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The CSS box model

Everything in CSS has a box around it.

Understanding these boxes is key to more complex layouts, and to aligning items with one another.[1] A block box is made of four official layers. The labelled diagram and the table use the names and jobs from MDN's box-model lesson.[1]



Layer	Official job
Content box	The area where your content is displayed; size it using properties like width and height.[1]
Padding box	The padding sits around the content as white space; size it using padding and related properties.[1]
Border box	The border box wraps the content and any padding; size it using border and related properties.[1]
Margin box	The margin is the outermost layer, wrapping the content, padding and border as whitespace between this box and other elements; size it using margin and related properties.[1]

The standard model

By default, browsers use the standard box model. Width and height size the *content box*. Padding and borders are then added to get the total size taken up by the box.[1]

```
.box {
  width: 350px;
  height: 150px;
  margin: 10px;
  padding: 25px;
  border: 5px solid black;
}
```

The actual space taken up by the box is 410px wide (350 + 25 + 25 + 5 + 5) and 210px high (150 + 25 + 25 + 5 + 5).[1]

The margin is not counted towards the actual size of the box. It affects the space on the page, but only outside the box. The box's area stops at the border.[1]

The alternative model

In the alternative box model, any width is the width of the visible box on the page. The content area is that width minus the padding and the border. MDN calls this convenient, because you do not have to add the border and padding to get the real size of the box.[1]

To turn it on for an element, set:

```
box-sizing: border-box;
```

Quick quiz

1. In the standard model, do width and height size the whole visible box, or the content box?
2. Is margin counted in the official "actual size" of the box?
3. Which declaration turns on the alternative model?

Answers. 1. The content box.[1] 2. No — the box's area stops at the border.[1] 3. `box-sizing: border-box`.[1]

Source, checked 17 November 2026. All wording and the worked example are from MDN Learn: The box model. https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Learn_web_development/Core/Styling_basics/Box_model

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