

# CSS `text-align` Explained

## What Does `text-align` Do?

The `text-align` property in CSS controls **horizontal alignment of inline-level content** (such as text, inline images, and inline elements) inside a block-level container (like a `<div>`, `<p>`, or `<section>`) [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#).

## Values for `text-align`

Value	Description
<code>left</code>	Aligns inline content to the <b>left edge</b> (default for left-to-right text)
<code>right</code>	Aligns inline content to the <b>right edge</b>
<code>center</code>	Centers the inline content horizontally
<code>justify</code>	Spreads lines so left and right edges are both aligned
<code>start</code>	Respects the writing direction (same as <code>left</code> in LTR, <code>right</code> in RTL)
<code>end</code>	Opposite of <code>start</code> , <code>right</code> in LTR, <code>left</code> in RTL
<code>inherit</code>	Inherits value from the parent
<code>initial</code>	Sets to default value (usually <code>left</code> or <code>right</code> )

## Practical Examples

```
div.left    { text-align: left; }
div.right   { text-align: right; }
div.center  { text-align: center; }
div.justify { text-align: justify; }
```

## How Does `text-align` Affect Content Inside a `<div>`?

### Inline and Inline-Block Elements

- **Affected (aligned):**
  - Text nodes (regular text)
  - Inline elements (e.g., `<span>`, `<a>`, `<img>`, `<strong>`)
  - Inline-block elements (e.g., `display: inline-block` on a `<div>`)
- **Alignment:** The `text-align` property on a block-level parent (such as a `<div>`) moves all **inline and inline-block child elements** horizontally inside its box [\[2\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[3\]](#).

## Block-Level Elements

- **Not directly affected:** Block-level elements (like `<div>`, `<p>`, `<h1>` by default) do **not** move horizontally in response to the parent's `text-align`.
- Content **inside** these block-level elements, if it is inline (like regular text), will obey the `text-align` of its own block parent, not the containing `<div>` <sup>[4]</sup> <sup>[3]</sup> <sup>[5]</sup>.

## Summary Table

Parent Has	Child is	What <code>text-align</code> does
<code>&lt;div&gt;</code>	Inline	Aligns horizontally
<code>&lt;div&gt;</code>	Inline-block	Aligns horizontally
<code>&lt;div&gt;</code>	Block (e.g. inner <code>&lt;div&gt;</code> or <code>&lt;p&gt;</code> )	No effect on the element's position; only their <b>own</b> inline children listen to their <code>text-align</code> <sup>[2]</sup> <sup>[6]</sup> <sup>[7]</sup>

## Visual Scenario

If a `<div>` uses `text-align: center;` and contains both a `<span>` and a nested `<div>`:

```
<div style="text-align: center;">
  <span>I'm centered text (inline)</span>
  <div>I'm a block element (not centered by parent)</div>
</div>
```

- The `<span>` is horizontally centered inside the parent `<div>`.
- The nested `<div>` is **not** horizontally centered by this rule. Instead, it will occupy the full width (block behavior), and its **own content's alignment** depends on its own `text-align`.

## Extra Details

- To **center a block-level element itself**, use margin techniques instead:

```
.center-block {
  width: 200px;
  margin: 0 auto;
}
```

- `text-align` is **inherited** by child elements, so if not otherwise specified, nested elements will use their parent's alignment <sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[2]</sup> <sup>[7]</sup>.
- Images, if inline or inline-block, are also aligned by `text-align`.

## Conclusion

- `text-align` in a block container (like `<div>`) horizontally aligns **inline and inline-block content** within it.
- It does **not** move block-level child elements themselves; only their own inline content is affected by their own `text-align` property.
- Use `text-align: center;` for centering inline content, and margin techniques to center block containers<sup>[2] [4] [3]</sup>.

## References:

- <sup>[1]</sup> W3Schools
- <sup>[2]</sup> MDN Web Docs
- <sup>[4]</sup> GeeksforGeeks
- <sup>[3]</sup> ExpertBeacon
- <sup>[6]</sup> Elementor
- <sup>[7]</sup> W3C CSS Properties
- <sup>[5]</sup> Stack Overflow



1. [https://www.w3schools.com/cssref/pr\\_text\\_text-align.php](https://www.w3schools.com/cssref/pr_text_text-align.php)
2. <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/CSS/text-align>
3. <https://expertbeacon.com/css-text-alignment-a-comprehensive-expert-guide/>
4. <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/css/css-text-align-property/>
5. <https://stackoverflow.com/questions/65982640/how-to-align-inline-elements-using-text-align-property>
6. <https://elementor.com/blog/how-to-center-text-in-css/>
7. <https://www.w3.org/wiki/CSS/Properties/text-align>