

The HTML doctype

An article from



[Hello! HTML5 and CSS3](#) EARLY ACCESS EDITION

Rob Crowther

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This article is taken from the book Hello! HTML5 and CSS3. The author discusses doctype, which HTML5 doesn't need for validation but still needs to be triggered for legacy browsers to render pages in standards-compliant mode.

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The DOCTYPE declaration is somewhat archaic; it comes from SGML, which was used to define previous versions of HTML in terms of the language syntax. It appears as the first thing in an HTML document and serves two practical functions:

- It is used by HTML validation services to determine which version the document uses
- When browsers use the DOCTYPE to determine whether to use standards, almost standards, or quirks mode to render the document. (The short version is: standards mode is what you want.)

HTML5 is defined in terms of its DOM representation after parsing, so it doesn't need a DOCTYPE for validation, but we still want legacy browsers to render pages in standards-compliant mode. With this in mind the authors of the HTML5 spec worked out the minimal amount of markup required to trigger standards mode in browsers:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML>
```

Compare this with similar declarations for HTML4 and XHTML1:

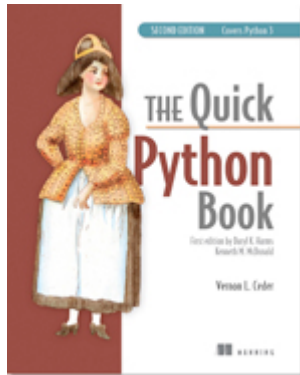
```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/html4/strict.dtd">
```

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
```

Summary

In this article, you've learned that HTML5 doctype is much shorter, easier to type, and easier to remember.

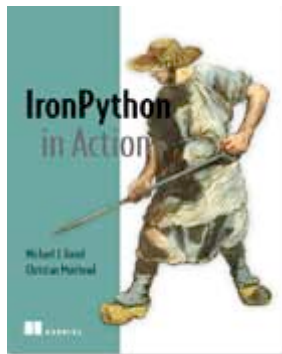
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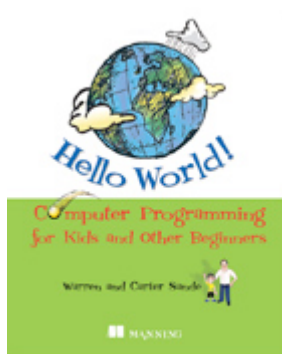
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