

# Motivation and Introduction to Best Practices

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## Motivation for Best Practices Guidelines

XML Schemas is an exciting new technology with lots of power. It's big ... and powerful ... and new ... and without a large experience base. With anything new it is often difficult to know how to get started, especially when there are no guidelines to show the way. The purpose of the Best Practices discussion is to collectively create a set of schema design guidelines that describes the pros and cons of each design issue, thus enabling a schema designer to make intelligent design decisions in creating a schema. The objective of these guidelines is not to dictate rules, "thou shall follow these rules", but rather, to shed light on all sides of each design issue, so that a schema designer is empowered to make intelligent design decisions.

To get a feel for the kinds of issues these guidelines cover, consider this design issue:

*How do you design your schema to be extensible? Can we design it to support dynamically changing requirements, without forcing each application that is exchanging XML data to upgrade in lock-step?*

This is one very important schema design issue. Without guidelines a schema designer will either:

- Blissfully ignore the issue, and arbitrarily select one approach. The wrong selection may result in scrapping the design and starting over.
- Spend a lot of time figuring out all the pros and cons of each side of this issue. It is not cost-effective for each schema designer to rediscover the pros and cons involved with each schema design issue. Further, it is unlikely that any one person alone will be able think of all sides to an issue.

One might be tempted to turn to the XML Schema specification for guidance. The XML Schema specification is of no help with this issue, nor with any issue involving Best Practices. Such things are (rightfully) outside its scope.

Ultimately, the specifics of designing a schema are dependent on the task at hand. However, the goal of this effort is to create a set of schema design guidelines that hold true irrespective of the specific task.

## Who's Developing the Guidelines?

These guidelines are being developed collectively by discussions among members of the xml-dev list group. The list of people participating in the discussions continues to grow:

- Roger Costello
- Curt Arnold
- Len Bullard
- Mary Pulvermacher
- Paul Spencer
- Rick Jelliffe
- Caroline Clewlow
- Jon Cleaver
- Francis Norton
- Eddie Robertsson
- Jeff Rafter
- Ronald Bourret
- Toivo Lainevool
- Eric van der Vlist
- Martin Bryan
- Sam Hunting
- Tom Passin
- Mike Ripley
- John Schlesinger
- Jeni Tennison
- Richard Lanyon
- Ajay Sanghi
- Tom Gavin
- Paul Sangree
- Milton Taylor
- Robin Cover
- Clark Evans
- Dan Vint
- Henry Thompson
- Christian Nentwich
- Tim Bray
- Jeff Greif
- Caroline Weller

All are invited to join the discussions!

**Note:** These Best Practice guidelines assume that you already have a working knowledge of XML Schemas.