

# **XHTML and CSS Essentials for Library Web Design**

*Extensible Hypertext Markup Language  
Cascading Style Sheets*

**Michael P. Sauers**

# ***XHTML and CSS Essentials for Library Web Design***

***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.

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## 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 Sticking with the out-of-date model seems to be the quick “don’t fix what isn’t broken” answer for many busy professionals.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.

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## ORGANIZATION

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*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](mailto: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/](http://www.webdesign-l.com/)>, XHTML-L <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/XHTML-L/>>, and/or CSS-D <[www.css-discuss.org/](http://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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## **Acknowledgments**

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