# CIS 4004: Web Based Information Technology Summer 2014

Inside HTML5 – Part 4 - Forms

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- One of the biggest problems with XHTML and HTML 4 forms was that they were just dumb fields. Validation was required not only on the server-side, but also you had to duplicate the validation in the user's browser using JavaScript if you wanted to give the user the seamless experience they deserve.
- Given that almost every web page has some kind of form search, comments, sign-up, and so on, HTML5 has come to the rescue and provides built-in validation for many of the most common types of data entered via web forms.



- HTML5 makes developing forms quicker. There are some nice goodies like the addition of two new HTTP types for form action (update and delete) to go along with the current get and post actions.
- The most useful new features and the new form input types which provide special user interfaces and built-in error reporting.
- Eventually, you won't need JavaScript validation at all for these fundamental data types. Until everyone is using an HTML5 browser, some JavaScript validation will still be required.



- It was actually the new form fields that were at the basis of the specification that ultimately became HTML5. It is also in this area where you'll see the principle of specifying backwards-compatible extensions to HTML5 in action.
- The extensions are largely new values of the type attribute of the input element.
- XHTML and HTML4 specified that browsers should assume <input type=text> if you don't specify a type attribute, or you use an unknown type. Therefore, legacy browsers that don't understand the new extensions will fall back to the default and will allow the user to enter data in a plain text field. This fallback can be detected in JavaScript and handled so that old browsers can mimic the new behaviors.

- The HTML5 specification makes no requirements on how browsers should present the new input types to the user or report errors (handle validation). Different browsers and different devices will present different user interfaces, as we will see.
- The manner in which the browser reports errors is also undefined by the HTML5 specification. Error messages are part of the browser and are thus automatically localized. This means much less work for the developer and a more usable experience for the consumer.



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- There are two basic parts to any form: the collection of fields, labels, and buttons that the visitor sees on the page and hopefully fills out; and the processing script that takes that information and converts it into a format that you can read or tally, or process in some manner perhaps on a database.
- Constructing a form's fields and buttons is straightforward and similar to creating any other part of the web page. Some of these form field types include text boxes, special password boxes, radio buttons, checkboxes, drop-down menus, large text areas, and even clickable images.
- Each element has a name that will serve as a label to identify the data once it is processed. CSS is used to style the form.

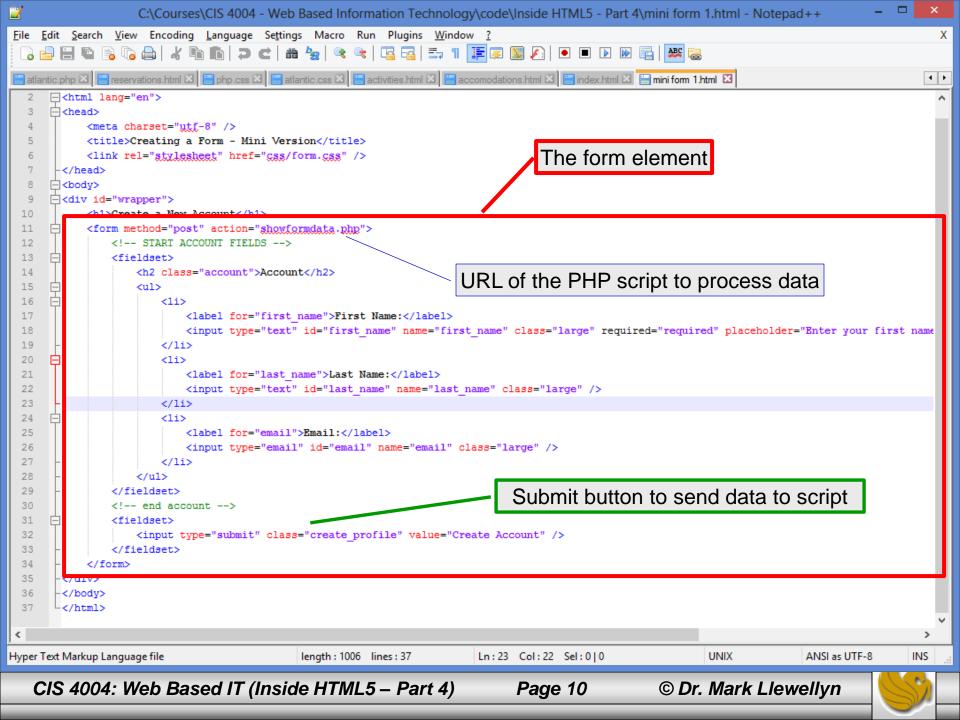


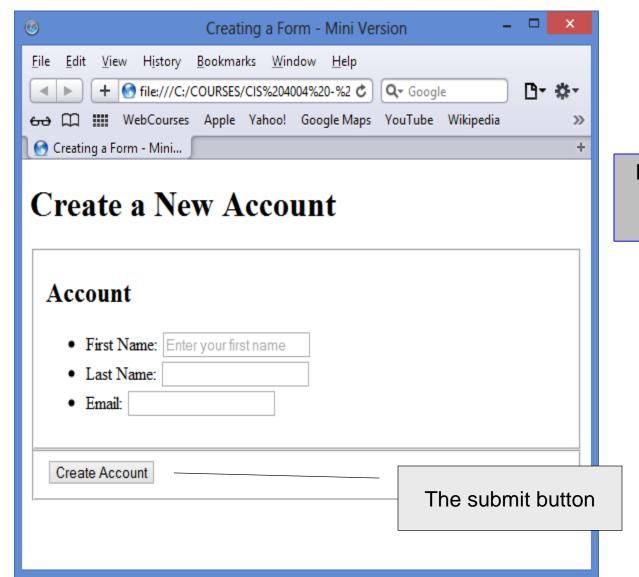
- Using forms often requires using a server-side scripting language to receive the submitted information. It requires code on the web server that listens for form responses and processes the information in the response by storing information in a database, sending it in an email, or redirecting the user to new information.
- PHP is often the server-side scripting language that is utilized for this purpose, but there are many other server-side scripting languages. We'll cover PHP in more depth later in the course.
- Before we look at some of the new HTML5 form elements, let's examine creating basic forms and processing them.



- Every form has 3 basic parts:
  - The form element.
  - The actual form elements where the visitor enters information.
  - The submit button that sends the collected information to the server.
- The form element includes the URL of the script that will process the form and its method (get, post, etc.).
- The example on the following page is a snippet of markup from a much larger form that we'll examine later. This example shows only a very simple form.

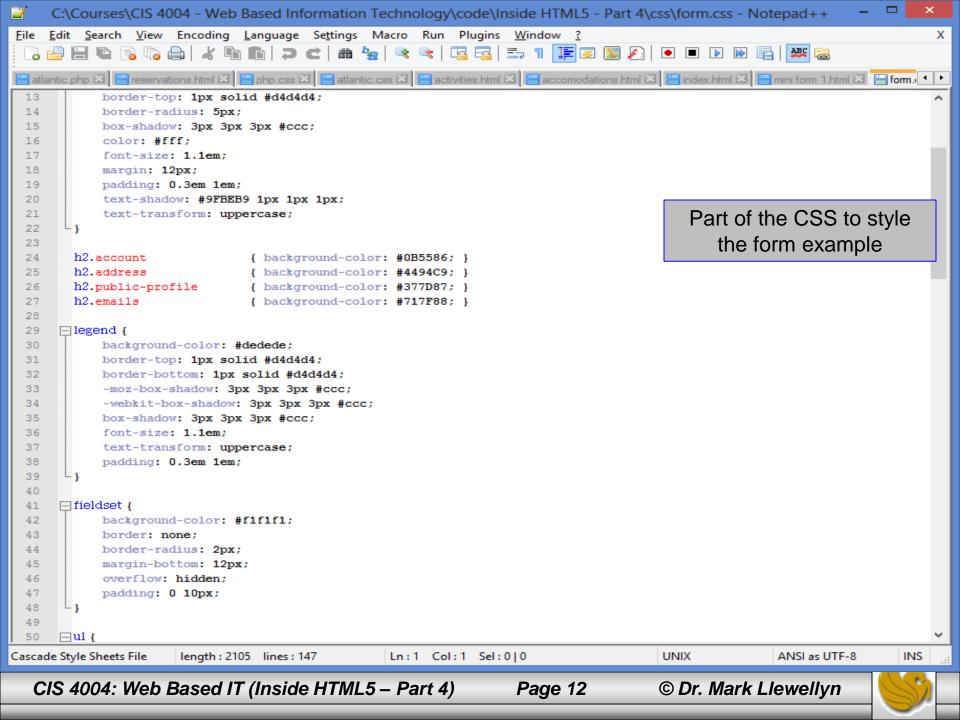


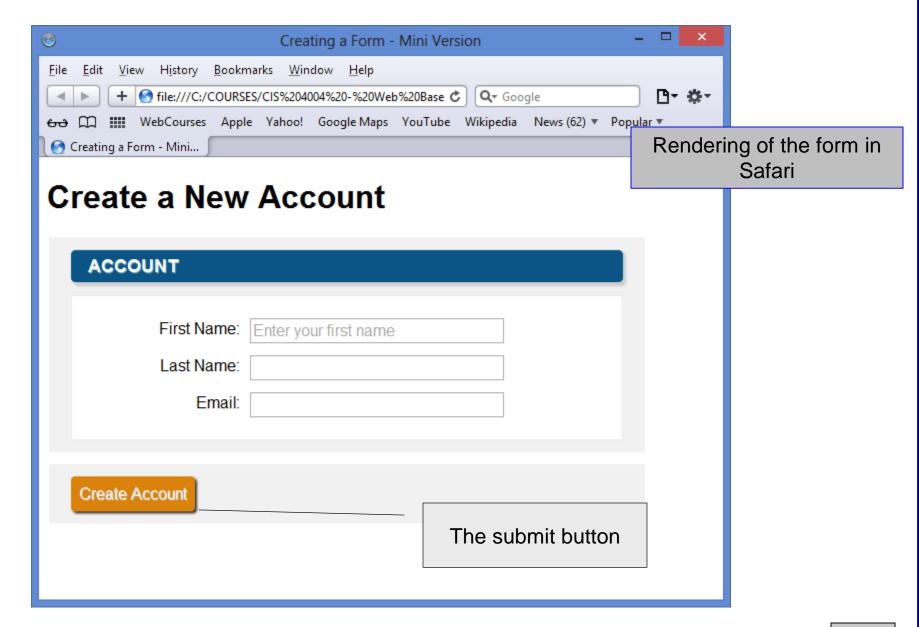




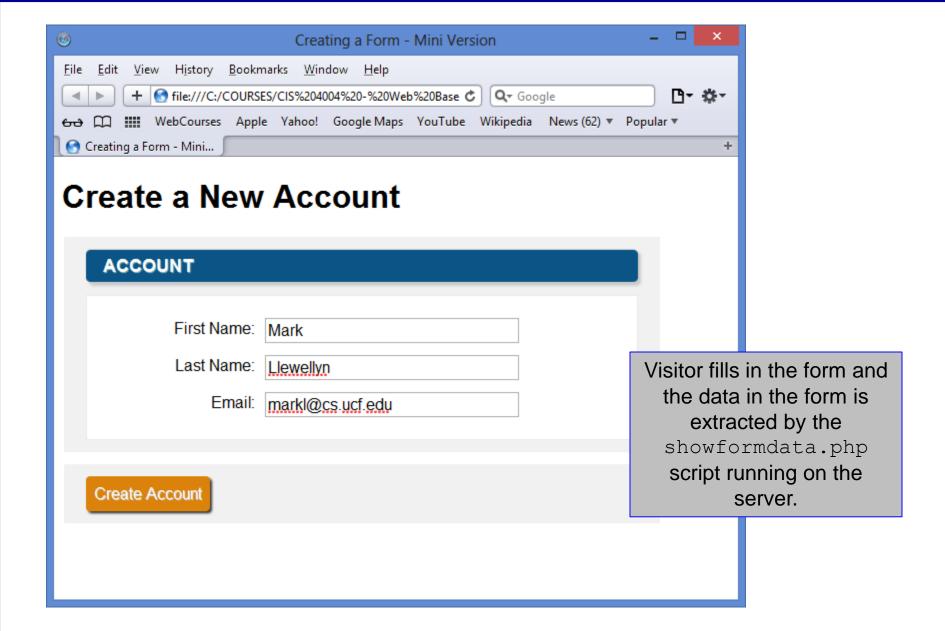
Rendering of the form in Safari with no CSS applied



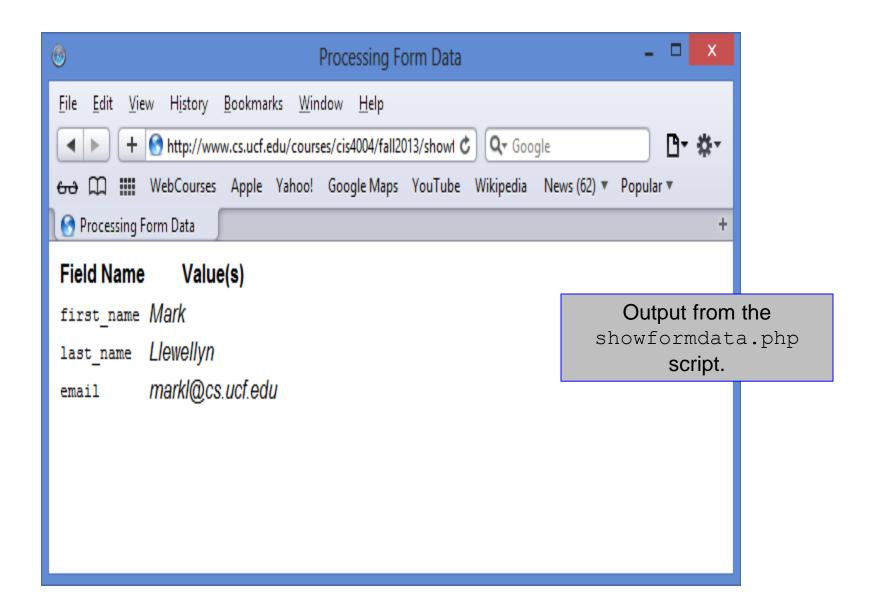












# Fieldsets and Legends

- Let's look at some of the basic form elements in the previous example and see how they can be styled and grouped to create a form that is both visually appealing as well as useful for your web page.
- If you have a lot of information to fill out on a form, you can use a fieldset element to group related elements and make the form easier to follow. The easier it is for your visitors to understand the form, the more likely they are to fill it out correctly.
- You can also use the legend element to give each fieldset a caption that describes the purpose of each grouping. However, there is currently an almost universal lack of browser support for visual control over the legend element, so I recommend using regular heading elements.



# Fieldsets and Legends

- The legend element limits the power of CSS to position it. It is this reason that its styling is limited in most browsers. I recommend that you use an appropriately styled element or <h1>-<h6> element to recreate its effect. Notice that this is the approach I took in the previous example.
- Text boxes can contain one line of freeform text that is, anything that the visitor wants to type and they are typically used for names, addresses, and so on.
- There are many ways to separate your form elements from each other. In this example, I an using unordered lists, but it is also common to see <div>, or <br/> elements used in this context.



#### **Textboxes**

- Personally, I feel that the unordered list is more semantically correct for this as I would view a form as a list of elements to be completed by the visitor before they click the submit button.
- Text boxes can be different sizes to accommodate different types of fields. In the previous example, I used a CSS style sheet to set the width using classes. However, you can also set the width with the size = "n" attribute on the HTML5 element itself. I would normally take this approach as it is easier to make changes to a form in general via CSS than it is to go through the markup looking for size attributes in the various form elements.
- While every form element must have the name attribute set, the value attribute is optional and only needs to be specified if the form element is to have a default value.



#### **Textboxes**

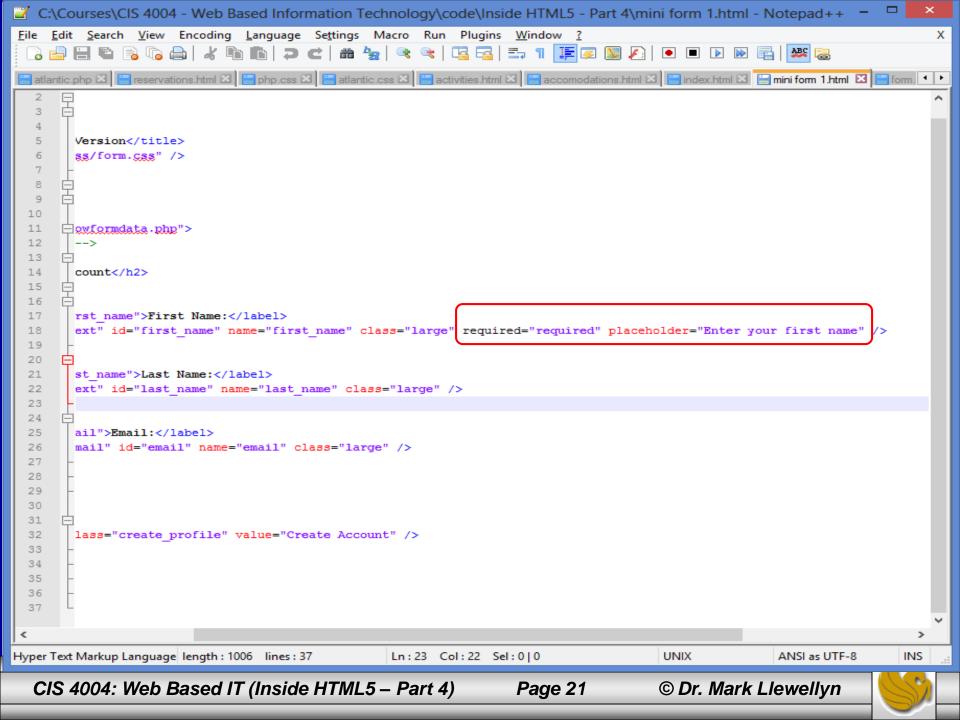
- The name attribute must be specified for each element of your form. The reason is that this is how you access these values on the server to which the form data is sent for processing.
- Older versions of IE can get the name and id attributes confused when the script uses the getElementByID method. The way this is normally handled is to use the same unique value for both the name and id for each field in the form. This enhances the accessibility of your form. Notice that this is the approach I took in the previous example.

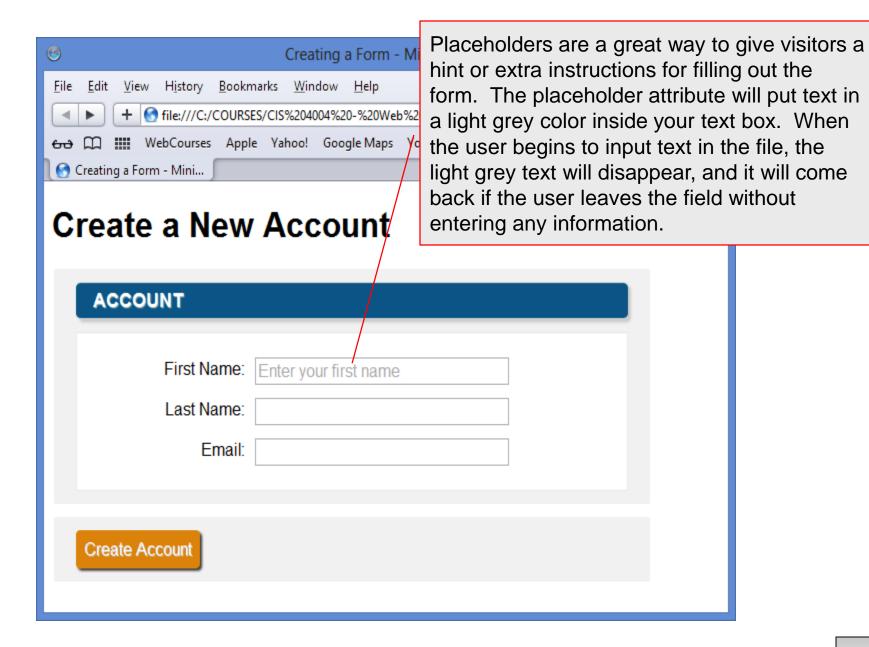


#### HTML5 Form Attribute Enhancements

- Forms are one area of HTML that many developers find painstaking, because it often requires extra effort with CSS and JavaScript to make them function well.
- HTML5 has made some significant improvements to forms by adding many form enhancements that were not available in HTML 4 or XHTML.
- These enhancements include attributes autofocus, required, placeholder, maxlength, and pattern. I'll introduce some of these as we go along with additional examples, but if you look at the complete code for the previous example (see course webpage for complete markup and next page for quick view), you'll see that both required and placeholder were used in text box for the first name.





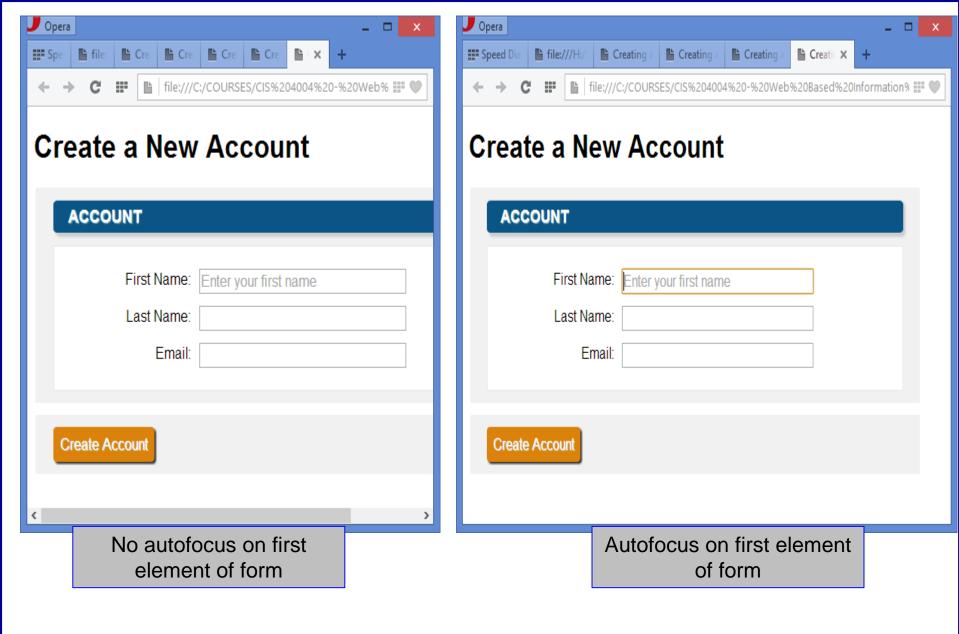




#### HTML5 Form Attribute Enhancements

- The required attribute can be applied to any number of fields in a form. Any field that is designated as required must have a value entered in the field for the form to submit. If the user clicks the submit button and a required field has no data entered and error will be generated and the form data will not be submitted to the server.
- When desired, an element can have the autofocus attribute set to have a value of autofocus. If it is the first element to have this attribute, the input element will by default have focus when the page loads. Notice in the previous example, that no element had autofocus set, so the visitor was required to click on the first (or some) element to begin filling out the form. Notice the difference in the two renderings on the next page.







#### **Password Boxes**

- The only difference between a password box and a regular text box is that whatever is typed in the password box is hidden by bullets or asterisks. The information is not encrypted when it is sent to the server.
- A password box only keeps onlookers from seeing a user's password as it is typed. To really protect the password, a secure (https) server connection must be utilized.



# Labeling Form Parts

- HTML5 provides a semantic method for marking up labels so that they are formally linked to the associated element. This makes them useable for scripting and other purposes.
- Notice in the example markup (see page 10) that each form element is inside a label element with a for attribute.
- For example, you might want to have "First Name" before the text field where the visitor should type their first name.

#### CAUTION!!!

Placeholders are sometimes incorrectly used as a replacement for the label. Be sure to use placeholders as hints to the visitor only.



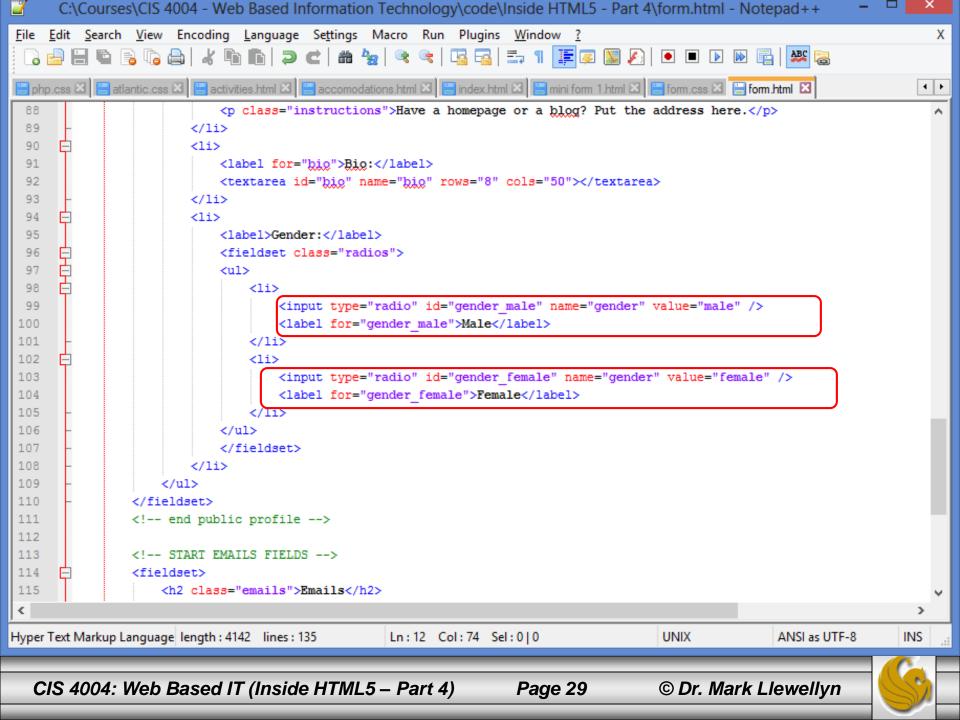
# Labeling Form Parts

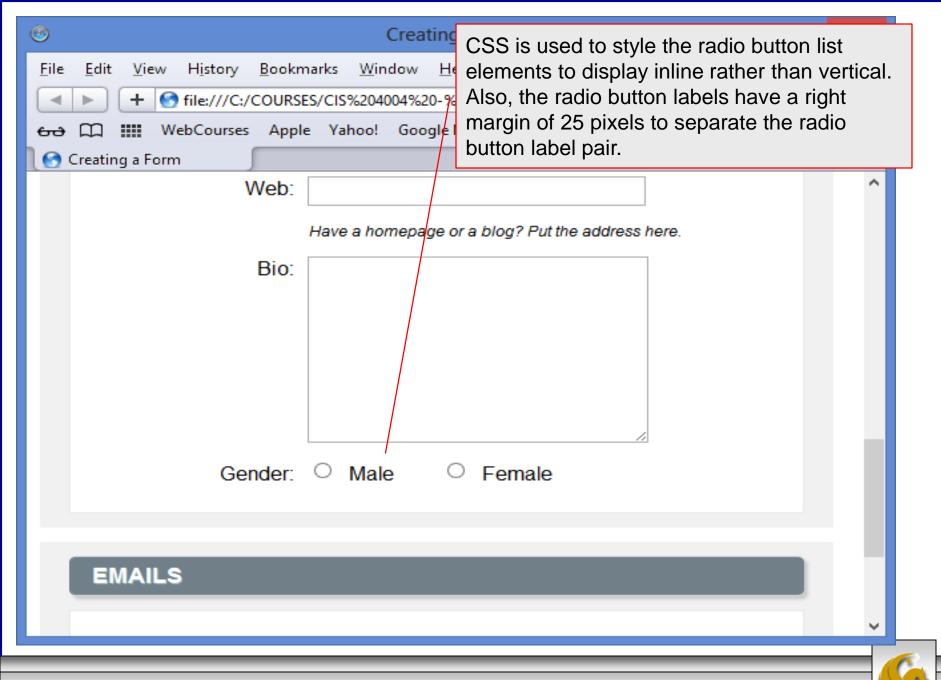
- Using field labels in this semantically correct way gives you an easy way to identify them in a CSS style sheet.
- If you use the for attribute, you must also add the id attribute to the associated form element's start tag in order to mark it with a label. The document will not validate if you miss this step and use a label but do not include a matching id.
- Using the for attribute in the label requires that the label match the id attribute of the form element.
- Labels for radio buttons and checkboxes (more later) allow the user to click the label as well as the form element to modify the state. This is sometimes easier for the visitor to do than to place the cursor on a small dot or checkbox.



#### Radio Buttons

- Radio buttons are used when you want to provide the visitor, typically a limited number of options for some field, but the visitor is limited to being able to select only one of the options.
- Radio buttons are named after the type of radios that many old cars had in which selecting a station was done by depressing a selector button. Only one selector button could be pushed at a time.
- The name attribute serves a dual purpose for radio buttons: it links the radio buttons in a given set together, and it identifies the value when it is sent to the script for processing.
- The value attribute is crucial for a radio button, since the visitor has no way of typing a value for a radio button.
- Part of the large form example that illustrates radio buttons is shown on the next page.





#### Radio Buttons

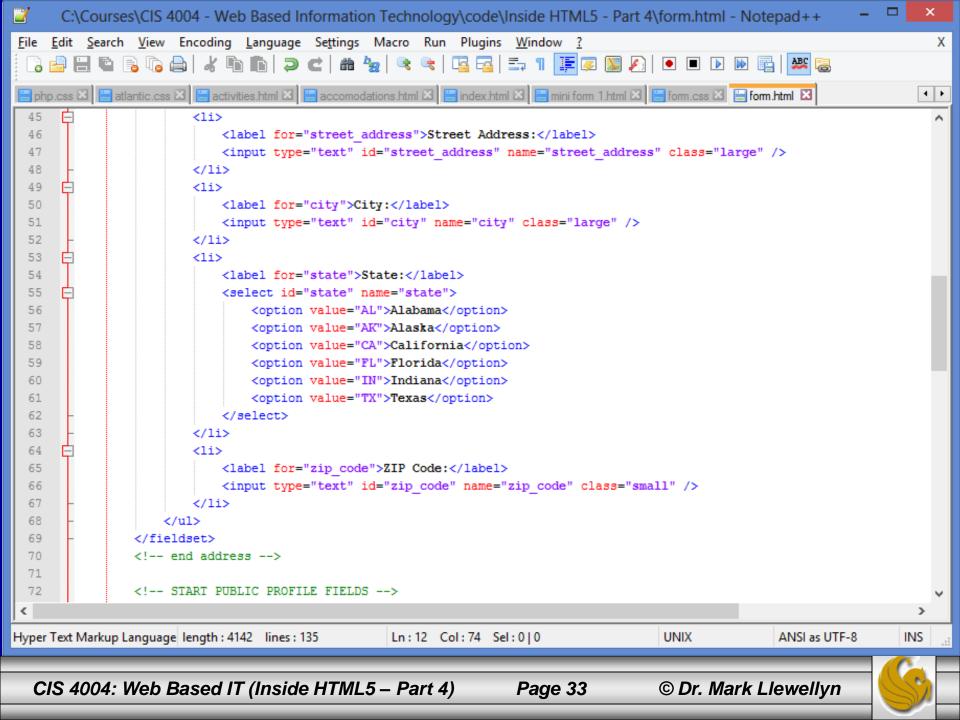
- If desired, the attribute checked = "checked" can be set to make the radio button active by default when the page is opened. You can do this to only one radio button in the set.
- If you do not set the value attribute, the word "on" is sent to the processing script. Its not particularly useful, since you cannot tell which button in the set was selected.
- For radio buttons only, the name attribute must be the same for every radio button in the set. The id attribute for each element on the page must be unique.

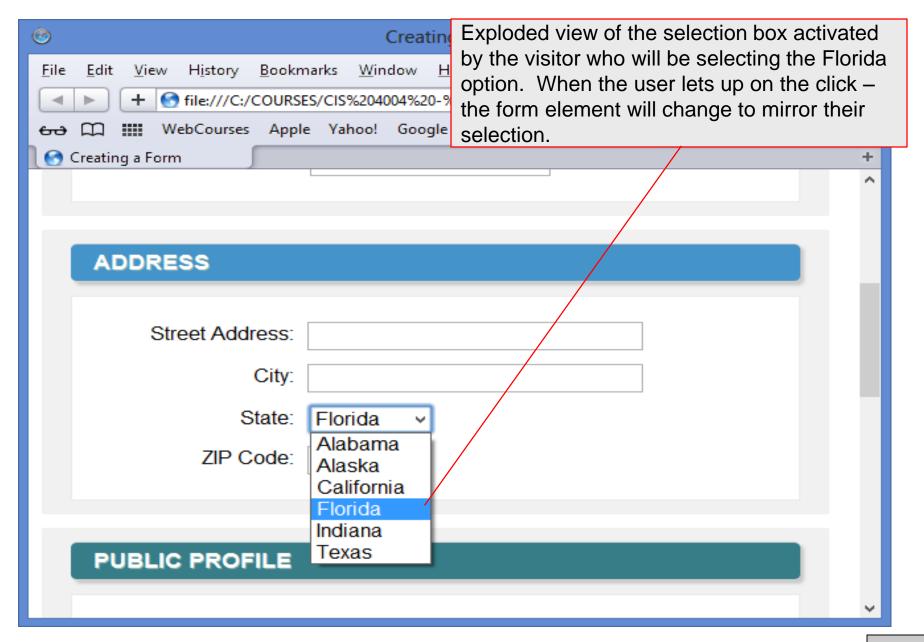


#### **Selection Boxes**

- Selection boxes are a convenient way to offer your visitors a choice from a given set of options. They are most often rendered as dropdown lists.
- You can give the user the option of choosing only one option or several options from the list.
- Selection boxes render as a box of items with a scroll bar.
- Selection boxes are made up of two HTML5 elements: select and option. You set the common name attribute in the select element and you set the value attribute in each of the option elements.
- The part of the big example markup that displays the selection box is shown on the next page.





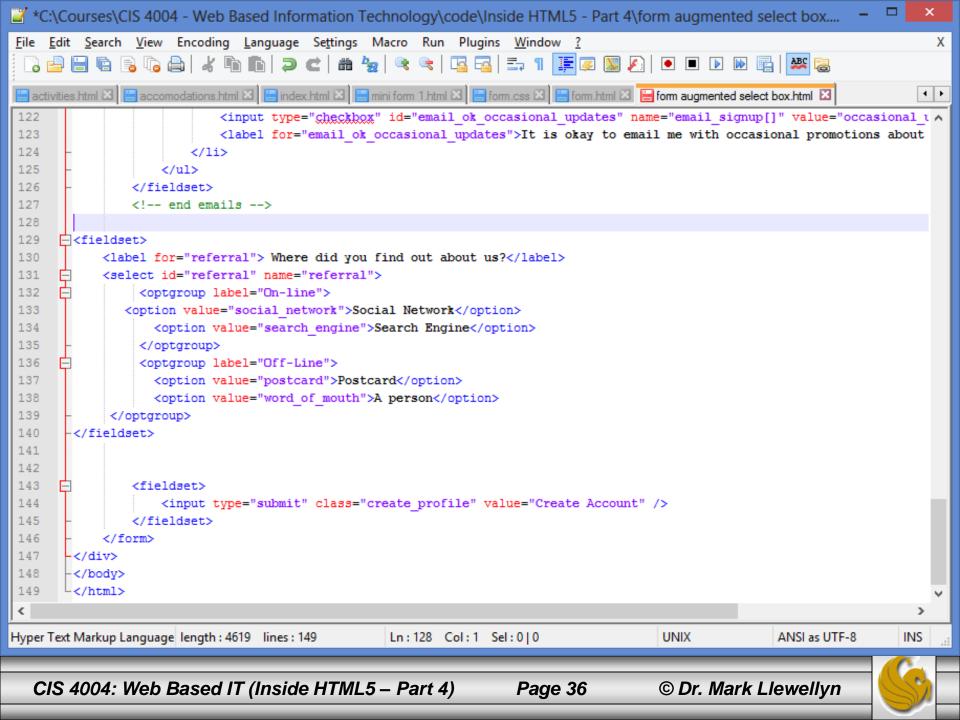


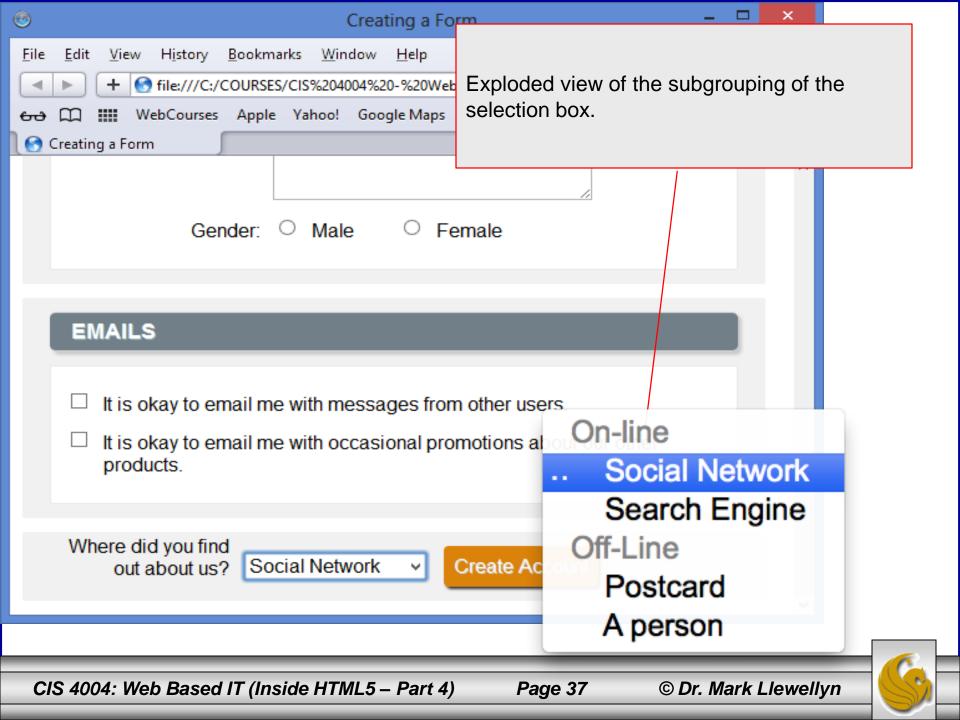


#### **Selection Boxes**

- A visitor will not be able to not make a selection in a menu unless you set the size attribute.
- If you have a particularly large menu of items, you may want to group the options into categories. Before the first option element in the first group that you want to place together enter an optgroup element and enclose all of the subgroup menu items inside the optgroup element. Repeat this for as many subgroupings as you'd like to create.
- Browsers generally do not create true submenus, but rather group the items into a single menu with subgroups.
- The example on the next page illustrates this concept.







# **Selection Boxes**

- The attribute selected="selected" is used to specify that an option in the selection box is to be selected by default.
- If desired, the attribute size="n", where n represents the height (in lines) of the selection box can be used to define how many lines are visible at one time by the visitor.
- If you use the size attribute, the selection box appears more like a list, and there is no automatically selected option (unless you use selected).
- If size is bigger than the number of options, visitors can deselect all values by clicking in the empty space.



# **Check Boxes**

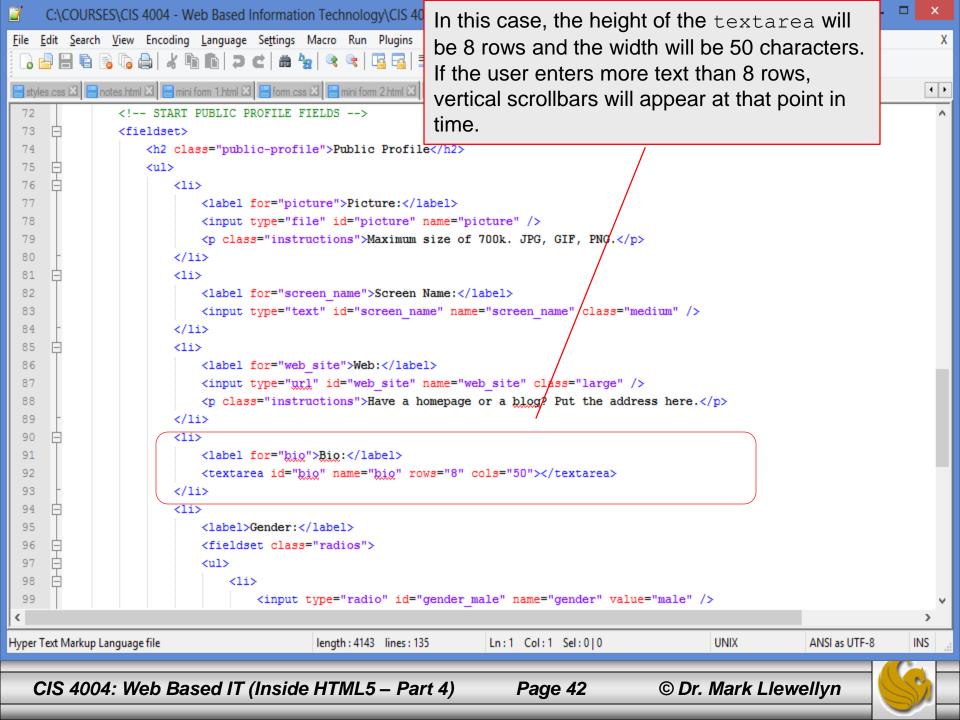
- Radio buttons can accept only one answer per set (grouping of radio buttons). Check boxes allow the user to select as many options in a set as they like.
- Similar to radio buttons, check boxes are linked together in a set or group via the value of the name attribute.
- The visitor can select as many checkboxes as appropriate. Each corresponding value will be sent to the script, along with the name of the checkbox set.
- As you can see in the example on the next page, the label for a checkbox comes after the input element. This means that you will often need to style the label for a checkbox separately.

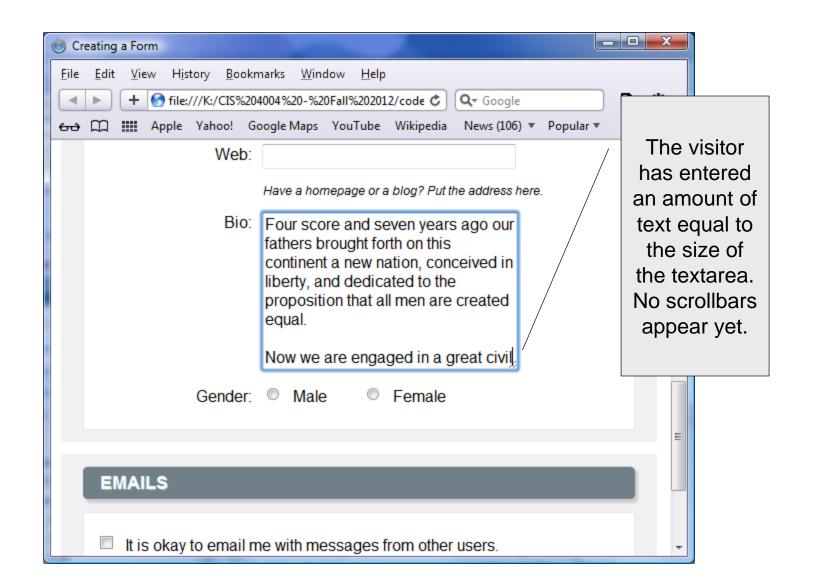


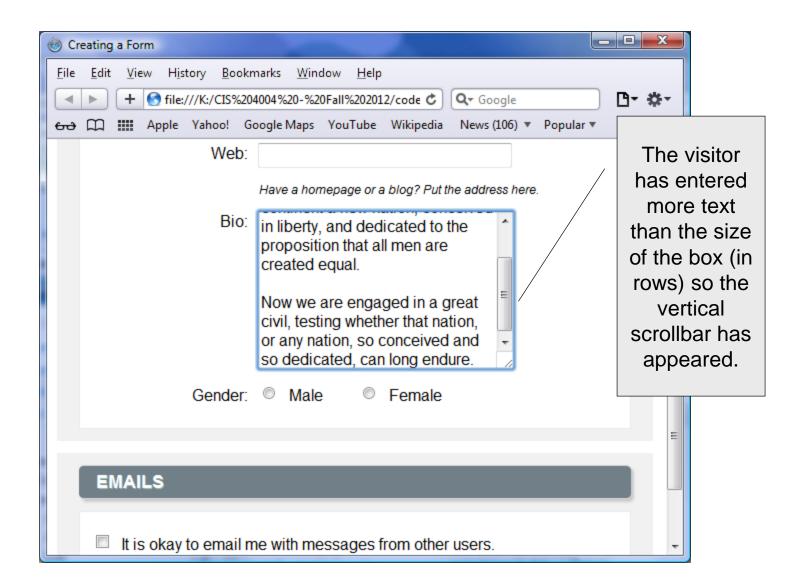
# **Text Areas**

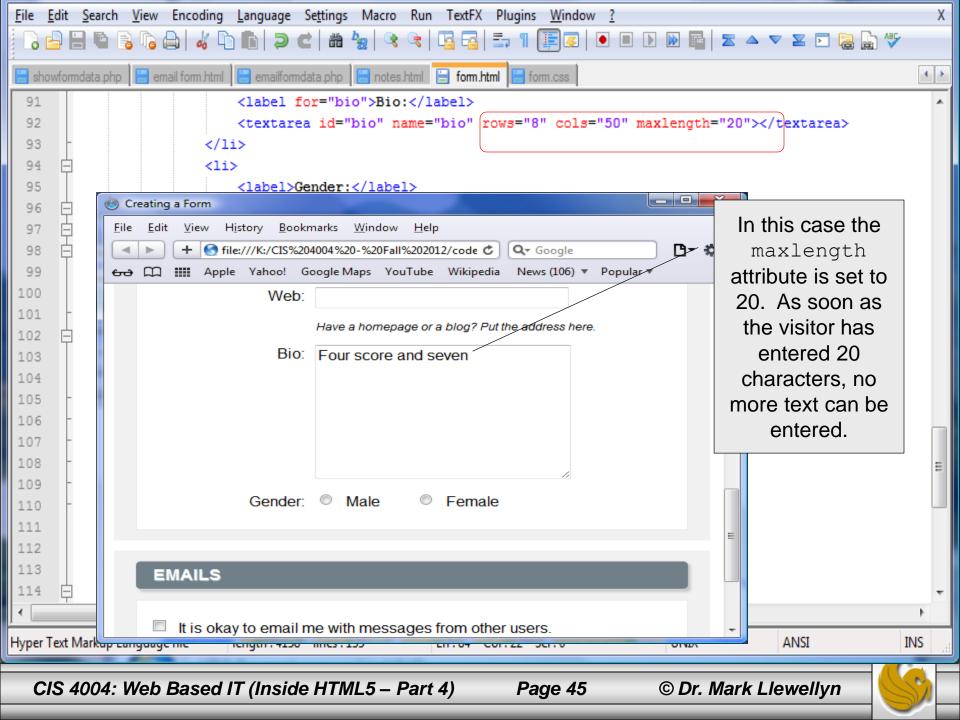
- Text areas are used when you want to provide your visitor room to write questions or comments.
- There is no value attribute with text areas. The value instead is the text that appears between the start and end textarea tags.
- Visitors can enter up to 32,700 characters in a text area (the maximum number of characters allowed). Scroll bars will appear automatically when needed, depending on the size of the text area and the number of characters the visitor has entered.
- The attributes rows and cols set the height of the textarea in rows and the width of the textarea in columns respectively. The attribute maxlength (new in HTML5) sets the upper limit on the number of characters that can be entered in the textarea.











# Calendar And Time Controls

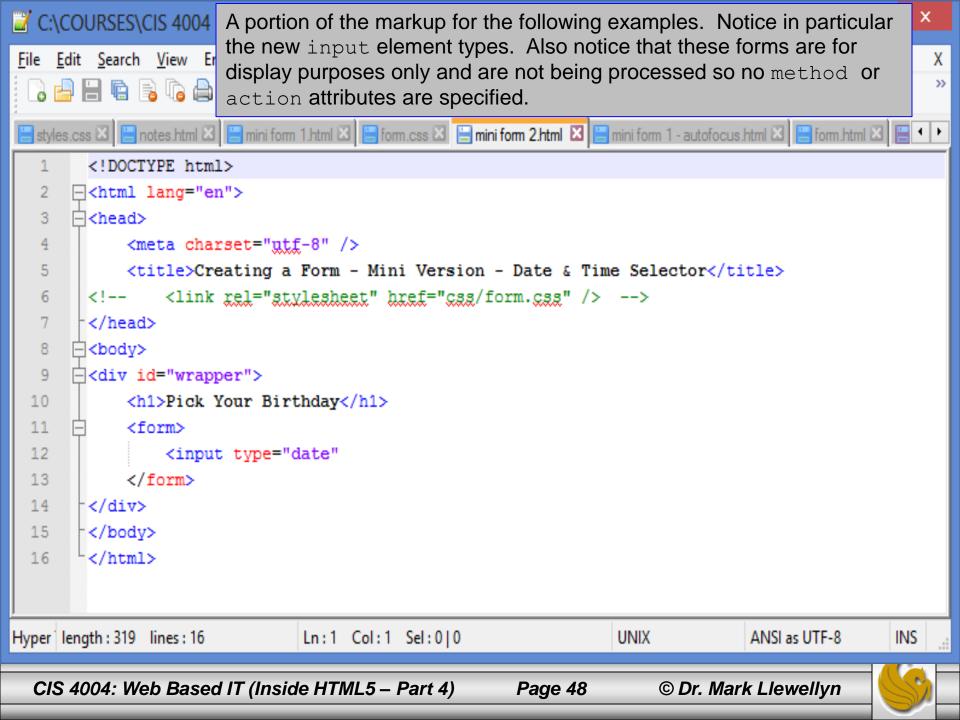
- A common issue web developers have to deal with is how to create calendar widgets that allow the users to pick a date from a calendar so they do not have to enter the date themselves.
- In the past, creation of such a widget always required JavaScript, but with HTML5 the need to use JavaScript is disappearing.
- HTML5 has several new input types that create different calendar and time controls. Currently, not all browsers support these new types. Opera has the best and most elaborate support followed by Safari and Chrome. For the examples that follow, I've used Opera 19.0 to demonstrate these new input types.

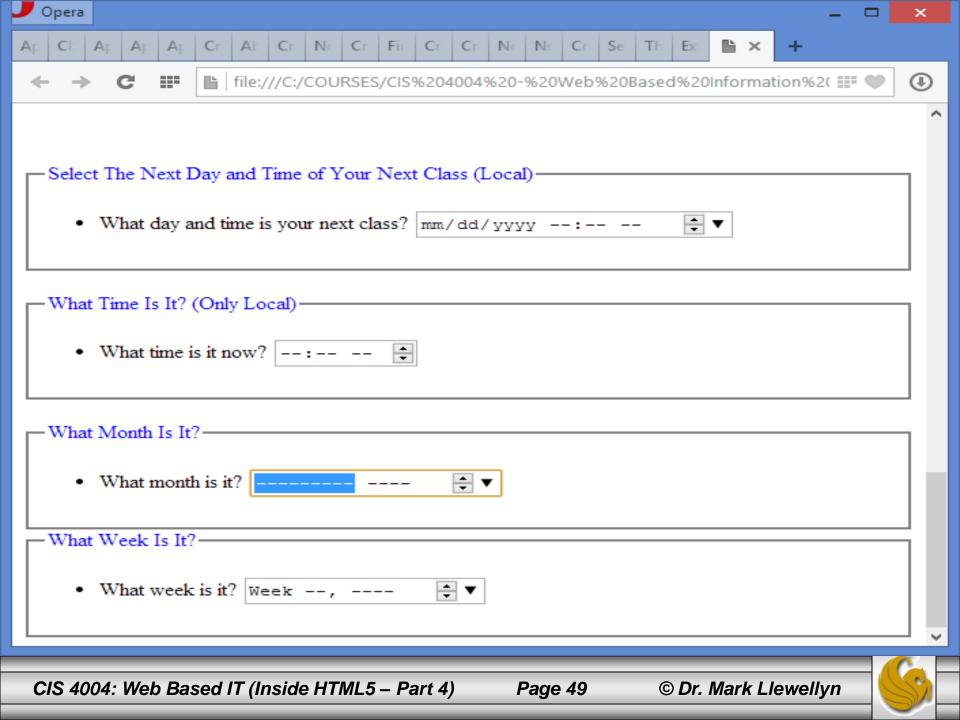


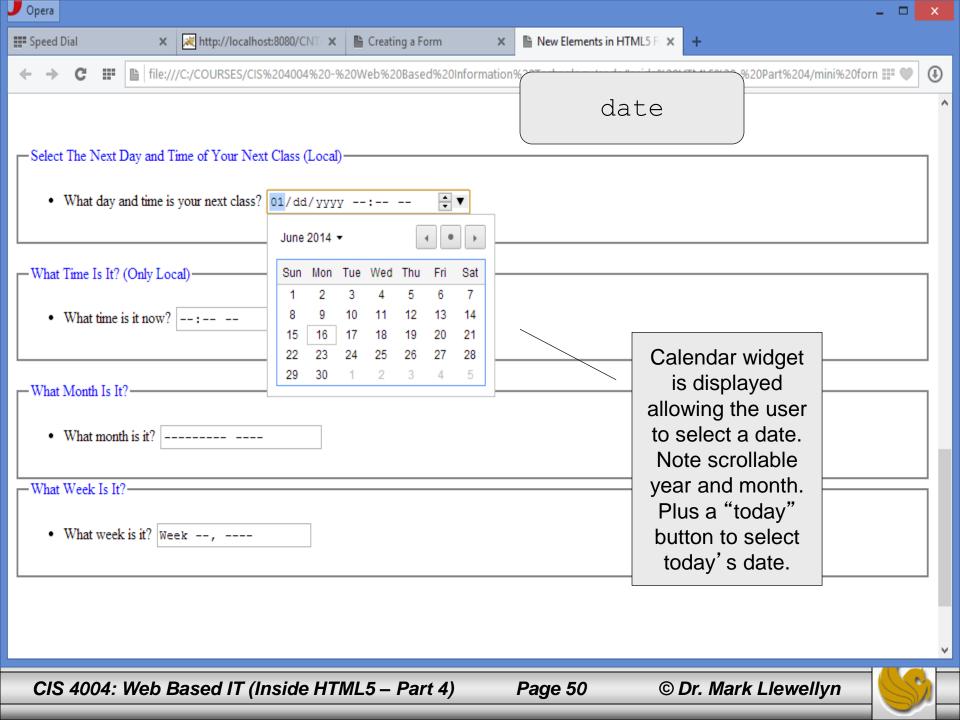
#### **Date and Datetime**

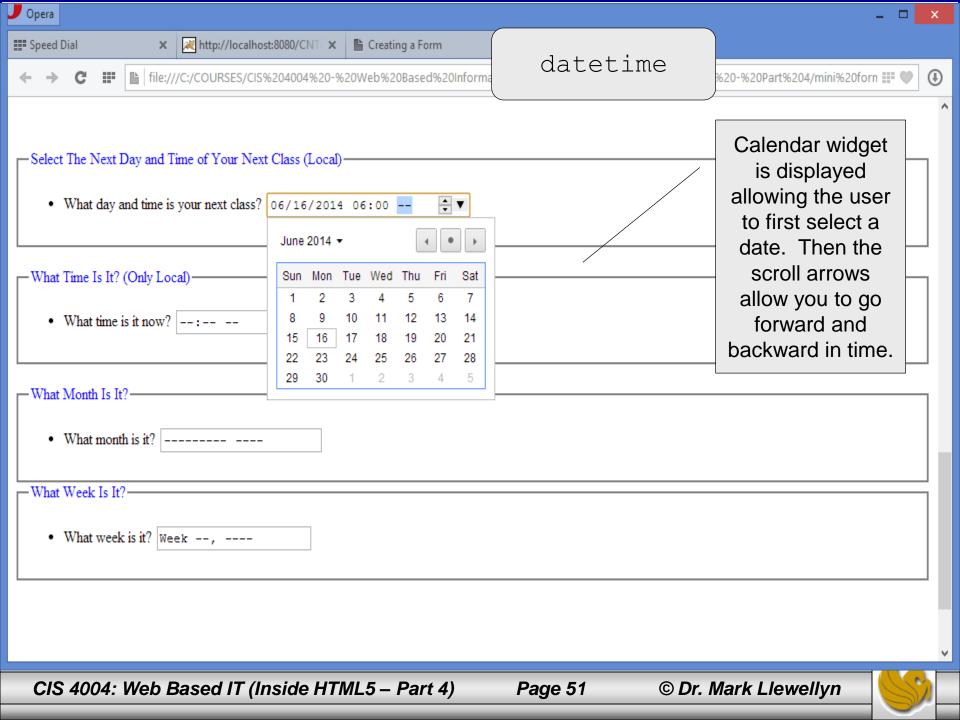
- The new HTML5 input type date allows the user to select a calendar date.
- In Opera, a calendar with a date picker is provided. In Safari a scrollable element is provided that defaults to the current date.
- The HTML5 input type datetime generates a calendar along with a time selector with the time being UTC.
- The HTML5 input type datetime-local is identical to datetime except that the time is based on your local time (whatever is considered local time by your computer).
- These are all illustrated on the next few pages.



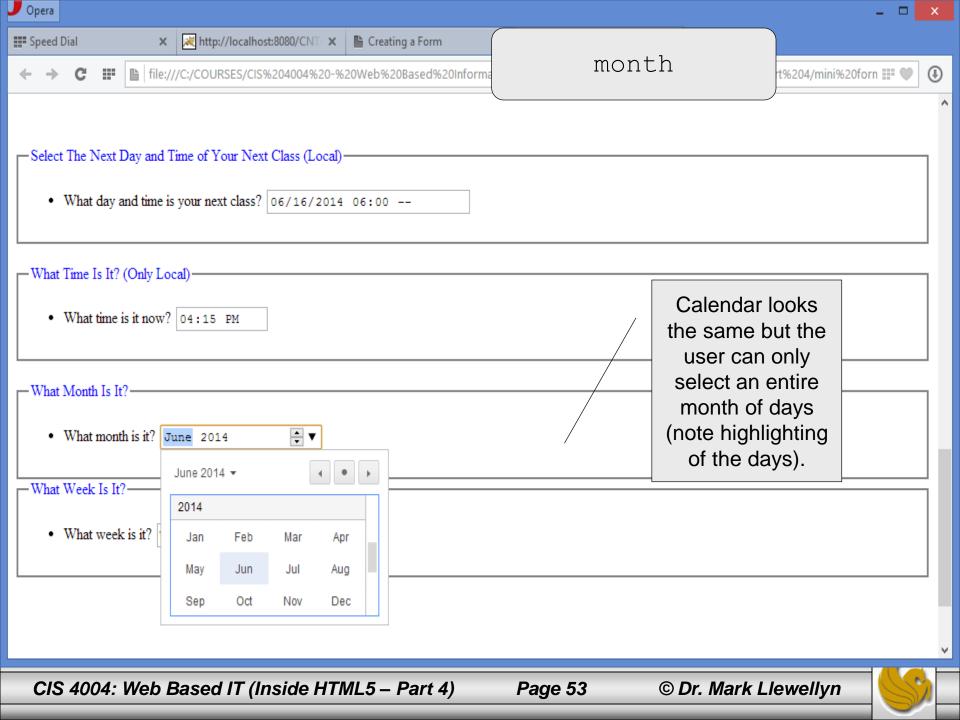


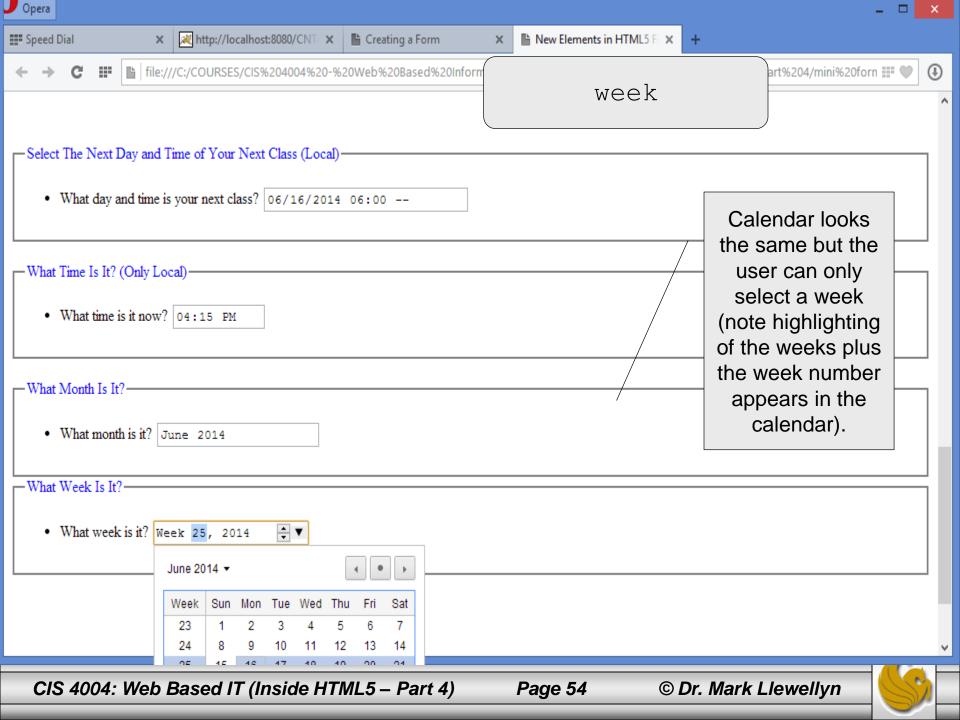












#### **Date and Datetime**

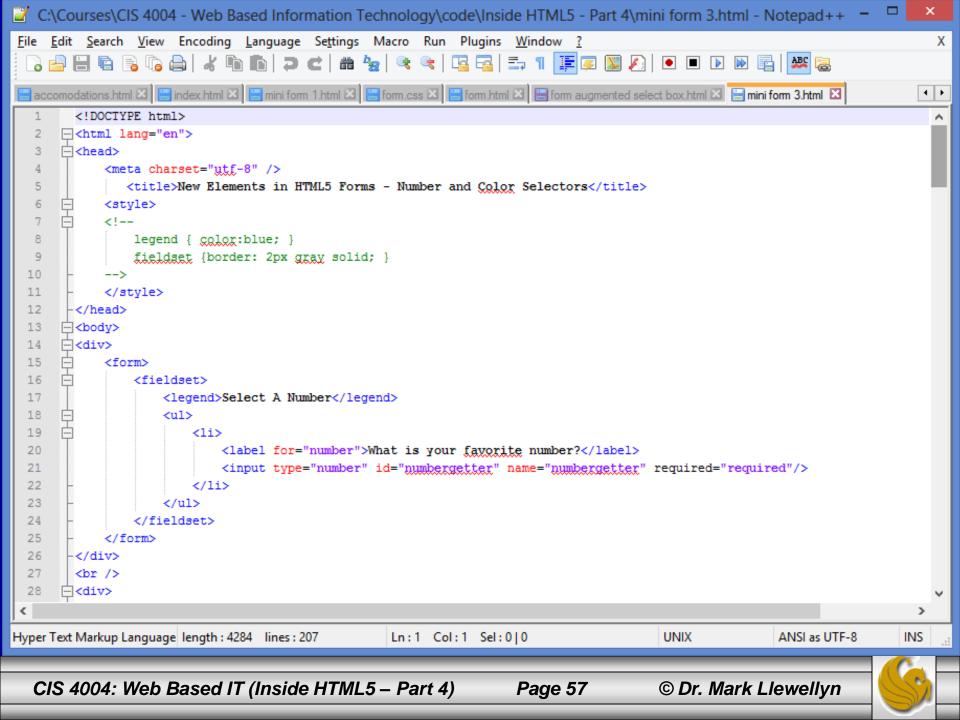
- There are two new attributes, min and max that can be used to restrict the values for dates and times of the widget.
- For a date, if you wanted to make sure the user could not pick a date to far in the past, the min attribute would be set. Similarly, to make sure that they cannot enter a date too far in the future, the max attribute would be set. The values would have the format: YYYY-MM-DD.
- For times, similar restrictions are allowed but the format for a time is HH: MM.

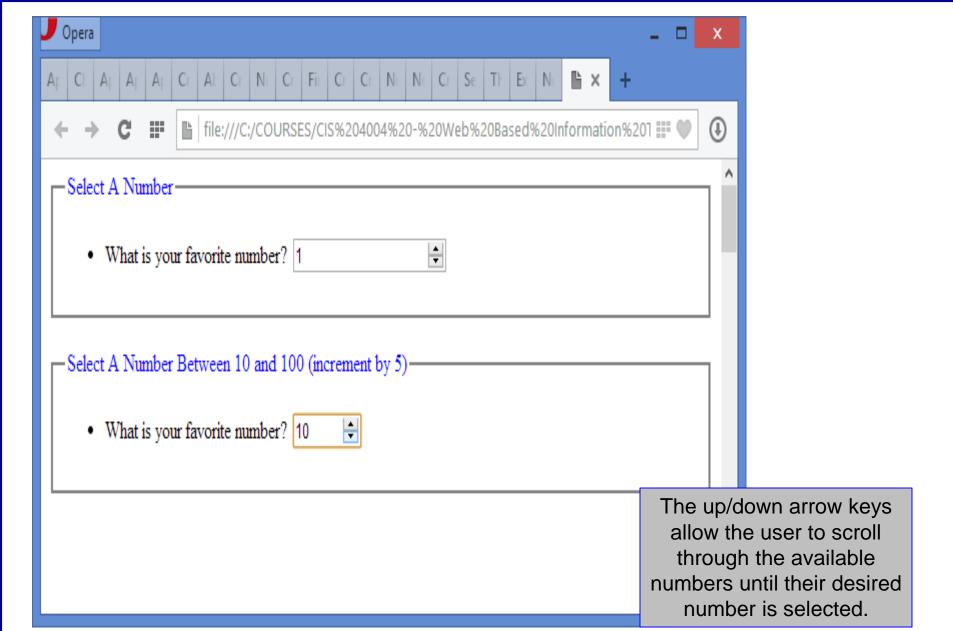


# **Number Selectors**

- The new number input type is used to allow the user to enter a number, again, without them being required to type the number.
- It accepts only numbers, otherwise, a validation error is returned.
- It allows the min and max attributes to be specified to limit the range of values that can be selected.
- It also allows for another new attribute, step, which allows you to specify the increment values that can be entered.
- An example is shown on the next page.



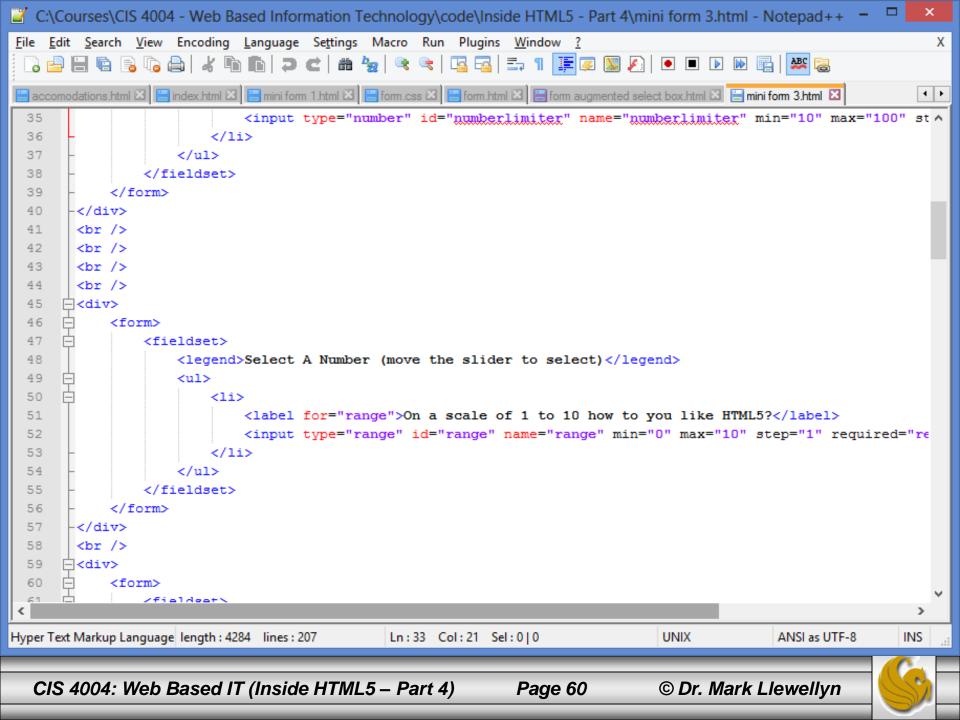


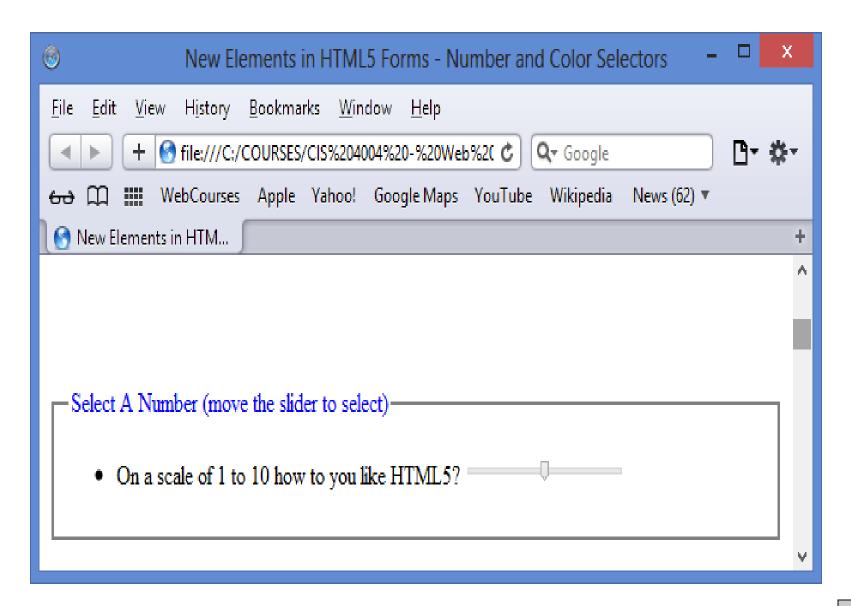


# Sliding Numeric Selectors

- The new range input type generates a slider control. It has no text area for the user to type into, and like the number input type, it can use the min, max, and step attributes.
- In the past, with HTML4 or XHTML, including such a form control would have required JavaScript to be able to generate and control the widget.
- There is limited control over how the slider looks because at the moment the controls are browser-specific. However, you can apply a height and width to the range control. If you specify a height larger than the width, the control renders vertically instead of the default horizontal rendering.





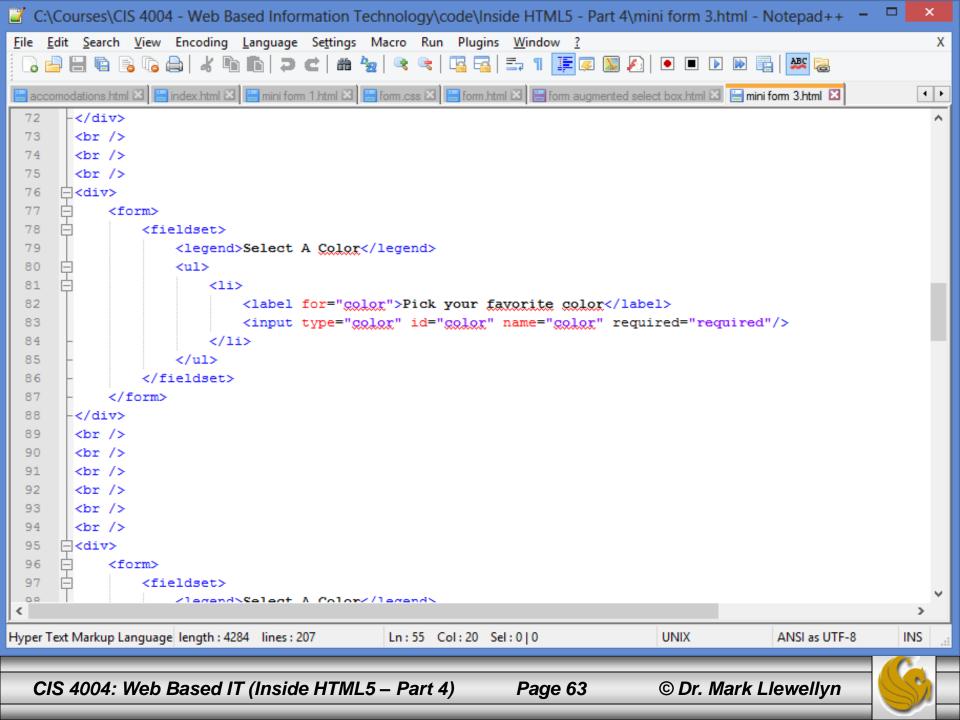


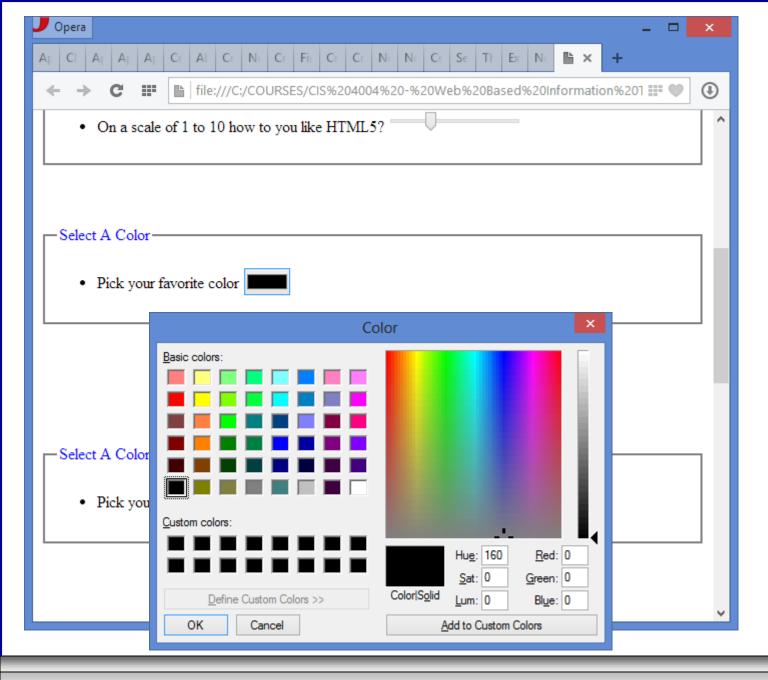


# Color Selectors

- The new color input type allows the user a choice of some basic colors with the options of entering a hex value or using a color picker, similar to what is used in many software packages.
- The only desktop browser that currently supports this input type is Opera 11+.
- The next couple of pages illustrate this input type.









# Creating An Autocomplete Feature With list and datalist

- The datalist element is new in HTML5. Combined with the list attribute, it is used to provide a predefined list of options, making the process of creating a list seem like an autocomplete form.
- User's don't necessarily have to choose from the predefined options, they can type their own answers if they wish.
- The datalist is similar to a select element. However, with a select element, the user cannot type their own option if they need to do so.
- The next two pages illustrate this new element.



