



Elements vs. Attributes

5

Introduction

One of the first questions people who are starting to use XML as is “Which should I use, elements or attributes?”

There is no hard-and-fast rule (indeed, some people have proposed abolishing attributes, claiming that they are completely redundant or perhaps even harmful). This exercise might help you make your own decision...

Setting Up

Make a new directory for this exercise. Call this directory *Compare*: For example:

```
C:\> mkdir Compare
C:\> cd Compare
```

All the files that you subsequently create as you do this exercise should be contained in this directory.

The Exercise

Here is the data that you will be working with:

```
Class 100: Introduction to XML
Students:
  9823476 Fred Flintstone
  9912675 Danger Mouse
  9878641 Johnny Bravo
  9756489 Homer Simpson
```

Markup Variations

Now you will create two documents, marked up differently.

Element-Based

Create a simple DTD for this data *using only elements*.

Once you have created your DTD, mark up the supplied data accordingly.

Open the marked-up document in IE5 (you can simply double-click on the file). Does it look ‘right’? (Some people believe that for a piece of English prose to be considered well-formed, it should be able to withstand the “telephone test”: if the prose can be read down the telephone and completely understood by the listener then it can be considered ‘good.’ The “does it look right in IE5?” test can be considered as XML’s version of the “telephone test”...)

Attribute-Based

Repeat the above exercise, but this time *using only attributes*.

A Balanced Approach

As with many things in life, there is probably a balance between using only elements and using only attributes.

Repeat the exercise a third time, using a mix of the two markup techniques. Which data should be marked up as attributes and which as elements? Does the resulting document “look right” in IE5?