

Lecture Notes: The HTML 4 Table Model

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1 Background

Before HTML 4 there was a different table model

It was

- not compatible with US government standards and
- it had virtually no accessibility support

Tables are sometimes used for layout, but CSS is so prevalent now that there is no need for such silliness

- layout-by-tables is very difficult for users who can't see the entire table at once (we are all disabled at some time)
- tables should only be used for tabular data, not presentation

The new model is more complex but it has many advantages:

- more logical markup
- hooks to enable searching and summarization
- support for multi-screen tables

2 Basics

`<table>` A block level element with begin and end tags

2.1 Parts

2.1.1 Minimal

`caption` similar to `title` for entire webpage

`tr` rows

`th` and `td` headings and data

2.1.2 Organizational and Presentational Elements

`thead` and `tfoot` headings (both declared at the top of the table)

`colspan` and `rowspan` attributes

`colgroup` and `col` `colgroup` is a container for `cols`

provide logical structure

can be used for presentation with:

- `rules`
- `width` attribute
- CSS

`align` and `valign`

better to use CSS now

`align` options:

- left, center [sic], right
- justify
- char

`valign` options: top, middle, bottom, baseline

2.2 Markup for Non-Visual Agents

Includes robots, audio browsers, etc.

`summary` attribute

`scope` and `axis`

- `scope` tells user agents which heading a cell relates to (similar to `headers`)
- `axis` help users to understand what a cell in table represents (think of the table as n -dimensional layout ($n \geq 2$) the `axis` is the dimension that the cell is related to

`headers` for headings not in the main columns

3 More

For more details and some examples see the HTML 4.01 standard [Raggett et al. \[1999\]](#).

For CSS hooks into HTML tables see the CSS 2 standard, in particular the box model and tables sections [Bos et al. \[1998\]](#), [Lie and Bos \[1999\]](#).

For some specific advice about how to make tables accessible to the most people (and by extension web robots and other software) see the W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative's recommendations [Chisholm et al. \[1999b,a\]](#).

References

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