

[Anonymized]

COMM 362 – Assignment #2

At its core, every website you've ever visited is built on HTML and CSS. HTML, also known as the hyperlink markup language, is a markup language that is used to provide the contents of a webpage. Think: text on a page or all the images present. On the other hand, CSS, or cascading style sheets, is typically used in conjunction with HTML to provide a webpage its stylistic components, such as background colors, fonts, and general formatting. Semantic HTML enforces the idea of maintaining this separation between content and styling, so that the HTML code can retain its original meanings. Though most consumers of the internet care mainly about the presentation and visual appeal of a webpage, there are benefits to writing semantic HTML that adds an additional layer of meaning to a webpage.

One major reason why using semantic HTML is encouraged is because it makes it easier for both end-users and developers to understand the importance of the content. Since many HTML tags have human understandable meanings associated with them, using the tags properly give different portions of the webpage different levels of importance. For example, there are 6 variations of the header tags, conveniently labeled h1 through h6. Each subsequent header after h1 denotes a lesser important heading in the webpage. Developers may use these 6 different header tags to convey the importance of the text that might follow a particular header. However, if the header tags are used merely for their ability to easily change the size of a font, then it loses its intrinsic purpose, to convey the importance of a portion of text in relation to other surrounding text.

Another reason why using semantic HTML is encouraged is because it improves general code readability. Most HTML tags are very self-explanatory. `<h1>`, one of the header tags, implies that the text enclosed by this tag is a type 1 heading. `<p>` or a paragraph tag implies the text enclosed by this tag is a paragraph. More obviously, a `<blockquote>` tag is used to imply that the text enclosed by this tag is a block quote. When these semantic tags are used outside their intended use case, confusion may arise when reading over the quote. A very common bad practice amongst web developers is using the paragraph tag to introduce white space in a webpage. White space, typically considered a stylistic element to a webpage, can be created using the following html: `<p> </p>`. Essentially what this code does is it tells the browser to display a space (similar to the space created with the space bar). Web developers would string multiple pieces of this code together in order to create gaps in the webpage. The issue with this is that it disregards the intrinsic meaning of a `<p>` tag, that is to enclose a paragraph of text. When reading HTML code that contains strings of `<p> </p>`, users can no longer easily tell the function of this piece of code strictly from the html alone. The same applies when using header tags for changing font size instead of defining actual headers or using a block quote tag for its indentation capabilities rather than to define a portion of the text as a block quote. All these improper uses of HTML tags makes it harder to understand what the HTML tag is attempting to do.

A final consideration for using semantic HTML strictly to reinforce the meaning of a webpage's content is because it makes the code easier to maintain or revise. It is in a developer's best interest to make the least amount of changes to their code to achieve a desired result. When considering the change that needs to be made, if the code is structured properly and semantic HTML is used, for the most part a developer need only look into the CSS of a webpage if they wanted to change up the page's styling or the HTML of a webpage if they wanted to change up the page's contents. When styling is interwoven into the HTML of a code, such as using paragraph tags to introduce whitespace, it becomes less apparent to a developer where exactly in the code something needs to be changed to achieve a certain result. By keeping content and styling separate in HTML and CSS respectively and by using HTML tags based on

its intended use case, developers have more control over their code and are more aware of where changes need to be made.

Like many programming concepts, Semantic HTML is not enforced and best seen as good practice. There are many benefits associated with using semantic HTML in creating webpages, primarily in add meaning to a webpage's underlying structure. In the end, it is ultimately down to a webpage's developer to weigh the benefits of using semantic html against using what works.

Works Cited

“Semantic HTML for Meaningful Webpages.” *Brevity Digital Design & Branding*, 23 May 2018, seekbrevity.com/semantic-markup-important-web-design/.

Kyrnin, Jennifer. “What Is Semantic HTML and Why You Should Use It.” *Lifewire*, Lifewire, 2 May 2019, www.lifewire.com/why-use-semantic-html-3468271.