Web Page Design, Organization and Content Yahoo! Geocities (Part 2)

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Introduction

This is a follow-up of my previous paper on creating homepages for students using Yahoo! Geocities. The first part is on the design of the pages, the second part is how the site is organized and structured, and the third part is on creating content. The best way to learn about page design is by browsing the web and looking at badly designed pages, of which there is no shortage. The pages we are thinking about here are personal web pages, not commercial ones. Most web design guides are for commercial sites, but the same rules apply to personal sites. One thing to remember about Geocities PageBuilder is that the number of fonts and colors available are limited.

What is it about and who is it for?

The homepages the students make are about themselves, their community, school life and interests. It is for the student who is making it, the teacher, classmates and, of course, anyone who wants to visit the page.

Page layout and design

The most important thing to remember about layout and design is to

keep it simple and consistent. Each page should be able to stand on its own, with clear navigation and no dead end pages.

Background colors

There are two color pallets on the bottom right of the PageBuilder Tool Bar (Fig. 1). One is for fonts and the other is for background fields. The colors are limited but adequate. When choosing a color you should avoid bright colors. Nothing is harder on the eyes or more annoying than looking at a bright page. White is better than bright. Pastels are a good choice.
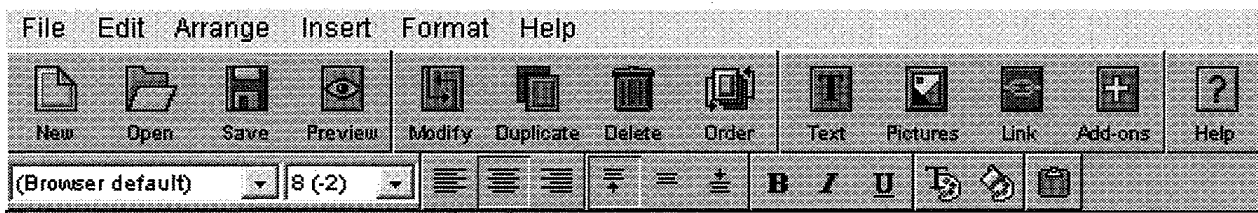

Fig. 1

Background and font colors can be changed using the color pallets. The small **T** with the color pallet is for text and the **paint can icon** is for background within the text frame (but not the text itself).

Also, Geocities has many backgrounds that you can choose from. Some of these are too busy and bright themselves. Again, backgrounds that are light pastels, or those that look like a faded picture work well. You don't have to use the same background for each page, but you don't want them clashing with each other, either.

By choosing the **Add-ons** button from the **Tool Bar** you get this pop-up window below (Fig. 2). When you select **Background** another window will appear (Fig. 3). You then click on any background and it will appear in the
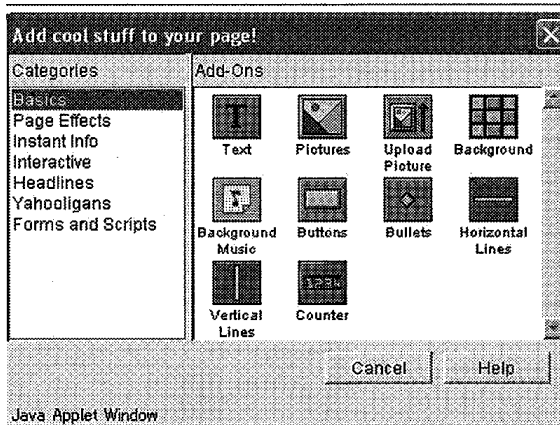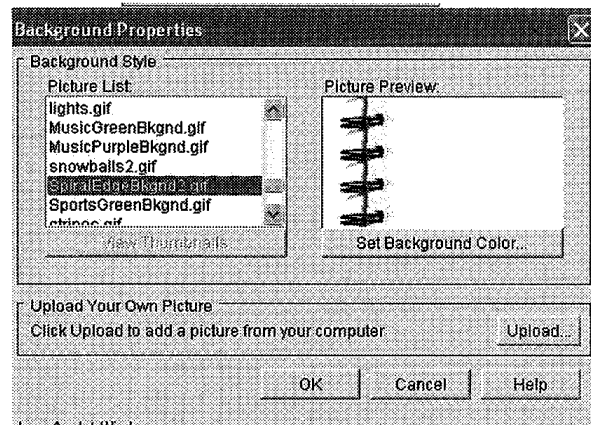
Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Picture Preview window. Once you find one you like, choose **Set Background Color**.

Font styles, sizes and colors

Geocities PageBuilder also has a limited number of fonts and font sizes, but what they provide is enough. When choosing a font, try to be consistent throughout.

As for font sizes, don't use anything less than 12 point for longer text passages. Point size 14 is easy to read. Think about your viewer. Below, Fig. 4 shows the color pallet for text, and Fig. 5 shows the type and sizes of fonts available.

Upper and lower case lettering

You should never use upper case letters in the body of the text because it is hard to read. If used at all, upper case can be used for headers or when you really need to get the viewers attention.
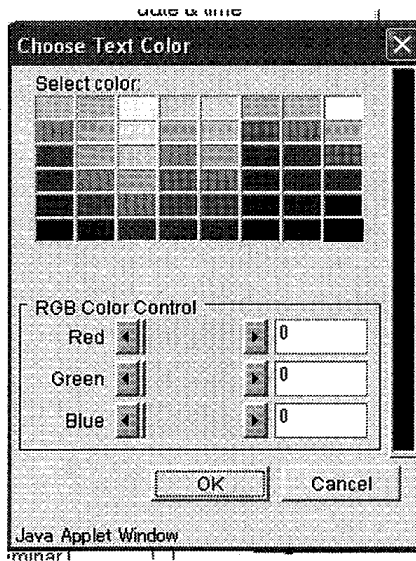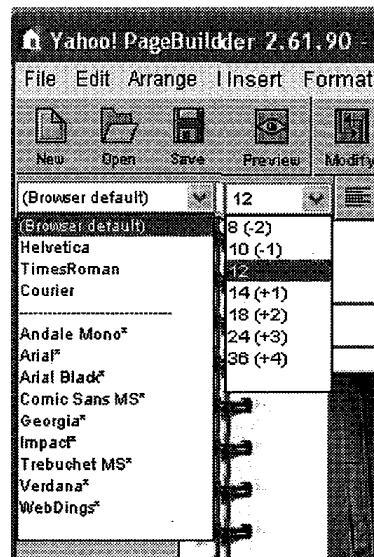
Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Bold, underlined, italics and colored text

Some bold text is hard to read when small, and should only be used with large font sizes. You should not use underlined text because it can be confused with links, which are automatically underlined. Therefore, you may want to use italics instead of underlining words. Choosing a color for the font is critical. The reader has to be able to see it over your background. The colors blue and red should be avoided if possible, because both of these colors are used for links (blue before you click on it, and red after).

Spacing of words, indentation of paragraphs and the use of white space

As long as you are using a font of 12 points or larger, you do not need to worry about spacing of words. However, if you use an italicized word within the text you might want to put an extra space before and after it so that it is clearly visible and doesn't lean into the next word.

Paragraphs for print are almost always indented. The web is not

print. Rather than indent paragraphs the usual way, aligning the text on the left and leaving one or two lines of white space between paragraphs breaks the space up nicely. I find this to be much easier on the eye and a good way to break up text on the screen. White space is important for both printed and online material, but its uses and purposes can be somewhat different.

Page length, width, and scrolling

The page should not be so wide that you have to scroll along the bottom to see all of it. PageBuilder is set up so that the width of the page is controlled. This is important because not everyone uses the same browser and screen sizes vary.

The length of the page is determined by how much information you have on it. The more you put on your page, the longer it will become. As a general rule, do not make excessively long pages. It is better to continue on another page if you have to.

Photos (JPEG graphics and GIF files), Clip Art and other files

Geocities provides a catalog of pictures, animation, clip art and add-ons that you can use. You can also upload pictures and files into Geocities, but you should try to keep those file sizes as small as possible. The free Geocities site only allows a certain number of megabytes to be viewed per hour with its free service. If you go over that limit your site will become inaccessible for an hour or so.

I once put a PDF file on my site and instructed students to open it. After a few of them did, the site stopped responding because it had exceeded its limit. After that experience I changed to adding links to large files instead of having them on the site itself. Audio files should also be avoided

because the file sizes are very large. All of these add ons can cause the page to load slowly or make the site inaccessible because of their size.

Basic Web Site Structures

Internal links for site navigation

Web sites are organized around three basic structures: sequences, hierarchies and webs (Fig. 6). These structures dictate how you navigate through websites, and each can lead to a different experience of the site.
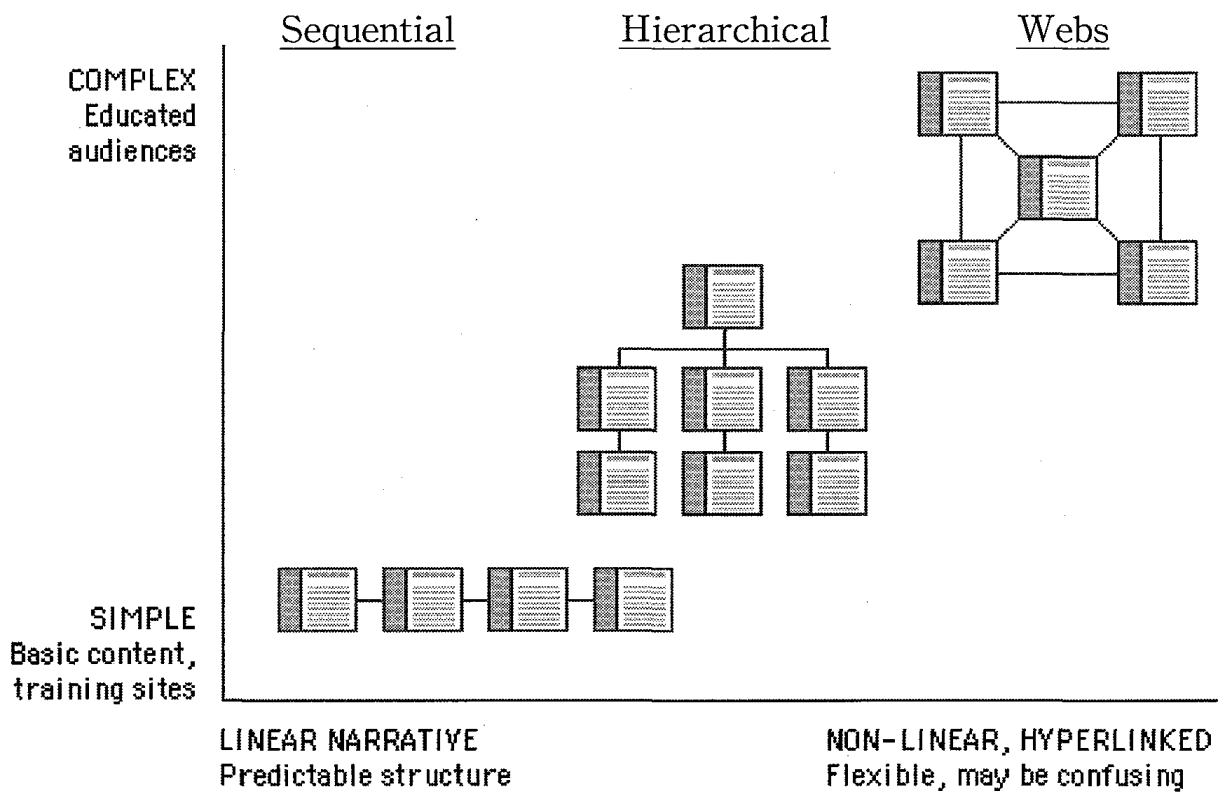

Fig. 6   (Source: The *Web Style Guide*)

Sequential

The simplest website structure is sequential. The first page goes to the second, followed by the third page, and so on. Each page has a back

link to the previous page and a link to the first page, but no other links. So if the number of pages continues to grow, the only way to get back to a page somewhere in the middle would be to click on link after link forward or link after link backward. For most people this is probably not the most efficient way to get things done.

Hierarchical

Hierarchies are structured with one index page (the first page you see) and give links to several other pages that in turn link to yet others. All pages would link back to the index page and to the beginning of other hierarchy categories. Generally, all of the secondary pages would be different topics that are expanded on in subsequent pages.

Those pages would link back to their topic only (and to the index page, of course). This style is often used for filling out information when signing up for a service, for example, or purchasing something online. It might also be used for a lesson or for something needing a step-by-step approach. This structure is best suited to material that needs to be well organized and analytical.

Webs

Webs are what they sound like. Each page is linked to every other page within and outside of the site. The *Web Style Guide* (http://www. webstyleguide.com/) says,

"Although the goal of this organization is to exploit the Web's power of linkage and association to the fullest, web-like structures can just as easily propagate confusion. Ironically, associative organizational schemes are often the most impractical structure for Web sites because

they are so hard for the user to understand and predict. Webs work best for small sites dominated by lists of links and for sites aimed at highly educated or experienced users looking for further education or enrichment and not for a basic understanding of a topic."

I both agree and disagree with the above statement. I feel that this structure is more open and free flowing, and although it might be a little confusing for the beginner, one way to avoid confusion in this structure is to keep the page layout consistent and the important information, such as links, in the same areas of every page.

My structural preference is a combination of all three. Each page is linked by a back link, a link to my main page, and links to all other pages within the site. My index page functions like the one in the hierarchal structure (Figs. 7 and 8). Users will only see it once. There is no way back to it except by using the back button on the browser. The reason I do this is so that I can monitor student activity on the site.

My main page (Fig. 9) then acts as my index page after entering the site, and from there on it follows the web structure. I have students set theirs up the same way. By using this structure anyone can go where they want, or they can follow it in a linear (sequential) fashion.

Website Content

The type of content students put on their site depends on the teacher and how much time they want students to spend developing their home-pages. I usually have students start with a personal profile (Fig. 10). Here they can write briefly about themselves, their interests, their hometowns, what they want to do in the future, and so on. Then they can expand on

those themes.

This can be an entry point for developing writing and doing online searches about their hobbies and putting the information on their site. They could also write about their hometown and add a link (an English site) to it if there is one. Work they are producing in other classes can also be put on their sites. There are a number of good resources for ideas for online searches and projects (see References for a list of books and the Appendix for a short list of websites).

Links to outside sites

Adding links to your page is a good way to add content that someone else has created. It is important to keep in mind who you are adding the links for. For Japanese students you want to link to sites that are made for a lower level of English ability, such as kids sites like Yahooligans. Sites for language learning are useful for both students and teachers (Figs. 11 and 12).

However, just as it is important to provide outside links, it is just as important to limit the number of those links. Putting up a long list of sites will only discourage the viewer. Check the sites out yourself and only make links to those that are truly useful and interesting for the people you want to attract to your site. It is important to check the outside links frequently. Some sites change the URL address, and some sites disappear altogether.
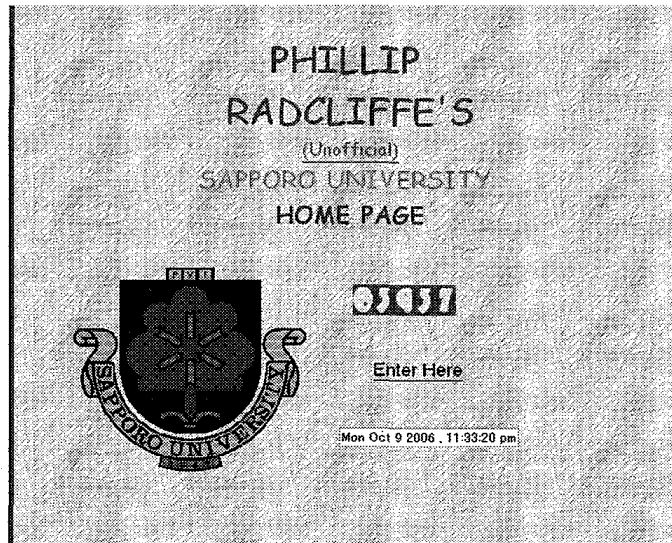
Index Page

Fig. 7

This is my index page, which is the first page you see before entering the site. I put a counter here to monitor student activity.
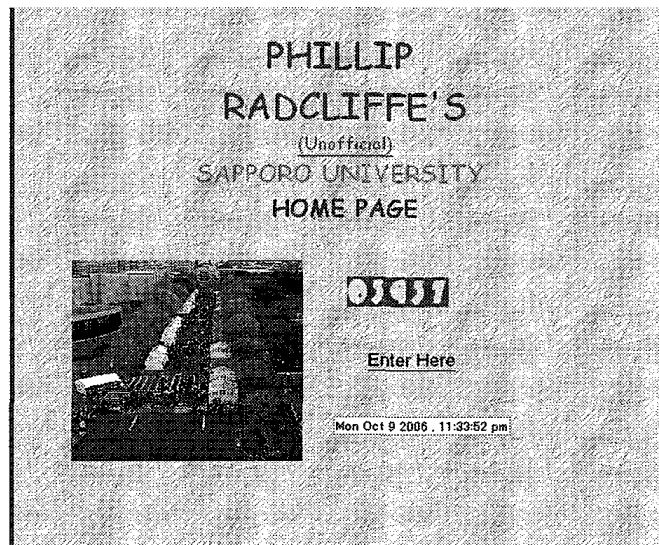

Fig. 8

I also added a mouse-over on the Sapporo University logo so that it changes to a photo of the school festival as seen from my office window.
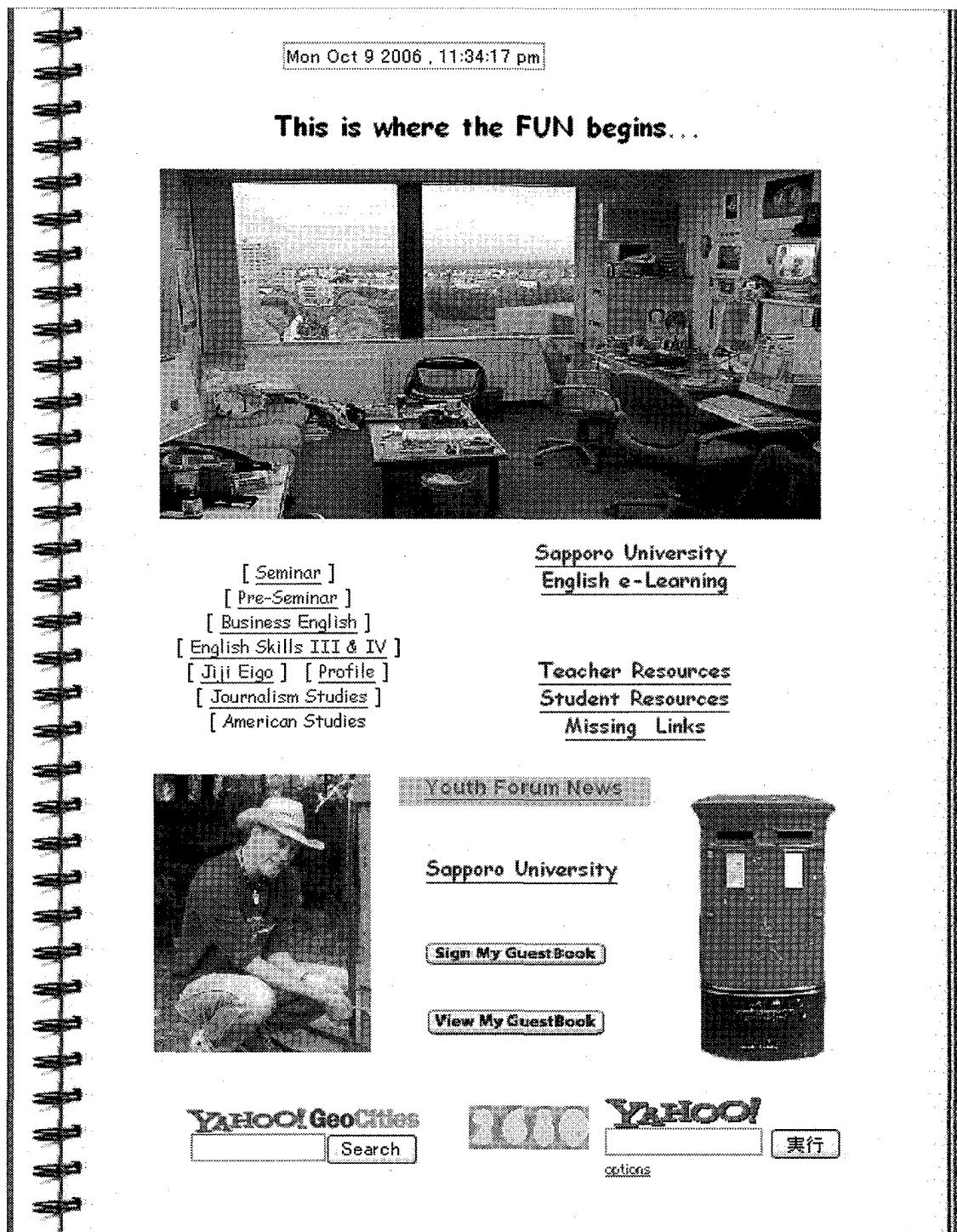
The Main Page

Fig. 9

This is my main page. All of the contents are shown here, plus a few outside links.

Personal Profile Page

Personal Profile

Home

PHILLIP DEAN RADCLIFFE

Home: Bloomington-Normal,Illinois, USA.

Date of Birth: December 3.

[Jiji Eigo]
[Seminar]
[Pre-Seminar]
[Business English]
[English Skills III & IV]
[American Studies]
[Journalism Studies

I grew up in Illinois, which is considered part of the heartland of the United States. I first came to Japan at the age of 17 as an exchange student. I lived in Asahikawa for one year and went to Kita High School. I also spent one year in Nagoya at Nanzan University on an exchange program when I was a student at Illinois State University.

My own profile page is too long to show here, so I have cut out some portions. I kept it long rather than break it up on separate pages. Since the viewer has to scroll down, I placed **Home** buttons at the top, in the middle and on the bottom of the page.

Home

The bars help to break up the page and organize the information so that it is easily understood visually. I have also placed a few links within the text itself rather than create another list of links.

Besides teaching the Seminar, I also teach:
Pre-Seminar, Jiji Eigo, English Skills III & IV, Business English,
Nyumon Enshu, American Studies, and Journalism Studies.

Home

[Home] [Seminar] [Journalism Studies] [English Skills III & IV]
[American Studies] [Jiji Eigo] [Student Resources]
[Teacher Resources] [Missing Links]
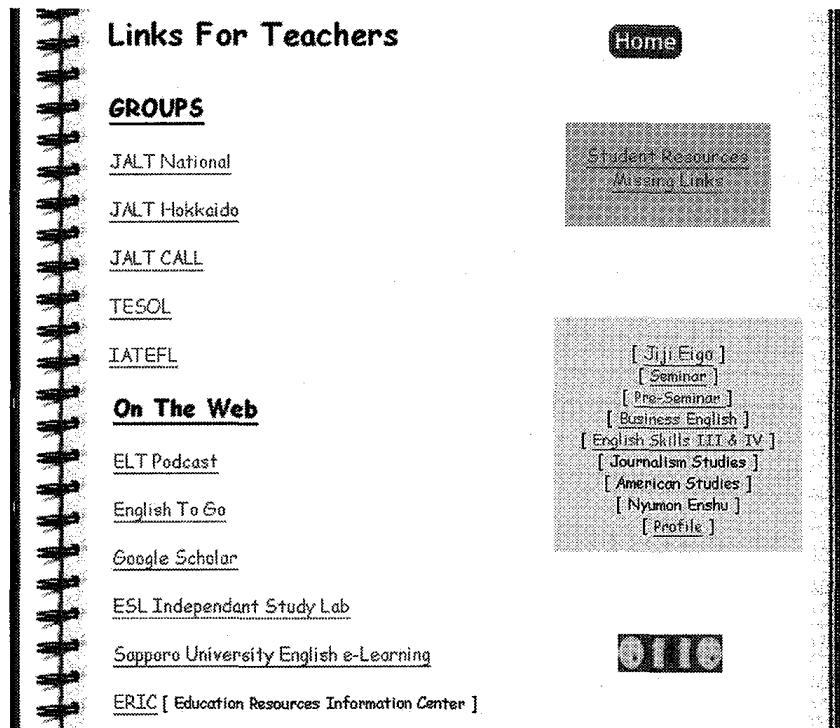
Fig. 10

Links For Teachers Page

Fig. 11

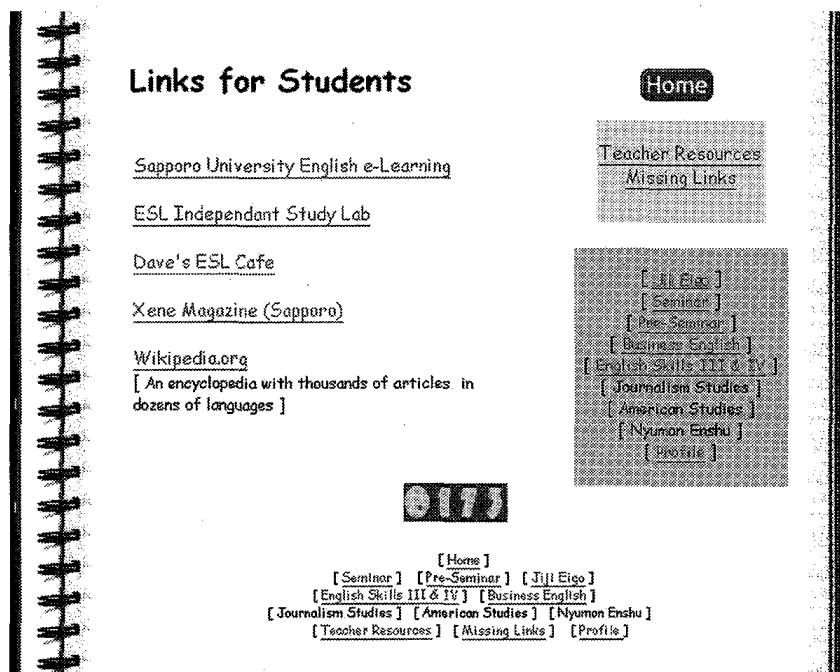## Links For Students Page

Fig. 12

The two pages above look almost the same. I made slight changes to them so that the viewer would notice they are different, but the basic layout and colors are consistent so anyone should be able to find the information they need easily. The internal and external links are clearly separated.

Summary

Web pages can be very fun for individuals to make, and they are very useful, maybe even indispensable in this day and age, especially for organizations and companies. Geocities PageBuilder makes it easy to create them by taking away the need to write any HTML yourself.

When making a website, it is important to make pages that look pleasant and that are accessible. But just making nice looking pages is not enough. The overall web site itself has to be easy to navigate, and above all, it must have some interesting and useful content. All of these things (the layout and design of the pages, the structure of the site, and the content of the site) need to be combined to create a successful home page, and this takes time and planning.

Home pages were all the rage not so long ago in the early days of the Internet. Now everyone seems to want to do the next new thing, such as make a blog and podcast. These newer applications can be integrated into any existing website. Yahoo! makes it easy to automatically add its own blog site into any Geocities site, and if you have a podcast site, it can be linked to a homepage.

References

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http://www.mla.org/

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Yahoo! Geocities
http://geocities.yahoo.com/

Appendix

Textbooks

Gitsaki, Christina and Taylor, Richard P. 1999. *Internet English.* Oxford

University Press

Sperling, Dave. 1999. *Dave Sperling's Internet Activity Workbook.* Prentice
Hall Regents

Content Resources for Websites

Activities for ESL Students

http://a4esl.org/

Dave's ESL Café

http://www.xtec.es/~dpermany/creditvirt/students/unit4/task2/
daveesl.htm

elllo

http://www.elllo.org/

English-to-go.com

http://www.english-to-go.com/

English Movie Trailers

http://www.english-trailers.com/index.php

ESL Blues

http://ww2.college-em.qc.ca/prof/epritchard/

ESL Independent Study Lab

http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/toppicks.html

ESL Listening Lab

http://www.esl-lab.com/

Manythings Quizzes

http://www.manythings.org/

Talking English

http://www.britishcouncil.org/klc-talking-english-edition-10

New York Times Learning

http://www.nytimes.com/learning/

Voice of America Special English

http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/

Yahoo! Geocities

http://geocities.yahoo.com/