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XML Explained in Brief

For those who've spent time among web programming professionals, the term "XML" is likely familiar. XML, short for Extensible Markup Language, is similar to Hypertext Markup Language, or HTML. Even those who don't make their careers in web programming are probably familiar with this language, used to display content on a web page. HTML language works by communicating to the browser how information should be displayed. [XML](#) is different in that the information encoded can be processed as data or be displayed like HTML.

An example might help make this clearer. Say you put the word "zip" in tags, meaning the following data is a zip code. Put the word "zip" in tags, meaning the data in the tags is a zip code. The XML file can be used different ways, including being processed as data by another program or stored as data on another computer, or be displayed on a web page.

XML and HTML often work hand-in-hand, and XML markup frequently appears within an HTML page. The "extensible" part of XML means that markup symbols are self-defined and unlimited. The result is great flexibility, a good reason why it is a preferred language among web programmers.

If you have an interest in web development, time is well-spent learning XML. Even as the language is still being continually developed, it is currently commonly used for blog newsfeeds, weather services, and e-commerce sites. The XML is used to manage and transmit data, and the browser is used to display that data as needed. XML is a useful conduit for transmitting data between systems that otherwise cannot communicate. Think of it as a virtual "envelope," used to transmit data identity and structure. If web development is in your future, the benefits of learning XML should be pretty clear!

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