

HTML <dl> - More Than Just A Definition List

#dl# creates a description list. #dl# description, syntax, usage, attributes and examples. HTML-5.com is a great guide for web developers. [TV Series & Actors and Actresses](#). Follow [TV Series](#) and [HTML 5](#) on Google+.

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The <dl> Tag for a <dfn>Description List</dfn>

Formerly the <dfn>Definition List</dfn> element

The <dl> tag is used to create a <dfn>description list</dfn> consisting of [description terms](#) alternating with groups of one or more [detail descriptions](#). Note that in previous [versions of HTML](#) these elements were called <dfn>definition list</dfn>, [definition terms](#) and [definition descriptions](#). However, since the purpose of the HTML 5 [<dfn> tag](#) is to code a definition, the [<dt> tag](#) by itself does *not* identify a term being defined. To create a list of terms and definitions, such as for a glossary, each term defined should be identified by putting it inside a [dfn element](#) as shown in this example:

Term: <dfn><dl> tag</dfn>

Definition: The <dl> tag is used to code a description list consisting of [description terms](#) alternating with groups of one or more [detail descriptions](#).

Term: <dfn><dt> tag</dfn>

Definition: The [<dt> tag](#) is used to code a [description term](#) in a description list, leading into one or more [detail description](#) elements.

Term: <dfn><dd> tag</dfn>

Definition: The [<dd> detail description tag](#) is used to code the description of an item inside a **dl** element for a description list.

This is an actual working example of the [<dl> tag example code](#) below. In most HTML 5 browsers such as Firefox and Opera, the text inside the [dfn element](#) will be in an italic font, except for WebKit browsers such as Chrome and Safari which display it in an upright font.

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<dl> Tag Syntax

Rules for coding HTML **dl** elements

```
<a mode="pre" href="../body-tag/index.html#syntax"><body></a>
  <a mode="pre" href="../html-tag-list.html#flow-content-model">... flow content expected ...
  <b mode="pre"><dl></b>
    ...
    <a mode="pre" href="../dt-tag/index.html#syntax"><dt></a><a mode="pre" href="../dfn-tag/index.html#syntax"><dfn></a>
    <a mode="pre" href="../dd-tag/index.html#syntax"><dd></a>
    <a mode="pre" href="../../definitions/index.html#flow-content">... flow content ...</a>
```

```
</dd>
...
<b mode="pre"></dl></b>
...
</body>
```

Make sure you understand the [difference between a tag and element](#) and are familiar with the [definitions](#) of [namespace](#) and other [HTML terms](#).

1. Include a **dl** element where [flow content](#) is expected.
2. Begin the **dl** element with a starting `<dl>` tag. The element name uses lower case letters and should be in the [HTML namespace](#), which it will pick up automatically from the [xmlns attribute](#) on the `<html>` tag.
3. Inside the **dl** element, between the `<dl>` starting tag and the `</dl>` ending tag, code the [li elements](#) for the list items.
4. End the **dl** element with a matching `</dl>` closing tag.

Content of the dl element

The content of the **dl** element can only include [HTML comments](#), [dt elements](#) and [dd elements](#).

Validation Errors

If the **dl** element is used where [phrasing content is expected](#), the W3C Markup Validation Service will report an error like this:

```
<samp class="block">Line <var>line#</var>, Column <var>col#</var>: HTML element dl not allowed as child of HTML element <var>element</var> in this context. Contexts in which element dl may be used: Where flow content is expected. Content model for element <var>element</var>: Phrasing content.</samp>
```

Other tools that validate HTML code may report a similar error. In electronic publishing, for example:

```
<samp class="block">element "dl" from namespace "http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" not allowed in this context</samp>
```

To resolve this type of error, move the **dl** element and its [inner HTML](#) inside one of the [HTML elements where flow content is allowed](#).

The [inner HTML](#) code of the **dl** element must include at least one [dt element](#) and at least one [dd element](#). If either one is missing the W3C Markup Validation Service will report an error like this:

```
<samp class="block">Line <var>line#</var>, Column <var>col#</var>: HTML element dl is missing a required instance of child element dt [or dd] Content model for element dl: Zero or more groups each consisting of one or more dt elements followed by one or more dd elements.</samp>
```

To resolve this type of error, add the missing element(s) to the [inner HTML](#) of the **dl** element.

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<dl> Tag Attributes

Attributes of the <dl> tag

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| global attributes | In addition to the personal attributes of the <dl> tag below, any of the common HTML attributes can also be coded. |
|-----------------------------------|--|

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<dl> Tag Examples**Examples of the [dl](#) tag in HTML 5****Example of the <dl> tag for a list of definitions**

Here is an example of how to code a glossary of some HTML terms and their definitions.

```

<b mode="pre"><dl></b>
  <dt>Term: <dfn>&lt;dl&gt; tag</dfn></dt>
  <dd>Definition: The &lt;dl&gt; tag is used to code a description list
  consisting
  of description terms alternating with groups of one or more detail
  descriptions.</dd>
  <dt>Term: <dfn>&lt;dt&gt; tag</dfn></dt>
  <dd>Definition: The &lt;dt&gt; tag is used to code a description term
  in a description list, leading into one or more detail description
  elements.</dd>
  <dt>Term: <dfn>&lt;dd&gt; tag</dfn></dt>
  <dd>Definition: The &lt;dd&gt; detail description tag is used to code the
  description of an item inside a <b>dl</b> element for a description list.</dd>
</b mode="pre"></dl></b>

```

Note that since the <dl> tag, [<dt> tags](#) and [<dd> tags](#) do *not* indicate that this is a list of terms and their definitions, each term is coded inside a [dfn element](#).

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Changes in HTML 5 - <dl> Tag**What's new in HTML 5****Differences between HTML 5 and earlier versions of HTML**

The following attributes should *not* be coded on the <dl> tag because they either have been deprecated or were never officially supported:

- [compact](#)

The [2000-2010 Recommendations from the W3C HTML Working Group](#) defined the [HTML namespace](#) for the **dl** element type name along with the names of all [HTML element types](#). In older (pre-2000) [versions of HTML](#), element type names were not associated with a namespace.

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THE END