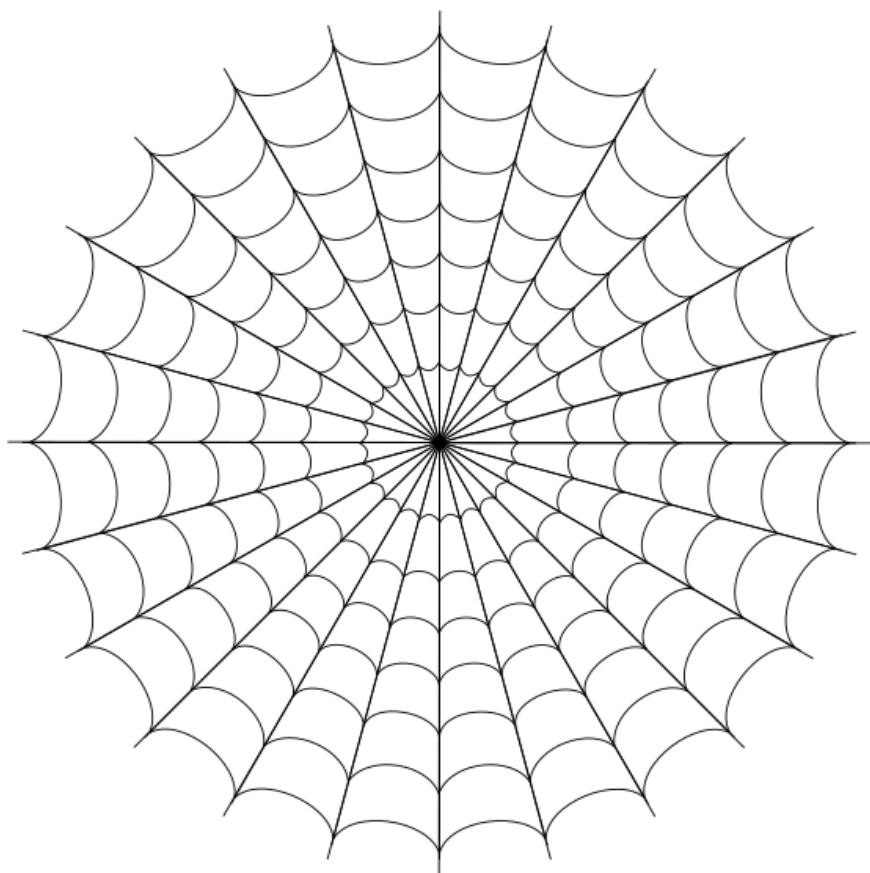


Webpage Jam 2026

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1 The Beginning

It's Webpage Jam 2026! Let's write a webpage like it's [1996](#) (§5). I'm going to just [go wild](#) (§17) and [hand](#) (§10) write some HTML. Of course, you're reading the printed zine version of this hyper-essay. For details about how the zine version was made, read the [colophon](#) (§22). What even is a [hypertext](#) (§2), anyway?

2 Hypertext

One part of a text can link to another. An incredible idea!
And yet, paradoxically, the following are both true.

1. Hypertext is centuries old.
2. Hypertext doesn't really exist yet.

There is a [really old book](#) (§9) that I like to read in the mornings. The edition I have is full of scholarly apparatus showing how the text refers to itself. Almost every line has some links to other lines. One edition of the book even has footnotes with little “programs” showing you how to transform some lines into the corresponding lines in other translations of the book.

And people have been reading this old book for [ages](#) (§11).

And yet, I don't think that we really know what hypertext even *is* yet. I don't have a sense of what makes a good or satisfying one. It is hard for me to come up with examples of [novel hypertexts](#) (§3). Sure, I like a well-organized book. It is nice when the footnotes and margin paragraphs compliment the text. I've even enjoyed a few [interactive fiction](#) (§12) games.

But, like, what was the promise of hypertext? I think in the [early days](#) (§5), people were really excited out the possibility of hypertext. It was a [crazy](#) (§13) idea that would revolutionize everything. Did it?

The contemporary internet just don't feel very hypertext-y. The hyper-textuality of the internet isn't its most salient feature. Unless I'm really being thoughtful, I tend browse or skim. A lot of my default internet behaviour feels like the computerized analogue of pulling picture albums off the shelf and flipping through them.

It just so happens that there are a *tonne* of albums and the shelf is huge.

3 Kobo

A couple years ago, I got a Kobo. It felt really comfortable to use. I was astounded by how it changed my reading. I could look up words instantly. No need to thumb through a dictionary. I looked up everything! It was wild. I was really browsing a hypertext that was comfortable to use.

I'm pretty used to most of the technology in my life. When I got an e-reader, I was like: "Holy cramole! Who would I be if I had access to one of these earlier?" It was revolutionary for me.

[↑ \(§1\)](#)

4 Poetry

Poetry is neat. It's like the cheapest possible art form. You take the raw materials of language and go with it.

Want to be a poet? Just start saying cool stuff.

You don't even need to write it down.

Speak more beautifully.

I admire the conciseness of poetry. The way that it can subvert the machinery of language. My only complaint about poetry is that I only enjoy a few of poems. It takes a lot of reading boring, tedious, or irritating poetry to find the good poems. Here are some poems that I like a lot.

- The Mysterious Naked Man by Alden Nowlan
- Eunoia by Christian Bök
- Problems worthy of attack ... by Piet Hein
- Pangur Bán

The [enabling constraints](#) (§17) for this *hyper-essay* don't allow me to link you sources for these. Sorry. They're all online somewhere. Enjoy!

5 1996

What do I mean, "write a webpage like it's 1996?" I have no idea. I wasn't online back then; I was too busy building Lego. There is a lot of [nostalgic](#) (§6) ranting about Ye Olde Internet. Ignore all that nonsense!

I guess what I mean is that I'm just pounding out angle brackets. Writing straight in the editor. There are no CMS / [SSG](#) (§16) acronyms here. It's just a long file. All these tags are made by hand.

My memory of computers and the internet really starts around 2000. I can remember making websites on Tripod. Hand closing (or not!) all my tags.

A few years ago, sometime before the Pandemic, I was hanging out with a couple. I said that I never learned CSS. One of the friends said: "Why not?" Well, of course, [CSS didn't exist](#) (§8) back when I started out. We did all our styling by hand.

6 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a funny thing, ya dig? I used to be really nostalgic for Peterborough, the town that I moved to when I first moved out. It felt so cool. Full of interesting hippies. We used to go to Food Not Bombs, a sort of anarchist soup kitchen that occupied city hall. I met a crazy occultist in line there one time. We moved in together and learned about Buddhism. He wanted to be a ninja and stopped paying his credit card bills because of some half-baked ideas about the legal system.

And much later, when I had moved on in life, I really wanted to move back to that city. I even applied for some serious jobs there. I thought hard about changing my life's direction just to get back to Peterborough.

And then, on [reflection](#) (§17), I realized that I didn't want to move back there. Rather, I wanted to be [twenty](#) (§11) again. The city itself didn't matter much; the thing I wanted back was my lifestyle there. The freedom and excitement of not living with my parents, the thrill of becoming an adult.

When I read people ranting about how simple the internet used to be back in [1996](#) (§5), I think they just want to be [young](#) (§11) and naïve again. It's a hell of a lot of fun.

7 Weave

I adore the play of words between text and textile. When Knuth introduced literate programming, he named the operation to produce a document “weave.” To produce a program one uses “tangle.” One weaves words and tangles programs; I think this says something deep.

A lot of metaphors in computing become richer when you practice their real world referents. You can learn something about weaving webpages by weaving fabric. The same is true about [gardening](#) (§15) in nature and maintaining a digital garden.

8 CSS

A quick Google reveals that CSS did exist in 2000. It was originally published as CSS1 in December [1996](#) (§5). I stand corrected; CSS existed when I was [sucking my thumb](#) (§6) and playing with Lego.

9 Bible

I like to read The Bible. This makes me something of a weirdo in popular North American culture. It definitely sets off alarm bells in some people. I can imagine a reader getting turned off this [hypertext](#) (§2) because it mentions The Bible. Sorry if mentioning the Bible is a huge turn off.

The Bible, putting aside all questions of religion, is just a really interesting book. It's The Book of Books. It is part of the foundation of Western literature. So much thinking about law, morals, and human relationships has been shaped by this book. Even writing “The Book of Books” is riffing off a Hebrew-language trope that's become naturalized in English.

It is a compendium of [poetry](#) (§4), law, [history](#) (§11), and wild speculation.

10 Hand

During the first weekend of the Jam, I had terrible pain in my right thumb. It had been getting worse and worse for weeks. Everything around the base of the thumb, where it connects to the wrist, felt like it was on fire.

I'm getting to the [age](#) (§11) where I need to visit the physiotherapist more pro-actively. I let it go too long. It turns out that my right hand is pretty bungled from overuse. Too much hand [writing](#) (§19). Too much typing.

The physiotherapist said that I should stop typing entirely for a while. That I could make do with voice dictation software. Oh gosh. That would be a total nightmare. I can't imagine piloting my computer by voice, or the learning curve required to do so.

Certainly, someone somewhere does it. There is a voice-only hacker who would hack circles around me. I'm not that person, yet.

11 Age

Age is a subtle thing. The older I get, the stranger the whole concept of age seems. I think that academics, like me, sort of freeze their development when they go to ~~the mad house~~ university. I certainly didn't really understand anything about adults until I became one.

It only occurred to me recently that I'm currently the age that my stepfather was when I moved out. That is to say, I'm now 37 and he was $37 = 20 + 17$ when I left home. I think about this fact a lot.

What was it like for him to have a 17 year old? I had my kids a decade later than him, so I feel much older than my kids. He was an empty nester at forty. I'll have a five year old and an eight year old. Age is wild.

[↑](#) (§1)

12 Interactive Fiction

Here is a weird in-person “game” that you can play. I've played this half a dozen times and enjoyed it every time. It's a very loose free-form sort of story telling game, riffing off the idea of interactive fiction. Get a big stack of index cards, two pens, and a friend.

In this game, you and your partner will be “interactive fiction engines” for each other. A move in the game consists of getting a blank card, writing out a short two or three sentence scene for your partner, and [handing](#) (§10) it to them. Your partner writes their next action at the bottom of the card and hands it back to you. You respond by writing a fresh card for them.

You and your partner can be in the same “world.” Or you can do totally different things for each other. Maybe one person is exploring a space station and the other is exploring a desert.

13 Ted Nelson

Ted Nelson might have gone crazy by thinking about the possibilities of hypertext too much. Then again, he might have been crazy to begin with and just happened to think about hypertext. It was in the air along with a lot of LSD.

[↑](#) (§1)

14 Outside

On the second day of working on this project for the Jam, I took my laptop outside at night and wrote on the porch. As I write these words for you, it is summer-evening-cool here in Canada.

A few neighbours are coming back from their evening dog walks. The sky is overcast and I can't see any stars. Insects are buzzing. Air conditioning units are humming.

It is so hard to convey the coziness of it through words. A [poet](#) (§4) could do it better than me, I suppose. So, I will set this as an exercise for the reader: If you haven't spent an evening outside lately, enjoying the calm, then I encourage you to do so. It might feel like this and warm your heart.

15 Garden

I love growing plants. They're simultaneously so familiar and so foreign. They don't really work the same way as us fauna. Imagine that a friend walks up to and says,

Hey! In this little baggy, I have some microscopic robot dots. You toss them just about anywhere and they'll start their auto-replication program. They build out a solar cell array and various water storage and purification systems for their own use. In a few months, with any luck, the robo-dots will begin producing human edible food. If we just leave them to their thing, they'll expand out and produce more micro-factories next year.

What a crazy way to think about pumpkin seeds!

[↑ \(§1\)](#)

16 Static Site Generators

I was strongly tempted to write a static site generator (SSG) for the webpage jam. A recurring fantasy of mine is to write the ideal SSG for myself. But it always feels too much like “fooling with tooling.”

Initially, before the Jam, I played with an [interactive fiction \(§12\)](#) engine, Twine, as a possible tool to *learn* during the Jam. It has various weirdnesses that turned me off of it. For example, you need to work with a graphic user interface. There is no text-only way to build a game in it. Or, more shockingly, it seems to have at least three mutually incompatible scripting languages. They all have weird names and one needs to look around for more information to figure out the differences. The default one supports syntax highlighting and seems quite futzy. One comment online describe it as a “field of rakes.”

Anyway, for this Jam, I decided to just go all-in on [pure hand-written HTML \(§17\)](#).

I'm curious about the pre-history of SSGs. It seems like everyone these days takes a stab at writing one in their favourite scripting language. Have SSGs always been around? All the text processing tools were just sitting there, on the table, at the dawn of the Linux epoch. I certainly hadn't heard of them before, say, 2010.

17 Reflection

Okay. Okay. Maybe, I am not going to go totally wild here. After throwing down a couple thousand words in this document, I think it is time for some reflection.

A couple “enabling constraints” have emerged while writing this *thing*.

First off, I'm [hand](#) (§10) crafting it. These are all locally sourced organic non-GMO free-range HTML tags. I am trying to do this [old school](#) (§5).

Next, I'm doing this off the top of my head. It is just what comes to mind. Stream on consciousness. I am [deliberately avoiding](#) (§18) looking stuff up. No extensive quotes from elsewhere. As I'm not linking to other things, this document is a bit self-obsessed. That's okay! It can stare at its own [navel](#) (§17).

On reflection, I realize that this is my first attempt at writing a *hyper-essay*. It is a [hypertext](#) (§2) that I'm enjoying crafting and which I hope that you enjoy reading. It swirls around writing, computers, the internet, and my own life.

18 Ensnarled in Snakes

Sometimes, when I'm [weaving](#) (§7) my website, I get bogged down by looking stuff up. “Oh, I want to toss in a link to such-and-such.” Click. Click. Clack. Three hours have gone by and I'm watching a cat ride a Roomba. Or, alternatively, if I try to drop in an image I find myself struggling with Gimp and ImageMagick like some kind of digital Laocoön.

19 Writing

I love writing. It's endlessly fascinating to me. I am a textual person at heart. When I was about nine years old, I started writing a journal. And now, decades later, I'm still writing it. Some of my finest hours have been spent sitting [alone](#) (§24), with a pen in [hand](#) (§10), scribbling away. Most of my work life is spent on the [command line](#) (§21).

The writing that I do is rather plain. I like to write straightforward things. What was for breakfast? How do I teach math? I like to document things, write them down, keep the pen moving.

There is something magical about capturing language in writing. Sure, there is more magic in [whispering](#) (§4) at night, and yet more magic in singing, but a text is more durable. A piece of writing has solidity. Concreteness. Writing turns thoughts in to objects. You can put your ideas out there. You can send them to people. You can look at the thoughts, polish them, revise them, amplify them.

Sometimes, my hyper-fixation on writing is a nuisance. Nothing ever comes out ~~w~~rite right the first time. Sometimes, [in conversation](#) (§23), I really wish that I could write what I want to say down first.

I don't really like watching things. I would much rather read them.

20 Silence

Quakers make a big deal out of silence. We sometimes even capitalize it and make a sort of mystery out of it. *Silence*.

I enjoy stillness and silence very much. I like to wake up before my wife and kids and enjoy the pre-dawn silence. To calmly sit, sip a cup of coffee, [read](#) (§9), and clear my mind. It's so refreshing to be [mute](#) (§23) in a silent world. To go beyond all speaking, all words, and just be quiet.

[Writing](#) (§19) is silent language. No one will ever read the words I'm writing right now out loud. (Sure. *You* could, if you wanted to be a punk.) I'm sitting in the stillness of my office, plunking away at the keys, silently composing this text. And yet, the message gets across. You and I have connected, through language, somehow.

Part of this fascination with silence is the fact that I like to be [alone](#) (§24).

21 Command Line

Of course, I love the command line. I [write](#) (§19) to it, and it writes back to me.

```
$ magic
```

The command line leverages our human capacity for language. The neural miracle that lets us combine words to form phrases allows us to pilot our computers combinatorially. It is a deeply humane way of computing.

It also allows for the most remarkable combinations of things. Whenever I come up with some clever command line hack, I feel a bit like a wizard. “Wow! I can't believe that that spell actually worked!”

22 Colophon

This little zine version of the Webpage Jam 2026 Hyper-Essay was produced by running the old school HTML through **pandoc** and formatting it in to a zine. Kenneth John Odle produces a little zine about Linux called The Codex. Ages ago, I stole his L^AT_EX template to produce a zine about string figures. A quick run through **pdfbook2** produces the doubled up zine format for printing.

```
pdfbook2 --paper=letterpaper jam-2026-zine.pdf
```

The fancy handling of section hyperlinks in the print version is achieved using the following wizardry. This prints the little section § mark after a link, for example: [hypertext](#) (§2).

```
\usepackage{hyperref}
```

```
\let\oldhypertarget\hypertarget
\renewcommand{\hypertarget}[2]{%
  \oldhypertarget{#1}{#2}%
  \label{ht:#1}%
}
```

```
%% Section Numbers in Links
```

```
\let\oldhyperlink\hyperlink
\renewcommand{\hyperlink}[2]{%
  \oldhyperlink{#1}{#2}~{\tiny (\S \ref{ht:#1})}%
}
```

23 Muteism

After the Pandemic, I had a weird side effect that I haven't seen anyone else write about. Essentially, a few years of Zoom meetings messed up my ability to talk normally. I couldn't really participate in real time conversations. It took me a long time to re-learn how to speak normally.

I think the source of this muteism was that speaking on Zoom required a conscious choice. You had to intentionally un-mute yourself, say the thing, and re-mute yourself. As the Pandemic wore on, my threshold for un-muting myself rose higher and higher. Until, eventually, I got to a point where there was never a good reason to un-mute. What is worth saying, *really*? What is better than [silence](#) (§20)?

Through Zoom, I got very comfortable expressing myself in writing via the chat. It seemed like there was never anything so important, or urgent, that I would need to say it out loud.

After the Pandemic, I had a few times meeting with friends where I would say almost nothing. “Hey. Good to see you.” And they'd just talk on and on about their lives. It was a nice way to be; so quiet, just nodding along, and saying “Wow.”

I intentionally worked on speaking more and have mostly recovered.

24 Alone

There is a collection of short films about the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould. In one of the films, he is shown pacing around his hotel room extemporizing on the amount of time that one needs to spend alone after being with other people.

Should one spend one hour alone for every hour with others?
Or two hours alone? How much is enough? Perhaps, one needs
a hundred hours alone?

I can't remember the exact lines, of course, but I think about this scene a lot. I don't try to calculate out these ratios but I certainly need time by myself. To be [silent](#) (§20), to [write](#) (§19), to be.

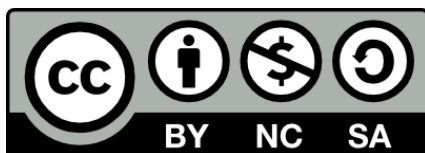
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You can find this zine online here:
<https://ctrl-c.club/~pgadey/jam-2026/>



It's a zine. You know what to do.
Be chill and enjoy the the hypertet.