

XHTML and CSS Essentials for Library Web Design

*Extensible Hypertext Markup Language
Cascading Style Sheets*

Michael P. Sauers

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Don't miss the companion Web site for this book, featuring sample coding, helpful additional resources, as well as updates from the author. Visit <http://www.travelinlibrarian.info/writing/XHTML-CSS/> to download files and learn more about the latest in web design.

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For my parents,
I bet you wondered when I was going to get around to you.
Thanks for everything.

And for Laura,
although you were supposed to wait a little longer
for a dedication, I just couldn't leave you out of this one.
Who says having a language-geek for a best friend can't be useful?
Thank you for the past 18 years,
especially the three weeks you spent toiling on this manuscript.

Preface

Librarians perform their jobs working closely with current standards, whether MARC or Z39.50 or LCSH or DDC. So why are most library Web sites created using HTML, a program not considered the current measure since at least 1999? Sticking with the out-of-date model seems to be the quick “don’t fix what isn’t broken” answer for many busy professionals. After all, isn’t the job done if the page looks good when it pops up on a computer screen?

XHTML and CSS Essentials for Library Web Design contends that you shortchange the user if you design in a limited environment envisioning only desktop/laptop computers connected to one or two of the major browsers, such as Netscape Navigator and Microsoft’s Internet Explorer. What about the next generation of popular browsers, such as Opera, Mozilla, Safari, and Firefox? And what about other platforms? Suppose a patron checks her library account using a Trēo600 cell phone/PDA—a terrific little gadget with a screen resolution of 64x64 pixels. Ever wonder what your site looks on a screen that size?

Back in 1999, the W3C—the World Wide Web Consortium, an international industry association that develops common protocols to promote WWW evolution and ensure its interoperability—stopped developing Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and refocused its efforts on XHTML, an Extended XML-based language to create better Web pages. Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) are a feature of HTML in which you can create style templates that specify how different text elements (paragraphs, headings, hyperlinks, etc.) appear on a Web page. CSS has been a part of good design even longer than HTML. The bottom line? If your library site does not employ or underutilizes the latest markup language, you are performing unnecessary work. Incorporating CSS will save your design team literally hours of work. As an added bonus, CSS allows a greater consistency in your site’s design and simply makes your pages reflect the modern and professional nature your institution wants to project.

Why is it so important to keep up with standards for users? If you’re not using the

current standards of XHTML and CSS, it is estimated that “99.9% of all Web sites are obsolete” (Zeldman, 2003). Providing access to information is a library’s core mission. Undoubtedly you and your colleagues take pride in taking the time to organize and present the best information available. Shouldn’t end users be able to take full advantage of your hard work? Utilizing current standards guarantees a patron easier access using any searching method.

ORGANIZATION

XHTML and CSS Essentials for Library Web Design is organized into three parts.

Part I, “XHTML Essentials,” contains 11 chapters and covers all the nuts and bolts of this markup language, including history, syntax, and proper use.

- Chapter 1, “Introduction to XHTML,” offers a brief history of markup from its earliest beginnings as SGML, through the development of HTML and the more recent introduction of XML and XHTML. It also supplies good reasons why you need to move from the older language to the newer.
- Chapter 2, “The Minimal Document,” examines the standard information that must appear on every page to make it compliant.
- Chapter 3, “Basic Markup,” examines key elements and attributes in an easy alphabetical arrangement. Each possesses a particular purpose, and none fall into any of the special categories of the remaining chapters.
- Chapter 4, “Hyperlinks,” shows how to create links between documents and Web site and to other sites. It also illustrates how to install e-mail links within a particular file.
- Chapter 5, “Images,” explains how to create imagemaps and insert images into text.
- Chapter 6, “Lists,” introduces how to build in bulleted, numbered, or lettered lists.
- Chapter 7, “Tables,” discusses how and when to use tables properly. It studies the code used for creating layout that organizes tabular data.
- Chapter 8, “Forms,” delves into the creation of an online form to collect data from your users. This chapter demonstrates how to construct a sample ILL request form that automatically e-mails the collected information.
- Chapter 9, “Frames,” explains how to divide up a user’s window into multiple independent areas in order to view more than one document at a time.
- Chapter 10, “Metadata,” talks about how to add information to documents to assist search engines and let other tools better index particulars.
- Chapter 11, “Validating Markup,” deals with the W3C validator service. This feature is an essential tool for a Web designer writing with good, clean conventions because it checks code and makes sure it follows the rules of XHTML.

Part II, “CSS Essentials,” contains ten chapters and covers the purpose, syntax, and proper use of cascading style sheets.

- Chapter 12, “Introduction to CSS,” discusses the logic behind this technology and why it is essential to use it when designing pages.
- Chapter 13, “CSS Mechanics,” explores the basic syntax of writing proper CSS code and getting XHTML documents to pay attention to source instructions.
- Chapter 14, “Colors, Measurements and URLs,” introduces how to specify colors, different units of measurement, and how to specify URLs when needed. It groups these three topics into a single chapter because they will have repercussions throughout the rest of the book.
- Chapter 15, “Formatting Text with CSS,” reveals the basic properties of formatting content within a document. It includes manipulating font, text color, boldfacing, underlining and other features.
- Chapter 16, “The Box Model,” launches a central concept in CSS and demonstrates how to control layout by making use of margins, padding, and borders.
- Chapter 17, “Links,” deals specifically with hyperlinks.
- Chapter 18, “Lists,” considers the part of CSS system that has an effect on the lists within your content. It includes examples suggesting original solutions for changing how to use lists.
- Chapter 19, “Forms,” focuses on how to construct forms properly and present them in a logical and eye-pleasing manner.
- Chapter 20, “Positioning,” combines concepts already discussed and takes them to the next level. It teaches how to create columns and introduces how to allow control within a document so that information appears regardless of placement in markup.
- Chapter 21, “Media Types,” presents the concept of employing different styles depending on platform, such as seeing one style on screen but another printed style.

The companion Web site contains nine sources of reference documents and recommended instructions on how to move from HTML to XHTML.

NOTE: I suggest reading or reviewing the chapters in order, but I set up this guide so you can skip mastered subjects or be able to read just the chapters that interest you. Remember, if you come upon an unclear concept, you can always backtrack to a previous chapter.

I’m happy to try and answer any questions. Drop me an e-mail at msauers@travelinlibrarian.info and I’ll see what I can do for you.

You might also try posting your questions to WebDesign-L <www.webdesign-l.com/>, XHTML-L <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/XHTML-L/>>, and/or CSS-D <www.css-discuss.org/>. I participate in these lists along with hundreds of other experts in their respective fields.

I hope *XHTML and CSS Essentials for Library Web Design* inspires you to inventive site planning. I hope you enjoy the essentials and go on to learn more!

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Contents

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	xv
Preface	xvii
Acknowledgments	xxi

PART I: XHTML Essentials

Chapter 1: Introduction to XHTML	3
Chapter 2: The Minimal XHTML Document	11
Chapter 3: Basic XHTML Markup	27
Chapter 4: Hyperlinks	83
Chapter 5: Images	101
Chapter 6: Lists	121
Chapter 7: Tables	137
Chapter 8: Web Forms	167
Chapter 9: Frames	229
Chapter 10: Metadata	247
Chapter 11: Validating Markup	257

PART II: CSS Essentials

Chapter 12: Introduction to CSS	267
Chapter 13: CSS Mechanics	271
Chapter 14: Colors, Measurements, and URLs	305

Chapter 15: Formatting Text with CSS	311
Chapter 16: The Box Model	327
Chapter 17: Links	345
Chapter 18: Lists	349
Chapter 19: Forms	373
Chapter 20: Positioning	399
Chapter 21: Media Types	443
Index	451
About the Author	459

List of Figures

2.1	Our Hybrid XHTML/MathML Document as Displayed in Amaya	19
2.2	Our Hybrid XHTML/MathML Document as Displayed in IE6	20
2.3	A Complete Minimal XHTML Document	24
3.1	The Results of Commenting Markup in the Browser	29
3.2	The <code>abbr</code> Element	30
3.3	The <code>acronym</code> Element with the <code>title</code> Attribute Displayed as Tip Text	31
3.4	The <code>address</code> Element	32
3.5	The <code>bold</code> Element	33
3.6	The <code>bdo</code> Element	34
3.7	The Firefox Text-Size Menu	35
3.8	The <code>big</code> Element	36
3.9	The <code>blockquote</code> Element	37
3.10	The <code>background</code> Attribute on the <code>body</code> Element	39
3.11	The <code>br</code> Element	41
3.12	The <code>center</code> Element	42
3.13	The <code>cite</code> Element	43
3.14	The <code>code</code> Element	44
3.15	The <code>del</code> Element	45
3.16	The <code>dfn</code> Element	46
3.17	The <code>em</code> Element	47
3.18	The <code>face</code> Attribute on the <code>font</code> Element	49
3.19	The <code>color</code> Attribute on the <code>font</code> Element	50
3.20	The <code>size</code> Attribute on the <code>font</code> Element	51
3.21	The <code>h1</code> Elements	53
3.22	The <code>hr</code> Element	54
3.23	The <code>width</code> Attribute with a Relative Value on the <code>hr</code> Element with a Full-Screen Browser Window	55

3.24	The width Attribute with a Relative Value on the hr Element with a Reduced Browser Window	56
3.25	The width Attribute with an Absolute Value on the hr Element on a Full-Screen Browser Window	57
3.26	The width Attribute with an Absolute Value on the hr Element with a Reduced Browser Window	58
3.27	The i Element	59
3.28	The ins Element	60
3.29	The kbd Element	61
3.30	The p Element	62
3.31	The pre Element	63
3.32	The q Element	64
3.33	The s Element	65
3.34	The samp Element	66
3.35	Firefox's Font-Size Menu	67
3.36	The small Element	68
3.37	The strike Element	69
3.38	The strong Element	70
3.39	The sub Element	71
3.40	The sup Element	72
3.41	The tt Element	73
3.42	The u Element	74
3.43	The var Element	75
3.44	The object Element	79
3.45	Displaying the Copyright Symbol Using Character Entities	80
4.1	IBM Home Page Reader	85
4.2	The Parts of a URL	86
4.3	Encoder	96
5.1	.gif photo, 640x480, 159k	103
5.2	.jpg photo 640x480, 38.1k	104
5.3	.gif line art, 200x315, 18.6k	104
5.4	.jpg line art, 200x315, 7.4k	105
5.5	Inserting an Image into Your Document	107
5.6	Alt-Text as Displayed in Lynx	108
5.7	Alt-Text as Displayed in IE	108
5.8	An Image with a Paragraph of Text	110
5.9	The Different Alignment Values for Images	111
5.10	An Image as a Hyperlink	112
5.11	A Hyperlinked Image with No Border	113
5.12	A Hyperlinked Image with a Border of 30	114
5.13	The hspace and vspace Attributes	115
5.14	The Image to be Used as an Imagemap	116
5.15	The Finished Imagemap	119
6.1	An Unordered List	123
6.2	An Unordered List with Square Bullets	124
6.3	An Ordered List	125
6.4	An Ordered List with Uppercase Roman Numerals	126
6.5	A Nested List	127

6.6	A Definition List with Three Terms	132
6.7	A Definition List with Terms and Data	133
6.8	One Term with Two Items of Data	134
6.9	One Term with Reformatted Data	135
6.10	A Better Use of Multiple Data on One Term	136
7.1	The Finished Table	138
7.2	A Basic Table	141
7.3	Our Table with the Border Turned On	142
7.4	Our Table with Headers	143
7.5	An Empty Cell with a Space That Works in Firefox but not in IE (shown)	144
7.6	Our Table with an Empty Cell That Works in Both IE and Firefox	145
7.7	Our Table with a Caption	146
7.8	The Caption with <code>align="bottom"</code>	147
7.9	The Caption with <code>align="left"</code>	147
7.10	The Caption with <code>align="right"</code>	148
7.11	Our Table with a 50 Percent Width	149
7.12	Our Table with 20 Percent Column Widths	150
7.13	Centering our Table	151
7.14	Aligning Your Table's Content	152
7.15	Centering All of our Content	153
7.16	Right-Justifying our First Column	154
7.17	Adding a New Row	155
7.18	Spanning the New Row Across All of the Columns	156
7.19	Adding a New Column	157
7.20	Spanning the New Column Along All the Rows	158
7.21	Adding the <code>cellspacing</code> Attribute	159
7.22	Adding the <code>cellpadding</code> Attribute	160
7.23	Our Table Sans Lines	161
7.24	Table Head, Foot, and Body	163
7.25	Setting the Column Background Colors with the <code>col</code> Element	165
8.1	The Form on Google's Home Page	168
8.2	An Amazon.com Form	169
8.3	BCR's Workshop Registration Form	170
8.4	Thirteen Forms on One Page	173
8.5	Asking for the User's Name	176
8.6	Starting to Fill out the Form	177
8.7	Asking for the User's Phone Number	179
8.8	Asking for the User's E-Mail Address and Phone Number	180
8.9	Supplying a Default Value for the Library Card Number	182
8.10	Asking the User for the Item's Title and Author	184
8.11	Radio Button for Item Type	186
8.12	Adding More Radio Buttons for Item Type	187
8.13	Asking the User for an Item Citation	189
8.14	A Drop-Down List for Borrower Type	191
8.15	Setting the Default Option on Borrower Type	193
8.16	Allowing for Multiple Selections	194
8.17	Limiting the Size of the Borrower Type Box	195

8.18	Asking the User for Amount Willing to Pay and Date Needed by and Supplying On-screen Instructions	197
8.19	Adding a <code>textarea</code> for User Comments	199
8.20	Adding Default Content to our <code>textarea</code>	200
8.21	Our Table with the Default Comment Text Replaced by the User	201
8.22	Adding a Checkbox	202
8.23	The BCR Print Request Form	204
8.24	Default Buttons	206
8.25	Changing Text on the Buttons	207
8.26	Adding a Print Button	208
8.27	The E-Mailed Result via <code>mailto:</code>	211
8.28	Our Completed and Filled-in Form	219
8.29	The Error Page	220
8.30	The Confirmation Page	221
8.31	The Confirmation E-mail	222
8.32	The Form Results as E-mailed to the Recipient	223
8.33	Organizing your Form with <code>fieldset</code> and <code>legend</code>	225
9.1	Our Column-based Frames	232
9.2	Our Frames as Rows	233
9.3	Mixing Rows and Columns	234
9.4	Our Pages as Loaded	237
9.5	Our Page After Clicking on the Hours Link	238
9.6	hours.html Displayed in the Correct Frame	239
9.7	HyperHistory as Displayed in Firefox	241
9.8	HyperHistory as Displayed in Lynx	241
9.9	HyperHistory as Displayed in Blazer (on a Trēo600)	242
9.10	A Frames Page as Displayed in Lynx	244
9.11	Displaying GoogleNews in an Inline Frame	245
9.12	Our <code>iframe</code> Document as Displayed in Lynx, Which Doesn't Support the <code>iframe</code> Element	246
9.13	An Ad Placed Via an <code><iframe></code> on the User Friendly Site	246
10.1	The Redirect Page	253
11.1	The W3C Validator	258
11.2	Upload Extended Interface	260
11.3	Sample Validator Errors	262
11.4	A Successfully Validated Document	264
13.1	Manipulating Indents with CSS	275
13.2	Changing First Letter and First Lines with CSS	277
13.3	Incorrect Display of our Use of the <code>id</code> Attribute	280
13.4	Display of our Use of Classes	281
13.5	Our <code>personal</code> Class as Applied to the Contents of a <code>dt</code> Element	282
13.6	Applying a Class to a Particular Element	283
13.7	Three Paragraphs with Individual Red Backgrounds	285
13.8	Three Paragraphs with a Single Red Background	286
13.9	Applying a Class Using the <code>span</code> Element	289
13.10	Finding IE's Internet Options Menu	298
13.11	IE's Options	298
13.12	IE's Accessibility Options	299

13.13	The Travelinlibrarian.info Home Page	300
13.14	The Travelinlibrarian.info Home Page with User CSS Applied	301
15.1	The <code>font-family</code> Property	312
15.2	The <code>font-style</code> Property	313
15.3	The <code>font-weight</code> Property	315
15.4	The <code>font-variant</code> Property	316
15.5	The <code>font-size</code> Property	317
15.6	The <code>text-align</code> Property	319
15.7	The <code>text-decoration</code> Property	320
15.8	The <code>text-indent</code> Property	321
15.9	The <code>text-indent</code> Property with a Negative Value	322
15.10	The <code>text-align</code> Property with a Zero Value	322
15.11	The <code>line-height</code> Property	323
15.12	Setting Letter and Word Spacing without CSS	324
15.13	The <code>letter-spacing</code> and <code>word-spacing</code> Properties	325
15.14	The <code>text-transform</code> Property	326
16.1	The W3C Box Model, www.w3.org/TR/REC-CSS2/box.html	328
16.2	Our Sample Box-model Document	330
16.3	Our Document with a 2px, Red, Dashed Border	332
16.4	Our Document with a 10px, Green, Outset Border	333
16.5	Our Document so Far	335
16.6	The <code>padding</code> Property	336
16.7	Setting Different padding Values on Each Side of the Box	336
16.8	The <code>margin</code> Property	338
16.9	Setting Different margin Values on Each Side of the Box	339
16.10	Setting Different margin Values for our Document's Body and its Content	340
16.11	Centering Content with <code>margin: auto</code>	342
16.12	Centering Content with <code>text-align: center</code> for IE	343
18.1	A Basic List Including a Nested List	350
18.2	The <code>list-style-type</code> Property with a <code>disc</code> Value	351
18.3	The <code>list-style-type</code> Property with a <code>circle</code> Value	352
18.4	The <code>list-style-type</code> Property with a <code>square</code> Value	352
18.5	The <code>list-style-type</code> Property with a <code>none</code> Value	353
18.6	The <code>list-style-type</code> Property with the <code>ol</code> Values Displayed in Firefox	354
18.7	The <code>list-style-type</code> Property with the <code>ol</code> Values Displayed in IE	355
18.8	An Unordered List with Icons as Bullets	356
18.9	The <code>list-style-position</code> Property	357
18.10	Goal for Formatting our List with CSS	358
18.11	Setting the Width of the List	360
18.12	Adding a Green Background	361
18.13	Setting the Font Weight and Color	362
18.14	Changing the Link Color	363
18.15	Setting a Link Hover Color and Font Size Change	364
18.16	Removing the Bullets	365
18.17	Adding some Padding	366
18.18	Setting the Left Margin on the Nested List	367

18.19	A Basic Four-Item List	368
18.20	Setting the Margin and Padding and Removing the Bullets	369
18.21	Adding a Border to Each Item	370
18.22	Adding some Color, Removing the Underlines, and Adding some Padding	371
18.23	Adding the Hover Effect	372
19.1	Our Form as We Left it in Chapter 8	373
19.2	Our Form After Formatting with CSS	376
19.3	Increasing the Size of the Legends	377
19.4	Adding Styled Numbers	378
19.5	Centering the Heading	379
19.6	Centering our Buttons	380
19.7	Adding some Space Above the Buttons	381
19.8	Setting the Width of the Form	382
19.9	Our Form Centered in Firefox	382
19.10	Our Form Not Centered in IE	383
19.11	Our Form Still Centered in Firefox	384
19.12	Our Form Now Centered in IE	384
19.13	Spacing out the <code><fieldset></code> s	385
19.14	Setting the Width of our Labels	386
19.15	Floating our Labels	387
19.16	Right-justifying our Labels	388
19.17	Adding some Padding to our Labels	389
19.18	The Results in IE	391
19.19	The Results in Firefox	392
19.20	Fixing the Radio Buttons	393
19.21	Clearing the <code><textarea></code>	394
19.22	Shrinking the Width of our <code><textarea></code>	395
19.23	Our Fixed Checkbox	396
20.1	A Drop-cap	400
20.2	Changing the Font of our First Letter	401
20.3	Increasing the Size of our First Letter	402
20.4	Floating our First Letter to the Left	403
20.5	Adding some Padding to our First Letter	404
20.6	A Sidebar	405
20.7	Fully Justifying our Text	407
20.8	Setting the Width of our Sidebar	408
20.9	Floating our Sidebar to the Right	409
20.10	Left-justifying our Sidebar Text	410
20.11	Adding a Right and Bottom Border to our Sidebar	411
20.12	Adding some Padding to and Increasing the Left Margin of our Sidebar	412
20.13	A Figure	414
20.14	Getting Started with our Figure	415
20.15	Floating our Figure	416
20.16	Aligning and Bolding our Figure's Caption	417
20.17	Adding some Padding to our Figure	418
20.18	Our Document Without Columns	423

20.19	Setting the Width of our Columns	424
20.20	Floating our Columns	425
20.21	Our Columns with 50 Percent Widths in IE	425
20.22	Our Footer Displayed in the Wrong Location on the Screen	426
20.23	Our Footer where it should be	427
20.24	A Menu Coded Second But Displayed on the Left	436
20.25	The position Property with a relative Value	438
20.26	The position Property with an absolute Value Placing the Image in the Upper Left Corner of the Browser Window	439
20.27	The position Property with an absolute Value Placing the Image in the Upper Right Corner of the Browser Window	440
20.28	The position Property with an absolute Value Placing the Image 100x From the Bottom of the Browser Window and 300px from the Left Side of the Browser Window	441
20.29	Using z-index to Overlap Content	442
21.1	The Bobby Home Page as Displayed in a Browser	445
21.2	The Bobby Home Page as Printed	446