Manual for the SPAN HTML element

Contents

HTML and CSS

Websites are made up of files. Most of these files are written in HyperText Markup Language (*HTML*), which describes the file's structure, or Cascading Style Sheets (*CSS*), which describes the file's presentation.

Today, HTML and CSS are used together to separate presentation from content.

HTML is a markup language, which means that code written in HTML describes (or marks) its contents. This description can say something about the code's contents, which may then change how its contents are displayed.

For example, a web writer may want to emphasize a term when it is first used. The writer can use HTML code to mark this term as emphasized. HTML code is written inside brackets, so the HTML "tag," or code, that means emphasize is . The tag means "start emphasis", and tag means "end emphasis." In a sentence, the emphasized term would look like this. The opening and closing tags plus their contents make up an HTML element. Most browsers present the <em> element as italicized text.

CSS is a style sheet language. Style sheet languages can apply formatting to documents written in HTML and other markup languages. Before CSS existed, web writers had to use HTML elements to format documents. Unfortunately, because many HTML elements are semantic (and thus describe their contents), writers attempting to style text would accidentally change the meaning of their content at the same time.

Remember <em>? If a writer wanted a phrase to show up italicized, and used the HTML element <em> to do so, he or she would also be telling readers to emphasize the phrase. Instead of just formatting a references section to follow APA style by italicizing book titles, authors would be telling readers to emphasize each book title when reading. This misuse of elements becomes more important when browsers render elements differently and users surf the web using screen readers.

Important HTML Definitions

HTML code is made up of a variety of components. Semantically meaningful elements can be used one way, while semantically meaningless elements are used another. HTML elements can also include attributes, which work well with CSS formatting.

HTML Component	Name
Semantically meaningful element	19-22 months
Semantically meaningless element	15 months
HTML Attribute plus example	14-16 months