
Adding a Result Element

OASIS DocBook TC

Abstract

Proposal to add a `result` element for use in documenting procedures.

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This proposal addresses the request to add a `result` element to use in documenting a procedure. The proposed content model is discussed along with the containers that would contain the `result` element.

Purpose

It is frequently desirable to document the results of a `procedure`, as well as the intermediate results of `steps` in a procedure. It may also be desirable to document the results of a `task`. It is generally considered good practice to provide a user with confirmation of what to expect when actions are taken by the user. While elements exist in DocBook to represent the various types of results (including simple paragraphs), providing a container for them would make the intent clearer and allow business rules to be checked (such as requiring all procedures to include a result to “close the loop” for the user of a procedure).

Parents of Result Elements

I will discuss `result` elements representing the following the following:

- the result of a `procedure`;
- the result of a `step`;
- the result of a `task`;
- intermediate procedure results (the result of a series of `steps`, but not the terminal result of a procedure);
- other potential locations.



Important

This description assumes a single `result` element for any result being described. This means that if there are alternatives (success and failure, for example) that they are both included in a single `result` element. An alternative model would be to allow multiple result elements with `class` attributes to identify the type of result (default

to success, but allow success, failure, and possibly other values). Modern software documentation frequently has to account for alternative results to user actions.



Note

The question of substeps and stepalternatives also needs to be addressed, but likely whatever decisions are made regarding procedures and steps can be applied to them.

Result of a Procedure

Representing the result of a procedure would best be provided by allowing the last element in procedure (following all the step elements) to be a result element. The contents of the result element would be interpreted as the result of the entire procedure, providing confirmation of the successful execution of the procedure.

Results of a Step

Representing the result of a step would best be provided by allowing the last element in step (following all the other child elements) to be a result element. The contents of the result element would be interpreted as the result of the step, providing confirmation of successful execution of the step.

Results of a Task

Representing the result of a task is more problematic. The structure of a task is more complex and determining the best location for a result is more difficult to propose. Rather than adding to the complexity of the task content model, it may be better to simply attach it to the embedded procedure.

Intermediate Procedure Results

At times, it is desirable to represent the result of a series of steps that are not the entire procedure, but that are required to produce a result visible to the user (so that results of individual steps are not meaningful). Representing intermediate results could be done using the result element that is a child of a step element, but that would be structurally inappropriate. The recommended structure would be to allow a result element to appear after at least two step elements have appeared in a procedure (since the result of a single step would be a child of that step). If that content model proves too difficult, allowing a result element to follow any step element in a procedure.

Other Potential Locations

Other potential locations would be as children of:

- example
- equation
- programlisting (possibly, but would probably be best done using example)

Since the request specifically addressed procedures, these are not addressed, but should be considered.

Contents of a Result

The result element should be flexible to allow representing a wide variety of results using different approaches. An optional title should be available (and possibly an info block). It may be that the

simplest model would be to simply allow block elements as children of steps. However, in keeping with the idea of representing what a result might be, at least some combination of the following (one or more) should be allowed (and limiting the content model may be a better idea if we are trying to reinforce the idea of it being a *result*). I have avoided most formal elements to reduce title overload, but that may not be necessary.

- `para`
- `formalpara`
- `mediaobject`
- `screen`, `screenco`, `screenshot`
- `computeroutput`
- `informaltable`
- `informalexample`
- `informalfigure`
- `literallayout`
- all the list elements
- all the admonitions