Composing Good HTML

Note: This document is being used the guinea pig for an experiment in generating multiple views of documents. Through the use of a Perl script, some x−perimental HTML directives, and those fun LINK elements nobody ever uses, I'm able to automate the generation of both a single document (suitable for printing) and a multi−part document (more appropriate to hypertext). There is also a postscript version available (via FTP, at jupiter.willamette.edu, as /outgoing/jtilton/strict−html.ps). Let me know what you think! (3/31/94)

Introduction

As the Web continues to explode in its own inimitable fashion, it is becoming more and more important to write HTML that conforms to certain guidelines. Specifically, with the current diversity of clients for the Web (and we can only expect to see more!), it's become important to write HTML that will look good on **any** client, and not just on the specific client which the author may have access to.

To that end, there are a few solutions. One approach is this one −− documents which point out common errors one might make in the composition of HTML. The other approach is software based −− a "lint"−like program for catching semantic errors in HTML, and perhaps even correcting them.

The thing to bear in mind is that, if you follow these guidelines, your document may not look as best as it possibly can on a particular browser. However, it also will not look ugly on any browser, which is the risk you take by disregarding these recommendations and tweaking your HTML for, say, Mosaic. Unfortunately, Mosaic may render things differently from Lynx which may render things differently from TkWWW, etc, etc, etc. These guidelines, in essence, should ensure the *best fit across the space of all possible browsers*, if you get my drift.

This document does **not** purport to be a style guide, or a beginner's manual to HTML. Fine documents already exists for these purposes.

(Note: This document is fairly stable, but still open to amendment. Please feel free to comment on that which is missing, wrong, right, or silly. **Especially,** *please point out anywhere that I don't follow my own guidelines −− I'll slink back and fix it, I promise! Thanks to everyone who's already done so!)*

Contents of this Document

- Acknowledgements

For More Information

There already exist documents on the Web which address this same topic, and perhaps in more detail. For definitive reference information you may wish to check the HTML specification from CERN. For a more detailed discussion of HTML composition style, you should also check the Style Guide (especially the section on device−independent formatting), which is also from CERN.

If you're looking for a good document for learning the basics of HTML, you will want to check out the Beginner's Guide to HTML, from NCSA.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank all of you have visited this document and commented on it, suggesting fixes, clarification, and even new sections. You know who you are (even if I managed to lose your addresses in the flood of information) ! It is, in some senses, still a work in progress and is always amenable to suggestion, modification, and repair. I appreciate your help!

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