

**Become an expert**

Learn more about where your career can take you



# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators  
Winter 2016



**Help your business value  
documentation**

**Give feedback in the  
classroom and in practice**

**Discover  
nanotechnology**

**Find out about Doc-to-Help  
improvements**

# jQuery plugins for enhancing web content

Scott DeLoach shares his five favourite jQuery scripts for enhancing web content.

jQuery is the most popular JavaScript framework, and it's used by 65% of the top 10 million websites. JavaScript frameworks focus on making it easier to reuse and customize code snippets, which they call "plugins". There are thousands of jQuery plugins, and most of them are free. In this article, I will focus on my five favourite jQuery plugins:

- Annotator
- FlowType
- FocusPoint
- HeatColor (with TableSorter)
- Prism.

## Linking to a jQuery CDN

Before you can use a jQuery plugin, you will need to either download the jQuery library script or load it from a Content Delivery Network (CDN). A CDN is easier to use and it's usually faster, but your users will need access to the web if you want to use a CDN. Many content authoring applications, such as MadCap Flare, already include jQuery with their outputs. If your authoring application already includes jQuery, you don't need to add it. If not, you just need to add a link to the local or CDN-hosted file. To download jQuery, see <https://jquery.com/download>. To link to jQuery on Google's CDN, add the following to your web page:

```
<script src="https://ajax.googleapis.com/ajax/libs/jquery/3.1.0/jquery.min.js"></script>
```

You should check the CDN periodically to see if there is a new version.

## Annotator

Annotator enables visitors to add editable comments to local or server-based html files, PDFs, EPUBs, and videos using a free Annotator account. It is an incredibly useful tool for content reviews, and it's also used by several universities including Harvard, MIT and Stanford in their open-library initiatives. I have used it with several clients, and it has always worked extremely well. Annotator was developed by Nick Stenning, a developer based in Berlin, and it is maintained by a team of web developers.

### To use Annotator:

1. Link to the jQuery CDN (see "Linking to a jQuery CDN").
2. Visit <http://annotatorjs.org> and download the Annotator CSS and JS files.
3. Link to the Annotator stylesheet:
 

```
<link href="annotator.min.css" rel="stylesheet" />
```

4. Link to the Annotator JavaScript file:

```
<script src="annotator-full.min.js"></script>
```

5. Use jQuery to call the Annotator script:

```
<script>$('body').annotator()
.annotator('setupPlugins');</script>
```

## FlowType

Typography guides such as *Elements of Typographical Style* recommend 45–75 characters per line to maximize readability. Responsive web design also recommends 45–75 characters per line. However, it is very difficult to meet that goal when designing for wide computer screens and small mobile phone screens at the same time. FlowType dynamically adjusts the font-size based on the screen width to ensure the ideal number of characters per line. You can even adjust the font size range and max/min screen width to consider when adjusting the font size. FlowType was developed by Simple Focus, a UI design team based in Memphis.

### To use FlowType:

1. Link to the jQuery CDN (see "Linking to a jQuery CDN").
2. Visit <http://simplefocus.com/flowtype> and download the FlowType JS file.
3. Link to the FlowType JavaScript file:
 

```
<script src="flowtype.jquery.js"></script>
```
4. Add the base FlowType style declarations to your stylesheet as provided on the Flow Type website.
5. Use jQuery to call the Flow Type script:
 

```
<script>$('body').flowtype();</script>
```

## FocusPoint

There are many jQuery plugins that can responsively resize images as the screen width increases or decreases. The problem is that the entire image is resized/cropped, which often means that the most important part of the image (the "focal point") is no longer emphasized or, even worse, is no longer even visible. FocusPoint responsively crops images to make sure the focal point is always visible and positioned to draw the user's attention. You can either identify the focal point yourself, or you can use a tool on the FocusPoint website to identify your image's focal point. FocusPoint was created by Jono Menz, a web developer based in Canada.

### To use FocusPoint:

1. Link to the jQuery CDN (see "Linking to a jQuery CDN").

2. Visit <https://github.com/jonom/jquery-focuspoint> and download the FocusPoint CSS and JS files.
3. Link to the FocusPoint stylesheet:
 

```
<link href="focuspoint.css"
      rel="stylesheet" />
```
4. Link to the FocusPoint JavaScript file:
 

```
<script src="focuspoint.js"></script>
```
5. Use the helper tool at the FocusPoint website to identify your image's focal point.
6. Copy the data attributes from the helper tool.
7. Wrap your image in a div and include the data attributes:
 

```
<div class="focuspoint" data-focus-x="0.331" data-focus-y="-0.224" data-image-w="400" data-image-h="300">
      
      </div>
```
8. Use jQuery to call the Focus Point script:
 

```
$('.focuspoint').focusPoint();
```

### HeatColor and TableSorter

HeatColor can be used to automatically colour-code numeric data in tables, and TableSorter enables users to sort tables by their column headings. Together, HeatColor and TableSorter can be used to provide sortable, dynamically colour-coded tabular data. For example, a table comparing multiple hardware devices, such as printers, could be sorted by any column and automatically colour-coded based on the data values. HeatColor and TableSorter both support very old browsers, and they've both been used by numerous websites for some nine years. HeatColor was created by Josh Nathanson, a web app developer based in San Francisco. TableSorter was created by Christian Bach, a frontend developer based in Stockholm.

#### To use HeatColor with TableSorter:

1. Link to the jQuery CDN (see "Linking to a jQuery CDN").
  2. Visit <http://www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/heatcolor> and download the HeatColor JS file.
  3. Visit <http://www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/tablesorter/jquery.tablesorter.pack.js> and download the TableSorter JS file.
  4. Link to the HeatColor JavaScript file:
 

```
<script
      src="jquery.heatcolor.0.0.1.js"></script>
```
  5. Link to the TableSorter JavaScript file:
 

```
<script
      src="jquery.tablesorter.pack.js"></script>
```
  6. Add an ID or class to the table you want to sort: `<table id="example">`
  7. Add the sample code at the following website to the bottom of your file: <http://www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/heatcolor/index.cfm>
- Tip: TableSorter has additional features, as documented at <http://tablesorter.com/docs>.

Once you have TableSorter working with HeatColor, you can enhance and customize it as needed.

### Prism

Prism automatically formats code samples. It is used by major websites such as [sitepoint.com](http://sitepoint.com) and by Brendan Eich, the creator of JavaScript. Prism currently supports over 115 programming languages, and it is customizable with themes and extensions. The [prismjs.com](http://prismjs.com) website provides examples, instructions, and a customized downloader to help you get everything set up as easily as possible. It is extremely well presented and explained, which is unusual for jQuery plugins. Prism was created by Lea Verou, a research assistant at MIT and a CSS expert.

#### To use Prism:

1. Link to the jQuery CDN (see "Linking to a jQuery CDN").
2. Visit [prismjs.com](http://prismjs.com) and download the Prism CSS and JS files.
3. Link to the Prism stylesheet:
 

```
<link href="prism.css"
      rel="stylesheet" />
```
4. Link to the Prism JavaScript file:
 

```
<script src="prism.js"></script>
```
5. Wrap your code samples in `<pre>` and `<code>` tags:
 

```
<pre><code class="language-css">
      p { color: red; }
      </code></pre>
```

Tip: Code samples are normally enclosed inside a `<pre>` tag, but Prism also requires a `<code>` tag inside the `<pre>` tag as specified in the HTML5 recommendation. If you are adding Prism to existing code samples, you may need to add the `<code>` tag. I use a search-replace tool (Search-and-Replace by Funduc Software), and it is normally relatively quick and easy to add to my files.

### Examples

I have added examples of each plugin to my website. To download the examples, see [www.clickstart.net](http://www.clickstart.net). 



**Scott DeLoach** is the Founder and CEO of ClickStart. He has 25 years' experience as a UA/UX architect and provides Flare, Doc-to-Help, JavaScript, HTML, and CSS consulting and

training for government agencies and companies around the world.

E: [scott@clickstart.net](mailto:scott@clickstart.net)

W: [www.clickstart.net](http://www.clickstart.net)

LI: [www.linkedin.com/in/scottdeLoach](http://www.linkedin.com/in/scottdeLoach)

## References

Annotator - a jQuery plugin for adding comments to web pages  
<http://annotatorjs.org> (accessed 15 September 2016)

Elements of Typographical Style Applied to the Web - *Elements of Typographical Style* adapted for web content  
<http://webtypography.net/2.1.2>  
 (accessed 15 September 2016)

FlowType - a jQuery plugin for adjusting the font size based on the screen width  
<http://simplefocus.com/flowtype>  
 (accessed 15 September 2016)

FocusPoint - a jQuery plugin for automatically cropping images  
<https://github.com/jonom/jquery-focuspoint>  
 (accessed 15 September 2016)

Franz L (2014) 'Size Matters: Balancing Line Length And Font Size In Responsive Web Design' *Smashing Magazine* - article discussing best practices for line length  
[www.smashingmagazine.com/2014/09/balancing-line-length-font-size-responsive-web-design](http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2014/09/balancing-line-length-font-size-responsive-web-design)  
 (accessed 15 September 2016)

Google's jQuery CDN - a hosting site for jQuery  
<https://jquery.com/download>

HeatColor - a jQuery plugin for automatically color-coding tabular data  
[www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/heatcolor](http://www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/heatcolor)  
 (accessed 15 September 2016)

jQuery - JavaScript framework library  
<https://jquery.com/download>

Prism - a jQuery plugin for formatting code samples  
[www.prismjs.com](http://www.prismjs.com)  
 (accessed 15 September 2016)

TableSorter - a jQuery plugin for sorting table columns when clicked  
[www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/tablesorter/jquery.tablesorter.pack.js](http://www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/tablesorter/jquery.tablesorter.pack.js) (accessed 15 September 2016)  
[www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/heatcolor/index.cfm](http://www.jnathanson.com/blog/client/jquery/heatcolor/index.cfm) (accessed 15 September 2016)

TableSorter documentation  
<http://tablesorter.com/docs>

### Further reading

Espirian J (2014) 'Enhancing web output with jQuery' *Communicator*, Spring 2014: 44-46



Choosing a training course is not easy.

ISTC accredited training courses have been reviewed by experienced technical communicators and display the Accredited Training Course logo.



For a list of currently accredited courses, see the ISTC website

Course providers can contact [education@istc.org.uk](mailto:education@istc.org.uk) for more details of the accreditation process





# See what else we offer...

If you enjoyed this article, visit our website to see what else we do.

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators is the largest UK body representing information development professionals, serving both our members and the wider technical communication community.

## What the ISTC offers



### Professional development and recognition

Resources and opportunities to develop and diversify skills, stay up to date with trends and technologies, and get recognition for achievements.

Our CPD (Continuous Professional Development) framework enables you to provide evidence of your learning in all its forms, and our Awards programme gives you the opportunity to showcase excellent work.

## Communicator



### Communicator professional journal

*Communicator* is the ISTC's award-winning quarterly professional journal, covering the breadth of technical communications, offering in-depth articles, case studies, book and product reviews.

Now you've read a sample article, would you like to see more? The journal is free to our members and is also available on subscription.



### ISTC Community

The ISTC offers opportunities to network, exchange expertise, and stay in touch with the UK technical communication industry – through a range of online groups, local events, and InfoPlus+ (our monthly newsletter).

Find us on LinkedIn, Eventbrite and YouTube.



### Technical Communication UK

The ISTC hosts Technical Communication UK, the annual conference that aims to meet the needs of technical communicators, their managers and clients, from every corner of the industry.

Open to all, visit [www.technicalcommunicationuk.com](http://www.technicalcommunicationuk.com) for the latest news.



### ISTC Resources

The ISTC offers access to discounted essential resources, including British Standards publications.

