**When Elements Overlap: The z-index Property**

When two positioned elements overlap, how do you tell the browser which element goes in front? Just as you use the left property to set the x-axis (left to right) value, and the top property to set the y-axis (up and down) value, you need to use the z-index property to set the z-axis (forward and back) value in this flattened three-dimensional space; z-index tells the browser which element goes in front and which element goes behind.

Property: **z-index**  
Values: 0 (zero) or any integer; (negative values are permitted).  
Example: **z-index:10;**

The higher the z-index value is, the farther in front an element becomes; the lower the z-index value is, the farther in back an element becomes. You may not use numbers with decimal places.

In the following example, I have two positioned DIV tags, fred (which contains the letter A graphic) and martha (which contains the letter B graphic). I have set fred's z-index to 10, and martha's z-index to 20; martha, therefore, is in front of fred.

Example (in context using an embedded style sheet):

<html>

<head>

<title>Example CSS-P Page</title>

<style type="text/css">

#fred {

position:absolute;

left:100px;

top:30px;

z-index:10;

}

#martha {

position:absolute;

left:120px;

top:45px;

z-index:20;

}

</style>

</head>

<body>

<div id="fred">

<img src="capitalA.gif" width="54" height="54" />

</div>

<div id="martha">

<img src="capitalB.gif" width="54" height="54" />

</div>

</body>

</html>

Here is the above example [displayed](http://fog.ccsf.edu/~srubin/cssP6.html).

In the next example, I have the same layout, but this time I have set fred's z-index to 100, bringing it in front of martha.

Example (in context using an embedded style sheet):

<html>

<head>

<title>Example CSS-P Page</title>

<style type="text/css">

#fred {

position:absolute;

left:100px;

top:30px;

z-index:100;

}

#martha {

position:absolute;

left:120px;

top:45px;

z-index:20;

}

</style>

</head>

<body>

<div id="fred">

<img src="capitalA.gif" width="54" height="54" />

</div>

<div id="martha">

<img src="capitalB.gif" width="54" height="54" />

</div>

</body>

</html>

Here is the above example [displayed](http://fog.ccsf.edu/~srubin/cssP7.html).

Again, higher z-index values go in front, lower z-index values go in back.

If NO z-index value is set, or BOTH z-index values are identical, then whichever DIV element comes LATEST on the HTML page goes in front.

In the following example, fred and martha have both been set to a z-index of 10. Because martha comes later in the HTML code than fred, she ends up being placed in front.

Example (in context using an embedded style sheet):

<html>

<head>

<title>Example CSS-P Page</title>

<style type="text/css">

#fred {

position:absolute;

left:100px;

top:30px;

z-index:10;

}

#martha {

position:absolute;

left:120px;

top:45px;

z-index:10;

}

</style>

</head>

<body>

<div id="fred">

<img src="capitalA.gif" width="54" height="54" />

</div>

<div id="martha">

<img src="capitalB.gif" width="54" height="54" />

</div>

</body>

</html>

Here is the above example [displayed](http://fog.ccsf.edu/~srubin/cssP8.html).

Some designers start with their first positioned element being at a z-index of at least 10. That way, if they change their mind about the design and need to position something BEHIND that element, they still have some z-index values left! Some designers also increment z-index by multiples of 10 (10, 20, 30, 40, etc), so that they have some z-index values BETWEEN various elements, in case they need to insert something else later.

You can also place an image underneath some text by applying a z-index of -1 to the image. Here is an [example](http://fog.ccsf.edu/~srubin/zneg.html).