XML is a markup language for documents containing structured information.

Structured information contains both content (words, pictures, etc.) and some indication of what role that content plays (for example, content in a section heading has a different meaning from content in a footnote, which means something different than content in a figure caption or content in a database table, etc.). Almost all documents have some structure.

A markup language is a mechanism to identify structures in a document. The XML specification defines a standard way to add markup to documents.

What's a Document? - The number of applications currently being developed that are based on, or make use of, XML documents is truly amazing. For our purposes, the word "document" refers not only to traditional documents, like this one, but also to the miriad of other XML "data formats". These include vector graphics, e-commerce transactions, mathematical equations, object meta-data, server APIs, and a thousand other kinds of structured information.

So XML is Just Like HTML? - No. In HTML, both the tag semantics and the tag set are fixed. An <h1> is always a first level heading and the tag is meaningless. The W3C, in conjunction with browser vendors and the WWW community, is constantly working to extend the definition of HTML to allow new tags to keep pace with changing technology and to bring variations in presentation (stylesheets) to the Web. However, these changes are always rigidly confined by what the browser vendors have implemented and by the fact that backward compatibility is paramount. And for people who want to disseminate information widely, features supported by only the latest releases of Netscape and Internet Explorer are not useful.

XML specifies neither semantics nor a tag set. In fact XML is really a **meta-language** for describing markup languages. In other words, XML provides a facility to define tags and the structural relationships between them. Since there's no predefined tag set, there can't be any preconceived semantics. All of the semantics of an XML document will either be defined by the applications that process them or by stylesheets.

Plus much more ... **Are you gaining the benefits that XML has to offer?**

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