
DITA 2.0 proposed feature #372 Remove data-about

Remove the <data-about> element from DITA 2.0..

Date and version information

Include the following information:

Date that this feature proposal was completed

Sept 1, 2020

Champion of the proposal

Robert D Anderson

Links to any previous versions of the proposal

Based on email: <https://lists.oasis-open.org/archives/dita/202009/msg00013.html>

Links to minutes where this proposal was discussed at stage 1 and moved to stage 2

<https://lists.oasis-open.org/archives/dita/202009/msg00021.html>

Reviewers for Stage 2 proposal

Eliot Kimber, Carsten Brennecke, Éric Sirois

Links to e-mail discussion that resulted in new versions of the proposal

N/A

Link to the GitHub issue

<https://github.com/oasis-tcs/dita/issues/372>

Original requirement or use case

The <data-about> element is poorly understood, and even the specification authors are unsure at this point how to define the element in a clear way. We have the impression it is only used rarely, probably not for the intended purpose; the <data> element itself is likely able to serve metadata needs adequately.

By removing the element, we can simplify the language and remove an element that is causing confusion for many authors.

Use cases

There is no way to "use" the feature; removing the element will simplify the authoring experience.

New terminology

N/A

Proposed solution

Delete the <data-about> element from the specification and grammar files.

Benefits

Address the following questions:

Who will benefit from this feature?

Authors who have an improved editing experience; technical committee members that do not need to maintain this in the specification.

What is the expected benefit?

Improved authoring experience.

How many people probably will make use of this feature?

Most; it will disappear from insert-markup windows for most authors. For authors that already removed it, customizations to remove the element will no longer be needed.

How much of a positive impact is expected for the users who will make use of the feature?

Minor positive impact.

Technical requirements

Provide a detailed description of how the solution will work. Be sure to include the following details:

Adding new elements or attributes

N/A

Renaming or refactoring elements and attributes

N/A

Removing elements or attributes**Removing a topic or map specialization**

N/A

Removing a domain entirely, or from select document types

N/A

Removing an element

Removing <data-about> from the core topic and map modules (it is part of the "common elements" grammar module). This means it will disappear from all document types that do not already use constraints to remove the element.

Removing an attribute

N/A

Processing impact

Processors can optionally remove support for this element, which was already considered hidden by default.

Overall usability

N/A

Backwards compatibility

DITA 2.0 is the first DITA release that is open to changes affecting backwards compatibility. To help highlight any impact, does this proposal involve any of the following?

Was this change previously announced in an earlier version of DITA?

No

Removing a document type that was shipped in DITA 1.3?

No

Removing a domain that was shipped in DITA 1.3?

No

Removing a domain from a document type shell that was shipped in DITA 1.3?

No

Removing or renaming an element that was shipped in DITA 1.3?

Yes; <data-about> is removed from the common elements module, meaning it will disappear from all document types.

Removing or renaming an attribute that was shipped in DITA 1.3?

No

Changing the meaning of an element or attribute in a way that would disallow existing usage?

No

Changing a content model by removing something that was previously allowed, or by requiring something that was not?

Indirectly, because <data-about> was allowed in most contexts, and is no longer defined.

Changing specialization ancestry?

No

Removing or replacing a processing feature that was defined in DITA 1.3?

No

Are element or attribute groups being renamed or shuffled?

No

Migration plan

If the answer to any question in the previous section is "yes":

Might any existing documents need to be migrated?

Yes. The most likely solution is to migrate <data-about> elements to use <data> with additional attributes. This can likely be automated but that automation will vary based on how the element is used (the TC is not aware of any common usage).

Might any existing processors or implementations need to change their expectations?

Minimally, processors can optionally remove support for this element.

Might any existing specialization or constraint modules need to be migrated?

Modules or constraints that explicitly reference the <data-about> element will need to remove those references. If a constraint's only purpose is to hide this element, that constraint can be removed.

If no migration need is anticipated, why not?

N/A

Costs

Outline the impact (time and effort) of the feature on the following groups.

Maintainers of the grammar files

Small cost to remove (lower than the cost of maintaining / updating for DITA 2.0)

Editors of the DITA specification

Small cost to remove (lower than the cost of maintaining / updating for DITA 2.0); remove the element reference topic for this element, and remove other mentions of the element.

Vendors of tools

Minimal to no impact (optionally removing support for missing element).

DITA community-at-large

Expecting no cost to the majority of the community, because this element is so rarely used; some migration cost for any authors that have adopted the element.

Producing migration instructions or tools

- How extensive will migration instructions be, if it is integrated into an overall 1.3 # 2.0 migration publication or white paper? **Minimal; a few search/replace examples are likely enough.**
- Will this require an independent white paper or other publication to provide migration details? **No.**

- Do migration tools need to be created before this change can be made? If so, how complex will those tools be to create and to use? **No tools needed for this specific change.**

Examples

The following example is copied from the DITA 1.3 specification:

```
<topic id="questions">
  <title>Questions and answers</title>
  <prolog>
    <data-about href="urn:isbn:0156983508" scope="external">
      <data name="title">The World Doesn't End</data>
      <data name="author">
        <data name="firstname">Charles</data>
        <data name="lastname">Simic</data>
      </data>
      <data name="published" datatype="year">1989</data>
      <!-- ... -->
    </data-about>
    <!-- ... -->
  </prolog>
  <body>
    <!-- ... -->
    <lq href="urn:isbn:0156983508">In a forest of question marks ...
    </lq>
    <!-- ... -->
  </body>
</topic>
```

A migrated version of this example would switch the <data-about> element to <data>, and add an attribute to clarify the purpose:

```
<topic id="questions">
  <title>Questions and answers</title>
  <prolog>
    <data name="external-isbn" href="urn:isbn:0156983508" scope="external">
      <data name="title">The World Doesn't End</data>
      <data name="author">
        <data name="firstname">Charles</data>
        <data name="lastname">Simic</data>
      </data>
      <data name="published" datatype="year">1989</data>
      <!-- ... -->
    </data>
    <!-- ... -->
  </prolog>
  <body>
    <!-- ... -->
    <lq href="urn:isbn:0156983508">In a forest of question marks ...
    </lq>
    <!-- ... -->
  </body>
</topic>
```