Consistent Data Transfer

- Transfer of data has become increasingly important
- Can’t assume control of all ways data is created and used
  - Cross-platform, cross-system, etc.
  - People want to access data for their own purposes
  - People want to use data from several sources
- Data may be more complicated than “traditional” formats would support
  - E.g. ASCII text only good for some text documents
- Need a more universal means of transferring data

Markup Languages

- Idea is to “tag” information to give a sense of its meaning/semantics
- How that is handled is up to reader
- Usually separates presentation from structure
- Examples:
  - HTML: standard web page information, interpreted by browsers
  - TeX/LaTeX: document specification, style descriptions determine how it is laid out

XML

- eXtensible Markup Language
- Extensible: able to define additional “tags”
  - Specific tags and the semantics associated with them allow specifications of different languages
- Developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to help standardize internet information transfer
- Now used as the basis for many specialized languages
  - Each has its own semantic requirements
XML Characteristics
• Straightforward to use on the internet
• Easily processed/parsed
• Human-readable
• Capable of expressing wide range of applications
  - Including hierarchies, tables
• Can be very large/verbose

XML Document Text
• Intermingled character data and markups
• Markups:
  - Start/End tags (and empty element tags)
  - Entity/Character references
  - Comments
  - CDATA delimiters
  - Processing Instructions
  - XML/Text declarations
  - Document type declarations

Basic XML Syntax
• Some prolog/header
  - Possibly describing/referring to type of XML
• Single root element
• More elements forming a tree
  - Elements fully “nest” inside each other
  - Can have any number of children elements
• Elements begin with a start tag, end with an end tag
  - `<Elem>Stuff in element</Elem>`

Tag Format
• Starting Tags can declare attributes
  - `<TagName Attr1="…" Attr2='…'>`
  - Note that attributes can use “ or ‘
• Ending Tags match starting tag name, but with a / preceding
  - `</TagName>`
• Character data (and maybe other elements) in between start/end tags
• Empty element:
  - `<Elem/>
  - Equivalent to `<Elem></Elem>`
Entity/Character References

- Note: Some character patterns are “reserved”
  - <, >, &, ‘, “
- An entity reference is a name given to a character or set of characters
  - Used for any other things to be repeated
    - General entity form: &Whatever;
  - Used for the “reserved” characters
    - &lt; <, &gt; >, &amp; &, &quot; “, &apos; 

Character References

- Character References are specialized
- Use the form &#...; where the ... is a reference to a character in an ISO standard
  - &#38; is an &

Comments

- Begin with <!--
- End with -->
- Everything in between is ignored
  <!-- This is a comment -->

CDATA sections

- Used to note a section that would otherwise be viewed as markup data
- <![CDATA[ ... ]]> 
  <![CDATA[ <b>This <a>is</b>not</a>bad ]]>
Processing Instructions
- Allow documents to contain instructions for applications reading them
  - “Outside” the main document
- `<? Target ... ?>`
- Target is the target application name
  - Any other instructions follow
- `<? MyReader -o3 -f input.dat ?>`

XML Semantics
- Semantics must be declared to determine what is valid syntax
  - Tags allowed and their attributes, entities
  - Does not say how it is processed
- Can be located in XML document itself
- Can be contained in separate Document Type Declaration (DTD)
- Newer XML Schema definitions, which capture semantics in an XML-like document
  - But drawbacks, including difficulty to use, not as universally implemented, large size, etc.

XML/Text Declarations
- Documents should start with declaration of XML type used, in a prolog:
  - `<?xml version="1.0" ?>`
- Other documents “included” should also have such a prolog, as the first line

Document Type Declaration: DTD
- Defines constraints on the structure of the XML
- Comes before first element
- Either defines or points to external definition of Document Type Definition (DTD)
- External: `<!DOCTYPE Name SYSTEM url>`
- Internal: `<!DOCTYPE Name [...]>`
- The DTD can be standalone (no further external references) or not
Element Declarations

- Define elements and allowed content (character data, subelements, attributes, etc.)
- `<!ELEMENT Name Content>`
  - Name is the unique name
  - Content describes that type of element
- Options for Content:
  - EMPTY – nothing allowed in the element
  - ANY – no restrictions
  - Children elements only
  - Mixed character and children elements

Element Declarations: Child element content

- When an element has (only) child elements within it
- Specify using:
  - Parentheses ( ) for grouping
  - The `,` for sequencing
  - The `|` for “choice of”
  - The `+` (one or more), `*` (zero or more), or `?` (zero or one) modifiers.
    - If no modifier, means “exactly once”

Example of Child elements

```xml
<!Element book (title, coverpage, tableofcontents?, editionnote*, preface?, (chaptternumber, chaptertitle, chaptertext)+, index?)>
```

Element Declarations: Mixed element content

- When an element can contain both character and child elements
- The character text is denoted as a kind of special element name: `#PCDATA`

```xml
<!ELEMENT story (#PCDATA|a|b|c)*>
```
Attribute Declarations

- Define allowed attribute names, their types, and default values
- `<!ATTLIST ElementName Attribute*>`
  - ElementName is the name of the element those attributes belong to
  - Repeat attribute definition as many times as needed

Attribute Declaration: Types

- Name Type Default Value
- Name is the attribute name
- Type:
  - CDATA: string
  - Enumerated: specified via a comma-separated list in parentheses
  - Tokenized: a limited form, specified by some other rule defined in the DTD
  - Several variations

Attribute Declaration: Defaults

- Specify a default value
  - Also specify whether attribute is needed in the element
- #REQUIRED
  - This attribute must be specified each time (no default)
- #IMPLIED
  - No default is specified
- Otherwise, use the default value given
  - Precede by #FIXED if it must always take that default

Attribute Declaration Example

```xml
<!ATTLIST Book
  title     CDATA  #REQUIRED
author    CDATA  "anonymous"
publisher CDATA  #IMPLIED
category  (fiction,nonfiction) "fiction"
language  CDATA  #FIXED 'English'
>
```
Entity Declarations

- Entity References should be declared
- Internal Entity:
  - `<!ENTITY Name ReplacementText >`  
  `<!ENTITY CR “Copyright 2008”>`
  
  &CR;
- External Entity:
  - `<!ENTITY Name SYSTEM url >`
  `<!ENTITY BP SYSTEM “http://this.com/BP.xml”>`
  
  &BP;
- There are also other variations on external entities

Parameter Entities

- Like general entities, but refer to entities to be used in the Document Type Declaration
- Use a % instead of an &
  `<!ENTITY % newdef SYSTEM “http://this.com/newdef-xml.entities”>`
  
  %newdef;

Conditionals (in the DTD)

- Used in the DTD to apply different rules
  `<![Condition[…]]]>`
  - If Condition is INCLUDE then keep
  - If Condition is IGNORE then skip
- Combine with parameter entities:
  `<!ENTITY % addborder ‘INCLUDE’>`
  
  ...  
  `<![%addborder;[
  ... (stuff to draw border) ... ]]>`

XML Namespaces

- Different XML definitions could define the same element name.
- If we want to use both, could have conflict.
- Can distinguish using namespaces.
  `<a:book>...</a:book>`
  `<b:book>...</b:book>`
Defining XML Namespaces

- xmlns attribute in definition of element
  xmlns:prefixname="URL"
  
  <a:book
    xmlns:a=http://this.com/adef>
  
- Can be defined in first use of element or in XML root element.
- Can define a “default”
  - No prefix needed, leave off : also

Summary/More Information

- XML has become a standard way of transferring information, especially over the internet
- Provides flexibility to represent a wide range of data.
- Many texts/online tutorials about XML
- W3C “official” pages:
  
  http://www.w3.org/XML/

  See in particular the XML 1.0 specs (more than the 1.1 specs)