Introduction to Open XML

Said simply, Open XML documents (DOCX, XLSX, and PPTX) are ZIP files that contain XML inside of them. You can take any DOCX file, change its extension to .ZIP, unzip it, and examine the various XML files that are in the ZIP file.

Open XML is an ISO standard (ISO/IEC 29500). This is a fantastically good thing. The XML markup within the ZIP file is very carefully defined.

The Open XML standard is freely available to everyone – you can download the PDF that contains the Open XML standard from the ISO web site at <http://standards.iso.org/ittf/PubliclyAvailableStandards/>.

Near the bottom of the page, you can find the links for ISO/IEC 29500. Of course, it is a bit long and a bit daunting. Every button, check box, and radio button that you find within Word, Excel, and PowerPoint has an impact on the markup in DOCX, XLSX, and PPTX files. WordprocessingML is the sub-dialect of Open XML for wordprocessing documents – DOCX files.

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