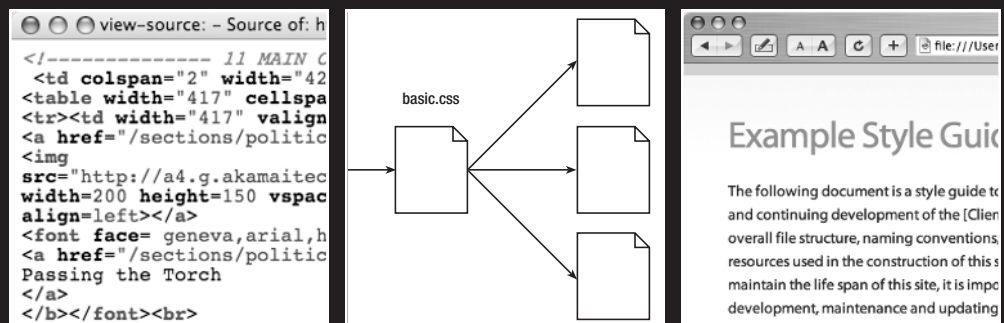


1 SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS



The human race is a naturally inquisitive species. We just love tinkering with things. When I recently bought a new iMac G5 I had it to bits within seconds, before I'd even read the instructions. We enjoy working things out ourselves, creating our own mental models about how we think things behave. We muddle through and only turn to the manual when something goes wrong or defies our expectations.

One of the best ways to learn Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) is to jump right in and start tinkering. However, if you're not careful you may end up misunderstanding an important concept or building in problems for later on. In this chapter, I am going to review some basic, but often misunderstood, concepts and show you how to keep your (X)HTML and CSS clear and well structured.

When we use the term XHTML, we are referring to Extensible Hypertext Markup Language, and when we use the term (X)HTML, we are referring to both XHTML and HTML.

In this chapter you will learn about

- The importance of a well-structured and meaningful document
- Coding best practices
- Common coding mistakes
- Document types, DOCTYPE switching, and browser modes
- Ways to target your styles
- The cascade, specificity, and inheritance

Structuring your code

Most people don't think about the foundations of a building. However, without solid foundations, the majority of the buildings around us wouldn't exist. While this book is about advanced CSS techniques, much of what we are going to do would not be possible (or would be very difficult) without a well-structured and valid (X)HTML document to work with.

In this section you will learn why well-structured and meaningful (X)HTML is important in CSS development. You will also learn how you can add more meaning to your documents, and by doing so, make your job as a developer easier.