incarnation of PHP – the "PHP Hypertext Preprocessor". It's a programming language for building dynamic, interactive web sites, originally devised by Rasmus Lerdorf way back in 1994. Since then it's been through a great many changes, and has been adopted by web programmers all around the world. So what exactly is it?

In technical terms, PHP4 is a cross-platform, HTML-embedded, server-side web scripting language. Let's take a moment to define these terms:

- ❑ **Cross-platform**

You can run most PHP4 code, without alteration, on computers running many different operating systems. A PHP4 script that runs on Linux will generally run on Windows as well.

- ❑ **HTML-embedded**

PHP4 code is written in files containing a mixture of PHP instructions and HTML code.

- ❑ **Server-side**

The PHP4 programs we write are run on a server – specifically, a web server.

- ❑ **A web scripting language**

We run PHP4 programs via a web browser. We access the web server on which they reside, and this runs the program, sending any resulting output back to the browser.

This means that we're going to be writing programs that mix PHP4 code and HTML together, using the former to control and format the latter. We'll then need to put those programs onto a web server to run them. Finally, we're going to access them from a web browser, which displays the resulting HTML. This means our programs can be made available for other people to access across the Web, simply by placing them on a public web server.

You're probably already familiar with HTML – "HyperText Markup Language". This is the language used to write web pages, combining plain text and special tags that tell a browser how to treat that text. We use HTML to describe how different elements in a web page should be displayed, how pages should be linked, where to put images, and so on.