

E-COURSE REVIEWS

Despite the similarity of the acronyms, XML isn't merely a better form of HTML. Rather, it's a logical markup language that allows documents to be read by a variety of vendor-independent applications.

Appropriate benchmarks for XML publishers are content, design, testing, and resources. Good XML courses provide smooth transitions between beginner-level concepts, such as language syntax, and more advanced topics, such as streamlined markup techniques. The most effective XML publishers incorporate review assessments and links to XML-related Websites.

Highly Recommended

★★★★ *XML Programming Series*: 20 hours, US\$800 for 6 months of course access. Publisher: DigitalThink

The series presents each module of XML content after discussing a problem that previous syntax couldn't solve. That's consistent throughout the series and a necessary ingredient for users to understand the bigger picture. A downloadable resource pack includes working code samples and content for tutor-graded exercises.

The trademarks of this series are onscreen code that teaches downloadable code and problematic code. DigitalThink is the only publisher in this review that requires the use of human support (through tutors and forums). The combination of those factors makes it our top XML course.

Recommended

★★★★1/2 *XML Series*: 15 hours, pricing models vary by user or organization. Publisher: MindLeaders

MindLeaders's XML courses are lean and targeted. The objective is to teach users syntax and vocabulary in an intense, fast-paced atmosphere. The quiz-to-text ratio is high, and the format and wording of the questions are suited to the subject. With MindLeaders's evaluation format, users should always know when they can move ahead or need to study more.

The courses offer no additional resources, such as XML-related Websites or books, and lack support mechanisms, such as tutors and peer forums, so users will have to be resourceful and independent.

★★★★1/2 *XML Markup and Programming*: 45 hours, pricing depends on user specifications. Publisher: Pearson Technology Group Interactive

PTG's XML series covers everything from SGML roots to designing a totally new tagging technology with the assistance of Perl, Java, and XHTML (eXtensible

HyperText Markup Language). Such a broad range of coverage means that content isn't repeated but catalogued for future reference.

Users can download, manipulate, and execute plenty of code. Aside from that feature, however, PTG's XML modules function as navigable textbooks—comprehensive but impersonal. PTG Interactive's robust XML series would make a good supplementary reference. As a primary e-learning tool, it has no equal in content but lacks support mechanisms.

Adequate

★★★ *XML 1.0 Series, Second Edition*: 45 hours, US\$460 for 6 months of course access. Publisher: ActiveEducation

ActiveEducation's XML series is similar to MindLeaders's in that they're both lightweight. Neither has many fancy simulations or complex systems of support and resources, though ActiveEducation's XML offerings are highly organized and keep good records of scores. The instructional language is clear; concepts are sound.

This series relies more on text than graphics. Because the code is in .gif format, it looks distorted. But the real problem is that learners are unable to copy code out of the graphics for manipulation or testing. Simulations suffer from the same poor code representation.

Lguide.com (www.lguide.com) is an independent e-learning research and consulting company. For more information about Lguide.com services, email info@lguide.com.

These ratings are provided by lguide.com and do not imply endorsement by T+D or ASTD.



At a Glance

XML Programming Series: Excellent design and resources. Good content. Adequate testing.

XML Series: Excellent testing. Good content and design. Poor resources.

XML Markup and Programming: Excellent content. Good design and resources. Poor testing.

XML 1.0 Series, Second Edition: Good content. Adequate design, testing, and resources.