

Using Divs to display table-like data

Asked 16 years, 3 months ago Modified 9 years, 1 month ago Viewed 20k times



I want to display data like the following:

5

Title	Subject	Summary	Date
-------	---------	---------	------



So my `HTML` looks like:



```
<div class="title"></div>
<div class="subject"></div>
<div class="summary"></div>
<div class="date"></div>
```

The problem is, all the text doesn't appear on a single line. I tried adding `display="block"` but that doesn't seem to work.

What am I doing wrong here?

Important: In this instance I don't want to use a `table` element but stick with `div` tags.

`CSS`

Share

Improve this question

Follow

edited Apr 16, 2014 at 14:42



SW4

71.1k ● 20 ● 136 ● 139

asked Sep 22, 2008 at 3:08



public static

13k ● 27 ● 67 ● 87

-
- 3 What are you doing wrong? Displaying *tabular data* using divs. Tables are for tables, divs are for layout. Use tables instead! – [Jon Limjap](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 3:10
-
- 3 +1 for using the table tag. It isn't evil when it's used to display actual tabular data. – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 3:24
-
- 2 @The update, this site does not display tabular data. That's why they don't use tables. You are talking about a table. – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 3:28
-
- 1 Think about using table for data that you'd use a table in your favourite word processor. use divs when you're about to "just position something" somewhere on the page, like you'd use frames in wordprocessing (hoping are they called frames in the english UIs?) – [Olaf Kock](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 3:37
-

- 2 I think all of you brought your thoughts on tables vs divs across pretty well. But he asked a pretty straight forward question and deserves an answer. "Use a table" is not an answer to "how does this work", so why is everyone voting these table-things up? – [sdfx](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 11:45

20 Answers

Sorted by: Highest score (default) ▾

▲ It looks like you're wanting to display a table, right? So go ahead and use the `<table>` tag.

37

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:12



[Andy Lester](#)

93.5k ● 15 ● 104 ● 159



▲ I would use the following markup:

27

```
<table>
  <tr>
    <th>Title</th>
    <th>Subject</th>
    <th>Summary</th>
    <th>Date</th>
  </tr>
  <!-- Data rows -->
</table>
```



One other thing to keep in mind with all of these div and list based layouts, even the ones that specify fixed widths, is that if you have a bit of text that is wider than the width (say, a url), the layout will break. The nice thing about tables for tabular data is that they actually have the notion of a column, which no other html construct has.

Even if this site has some things, like the front page, that are implemented with divs, I would argue that tabular data (such as votes, responses, title, etc) SHOULD be in a table. People that push divs tend to do it for semantic markup. You are pursuing the opposite of this.

Share

edited Sep 22, 2008 at 11:21

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:26

Improve this answer



[Chris Marasti-Georg](#)

34.6k ● 17 ● 93 ● 137

Follow

I would add `<thead>` and `<tbody>` to the mix, but otherwise... this. Tables are for tabular data.
– [Jonny Buchanan](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 9:14

- 1 +1 for thead and tbody. That is one area in my web development that could use improvement.
– [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 13:08
-



22



I don't mean to sound patronizing; if I do, I've misunderstood you and I'm sorry.

Most people frown upon tables because people use them for the wrong reason. Often, people use huge tables to position things in their website. *This* is what divs should be used for. Not tables!

However, if you want to display *tabular data*, such as a list of football teams, wins, losses, and ties, you should most definitely use tables. It's almost unheard of (although not impossible) to use divs for this.

Just remember, if it's for displaying data, you can definitely use a table!

[Share](#) [Improve this answer](#) [Follow](#)

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:34



[stalepretzel](#)

15.9k ● 23 ● 78 ● 92



10



If there's a legitimate reason to not use a table then you could give each div a width and then float it. i.e.

```
div.title {  
  width: 150 px;  
  float: left;  
}
```

[Share](#) [Improve this answer](#) [Follow](#)

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:20



[da5id](#)

9,136 ● 9 ● 41 ● 53

- 1 ouch! any text displayed, if zoomed, could get mangled. at least use em not px for units.
– [DarenW](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 4:56

- 1 ...or specify font sizes in px as well, which effectively disables font sizing in browsers (zoom still works though). – [Vilx-](#) Nov 20, 2009 at 10:41
-



5



Is there a reason to not use tables? If you're displaying tabular data, it's best to use tables - that's what they're designed for.

To answer your question, the best way is probably to assign a fixed width to each element, and set float:left. You'll need to have either a dummy element at the end that has clear:both, or you'll have to put clear:both on the first element in each row. This



method is still not fool-proof, if the contents of one cell forces the div to be wider, it will not resize the whole column, only that cell. You maybe can avoid the resizing by using `overflow:auto` or `overflow:hidden`, but this won't work like regular tables at all.

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:12



gregmac

25.2k ● 11 ● 90 ● 120



or indeed this, which is very literally using tables for tabular data:

<https://stackoverflow.com/badges>

4

Share

edited May 23, 2017 at 12:32

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:31



Improve this answer



Community Bot

1 ● 1



breton

Follow



Just to illustrate the remarks of the previous answers urging you to use table instead of div for *tabular* data:

4

[CSS Table gallery](#) is a great way to display beautiful tables in many many different visual styles.



Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:54



VonC

1.3m ● 558 ● 4.7k ● 5.6k



Sorry, but, I'm going to tell you to use tables. Because this is tabular data.

4

Perhaps you could tell us why you *don't* want to use tables?



It appears to me, and I'm sure to a lot of other people, that you're confused about the "don't use tables" idea. It's not "don't use tables", it's "don't use tables to do page layout".



What you're doing here is laying out tabular data, so of course it should be in a table.

In case you're unclear about the idea "tabular data", I define it like this: bits of data whose meaning isn't clear from the data alone, it has to be determined by looking at a header.

Say you have a train or bus timetable. It will be a huge block of times. What does any particular time mean? You can't tell from looking at the time itself, but refer to the row or column headings and you'll see it's the time it departs from a certain station.

You've got strings of text. Are they the title, the summary, or the date? People will tell that from checking the column headings. So it's a table.

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Oct 11, 2008 at 9:19



[AmbroseChapel](#)

12.1k ● 7 ● 49 ● 69

AMEN! I can't count how many times I've had this same response to "tables are bad tho" people. – [Michael Peterson](#) Jul 15, 2015 at 18:28



2

The CSS property float is what you're looking for, if you want to stack div's horizontally.

Here's a good tutorial on floats: <http://css.maxdesign.com.au/floatutorial/>



Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 4:52



[Gavin M. Roy](#)

4,641 ● 4 ● 35 ● 29



2

display:block garauntees that the elements will *not* appear on the same line. Floating for layout is abuse just like tables for layout is abuse (but for the time being, it's necessary abuse). The only way to garauntee that they all appear on the same line is to use a table tag. That, or display:inline, and use only (Non-Breaking Space) between your elements and words, instead of a normal space. The will help you prevent word wrapping.



But yea, if there's not a legitimate reason for avoiding tables, use tables for tabular data. That's what they're for.

Share

[edited Sep 22, 2008 at 5:12](#)

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:28

Improve this answer

Follow



[breton](#)



2

In the age of CSS frameworks, I really don't see a point of drifting away from table tag completely. While it is now possible to do `display: table-*` for whatever element you like, but table is still a preferred tag to format data in tabular form (not forgetting it is more semantically correct). Just pick one of the popular CSS framework to make



tabular data looks nice instead of hacking the presentation of `<div>` tags to achieve whatever it is not designed to do.



```
display: block
```

will certainly not work, try

```
display: inline
```

or float everything to the left then position them accordingly

but if you have tabular data, then it is the best to markup in `<table>` tag

some reference: [from sitepoint](#)

Share

edited Nov 17, 2015 at 3:45

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 4:03

Improve this answer

Follow



Jeffrey04

6,318 ● 12 ● 48 ● 69



You'll need to make sure that all your "cells" float either left or right (depending on their internal ordering), and they also need a fix width.

1

Also, make sure that their "row" has a fixed width which is equal to the sum of the cell widths + margin + padding.



Lastly make sure there is a fixed width on the "table" level div, which is the sum of the row width + margin + padding.

But if you want to show tabular data you really should use a table, some browsers (more common with previous generation) handle floats, padding and margin differently (remember the famous IE 6 bug which doubled the margin?).

There's been plenty of other questions on here about when to use and when not to use tables which may help explain when and where to use divs and tables.

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:31



Aaron Powell

25.1k ● 18 ● 101 ● 150



Using this code :

1

```
<div class="title">MyTitle</div><div class="subject">MySubject</div><div class="Summary">MySummary</div>
```

You have 2 solutions (adapt css selectors to you case):

1 - Use inline blocks

```
div
{
    display: inline;
}
```

This will result in putting the blocks on the same line but remove the control you can have over their sizes.

2 - Use float

```
div
{
    width: 15%; /* size of each column : adapt */
    float: left; /* this make the block float at the left of the next one */
}

div.last_element /* last_element must be a class of the last div of your line */
{
    clear: right; /* prevent your the next line to jump on the previous one */
}
```

The float property is very useful for CSS positioning :

http://www.w3schools.com/css/pr_class_float.asp

Share

edited Sep 22, 2008 at 13:02

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 9:03

Improve this answer



Bite code

595k ● 116 ● 309 ● 334

Follow

- 2 clear:both will put the element on the next line. You want clear:right, to keep the next floated element from being to the right of the last element. – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 12:58

The reason the questions page on stack overflow can use DIVs is because the vote/answers counter is a fixed width.

1



Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Oct 10, 2008 at 20:46



Jimmy

91.3k ● 18 ● 121 ● 139



Tabular data can also be represented as nested lists - i.e. lists of lists:

1



```
<ul>
  <li>
    heading 1
    <ul>
      <li>row 1 data</li>
      <li>row 2 data</li>
    </ul>
  </li>
  <li>
    heading 2
    <ul>
      <li>row 1 data</li>
      <li>row 2 data</li>
    </ul>
  </li>
</ul>
```

Which you can layout like a table and is also semantically correct(ish).

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Nov 20, 2009 at 10:38



Darren Walker

11 ● 1

How would something like this get laid out like a table? Would doing so serve to break any other ul's you might have? – [lindes](#) Feb 5, 2011 at 4:46



For the text to appear on a single line you would have to use display="inline"

0

Moreover, you should really use lists to achieve this effect



```
<ul class="headers">
  <li>Title</li>
  <li>Subject</li>
  <li>Summary</li>
  <li>Date</li>
</ul>
```

The style would look like this:

```
.headers{padding:0; margin:0}
```


.headers li{display:inline; padding:0 10px} /The padding would control the space on the sides of the text in the header/

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 3:13



Matthew Encinas

147 ● 1 ● 7

Why use a list to display tabular data? That's what the table tag is for. – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 3:24

Also, the columns beneath would not line up properly with their headers, since each list item would have a variable width depending on its content. – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 3:27



0



I asked a similar question a while ago [Calendar in HTML](#) and everyone told me to use tables too.

If you have made an igoogole home page, just yoink their code. I made a system of columns and sections within the columns for a page. Notice with google you can't have an infinite number of columns and that offends our sensibilities as object people. Here's some of my findings:

- You need to know the width of the columns
- You need to know the number of columns
- You need to know the width of the space the columns inhabit.
- You need to ensure whitespace doesn't overflow

I made a calendar with DIV tags because it is impossible to get XSL to validate without hard coding a maximum number of weeks in the month, *which is very offensive*.

The biggest problem is every box has to be the same height, if you want any information to be associated with a field in your table with div tags you're going to have to make sure the `whitespace:scroll` or `whitespace:hidden` is in your CSS.

Share

Improve this answer

Follow

edited May 23, 2017 at 11:54



Community Bot

1 ● 1

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 4:21



Peter Turner

11.4k ● 10 ● 70 ● 113

What problem did you have getting XSL to validate? – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 14:14



0



Preface: I'm a little confused by the responses so far, as doing columns using DIVs and CSS is pretty well documented, but it doesn't look like any of the responses so far covered the way it's normally done. What you need is four separate DIVS, each one with a greater "left:" attribute. You add your data for each column into the corresponding DIV (column).

Here's a website that should help you. They have many examples of doing columns with CSS/DIV tags: <http://www.dynamicdrive.com/style/layouts/>

All you have to do is extrapolate from their 2-column examples to your 4-column needs.

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Sep 22, 2008 at 6:09



[dj_segfault](#)

12.4k ● 4 ● 32 ● 37

Again, this is terribly anti-semantic. Picture a screen-reader trying to read this. Further, say row 1 has an item that is 1 line in the first column, and 2 lines in the second column. Row 2's first column item will not line up with row 2's second column. – [Chris Marasti-Georg](#) Sep 22, 2008 at 12:57



0



You should use spans with:

```
display:inline-block
```

This will allow you to set a width for each of elements while still keeping them on the same line. See [here](#), specifically [this section](#).

Now, to appease the downvoters - of course tabular data should be in a table. But he very specifically does NOT WANT a table. The above is the answer to HIS QUESTION!!!

Share Improve this answer Follow

answered Nov 20, 2009 at 10:18



[SamGoody](#)

14.4k ● 10 ● 82 ● 93



0



First `display:block` should be `display:inline-block` , Although you might have figured it out already. Second you can also use `display:table` , `display:table-cell` , `display:table-row` and other properties. Although these are not as good as using table.

Share Improve this answer Follow



answered Aug 22, 2012 at 11:47



Sanuj

1,137 ● 1 ● 12 ● 24
