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HTML & XHTML: The Definitive Guide, 6th Edition by Chuck Musciano, Bi...

## Headings

Users have a hard enough time reading what's displayed on a screen. A long flow of text, unbroken by title, subtitles, and other headers, crosses the eyes and numbs the mind, not to mention the fact that it makes it nearly impossible to scan the text for a specific topic.

You should always break a flow of text into several smaller sections within one or more headings (like this book). There are six levels of HTML/XHTML headings that you can use to structure a text flow into a more readable, more manageable document. And, as we discuss in [Chapters 5 and 8](#), there are a variety of graphical and text-style tricks that help divide your document and make its contents more accessible as well as more readable.

## Heading Tags

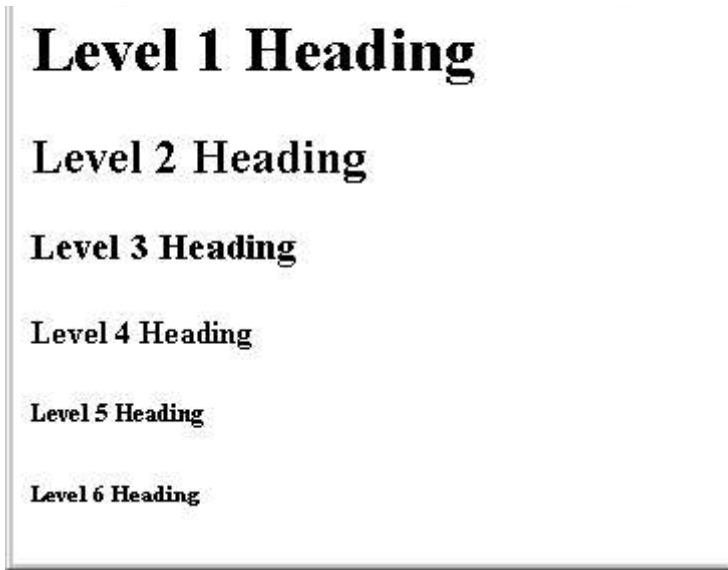
The six heading tags—written as `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>`, `<h4>`, `<h5>`, and `<h6>`—indicate the highest (`<h1>`) to lowest (`<h6>`) precedence a heading may have in the document.

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Attributes	align, class, dir, id, lang, onClick, onDb1Click, onKeyDown, onKeyPress, onKeyUp, onMouseDown, onMouseMove, onMouseOut, onMouseOver, onMouseUp, style, title
End tag	</h1>, </h2>, </h3>, </h4>, </h5>, </h6>; never omitted
Contains	text
Used in	body_content

The text enclosed within a heading typically is rendered by the browser uniquely, depending upon the display technology available to it. The browser may choose to center, format in bold-face, enlarge, italicize, underline, or change the color of headings to make each stand out within the document. And in order to thwart the most tedious writers, often users themselves can alter how a browser renders the different headings.

Fortunately, in practice most browsers use a diminishing character point size for the sequence of headers so that <h1> text is quite large and <h6> text is quite minuscule (see [Figure 4-3](#), for example).



*Figure 4-3. Browsers typically use diminishing text sizes for rendering headings*

By tradition, authors have come to use `<h1>` headers for document titles, `<h2>` headers for section titles, and so on, often matching the way many of us were taught to outline our work with heads, subheads, and sub-subheads.

Finally, don't forget to include the appropriate heading end tags in your document. The browser won't insert them automatically for you, and omitting the ending tag for a heading can have disastrous consequences for your document.

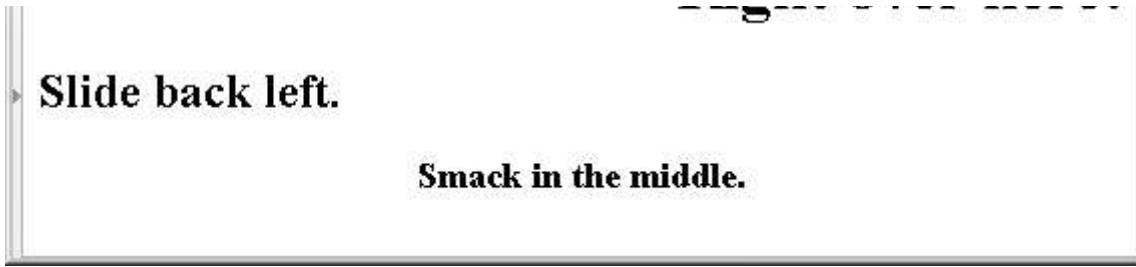
## The align attribute

The default heading alignment for most browsers is `left`. As with the `<div>` and `<p>` tags, the `align` attribute can change the alignment to `left`, `center`, `right`, or `justify`. [Figure 4-4](#) shows these alternative alignments as rendered from the following source:

---

```
<h1 align=right>Right over here!</h1>
<h2 align=left>Slide back left.</h2>
<h3 align=center>Smack in the middle.</h3>
```

---



*Figure 4-4. The heading's align attribute in action*

The `justify` value for `align` is not yet supported by any browser, and don't hold your breath. The `align` attribute is deprecated in HTML 4 and XHTML, in deference to stylesheet-based controls.

## The `dir` and `lang` attributes

The `dir` attribute lets you advise the browser in which direction the text within that paragraph should be displayed, and `lang` lets you specify the language used within the heading. [The `dir` attribute, 3.6.1.1] [The `lang` attribute, 3.6.1.2]

## The `class`, `id`, `style`, and `title` attributes

Use the `id` attribute to create a label for the heading that can later be used to unambiguously reference that heading in a hyperlink target, for automated searches, as a stylesheet selector, and with a host of other applications. [The `id` attribute, 4.1.1.4]

Use the optional `title` attribute and quote-enclosed string value to provide a descriptive phrase for the heading. [The `title` attribute, 4.1.1.5]

Use the `style` attribute with the heading tags to create an inline style for the headings' contents. The `class` attribute lets you label the heading with a name that refers to a predefined class declared in some document-level or externally defined stylesheet. [Inline Styles: The `style` Attribute, 8.1.1] [Style Classes, 8.3]

browser if it conforms to the HTML or XHTML standard. With the respective `on` attribute and value, you may react to that event by displaying a user dialog box or activating some multimedia event. [JavaScript Event Handlers, 12.3.3]

## Appropriate Use of Headings

It's often good form to repeat your document's title in the first heading tag because the title you specify in the `<head>` of your document doesn't appear in the user's main display window. The following HTML segment is a good example of repeating the document's title in the header and in the body of the document:

---

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Kumquat Farming in North America</title>
</head>
<body>
<h3>Kumquat Farming in North America</h3>
<p>
```

```
Perhaps one of the most enticing of all fruits is the...
```

---

Typically, the browser places the `<title>` text along the top of the main display. It may also place the title elsewhere in the document window and use it to create bookmarks or favorites entries, all of which vaguely are somewhere on the user's desktop. The level-three title heading in this example, on the other hand, will always appear at the very beginning of the document display. It serves as a visible title to the document, regardless of how the browser handles the `<title>` tag's contents. And, unlike the `<title>` text, the heading title gets printed at the be-

In our example, we chose to use a level-three heading (`<h3>`) whose rendered font typically is just a bit larger than the regular document text. Levels one and two are larger still and often are a bit overbearing. Choose a level of heading that you find useful and attractive and use that level consistently throughout your documents. Too big and it overwhelms the display window; too small and it's easily missed visually.

Once you have established the top-level heading for your document, use additional headings at the same or lower levels throughout to add structure and “scanability” to the document. If you use a level-three heading for the document title, for example, break your document into subsections using level-four headings. If you have the urge to subdivide your text further, consider using a level-two heading for the title, level three for the section dividers, and level four for the subsections.

## Using Headings for Smaller Text

For most graphical browsers, the fonts used to display `<h1>`, `<h2>`, and `<h3>` headers are larger, `<h4>` is the same, and `<h5>` and `<h6>` are smaller than the regular text size. Authors typically use the latter two sizes for boilerplate text, such as a disclaimer or a copyright notice. Though style rules ought to be used instead, some authors use headers for their smaller text to format tables of contents or home pages that display a site's contents. Experiment with `<h5>` and `<h6>` to get the effect you want. [Figure 4-5](#) shows how a typical browser renders the copyright reference in the following sample XHTML segment:

---

```
resulting in years of successful kumquat production
throughout North America.
</p>
<h6>This document copyright 2007 by the Kumquat Growers of
America. All rights reserved.</h6>
</body>
</html>
```

---

This document copyright 2007 by the Kumquat Growers of America. All rights reserved.

*Figure 4-5. HTML/XHTML authors typically use heading level six for boilerplate text*

## Allowed Heading Content

A heading may contain any element allowed in text, including conventional text, hyperlinks (`<a>`), images (`<img>`), line breaks (`<br>`), font embellishments (`<b>`, `<i>`, `<tt>`, `<u>`, `<strike>`, `<big>`, `<small>`, `<sup>`, `<sub>`, and `<font>`), and content-based styles (`<acronym>`, `<cite>`, `<code>`, `<dfn>`, `<em>`, `<kbd>`, `<samp>`, `<strong>`, and `<var>`). In practice, however, font or style changes may not take effect within a heading because the heading itself prescribes a font change within the browser.

At one time early on, there was widespread abuse of the heading tags as a way to change the font of entire sections of a document. Technically, paragraphs, lists, and other block elements are not allowed within a heading and may be mistaken by the browser to indicate the implied end of the heading. In practice, most browsers apply the style of the heading to all contained paragraphs. We discourage this practice because it is not only a violation of HTML and XHTML standards, but also is usually ugly to look at. Imagine if your local paper printed all the copy in headline type!

Large sections of heading text defeat the purpose of the tag. If you really want to change the font or type sizes in your document, use the standard cascading style definitions. See [Chapter 8](#) for details.

We strongly recommend that you carefully test your pages with more than one browser and at several different resolutions. As you might expect, your `<h6>` text may be readable at 640 × 480 resolution, but may disappear on a 1280 × 1024 display.

tice, most browsers recognize headings almost anywhere, formatting the rendered text to fit within the current element. In all cases, the occurrence of a heading signifies the end of any preceding paragraph or other text element, so you can't use the heading tags to change font sizes in the same line. Rather, use cascading style definitions to achieve those acute display effects. [[Inline Styles: The style Attribute, 8.1.1](#)]

## Adding Images to Headings

It is possible to insert one or more images within your headings, from small bullets or icons to full-size logos. Combining a consistent set of headings with corresponding icons across a family of documents is not only visually attractive but also an effective way of aiding users' perusal of your document collection. [[<img>, 5.2.6](#)]

Adding an image to a heading is easy. For example, the following text puts an “information” icon inside the “For More Information” heading, as you can see in [Figure 4-6](#):

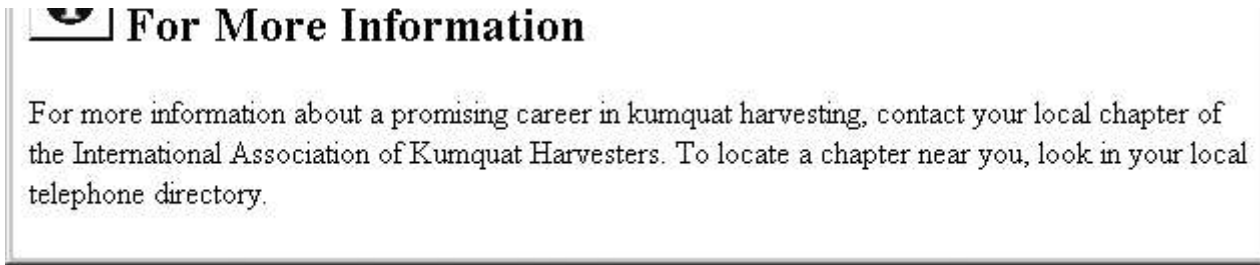
---

```
<h2>

For More Information</h2>
```

---





*Figure 4-6. An image within a heading*

In general, images within headings look best at the beginning of the heading, aligned with the bottom or middle of the heading text.

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