

Chapter 9

After finalizing the content blueprint, the designer creates a basic framework or "skeleton" by determining the structural makeup for the content. In this way, designers create an effective and flexible framework that can transfer to many types of user agents or display devices. Although additional work would be needed to translate a design for a computer screen to a small-screen device, the priority of the informational content, functionality, and navigation would have already been analyzed, which should speed up the design process.

There are many methods a designer can use to help ensure the separation of content from presentation. Listed below are topics that will be discussed in this chapter:

- Using stylesheets for consistency across your web site
- Allowing user-override of styles if they cannot read your font size or colors
- Controlling fonts in such a way that users with disabilities can still read the text
- Formatting and positioning text without misusing HTML table tags
- Working with lists that can be recognized by screen reader technologies
- Designating colors that have good contrast for readability
- Using aural stylesheets to enhance the experience of the web site
- Designing for various media types, for example, computer screens, speech synthesizers, or Braille devices
- Designing pages that are readable without stylesheets in case the assistive technology does not support them
- Validating stylesheets for accessibility

After an overview of stylesheet fundamentals, stylesheet issues related to accessibility will be discussed in more detail. In general, well-designed stylesheets allow screen readers to interpret the web site structure and render it properly. Even though many designers are reluctant to use stylesheets because of browser support concerns and their experience using table elements for layout, more and more designers are incorporating stylesheets because they do offer significant advantages even beyond those for accessibility.

Stylesheets give the user "global" control over the site. A master stylesheet or even a series of stylesheets allow all of the visual changes to be created or modified in one place for the entire site. This control saves designers a lot of time over the life cycle of a site.

CSS stylesheets also allow users to override author styles when needed. Allowing users to adjust colors, font sizes, backgrounds, and spacing can mean the difference between a completely unusable site and a flexible, usable site that meets the user's needs.

Stylesheets allow for precise positioning of information. Instead of relying on tables or transparent spacer images to create visual presentations, designers can use style properties to position, and even overlap, elements on the page.

CSS also supports aural presentation of web pages and media types. Taking the extra time to code for this method of presentation can significantly enhance user experiences with your site. When browsers start to support aural stylesheets, more designers will take advantage of them.