
Introduction to electronic books: EPub 3.0 and beyond

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A short introduction to current standards for electronic books, focusing on EPub 3.0 (a standard issued by the International Digital Publishing Federation) and its supporting specifications: XHTML, HTML 5, CSS, SVG, and Zip.

Are the dreams or visions of Ted Nelson, Alan Kay, and other visionaries of electronic books finally coming true? Current tablets, smart phones, and dedicated ebook devices seem to bring them closer to daily reality than ever before. We will survey the current shape of the territory for ebooks: what they can do, what they currently cannot do, what we hope they will be able to do soon. We will demonstrate some of the software available for generating EPubs and for checking them for device- and software-specific problems. Finally, we will outline some outstanding design and production challenges.

Many of the challenges of ebook production will be familiar to anyone with experience in book or journal production: mathematics, tables, graphics, and figures are no easier to handle (but, happily, not always much harder) in electronic books than they are in print publications or on the Web. Others will be familiar from web-site production: ebook readers and applications vary both in terms of what they can do and in terms of how closely they adhere to the EPub specification. The requirement that ebooks be self-contained and work with no network connection brings new challenges, as does the need for accessible content. Participants will learn how to check against relevant specifications, how to research problems, and how to attain an intuition for the sorts of things that are both possible and practical today.

The International Digital Publishing Federation (IDPF), which developed EPub, has recently merged with the World Wide Web Consortium; we will discuss

the outlook for further work in the area and explain how to get involved and how to help ebook readers improve to meet your needs.

Prerequisites: no firm prerequisites. Participants with some familiarity with XML, HTML, HTML 5, and CSS will be in a better position to follow the details of examples.