

# HTML5 Quick Learning Guide

*Just what you need to know to quickly  
move from HTML / XHTML to HTML5*

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HTML5 syntax is compatible with both HTML4 and XHTML1. Want to close empty elements with a slash? Go for it. Rather not? Then don't. Want to use lower case? Upper case? Take your pick. In other words, you really don't have to change the way you handle these things, so don't worry, ok?

**HTML5 doctype is much simpler:**

**New way:**

```
<!doctype html>
```

Old ways:

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

or

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

**Meta charset tag is much simpler:**

**New way:**

```
<meta charset="UTF-8">
```

Old way:

```
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=UTF-  
8" />
```

Divs are now used for styling rather than structure; HTML5 includes several new structural elements that help define parts of the document. Let's take a look at the main new structural elements that you'll probably use right away.

*(Note that included in the head is an HTML5 shiv that allows us to style elements in IE, and a basic CSS style is also included so we can help browsers that aren't caught up yet to render the new block-level elements as block-level elements. For now, it's easiest just to automatically include them. Understanding why can come later.)*

## *Main Structural Elements You'll Use Most Often in HTML5*

`<header>`

`<nav>`

`<section>`

`<article>`

`<aside>`

`<footer>`

Although these sound like “positions” in a document, and very often will be used in that way, they really are about grouping and not positioning. You might have 3 `<sections>` in a page, with each `<section>` having its own `<header>` and `<footer>` for instance. (Note that these elements - like classes - can be used more than once on a page).

*But to keep things simple, for this document's purpose, let's just think of a very basic document that contains a top header, a menu for navigation, a content section that contains a couple of articles, a sidebar, and a footer.*

In HTML4 or XHTML, you probably would have used divs, classes and ids to group each of those areas. You can and should still use divs, classes and ids for styling reasons, but they may no longer be as necessary as before for structural purposes. Some documents may be able to get by without them completely, while most will probably still need them for styling. But again, for the purposes of learning the quick facts to create a simple HTML5 document, let's keep this really basic.

Here's a simple way to code a very basic document that contains a top header, a menu for navigation, a content section that contains a couple of articles, a sidebar, and a footer in HTML5.

```

<!doctype html>
<html>
<head>
  <meta charset="utf-8">
  <title>Very Basic Document</title>
  <!--[if IE]><script src="http://html5shiv.googlecode.com/svn/trunk/html5.js"></script><![endif]-->
  <style>header, footer, section, aside, nav, article {display: block;}</style>
</head>
<body>
  <nav>
    <ul>
      <li><a href="#">Home</a></li>
      <li><a href="#">About</a></li>
      <li><a href="#">Products</a></li>
      <li><a href="#">Contact Us</a></li>
    </ul>
  </nav>
  <header>
    <h1><a href="#">Very Basic Document</a></h1>
    <h2>A tag line might go here</h2>
  </header>
  <section>
    <article>
      <h3><a href="#">First Article Title</a></h3>
      
      <p>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Integer nec odio. </p>
    </article>
    <article>
      <h3><a href="#">Second Article Title</a></h3>
      
      <p>Praesent libero. Sed cursus ante dapibus diam.</p>
    </article>
  </section>
  <aside>
    <h4>Connect With Us</h4>
    <ul>
      <li><a href="#">Twitter</a></li>
      <li><a href="#">Facebook</a></li>
    </ul>
  </aside>
  <footer>
    <p>All rights reserved.</p>
  </footer>
</body>
</html>

```

As you can see, the structure is fairly simple, and you can style these new structural elements in the CSS. However, because you may have some of these structural elements within different groupings on a page (such as several sections having different headers and footers), you may want to style each differently. In that case, you can still assign ids and classes just as you would in HTML4 or XHTML.

The point of the structural elements is to designate structure after all; presentation is dealt with in the CSS in whatever manner works best for you, using ids and classes.

So what are the actual definitions of these new structural elements?

**<header>** represents a group of introductory or navigational aids. (*Things you'd usually wrap in a H1, H2, Hx, etc*)

**<nav>** represents a section of the document intended for navigation. (*Like a menu*)

**<section>** represents a generic document or application section. It can be used together with the h1, h2, h3, h4, h5, and h6 elements to indicate the document structure. (*Just a logical grouping such as a content section*)

**<article>** represents an independent piece of content of a document, such as a blog entry or newspaper article. (*Independent is the key word here. If the piece of content could make sense plucked out of this document and placed somewhere else, it's probably an article*)

**<aside>** represents a piece of content that is only slightly related to the rest of the page. (*Usually a sidebar, but could be another type of content that isn't directly related to the main content*)

**<footer>** represents a footer for a section and can contain information about the author, copyright information, et cetera. (*You know, like... a footer*)

Of course, HTML5 comes with other interesting elements such as the video and audio elements, plus new and changed elements and attributes, but all of those belong in a separate cheat sheet. This one is to get you up and running fast, so there you have it. Just the basics that will let you quickly move from HTML4 or XHTML to HTML5 right now!

If you want to delve into the finer points, I recommend starting with the W3C draft, entitled HTML5 differences from HTML4 located at <http://dev.w3.org/html5/html4-differences/>

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Pretty simple, yes? :)