

What is the importance of the first line of an XML document?

Author: Mihai Rotaru

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The first line of an XML document must not be blank, since the document will fail the well-formedness test, and cannot be a valid XML document. As described in the standard, an XML document should begin with an XML declaration which specifies the version of XML being used. (<http://www.w3.org/TR/2008/REC-xml-20081126/#sec-prolog-dtd>)

However, a document not declaring the XML version on the first line can still pass the well-formedness test, but it cannot be a valid document. If the first line is blank, it cannot be well-formed, nor valid.

For example, the following is a well-formed XML document, but not valid:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<foo>This is the content of the foo element</foo>
```

This can be tested in an XML validator; for example, the one found at <http://www.validome.org/xml/validate/>:

☐ View Sourcecode ☐ Well-Formedness only

This Document is not valid.

↑

Error (1)

Line 2	File name:	Nonexistent
	Column:	7
	Error:	Can not find declaration of element 'foo'.
	Error Position:	<foo>This is the content of the foo element</foo>

As visible from above, the document is not valid because nowhere is the <foo> element declared. However, if we only test for well-formedness:

So summarize, the first line of an XML file should be used to specify the version of XML used; but it can also be any element, as long as it is not blank. However, a document without the declaration of the version of XML used cannot be valid - it can be well-formed, assuming XML syntax is respected throughout the file.