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# XSLT: Mastering XML Transformations



## Synopsis

XSLT documents a core technology for processing XML. Originally created for page layout, XSLT (Extensible Stylesheet Transformations) is now much more: a general-purpose translation tool, a system for reorganizing document content, and a way to generate multiple results-- such as HTML, WAP, and SVG--from the same content. What sets XSLT apart from other books on this critical tool is the depth of detail and breadth of knowledge that Doug Tidwell, a developer with years of XSLT experience, brings to his concise treatment of the many talents of XSLT. He covers XSLT and XPath, a critical companion standard, and addresses topics ranging from basic transformations to complex sorting and linking. He explores extension functions on a variety of different XSLT processors and shows ways to combine multiple documents using XSLT. Code examples add a real-world dimension to each technique. Useful as XSLT is, its peculiar characteristics make it difficult to get started in, and the ability to use advanced techniques depends on a clear and exact understanding of how XSLT templates work and interact. For instance, the understanding of "variables" in XSLT is deeply different from the understanding of "variables" in procedural languages. The author explains XSLT by building from the basics to its more complex and powerful possibilities, so that whether you're just starting out in XSLT or looking for advanced techniques, you'll find the level of information you need.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although Tidwell emphasizes a real-world approach to tackling XSLT and includes plenty of

practical examples in the book, he doesn't skimp when it comes to delivering the types of conceptual explanations (sections like "How a Stylesheet is processed" in Chpt 2 and "The XPath View of an XML Document" in Chpt. 3) that help readers understand what's going on "under the hood". Including a separate chapter covering the basics of XPath early in the book also makes for much easier reading, since we aren't left scrounging for scraps of information scattered throughout the text when XPath-related questions arise. If not for the fact that some authors have actually taken the opposite approach (introducing XPath concepts as they arise in the context of a discussion of XSLT), this would have seemed like a no-brainer. No review of this book would be complete without mentioning the value added by the appendices. Once you've digested all of the material in the body of the text, you'll likely continue to keep Tidwell's book close at hand because of Appendices A and C. Appendix A, the XSLT Reference, features a comprehensive dictionary-style reference for every element in XSLT 1.0 - including an XML source document, an example stylesheet that makes use of the element, and the result of the transformation for each. Appendix C, the XSLT and XPath Function Reference, follows a similar format.

This book is one of the most frustrating technical books I have ever read. The fact that it is from O'Reilly just makes it doubly insulting. The author doesn't bother to explain concepts. He just lists out the syntax for the various elements without bothering to explain how the instruction works. This book might be useful as an XSLT reference but it is useless as a learning tool. I totally agree with the other reviews of this book about the "huge honking examples" To give you an idea of how bad it is, the first XSLT example in this book is the obligatory "Hello World" example which is less than 20 lines. The second example is 3 pages long and uses concepts that have not been introduced at all!! The book also suffers from too many forward references. He keeps mentioning concepts that have no relation to the topic at hand. Sure, it might be great for completeness, but it just gets in the way when you're trying to learn a new concept and he keeps throwing additional, esoteric (by his own admission) stuff at you. In my opinion this is a very poorly written book.

I approached this book expecting to be disappointed. After all there is no shortage of good introductions to XSLT on the web and in Micheal Kay's book we already have an authoritative reference. Actually this book is that rare breed - an advanced tutorial. The book begins with three chapters of introductory material. Wisely the author does not go into every feature. But the meat of the book is in chapters 5-8. It covers in detail keys() in chapter 6, sorting (chapter 7), document() (chapter 8) and concludes with an excellent introduction to extension elements and functions. The

writing is lucid and the author often evaluates alternative strategies. The appendix lists all the XSLT elements and functions with examples which alone is worth the admission. I have already read it twice and I recommend it strongly.

This is in my opinion is a good book on XSLT. It teaches the basics and then some advanced stuff as well. I especially liked the XSLT reference (the latter half of the book) with examples of how to use the XSLT features, functions etc. I picked it up because I'm preparing for the IBM xml exam and this is listed as a reference in the IBM web site. The only complaint I have is that the book lists the entire code and they run for pages! :-(. I find it to be very distracting. It was better to just show a few code snippets to highlight a particular point and the reader could anyway use the code listing available in downloadable format in the oreilly web site. Hope the author will cover more meaty stuff in the 2nd edition probably and avoid such big code listings. I read the freely downloadable chapters of "XSLT quickly" by Bob Ducharme and found it to be excellent. Unfortunately that book isn't available here in India! I would recommend that book over this one for people looking for a good introduction to XSLT. It's so crisp! and has been written for people who have been programming before. Also check out XSLT and XPATH on edge.. by Jeni tennison. wow I liked it. It assumes knowledge of XSLT though (at least the basics) and deals with various practical usage of XSLT. I have read 3 chapters as of now and found it to be very well written and useful. If you are a java programmer looking to XSLT, I would recommend the following: XSLT Quickly XSLT and XPath on the edge Java and XSLT

I don't recommend this for a programmer. This book seemed to be a gloss over of XSLT and didn't probe too deeply into it. For that I recommend Michael Kay's excellent work XSLT. Basically I zipped through this book and wanted more - I wanted to understand what was going on and not just be able to do it. Kay's book provides that and much, much more.

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