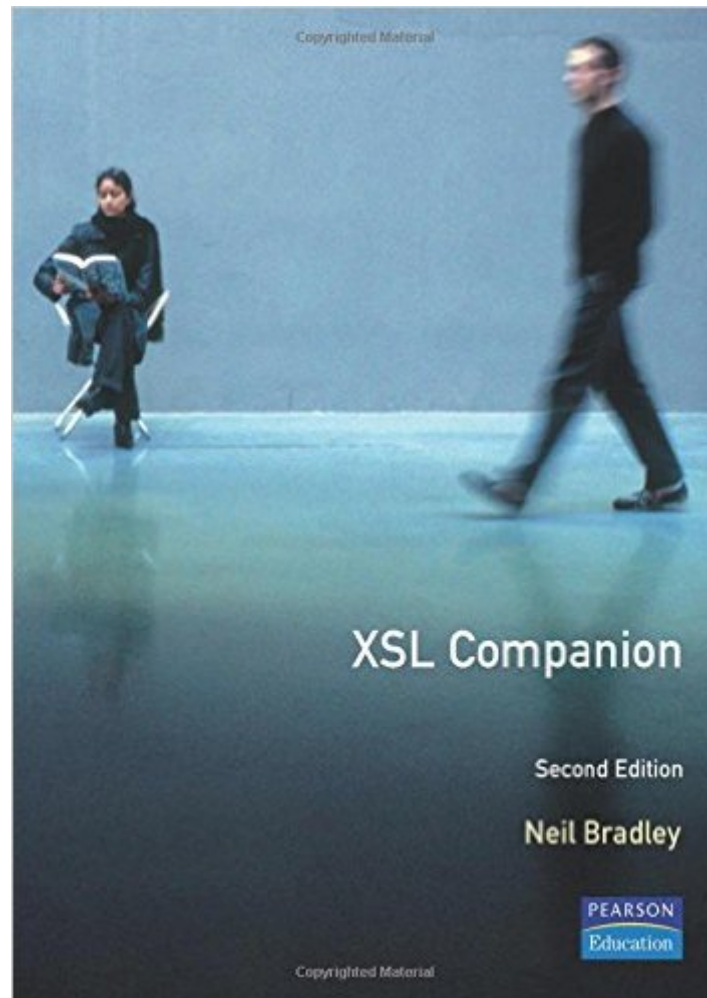


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The XSL Companion (2nd Edition)



Synopsis

-- All features explained clearly with plenty of examples and illustrations.-- Previous edition garnered great reviews.-- XSL use growing, as use of XML continues to grow.This guide explains the practical ways in which XSL can be used for formatting and manipulating information held in XML. The XSL standard has developed into three specific standards, all examined in detail - XSL, XSLT, and XPath. Together these form a powerful array of tools that allow you to control and optimize the formatting of your XML documents, and thus deliver content and information in a dynamic and flexible way. This book has been completely updated for the new XSLT standard, and has about 50% more coverage than the previous edition. It concludes with a reference to other formatting and stylesheet languages. If you are a current or potential XML user looking for just one reference to get you up to speed on styling and manipulating your XML documents with clarity, comprehensive coverage, and precision, then this book will be your essential and constant companion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent way to learn XSLT. The progression of chapters makes it both easy and exciting to read, in anticipation of learning about even more of XSLT's features. The book is well written, but there are at least a couple of typos in the examples. The description is generally clear enough that there will generally be no confusion (such as the ending " tag on page 132, instead of "" -- although the tag typo on page 127 causes more confusion). Filters, XPath expressions, and using named templates as subroutines are covered well, and many other useful tidbits are given, such as how to

output in HTML format (no closing tags), passing comments through to the output file, and suppressing the output of unnecessary namespace declarations. Calling Java methods from XSLT is also covered. I especially liked the explanation of how to reorganize input into a completely different order in the output, as well as how to insert content from other XML files. The formatting language called "XSL" is also covered in detail in the last half of the book, if you have a need to learn it. Hopefully, browsers begin to support it soon. The only material that I wanted to see covered that wasn't is how to perform arithmetic expressions (multiplication, division, and modulus, for example, although addition and subtraction are supported and examples are given). This is the best XSLT reference that I've found, but beware that much of the examples do not work in Microsoft IE 5.0 (or even 5.5 -- even with the latest 3.0 msxml parser). There are several issues, one of which is that the "[...] XSL namespace is not recognized and an older one must be used, instead). But the book references several parsers that *do* work with the latest XSLT spec, including XP and XT. This is really a great book on XSLT, XPath, and XSL!

Computing seems to have a propensity to generate an awesome acronym soup; two examples being XSL and XSLT. The difference between these is rather nuanced. Frankly, for most purposes, I would consider them interchangeable. But if you really want to know the difference, this book does a neat job explaining. Both have to do with manipulating XML documents. XSLT transforms an XML document into another document. The output can be XML, or any other format, with XHTML being a popular choice. XSLT does not necessarily have anything to do with presentation, per se. It is a declarative language, like SQL, and unlike C or Java, which are procedural languages. If the latter is your background, this may be your biggest impediment. Takes some getting used to. But the text is clearly written to help you along. Pure XSL, on the other hand, is an XML based formatting language. It is explicitly for displaying documents. In fact, it draws many of its property names and actions from CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). This was done to let those familiar with the latter pick up XSL quickly. There is a long chapter on XSL that goes exhaustively through its many properties. TeX and troff gurus will see numerous layout concepts redone here in new flesh. Overall, a very useful and up to date book. The examples and accompanying text do succinctly convey the meanings intended. This book has clarity. You are not deluged in unnecessarily complicated explanations. I do have some caveats. Firstly, tree diagrams are drawn from left to right?! Those from a computer science background are used to trees always being drawn from top to bottom. A minor thing, but still a little offputting. Like reading a book where all the pages are in landscape mode, instead of portrait mode. Secondly, XML is case sensitive, unlike HTML, as the author points out. So,

for example, and mean the same thing in HTML. But and are not the same in XML. The problem is that in many places, the author writes a tag in a body of code, in lower case, like . But he then refers to it in the text as Root, capitalised for emphasis. This can be very confusing to an XML newcomer. Lastly, many chapters could have done with problem sets and possibly answers. I understand that this would add to the book length. But it would greatly aid the reader, by giving her something to attack, instead of merely reading. Subject retention and all that. Especially apropos because the subject lends itself to explicit problem composition. Answers are objective; not just some vague essay writing. Plus, unlike some other software topics, the questions and answers can be concisely stated. There is no need for a mass of source code.

With index and all this book is just a tad over 300 pages. For the price you may be tempted to look to other books; I would urge you not to. After a in depth read of the first three chapters and a quick scan of the remaining chapters I feel this author is very capable of providing condensed information for the intermediate-advanced level developer. Any more than 300 pages would require unneeded "fluff" thrown in to attempt to make the book more useful to everyone, and would only frustrate the intermediate-advanced developer who's time is valuable. For my needs this book was perfect. It provided very detailed information on XSL and explained how XSL relates to XSLT and XPath, it also explained XQL. If you pick up a general XML book you usually will only find one or two chapters (two at best) discussing XSL. This book is intended as a companion to a general XML book (XML For Dummies, or this author's own XML Companion come to mind) this book assumes you know what XML is, what a DTD is, etc... I have searched for a book to teach XSL to perform complex filtering and grouping in the output, prior to reading this book I had read: XML for dummies (IDG Press) and Professional ASP XML (Wrox Press), this book goes into much better detail and is a perfect companion to both of the books listed above. The author's writing style is excellent, he provides many short examples of input/processing and output code in each chapter. He does not hold your hand and many of his descriptions have to be read a few times to fully grasp (XSL isn't as simple as you may think). Overall I feel very comfortable in saying this is the best book (and one of the only books) on the market to fully explain current XSL standards.

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