

# Kind of a Jerk Answer

So, I was looking up some information on the Internet and ran across a forum thread. A guy asked a question, saying he was a beginner with XSLT. Here's part of the answer he got from someone:

*Sorry, but if you don't know how to use XPath expressions within an XSLT stylesheet, then you really need to get a good book and do some reading. Forums are useful when you get stuck on specific questions, but they aren't the way to get started.*

Now, the thing that struck me is that the guy who gave this answer is author of one of the most well-known XSLT books out there (I actually own a copy) and instead of being helpful with the topic on which he is adept, he decides to berate the questioner and make unfounded claims about forums, and maybe hoped to get a book sale. Frankly, I'm tempted to burn his book after his arrogant, rude, chiding, erroneous, and otherwise useless comment.

Let us examine the statement in parts: "if you don't know how to ... you really need to get a good book and do some reading."

First off, I bought the author's book years ago when XSLT information was lacking on the Internet because XSLT information was lacking on the Internet. Especially information on getting started. Had information been available on the Internet, maybe in a forum, for example, I'd not have bought the book. It was overpriced and seemed awfully thick.

Secondly, perusing the Internet for technical information, especially forums, requires one to read. So it isn't like the questioner isn't reading. His question was actually a pretty good one for a beginner, and clearly he'd done at least a

little research already in order to even be able to ask it. The point is, "reading" doesn't require a "book." I can read information in many forms, including Internet resources of all forms, such as forums.

Thirdly, when it come to technical information about programming and related disciplines, do you really need/want to pick up "a good book" on the topic? Maybe if there isn't anything about it on the Internet. But having been a programmer through the birth of the Internet, I can safely say that "book" form is not the best source of information for a programmer. Why? Two reasons: one, searching in a book is generally limited to the author's decision about the index.

If it is an ebook it is a little more robust, but my assumption from the responder's remark is that he means a printed one. If it isn't a printed book, then it is really little different than searching the Internet, and he didn't even suggest Internet resources for the questioner. Besides, when he wrote the comment it doesn't look like **his** book was available in an e-format. So, I think he meant print.

The second reason the print book is not as good is that the information is quickly dated. I've bought print books and then two years later needed a reference and discovered that the book is a couple revisions behind the software or specification – in other words, about useless. So, I went to the Internet for the answers, usually hitting a few forums on the way. True, XSLT seems to change more slowly, but a beginner isn't going to know that.

A third note is that really to get familiar with a programming-related topic, a person probably needs to read the *equivalent* of a good book. But that means the equivalent volume and quality of one, probably from multiple kinds of sources and multiple sources. Reading from one alone is kind of like listening to one side of an argument and then drawing a conclusion. Or climbing one side of a mountain and then assuming the other side is just the same. Not to mention,

there is no reason for the responder to conclude that the questioner had **not** read a book already. The questioner certainly didn't say that.

Next look at this: "Forums are useful when you get stuck on specific questions, but they aren't the way to get started."

Who decided that? Who gave the responder the authority to even make such a claim? When I have to enter into a new realm of programming-related knowledge, perusing forums on topics is often **very** insightful. I've used forums to get started before. I was always glad that someone else who was getting started asked the question to which I found the answer on a forum because then I was able to get started without further ado. I didn't have to go and spend hours evaluating books on the topic and then wait several days for it to arrive at my house after I ordered it. I got started right away. Forums are a great way to get started. When beginners ask questions, a knowledgeable person can usually answer it quickly and easily. The beginner is helped, the expert gets the satisfaction of helping someone in need. What could be better? The Internet evoking good feelings all around – that would be novel.

But in this case the questioner used the forum as directed: he went to the forum and asked what he did precisely because he was stuck on a specific question. Also, I looked in the responders book and it doesn't really answer the question that was asked, so reading a book (the responder's book at least) wouldn't have helped. I assume the responder classifies his own book as "a good book" on the topic, so his point about reading a good book on the topic is moot: the questioner would still have probably asked the same question on a forum.

There are websites that exist solely for people to discuss questions in a forum style. These recognize that forums are very useful for getting started, especially for finding various alternative answers to a single question for beginners

to study. Stack Overflow, Experts Exchange – these are just two that come to mind.

I'm really disappointed that the responder could be so arrogant and crass (at the same time, and also a "crass" minus the "CR"). Fortunately, someone else, probably not an expert at the level of the responder I've written about, and I don't think someone who wrote a book on the topic – fortunately, this other person kindly provided a link to information pertaining to the questioner's need without also insulting the questioner's intelligence or belittling him in any way.

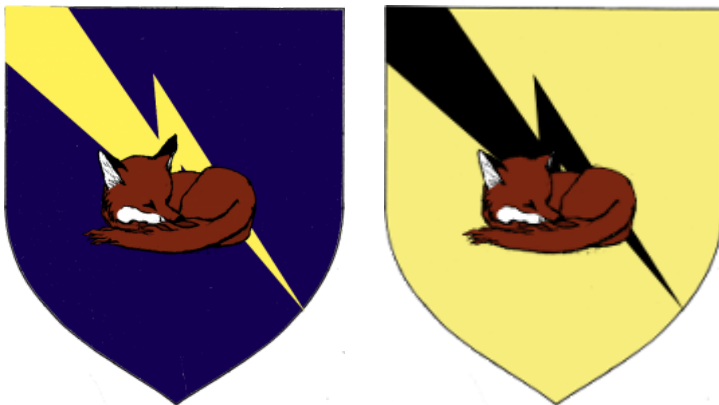
By the way, I'm not an XPath/XSLT beginner, and I have the responder's book (though, admittedly, I haven't read it cover-to-cover. It's not all that and a bag of chips) and the questioner's question on the forum helped me find the answer to my question, which was actually the same question he had.

So guess what? I sure am glad he asked that question on a forum!!!

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## Which Do I Like Better?

I don't know ...



I'm leaning toward the blue background (or in my best attempt

at blazon: Azure, a lightening bolt bendwise, point sinister, or, a fox dormant proper).

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## Martin the Mouse

My daughter wanted to go as Martin the Mouse from Redwall for Halloween. So I whipped up the head for her while she put together the rest of the costume. Anyway, this is my second fur head ... the first was the fox. Like the fox, this one is ventilated with a CPU cooling fan and has a hinged jaw that moves when the wearer talks. But unlike the fox in which the wearer looks through the tear ducts, the eyes on the mouse are "functional" clear acrylic hemispheres blackened with window tinting film that the wearer looks through.

I was on a tight schedule and didn't have time to craft a Sculpy nose or something, so just shaped this from foam. I wasn't happy with the pink, but that's what the girl wanted ...



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## Ash Fox

I was Ash Fox from Fantastic Mr. Fox for Halloween. Here I am decked out in the costume I made – my first attempt at a fursuit head. I managed to drink Bean's Hard Apple Cider using a fish tank airline as a straw. It was a good day!

