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Using PHP with MySQL

PHP was invented in 1995 as *Personal Home Page/Forms Interpreter* or PHP/FI. Within two years it morphed into something very like its present form. We are free to interpret its acronymic name as we please, say, *Pretty good Hypertext Processor*.

An old maxim says it takes 600 hours to learn your first programming language, but just 100 to learn the next one. PHP is spectacularly quicker. People who have never programmed have been known to get PHP web pages up in a few hours. Experienced programmers have been known to get their first PHP web pages up in an hour or less.

This ultimately utilitarian scripting language has three main uses:

- *server-side scripting* requires the PHP parser, a web server and a web browser, is ideal for rapid generation of dynamic web pages, and is the focus of this chapter;
- *command-line scripting* requires only the PHP parser, and is ideal for scripts that run under Linux/Unix *cron* or the Windows Task Scheduler;
- *client-side GUI applications*, only with a very good knowledge of PHP and a GUI add-in tool like GTK.

The language is so flexible, a hobby industry of 'inappropriate' PHP uses has grown up; for example a Swedish programmer wrote a TCP/IP stack and web server in PHP. Such flexibility has its dark side: function call interfaces can be inconsistent, and language documentation can be incomplete. If that bothers you, get ready to be bothered.

PHP versions 4 and 5 support many RDBMSs including MySQL. Soon after PHP's first release, web developers discovered that generating HTML from PHP and database data is quick and efficient. The PHP-enabled server makes no demands on the client beyond ordinary HTML rendering. Nothing analogous to a Java engine or Javascript processor is required. Lightweight scripts running efficiently on a server and imposing no special demands on the client are a web developer’s dream. So from early 2000 to mid-2005, the number of Domains in the world using PHP grew from one million to 23 million. The curve has since flattened. At least two-thirds of the world's web servers run PHP. The combination of Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP (*LAMP*) has become a standard. So too has *WAMP*: Windows, Apache, MySQL and PHP. The ratio of active WAMP to *WISA* (Windows-IIS-SQL Server-ASP) servers now runs at about 3:2.

Whether a machine is running Linux/UNIX or Windows, if it is to serve up web pages containing embedded PHP scripts, the PHP interpreter must run inside the machine's web server. In this chapter we describe how to use PHP with MySQL under the Apache 2 web server in Linux and Windows, and under IIS in Windows.

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