Stacking Order

HTML naturally stacks elements from top to bottom in the order they are listed. For example, if we create 3 div boxes named red, yellow, and blue (in that order), the red box will be at the top of the page, the yellow box right underneath the red box, and the blue box right underneath the yellow box. (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

But if we go to the CSS stylesheet and give these box divs the position of "absolute", that action takes the divs out of the HTML flow and literally stacks the boxes on top of each other so that now the blue box is the only box we can see. (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2

In order to see the stacking order, let's change the margin. If we add a 30px margin on the top and left to the yellow box, and a 60px margin on the top and left to the blue box, we will now clearly see the stacking order of the boxes. (Figure 5.3).

Red will be in the back, yellow will be on top of the red box, and blue will be on top of the yellow box. So, the elements that are listed first in the HTML file will be at the back and as we go down the HTML file, every other element will be stacked right on top of the previous one. (Figure 5.3)
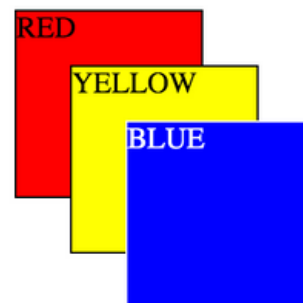

Figure 5.3

Another way to think of this order is to imagine how you might stack books on top of each other.

Figure 5.4

Let's say we have three books and we give the books the names "Book 1", "Book 2", and "Book 3".

If Book 1 is stacked first on a table, it would be on the bottom, but it would still be our first book stacked, even though it's not the book in the front or the book you immediately see.

Then we stack Book 2 on top of Book 1, then we stack Book 3 last, which sits at the very top of the stack. But even though Book 3 is on top, it is still last in our hierarchy because it is the third book, not the first. (Figure 5.4)

We can also experiment with this stacking order by changing the listing order in the HTML file. If we took the yellow box div, which is currently the 2nd box, and listed it after the blue box div, making the yellow one the 3rd and last div, the yellow box would come to the front of the stack.

In this new formation, the yellow box will now sit on top of the blue box, with the red box still in the very back. (Figure 5.5)
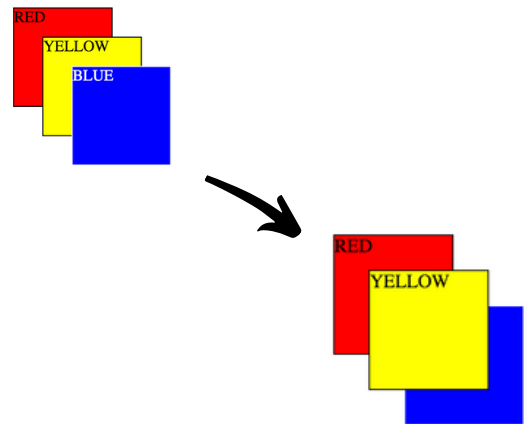

Figure 5.5

However, note that all of the boxes will stay in the exact same spot they were in when the yellow box div was listed 2nd in the HTML file. This is because we simply changed the stacking order in the HTML file, NOT the positioning in the CSS stylesheet.