

edition

a guide to web standards
and accessibility



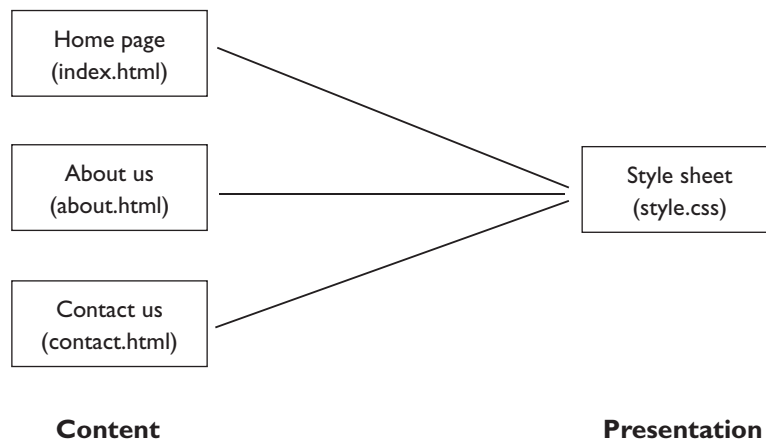
start here

What are web standards?

Web standards are a set of rules for ensuring websites are coded correctly. The rules are drawn up by the leading industry body, the **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)**.

In standards-compliant websites, the individual pages (coded in HTML or the more up-to-date XHTML) contain no or only minimal layout rules. Instead, the layout is governed by a separate page of rules, to which the other pages link, called a **Cascading Style Sheet** (or simply 'style sheet' or 'CSS file').

In the diagram below, the individual web pages are on the left, and contain text and images, while the CSS file on the right governs the appearance of those pages (eg how the text and images are arranged, what fonts and colour are used). Thus standards-compliant sites are often said to **separate content from presentation**, in contrast with earlier web design methods where each page contained a mixture of content and layout rules.



As its name suggests, the W3C is fond of acronyms and standards-compliant websites often carry logos such as the following (which denote valid XHTML, valid CSS and a triple-A accessibility rating respectively):



To validate their (X)HTML and CSS files, developers can use automated tools such as those online at validator.w3.org and jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator. Ensuring that a website is accessible to disabled users is trickier, often requiring a combination of human judgment and online tools such as Cynthia Says and WebXACT (formerly Bobby). Some other web languages, such as Javascript, have their own standards.

Find out more

The Web Standards Project | www.webstandards.org

What Every Web Site Owner Should Know About Standards | www.maccaws.org/kit/primer

The World Wide Web Consortium | www.w3.org

we mean it

The semantic web

Standards-compliant websites often use semantic mark-up. This means that the pages are coded to convey the document structure. Consider the following website text:

Global Week of Action

Biggest ever mobilisation on trade

This site is a record of some of the **thousands of events** that took place during the week.

- read event reports
- view video clips from around the world
- see what the media said
- view photos from the week.

Either of the blocks of code below could be used to produce it. But only the one on the left uses semantic mark-up. The main heading is labelled `<h1>`, the second heading `<h2>` and the bulleted list `` (unordered list) and `` (list item). The rules defining how the headings and lists will look are contained in a separate style sheet. In contrast, the non-compliant code on the right is full of rules determining how each item should look, but contains nothing to convey the document structure.

```
<h1>Global Week of Action</h1>
<h2>Biggest ever mobilisation on trade</h2>
<p>This site is a record of some of the
<strong>thousands of events</strong> that took
place during the week.</p>
<ul>
  <li>read event reports</li>
  <li>view video clips from around the world</li>
  <li>see what the media said</li>
  <li>view photos from the week.</li>
</ul>
```

Meaningful

```
<p><font face="Verdana" size="4"><b>Global Week of
Action</b></font></p>
<p><font face="Verdana" size="3"><b>Biggest ever
mobilisation on trade</b></font></p>
<p><font face="Verdana" size="2">This site is a record
of some of the <b>thousands of events</b> that took
place during the week.</font></p>
<p><font face="Verdana" size="2">&bull; read event
reports<br>
&bull; view video clips from around the world<br>
&bull; see what the media said<br>
&bull; view photos from the week.</font></p>
```

Meaningless

Semantic mark-up improves visibility in web searches. Search engines such as Google give higher ratings to well-structured text.

Another advantage is that the page makes more sense when visited with a non-graphical browser such as a screen reader (which reads out the site to a blind user, or renders it as braille). The screen reader ignores the graphical rules in the style sheet to produce a well-formatted 'text-only' document.



← The visual browser sees this.

→ The screen reader sees this.

Global Week of Action

10-16 April 2005
Setting the people's agenda

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- [Background](#)
- [Get involved](#)
- [News](#)
- [Events](#)

Resources

Different organisations and networks are producing their own resources for the Week of Action. These may be helpful for others when planning their own involvement. The resources are listed below. The views expressed in these resources do not necessarily represent the views of all involved in the Global Week of Action.

If your organisation has produced resources that are available to download or order, please add them to this site. Send the web address to resources@april2005.org

the good stuff

Why should I use web standards?

1. Search engine visibility

Cleaner code and semantic mark-up will help boost your site's search engine placement.

2. Shorter pages

Files download more quickly – so users don't have to wait and there is less pressure on your server.

3. Easier to redesign

The design rules are held in one central CSS file rather than throughout the site. Change this file and all of your pages are updated.

4. Easier to maintain

Because your site is coded to agreed standards, it's easier for new developers or in-house staff to pick up where others left off – they don't have to spend hours unravelling idiosyncratic code.

5. Accessible design

CSS-based sites allow you to improve accessibility without compromising on design. There is no need to produce a text-only version.



The World Development Movement site combines visual impact with accessibility.

6. Backwards compatibility

Standards are written so that old browsers still understand the basic structure of your documents. Even if they can't understand the newest additions to standards, they can still display your content.

7. Future proofing

Leading developers have signed up to the W3C and its standards – including Microsoft, Apple, Mozilla, AOL/Netscape, Adobe and Macromedia – so glitches are less likely to appear when your pages are viewed using new browsers or operating systems.

8. Device independence

CSS-based sites don't just work in standard web browsers, but can be accessed using screen readers, handheld devices and anything else that links to the net. You can add additional style sheets for particular situations, eg to produce print-optimised text when a user prints a page.

brains with beauty

Some web managers assume that accessible sites must look less interesting than non-accessible sites. But building sites with CSS allows designers to be more creative, not less. Here is a selection of standards-compliant sites produced for Channel 4, who insist on good design and accessibility.



Can You Believe It?



20th Century Greats



Shariah TV



The Worst Jobs in History



Last Rights



Classic Weapons of World War II