Structural Web Standards at Florida Hospital College

The Case for XHTML

XHTML is HTML reformulated to conform to XML standards and syntax. XHTML is XML with a limited list of predefined tags. XML standards insist on well-formed documents, meaning everything must be marked-up correctly and semantically. For all the details from the source reference: http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/.

Extend Reach

Current browsers are powerful software. They have the ability to display sloppy code. They are designed to be forgiving. The Web is rapidly extending beyond traditional browsers. We are beginning to access our Web pages from alternate display devices such as cell phones, PDAs, and other Web enabled products. W3CSchools points out these alternate devices are currently not powerful enough to be forgiving, they "do not have the resources or power to interpret a 'bad' markup language."

Data Described for the Future

XML is designed to describe data. HTML was designed to display data. The two married into XHTML yield the opportunity to write XML valid documents that are portable into different display options. (Screen, Print, Small Screen, Future Display Method). Zeldman says XHTML is "portable, practical and cost efficient."

XHTML is well-formed HTML so it is also backwards compatible.

A Big Step Toward Accessibility

Besides XHTML helping create structured documents which help all users, XHTML validation services for example remind us to use an "alt" tag for images. And since content is separate from the presentation, the content can be displayed or even read for those requiring special accommodation.

How Do We Do It?

1. Use **DOCTYPE.**
2. Tags must be **lowercase.**
3. Attributes must be **quoted** and **have values.** Ex: <textarea readonly="readonly">Read-only Text</textarea>.
4. **Tags must be closed.** This includes "empty tags", such as
, and end tags for list items, .
5. <B> and <I> are replaced by **** and **** respectively because the latter describe meaning instead of presentation.
6. Use predefined **structural elements** such as <h1> and <p>. All content should be contained in an appropriate structural element.
7. **Validate.**
   - http://validator.w3.org

Better Visibility

Because XHTML encourages good structure, is cleaner and consistent, and discourages presentation mark-up, the result is information that is faster, machine readable and more valuable for search engines.

Are We Too Strict?

For the near future the College will use XHTML Transitional as our document type. Because it is more forgiving in older browsers. However, whenever possible we should code and validate for XHTML Strict.

Resources

A List Apart : Better Living Through XHTML
http://alistapart.com/articles/betterliving

NYPL: Online Style Guide: XHTML: Guidelines
http://www.nypl.org/styleguide/xhtml/guidelines.html

W3C: XHTML™ 1.0 The Extensible HyperText Markup Language (Second Edition)
http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/

Why XHTML | W3Schools
http://www.w3schools.com/xhtml/xhtml_why.asp

Wikipedia : XHTML
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XHTML

Zeldman, Jeffrey. Designing with Web Standards. New Riders, Berkely, CA, 2003. pp. 145-152.

Prepared September 11, 2006