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Using PHP with MySQL

PHP came into existence in 1995 as Personal Home Page/Forms Interpreter or PHP/FI, and within two years 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, and a hundred hours to learn another one. PHP is spectacularly quicker. People who have never programmed have been known to get PHP web pages up in a dozen hours, and programmers have been known to get their first PHP web pages up in an hour.

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 will be 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. A Swedish programmer recently wrote a TCP/IP stack and web server in PHP.

Versions 4 and 5 of PHP provide support for many databases, including MySQL. In its present form PHP is just a few years old, but soon after its first release, web developers discovered that embedding PHP in HTML provides both rapid development and efficient execution. The PHP-enabled server makes no demands on the client apart from ordinary HTML rendering. Nothing analogous to a Java engine or Javascript processor is required. Lightweight scripts running efficiently on a server, imposing no special demands on the client are a web developer’s dream, so between January 2000 and July 2004, the number of Domains in the world using PHP increased from one million to 17 million. Two-thirds of the world's web servers run PHP. The server combination of Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP has become a de facto standard, with its universally recognised acronym, *LAMP*. So too has *WAMP*: Windows, Apache, MySQL and PHP.

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 with the Apache 2 web server under Linux and Windows, and with IIS under Windows.