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About the Double-Underlined Links

HTML Goodies : [Beyond HTML](#) : [Webmaster Tips](#) : [Webmaster Toolbox](#) : [A Web Developer Looks at Drupal Views: Power and Flexibility](#)

INTRODUCTION

- home
- about
- non-technical introduction
- newsletter archive

PRIMERS

- html
- MySpace html
- ad banners
- perl & cgi
- asp
- javascript
- database - sql

HTML & GRAPHICS TUTORIALS

- getting started
- backgrounds
- buttons
- browser specific
- colors
- forms
- frames
- html 4.01 tags
- html 4.01 ref
- image maps
- tables
- web graphics

BEYOND HTML

- asp
- cascading style sheets
- css keyword ref
- cgi scripting
- dhtml/layers
- dot net
- java applets
- javascript
- javascript keyword ref
- javascript script tips
- php
- security
- SEO
- vb script keyword ref
- webmaster tips
- webmaster projects
- webmaster toolbox
- video
- xml
- general reference pieces
- the master list

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A Web Developer Looks at Drupal Views: Power and Flexibility

By [Tyme](#)

In the last Drupal module review, I discussed the contributed module CCK. This time, I focus on Views – a module that puts real power and flexibility into your Drupal website.

Views pulls from your Drupal [database](#) a collection of data, which has been stored through creation of content, CCK fields; or stored by other modules. It then organizes and displays that content according to your specification using the Views data controls. For those of you familiar with SQL statements, that is what Views produces through GUI interface. You do not need to have experience writing SQL queries, but having that familiarity is an advantage for more advanced use.

This article is not meant to be a step-by-step guide, and the full capability of Views is beyond the scope of this article. However, I will touch on the basics in an attempt to excite you to learn and use the Views module.

Three examples of how you might use Views:

1. To create a page of story summaries
2. To display different types of [data](#) of the same subject, onto one page
3. To create an interactive (user requested) display of content

When you build a Drupal site, you should plan for the possibilities rather than merely the [immediate](#) needs. One tool to help you exploit the opportunities, and make Views work to its fullest, is Drupal's "Taxonomy".

Taxonomy is made up of a parent "Vocabulary" and its children, "Terms". Another way to think about vocabulary/terms is as sections and categories (the Joomla equivalent). Taxonomy is essential for manipulating data in Views.

Story Summaries Page

A stories summary page is one of the most basic examples of a Views-generated page, and what many content management systems (CMS) would refer to as blog style – the familiar story teasers with a "read more" link to the full article. The Drupal default home page (referenced as <front>) does this automatically when a content item is enabled to "promote to front page".

The screenshot shows the website for the Overseas Press Club of America (OPC). At the top, there is a navigation menu with items like Home, About the OPC, News, Press Freedom, Awards, Foundation, Events, Blog, FAQ, OPC Members, and RSS. Below the menu, there is a 'Latest News Features' section with a sub-menu containing 'News Briefs', 'Features', and 'People Remembered'. The main content area displays several news items, including 'Pakistan's Slippery Censorship', 'Stretching Rules of Warfare Paid Off in Ramadi', 'Back to Vietnam 35 Years After the Fall of Saigon', 'Thiessen: WikiLeaks Must be Stopped', and 'Newsweek Goes to Harman'. A search bar is visible in the top right corner.

In the above [Overseas Press Club of America](#) example, the menu shows that the News story type has been broken into categories: News Briefs, Features, and People Remembered (obituaries). Just as you would see in a print newspaper.

First, a taxonomy Vocabulary was created for "News" and under which Terms were created for "News Briefs", "Features", and "People Remembered". With this organization, Views now can be instructed to display these individual collections of data onto separate pages.

Notice the right sidebar block "Latest News Briefs". This summary block was created in the same View, along with the full page of "Features" summaries.

Here's a look under the hood:


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Edit view news_latest

List Add Edit Import Tools

View news_latest, displaying items of type Node. Export Clone View "Page" Changed view

Default Block Page

Basic settings

Name: Page
 Title: Latest News Briefs
 Style: Unformatted
 Row style: Fields
 Use AJAX: No
 Use pager: Yes
 Items per page: 10
 Distinct: Yes
 Access: Unrestricted
 Caching: None
 Exposed form in block: No
 Header: None
 Footer: None
 Empty text: None
 CSS class: None
 Theme: Information

Page settings

Path: news/newsbriefs
 Menu: Normal: News Bri...

Page: Add fields

Groups: Node

- Node: Post date
The date the node was posted.
- Node: Promoted to front page
Whether or not the node is promoted to the front page.
- Node: Published
Whether or not the node is published.
- Node: Sticky
Whether or not the node is sticky.
- Node: Teaser
The stored teaser field. This may not be valid or useful data on all node types.
- Node: Title

Relationships
None defined

Arguments
None defined

Fields

- Node: Title
- Node: Post date
- Content: Thumbnail- GeneraITN image
- Node: Teaser

Sort criteria
Node: Post date desc

Filters

- Node: Published Yes
- Node: Type = Story
- Taxonomy: Term = News Features

I have highlighted in red the key criteria that you will configure.

Fields

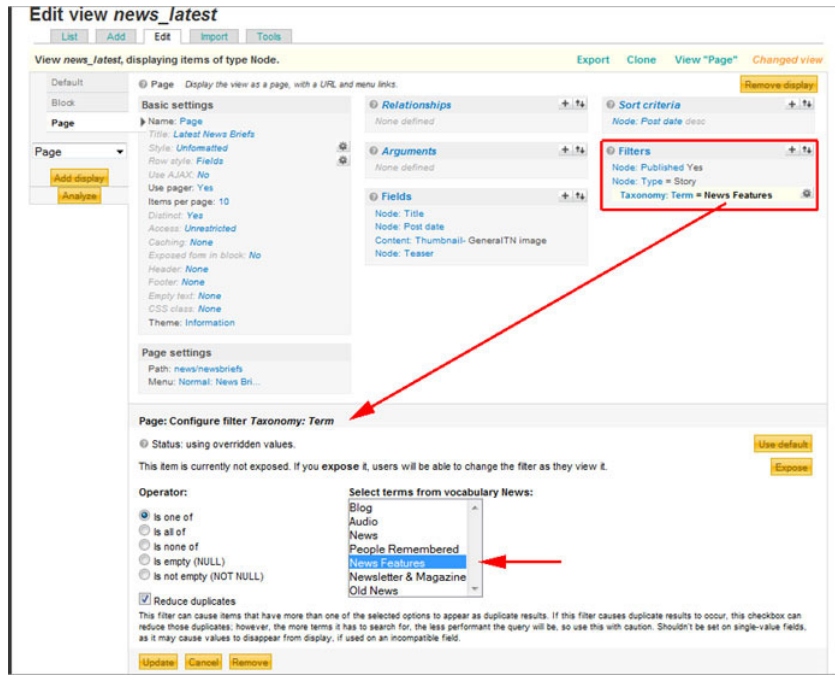
Remember, with Views, you are building a SQL query, so you must specify the fields that you want to pull from the database. Using the Views GUI interface, you simply click the plus sign (+) of the Fields box to display a list of fields, organized by type. In this case, you would use Node fields. Scroll through the list and check off the fields that you'd want to display.

In the News example, you see that I selected the typical story summary fields: story Title, story posted date, image thumbnail (a custom CCK field), and a story Teaser. [For more about CCK, read [Drupal CCK: I Cee You.](#)]

You may check multiple fields at once; Views will show additional settings for each, one screen at a time. These options will include teaser length, whether or not to have the title or image link to the full story, size for the image, and more.

Filters

Filters allow you to narrow the amount of data that you pull from the database, by selecting only certain records. These are the "WHERE" conditions of your SQL statement. In the above example, the type of content has been specified (Story), along with a directive to display only published content. You will notice also that I employed the all-important Taxonomy.



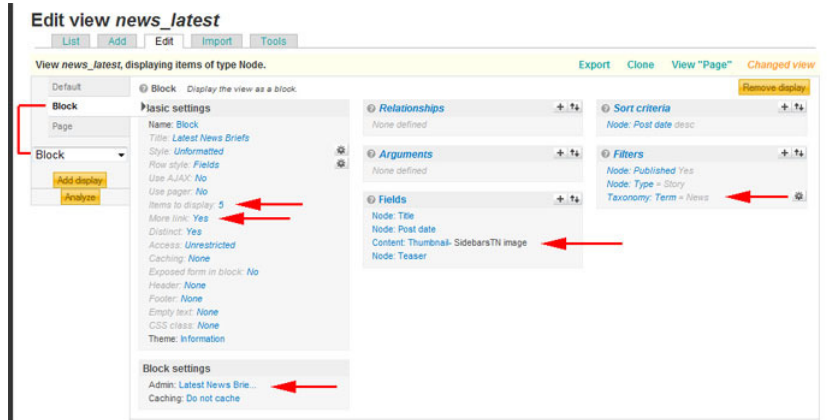
Because when creating my News content, I assigned each story a section (Vocabulary) and News category (Term), I am able to filter that data. And, with the Views interface, it is as easy as clicking the plus sign to display my options panel and then selecting the desired term. You can select to filter a term in (include) or out (exclude).

Page Title and Page URL

Lastly, you need to assign a page Title and a URL path for this web page – the way that you will directly access this Views-generated page.

Views Block

For the sidebar block, I added a display Block ("Add display"), which makes this View show up on the [admin](#) Block assignment page for positioning on the layout and among the site pages. Only a few changes are necessary to make the View more appropriate as a Block.



As shown on the live site screenshot, I chose to display News Features for the main content, with News Briefs for the sidebar block. So, for the filter, I pulled only news briefs. And, since it is a narrow sidebar, I reduced the number of items shown, the size of the teaser, and the size of the thumbnail image that accompanies each summary. I specified a "read more" link at the bottom of the block, and gave the block a thoughtful name so that I can easily find it on the admin Blocks assignment page.

On the same View setup, you can have a number of view types, the most common of which are page, block, and feed. The benefit of grouping them together on a View is that you can first set defaults – such as fields, node type, vocabulary/terms -- to apply to all, and then change minimal settings for the extra views.

Different Types Of Content On One Page

Using a different example: a school website. You might want to create a separate page for content related to each club at your school -- to include (for example) stories, events, announcements, featured member.

Most likely, you would have created each of those as a unique Content Type. In that case, you would follow the above method; for the filters, you would change the Node Type for each of your views.

So, for a typical Web page layout: on your Views setup, you would create a Page for the stories, a Block for the events, a Block for the announcements, and a Block for the featured member. Since each of those corresponds to a different Content Type, you would change the Filter "Node: Type" as appropriate.

After saving that View, you would go to the admin Blocks page and assign those Views Blocks to only your new Views Page for that club – using the path that you assigned for the Views Page.

User-Dictated Web Page

You can easily have a Views-generated Web page that allows the user to select what information appears on that page, based upon the established fields. An example of such a page is the [Overseas Press Club of America's awards page](#).

Tuesday, July 27, 2010

opc OVERSEAS PRESS CLUB OF AMERICA
Serving the interests of international journalists since 1939

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OPC Awards Past Recipients

You can filter the OPC Awards list by year, award, award type and winner name. More than one of these search element can be used and you may also select more than one award or award type by holding the CTRL key and click your selections. To deselect an item, hold the CTRL key and click the item again. Click APPLY to begin your search.

Award Year: -Year ▾

Award Name:
The Hal Boyle Award
The Bob Considine Award
The Robert Capa Gold Medal Award
The Olivier Rebbot Award
The John Faber Award
Feature Photography Award
The Lowell Thomas Award
The David Kaplan Award

Award Type:
Leadership
Online Journalism
Photo Journalism
Print Journalism
Radio
Television
Other

Recipient Name:

Recipient Affiliation: [Apply](#)

| Year | Award | | Award Recipient(s) | As appeared in/on | Honored for | Narrative |
|------|----------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------|--|--|
| 2009 | THE HAL BOYLE AWARD | Best newspaper or wire service reporting from abroad. | Farnaz Fassihi | The Wall Street Journal | "Hearts, Minds and Blood: The Battle for Iran" | Farnaz Fassihi's courageous reporting gives us an inside view of the unfolding drama in Iran. Operating... Read more... |
| 2009 | THE BOB CONSIDINE AWARD | Best newspaper or wire service interpretation of international affairs. | Rajiv Chandrasekaran, Karen DeYoung, Bob Woodward | The Washington Post | "Obama's War" | This series of pieces about how the Obama administration searched for a new strategy in Afghanistan included strong on-... Read more... |
| 2009 | THE ROBERT CAPA GOLD MEDAL AWARD | Best published photographic reporting from abroad requiring exceptional courage and enterprise. | Khalil Hamra | Associated Press | "War in Gaza" | Khalil Hamra's pictures of the Israeli military incursion into Gaza showed exceptional courage and... Read more |

This page has been constructed to allow the user to filter the awards archive by one or more of the fields: Award Year, Award Name, Award Type, Recipient Name, Recipient Affiliation.

You must be thinking that this is a very complicated procedure. Not so. One more option on your Views setup page and you'll have this interactivity.

Here is how that looks from behind the scenes:

Edit view awards_recipients

[List](#) [Add](#) [Edit](#) [Import](#) [Tools](#)

View awards_recipients, displaying items of type Node.

[Export](#) [Clone](#) [View "Page - Past Winners"](#) [View "Page - Current Winners"](#) [View "Page"](#)

Defaults: Page - Past Winners *Display the view as a page, with a URL and menu links.*

Page - Past Winners
 Name: Page - Past Winners
 Title: OPC Awards Past Recipients
 Style: Table
 Use AJAX: No
 Use pager: Yes
 Items per page: 10
 Distinct: Yes
 Access: Unrestricted
 Caching: None
 Exposed form in block: No
 Header: Professional - WebAdmin only
 Footer: None
 Empty text: Full HTML
 CSS class: None
 Theme: Information

Page settings
 Path: awards/awards-re...
 Menu: Normal: Past Rec...

Relationships
None defined

Arguments
Taxonomy: Vocabulary ID

Fields
 Content: Thumbnail: FeatureTV image
 Content: Award Type Default
 Content: Award Date Medium
 Content: Award Name Default
 Taxonomy: Term description
 Content: Award Default
 Content: Award Default
 Node: Body Narrative
 Node: Link

Sort criteria
 Content: Award Date desc
 Node: Post date desc

Filters
 Node: Published Yes
 Node: Type = Awards
 Taxonomy: Vocabulary = Awards
 Date: Date (node) (Content: Award Date (field_award_date)) Exposed Select Year
 Content: Award Name exposed
 Content: Award Type exposed
 Content: Award exposed
 Content: Award exposed

Page - Past Winners: Configure filter Content: Award Name (field_award_name) - Allowed values

Status: using overridden values.

This item is currently not exposed. If you expose it, users will be able to change the filter as they view it.

Operator:
 is one of
 is all of
 is none of
 is empty (NULL)
 is not empty (NOT NULL)
 Reduce duplicates

Award Name:
 The Hal Boyle Award
 The Bob Considine Award
 The Robert Capa Gold Medal Award
 The Olivier Rebbot Award
 The John Faber Award
 Feature Photography Award
 The Lowell Thomas Award
 The David Kaplan Award

This filter can cause items that have more than one of the selected options to appear as duplicate results. If this filter causes duplicate results to occur, this checkbox can reduce those duplicates; however, the more terms it has to search for, the less performant the query will be, so use this with caution. Shouldn't be set on single-value fields, as it may cause values to disappear from display, if used on an incompatible field.

[Update](#) [Cancel](#) [Remove](#)

When you set your Filter, simply click the Expose button to make that field a selection form field on the finished Views-generated page. That's it! Think of the possibilities.

Note: The fields prefixed with "Content:" are custom fields created with Drupal contributed module CCK. Don't forget to add that to your arsenal.

Summary

This overview has merely scratched the surface of the power of Views, especially coupled with CCK. But, I hope that it has piqued your interest and will send you rushing to <http://drupal.org/project/views> to download the latest release version.

Views is way too complex to have made it into Drupal 7 (very soon to be released). So, it remains a must-have contributed module in your Drupal tool box, and it is well worth the [investment](#).

Tyme is a freelance writer and multimedia specialist of many years. She likes walks in the park, cotton candy, and baby ducks. To learn more: <http://www.MultimediaByTyme.com/>.

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2 Comments ([click to add your comment](#))

By [Dusty](#) August 17 2010 2:58 PMPDT

Hi,

Thanks a lot for your article. It's great.

I work too on Joomla with jSeblod CCK. Filter and search features are most advanced than on Drupal CCK. I think to use it instead Drupal. It will be nice to see on Drupal the concept of Stage Query as on jSeblod CCK. It allow to by a simple interface to do many join queries.

Cheers

[Reply to this comment](#)



By [Tyme](#) October 16 2010 12:24 PMPDT

@Dusty, that's interesting about the Joomla application of CCK. I'll have to checkk that out.

[Reply to this comment](#)



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