The Document Outline

The core of HTML5 semantics is the recognition that using div elements to give meaning to a document is arbitrary and flawed. By using HTML5 semantic objects the web developer brings greater meaning to their content. A content outline is a tool you should be familiar with. You have been creating outlines for you essays and papers since the fifth grade. The content of a web page is no different; a document outline is a summary, in hierarchical list format of the structures and their headings.

When you want to create a document outline, you need to start to see your document in a new format as an outline view. An outline view displays your documents content by its structures. A **"map"** of your webpage that when viewed in an outline format will describe all of the documents headings and structural objects indented and indexed to represent their level in the overall document structure, or hierarchy of the webpage.

1. HTML5 Doctor
   1. *Untitled NAV*
   2. Ask the HTML5 Doctor
   3. Beginning HTML5 & CSS3
      1. Element Index
      2. Sponsors
      3. Ask the HTML5 Doctor
      4. More HTML5 Doctor
      5. Submit your site to the Gallery
   4. Related Posts:
   5. Recent Posts
   6. Recommended

A Sample Document Outline

What Does a Document Outline Contribute?

Why is this important? There are a number of reasons to be more specific about what is important on the page. The first is for the user of your webpage, the German philosopher and writer Arnold Schopenhaur once advised: "Write the way an architect builds, who first drafts his plan and designs every detail." An outline provides a map of where to go with the webpage. A well-developed outline will show what the thesis of the webpage is, what the main idea of each body paragraph is, and the evidence/support that will be offered in each paragraph to substantiate the main points. (these in turn are generated by the user-stories, a topic we will cover in the second web course.)

The second contribution of an outline is to provide a mechanism that helps the search tools identify what a user will be looking for from your webpage. The content can be neatly organized by its structure. For example, In most web pages the information in the header and footer areas of the page is most likely the content a user is **not** searching for. Content in these locations are excluded from a document outline. Notice that the header and footer are missing from the example outline above.

There are also certain html elements that create areas on a page but the headings inside them do not contribute to the outline of their ancestor. These are often elements that introduce external content to the page, the following elements and their content are excluded from a document outline (They actually have their own outlines!):
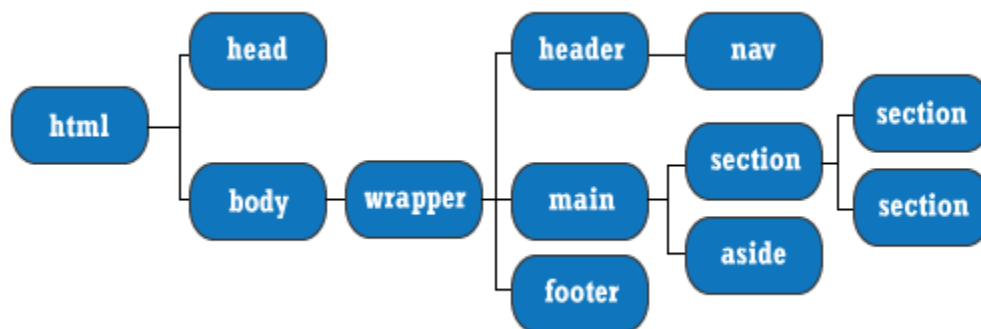
- **\<blockquote\>** indicates that the enclosed text is an extended quotation. Usually, this is rendered visually by indentation. A URL for the source of the quotation may be given using the cite attribute, while a text representation of the source can be given using the \<cite\> element.

- **<details>** The details element represents a disclosure widget from which the user can obtain additional information or controls.
- **<fieldset>** This element is used to group several controls as well as labels (<label>) within a web form.
- **<figure>** represents self-contained content, frequently with a caption (<figcaption>), and is typically referenced as a single unit. While it is related to the main flow, its position is independent of the main flow. Usually this is an image, an illustration, a diagram, a code snippet, or a schema that is referenced in the main text, but that can be moved to another page or to an appendix without affecting the main flow.
- **<td>** The <td> tag is used for specifying a cell (or table data) within a table. This tag must be nested inside a <tr> tag, which in turn must also be nested correctly.

How To Create A Document Outline

A document outline begins with an h1 heading tag. This tag is your "title" of your content (Not to be confuses with the title tag of the web page.). Below that are the h2 headings that indicate the headings of each structure (an article, section or aside)on your page. After that follows the sub headings (h3 – h6) as required. The HTML5 specification states " Sections may contain headings of any rank, and authors are strongly encouraged to use headings of the appropriate rank for the section's nesting level." This indicates that any heading tag (h1-h6) can be used at any level in the structure**, BUT** it makes no sense to do so! Please follow the h1 – h6 hierarchy on your page and style the tags appropriately with CSS.

The next consideration in your outline is how your headings nest in the DOM (Document Object Model). In the DOM, documents have a logical structure which is very much like a tree; to be more precise, it is like a "forest" or "grove".   Our webpage will look something like this in the DOM.

That same page would read as the following in our document outlining tool. Notice how the nav, primary heading and the aside heading are all at the same level? Can you find the nested sections of the section in the main? Notice the level of the secondary headings in the document outline tool? Do they match up with the nested sections?

Coding the Document Outline

There are some guidelines to follow when coding your document.

1. All pages require an h1 tag on the main to identify the page as the document title.
2. Internal headings must follow a logical depreciation, use CSS to style.
3. Sectioning elements (<article>, <section>, <nav> and <aside>) are always subsections of their nearest ancestor structure, regardless of what sections are created by internal headings. (1)
4. Untitled structures in the document outline are to be strictly avoided.
5. The flow of the document outline should match the flow of the web page.

In Class Activity

The document outline is a great tool to help bring structure to your page. Using the tool will allow you to see if your semantics are balanced which will increase the likelihood that a user searching online is going to find your content. In this activity navigate to the following webpages and document the structural objects and the headings that **you** see on the page. Then run the page through the document outline tool and compare **the differences between what you see as the outline on the page and what the browser identifies as the outline on the page**. Are the semantics balanced or imbalanced?

Website	Balanced or Imbalanced?
http://www.laurelpoint.com/meetings/meeting-rooms.htm	
http://www.dashwoodmanor.com/about/about-dashwood-manor.htm	
http://www.jamesbayinn.com/links	
http://www.arbutusinn.ca/about.html	
http://www.beaconinns.com/sidneybc/accommodation/beacon-inn-at-sidney-guest-rooms.htm	

References:

Robinson, Mike. "Document Outlines." . HTML5 Doctor, 12 July 2011. Web. 1 May 2014. <http://html5doctor.com/outlines/>.

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zziccardi, BillyONeal, allergic, Jürgen Jeka, jswisher, syssgx, kscarfone, Faldo, Gilchris, Yoshino, PablO, timemachine3030, NickolayBot, FreakCERS, Brettz9, Jscher2000, Sheppy, tregagnon, fscholz, Nickolay, hobophobe, betoscopio, Charles, trevorh, claudepache, teoli, Ptak82, simonsarris, SteveFaulkner, slhuang, BobChao, dekajp, ethertank, Rappo, Ruakh, Mgjbot, Ms2ger, haboqueferus, Dria. "HTML element reference." . Mozilla Developer Network, n.d. Web. 1 May 2014. <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTML/Element>.