

WRITING A USER GUIDE

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My sincere thanks to all those who made this book happen.

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INTRODUCTION

Technical writing is one of the hottest fields nowadays. Every product company needs technical writers. From writing manuals to answering RFPs, companies take technical writers help. In most of the companies, these people report to Marketing/Development department heads. In a few companies, these people directly report to vice-president of the company. Since technical writing provides a chance to dabble in to various things at any point of time, a technical writer's career is so exciting. Try it! You never feel sorry for choosing a technical writing career.

Best of luck!

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What you need to know to become a Technical Writer

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1. Strategies to Learn English

In the present world scenario, in most of the places, people has been using English (American, British, Australian, etc) for business communication. There are a few pockets in this world, where English is not spoken. But, the majority of the people in the world speak, read, and write English; they also use it to further their business needs, skills, and requirements. People who are from non-native English speaking countries need to learn this language separately as their second language, whereas native speakers, whose first language is English, not only speak it fluently since their childhood but also use it in their day-to-day interactions.

Strategy 1: Memorizing English word with the related mother tongue word through rote learning.

This is normally followed by most of the people while learning English in the initial stages. People, who have good memory power can benefit from this kind of rote learning. The ultimate achievement in learning a language is to use it in regular day-to-day life. So, people who are good at this

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strategy need to concentrate on how to use the words, they learn from time-to-time, in their regular life.

Strategy 2: Understanding and memorizing English word and its meaning; all in English only.

People using this strategy are one step ahead of those, who memorize English word with the related mother tongue word through rote learning. This strategy requires people to understand English better and have at the same time good memory power and retention skills.

Strategy 3: Understanding, memorizing English word and forming your own sentence using the same word.

This strategy is for those people who are able to understand English and are also capable of constructing grammatically correct sentences with a few words. Ideally speaking, this kind of learning increases the retention capacity of the mind because, following this strategy, the person is trying to link the word with a known context, that also, in English.

Strategy 4: Memorizing English words just by following a blind logic (for ex: preparing a list of words by following logic

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like starting every word with the ending letter of its preceding word)

Normally, one can see this kind of strategy in English-learning books, magazines, etc. This again comes under rote-learning strategy. One way, it allows one to memorize a few words. While remembering the words, one can also learn meanings of each word.

Strategy 5: Studying the root word and its related words and memorizing them by using the same in sentences and also by reviewing

This is also an advanced strategy. There are few good English-learning books out there, which had followed this kind of strategy. Readers of these books need to understand the root word for a particular group of words; by understanding the logic, not only one can easily memorize a few groups of words within a short span of time but also learn their related meanings.

Strategy 6: Gather beautiful phrases from your readings; review and use them in your day-to-day life

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This is a different kind of advanced strategy; people who can understand, speak and write an average-level of English can follow this one. This strategy involves reading a lot; whatever you read and whenever you come across beautiful phrases (a sequence of two or more words that does not contain subject, verb, etc, but acts as a unit in a sentence) jot them down, try to understand the meaning, and use them quite often in the relevant contexts, wherever possible.

Strategy 7: Gathering and jotting down new words wherever and whenever you come across them.

This is a helpful strategy for everybody who wants to improve their English vocabulary. This strategy involves reading a lot; where and when a new word appears, jot it down, haunt its meaning in dictionary, and use it in your day-to-day interaction.

Strategy 8: The easy and best way to learn English is to have a single novel, which is full of conversation-related stuff and read it as many time as possible; while doing this, try to remember the conversations and also the contexts for which they are being used.

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This strategy has been helpful to a lot of non-native English speakers and is already in use. People, who adapt this strategy, need to read a novel or a book, which holds lot of conversational stuff, for a number of times. Reading a novel for a number of times makes one's mind to remember the conversations as it is. This strategy mainly works for those people, who want to concentrate on spoken English.

Strategy 9: Imagine a situation and try to jot down all the words (terminology) you need to explain the situation in English; once you write the stuff, haunt for the meaning of English words in a good dictionary and read them as many times as possible.

This is a proactive strategy; one needs to imagine a situation, for example, like attending a phone call. Try to gather the words and sentences used in this context like "Could you please hold for a minute, May I know who is on the line, etc." After collecting all the words and sentences related to the said context, review and use them as frequently as you can in your daily interaction.

Strategy 10: The radical way to improve your English and also tease your brain for creativity is to jot down a list of 5 or 10

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words randomly from dictionary; start writing a story using those words.

This is quite an advanced strategy. The minimum requirement to adapt this kind of strategy is to understand, read, write, and speak good grammatical English. As this process involves creative writing also, one should be a little bit well-versed with English. The strategy involves collecting 5 or 10 random English words; understand their meaning and try to build a storyline around these words. Make sure the words used should fit the context.

Tips & Tricks Try to explain every context in a few short sentences. It is so important that you need to explain, write, and present each context in short sentences. Readers are not interested to read lengthy sentences; one more point is that lengthy sentences confuse readers. Whatever the context is, break it into small parts, and try to explain those small parts in a few short sentences. The battle to explain things in English is half-won the moment you start using this strategy.

Think how I can explain this situation in English. The main problem non-native English speakers face while learning English is that they think in their mother tongue and try to

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explain thoughts in English. They also use the same logic to construct sentences in English just like how they do the same in their mother tongue. The solution for this problem is to start thinking in English. If you don't have the habit of thinking in English, cultivate it now.

Read, understand, and digest the verbs of any new language, you want to learn. To grasp and learn a new language, concentrate on its verbs first; the secret lies there. Familiarize yourself with the verbs and their meanings. Then, try to attentively listen to the native speakers while they speak. Slowly, you may start understanding their conversation.

As English is becoming more and more widely used in business communications, it is better to learn it and join the bandwagon of millions of English speaking people all over the world.

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2. SDLC vs. DDLC

This chapter deals about Technical writing and discusses about how you adapt the writing process to suit the different stages of Software Development Life Cycle's (SDLC) needs and requirements.

Although there are many steps in SDLC, this chapter lists out only the important stages of SDLC. They are

1. Requirement Gathering
2. Analysis & Design
3. Coding
4. Code Review & Testing Phase
5. Launch (Alpha & Beta releases)
6. Maintenance

Every software project has its own customized SDLC framework.

All the proprietary framework versions are dependent upon the skeleton structure of the above SDLC framework.

Just like how every software project is dependent on SDLC, in the same way, every documentation project also is

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dependent on Document Development Life Cycle (DDLC). The DDLC framework is divided into the following steps.

1. Understand Product/project requirements
2. Doing Audience Analysis
3. Deciding about Output formats (.PDF, Online Help) & Documentation deliverables
4. Zeroing on Documentation & Graphic tools
5. Gathering the base or source documents
6. Template Designing
7. Time frame & Estimate
8. Identifying Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) & points of contact
9. Identifying peer, technical, and editorial reviewers
10. Creating the Documentation Plan
11. Draft Table of Contents (TOC)
12. Doing Content Development
13. Managing Review Cycles
14. Incorporating Review Comments
15. Final Output

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All the preceding DDLC framework steps can be summarized into five subcategories, which in turn can be mapped to every step of SDLC. The five summarized subcategories are

1. Preparation of the Documentation Plan
2. Writing the content
3. Reviewing the content
4. Document Delivery
5. Document Maintenance

Since every Documentation project in software field depends upon the corresponding project/product, the SDLC framework of the same has to be mapped with the DDLC of the corresponding Documentation project.

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Mapping of SDLC vs. DDLC

Sr. No.	SDLC Phase	Mapping	DDLC Phase
1	Analysis & Design	→	Preparation of Documentation Plan
2	Coding	→	Writing the content
3	Code Review & Testing Phase	→	Review the content
4	Launch (Alpha & Beta releases)	→	Document release
5	Application Maintenance	→	Document maintenance (incorporating functionality enhancements & modifications)

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As you can see from the preceding mapping, every process in SDLC is mapped with the corresponding process in DDLC. Most of the companies, particularly product companies, want the documentation ready by the time the product hits the market.

For the companies following Agile methodology, when the product is under development stage, there will be frequent enhancements, corrections, etc, during each iteration. Just like how the changes are incorporated in the code, in the same way, changes have to be done to the corresponding documentation to keep the deliverables up-to-date as per the client/market requirements.

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3. The DDLC

Most of the documentation teams in different companies follow their own DDLC as per their convenience. However, if you compare all the DDLC variations, you can easily see a common pattern, structure and process among all of them. DDLC in expansion is known Document Development Life Cycle. Most of the product based companies try to match every step of DDLC with the corresponding SDLC (software development life cycle) steps. This matching is necessary to release the product support documentation along with the release of the product itself in the market. This chapter tries to explain all the major steps of DDLC so that the reader will gain a good understanding once this chapter is read.

The most important basic steps in DDLC are

1. Requirement gathering
2. Audience analysis
3. Validation of template
4. Subject matter writing
5. Reviews
6. Correction incorporations

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7. Final Release
8. Maintenance

The preceding 8 steps form the backbone of DDLC (any variant). Usually, the guide writing starts from Requirement Gathering stage (first step). All the specs written by Business Analysts have to be thoroughly read and have to be understood by the Technical Writers. During this stage, the writers participate in different product related discussions, debates, walkthroughs, etc, so that they can gain an understanding about the to-be-created-product.

In the second step, the writers have to determine who is their target audience i.e., for whom they are going to write all these guides. This is a very important step in Guide writing. Depending on the target audience, the way a guide has to be written differs. For example, all the product installation guides target Administrators as their target audience. If the product installation requires that its Administrators need to have technical knowledge, then the guides have to be written in such a way keeping the technical administrators in mind i.e., the guide will use technical terminology.

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In the third step, here, a template will be created using the editor, which you want to use to write the guide. Since every company has their own documentation standards to be followed, this template should also adhere to those standards. Above all, the Documentation Head has to approve the template before you start writing the guide.

In the fourth step, you need to write about what you have studied and gathered about the product in the guide format using the approved template. Here again, depending on which type of guide you want to write, the information structure has to be changed. For example, a task-based guide does not look similar to a reference guide. Both guides have their own way of information structuring. If you want to write a guide, which can serve as an online guide also, then go for screen based guide format. This kind of writing forces you to write the matter in a modular way and this in turn helps you to quickly create an online guide using the same matter along with the information structure.

In the fifth step, you need to deal with different kinds of reviews. Initially, after you write the first draft, your guide will be pushed to the following reviews: self-review, peer

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review, technical review, editorial review. Depending on the requirement, a few companies also try to get the guide reviewed by the Marketing department, Design team, etc. These are additional reviews depending upon the need.

In the sixth step, you need to do a hell lot of corrections during the guide review period. Out of all the reviews mentioned above, Technical review by the subject matter expert (SME) is the utmost important one; the second one is the editorial review. Most companies that want to cut the review periods of the guide cut the remaining reviews except the Technical and Editorial reviews. Most of the times technical writers work parallelly on different projects, which are in different stages. For example, if a few projects are in review stage, some other in initial stage, like that. Since every guide is different and deals matter of its own, you need to be careful while working on the guides.

In the seventh step, the guide has to be released long with the new product in the market. If your product deals with a printed guide, then make sure that the printing work has to be done in advance. Nowadays, most of the companies are allowing the guide to download. This option saves lot of

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money and time. Moreover, a few others are opting for Wiki-based guides so that the user always can avail latest and updated information about the product and its processes.

The last and final step in guide writing deals with the Guide Maintenance part; once the product is released in the market, depending on the customer's requirements the company needs to add new features/ changes /enhancements to the product. When there are changes in the product, then the guides need to be updated automatically.

This process continues as long as the product is there in the market.

In summary, this chapter explains in brief about the DDLC and its various steps for the readers' understanding.

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4. Information Mapping

Before you write any topic as part of the technical writing, the first thing what you have to do is to ask yourself to whom I am writing this matter. In other words, you need to answer the question, who is my target audience? Based on the answer for this question, you can develop and present the matter. Gathering information to write a particular topic is different from presenting it. You need to break down the topics to the granular level and weigh each topic to judge where and how it has to be presented so that the reader can not only grasp the total topic within a short span of time but also remember it without much effort.

Presenting intricate matter judiciously in simple and understandable yet stylish way is what is called as Information Mapping. When you write a piece of matter about a particular topic as a big paragraph and present it to the reader, chances are very less that the reader may grasp the whole matter within the said time and remember it for a long time in future. But, using Information Mapping techniques, you can chunk the target into different understandable nuggets (information blocks), give them

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proper and relevant headings and provide some value addition in the form of Concept, Principle, etc, and project the whole matter in a different way compared to the earlier big meaningless non-chunked mass to the reader. This way, there are more possibilities that the reader, without wasting much time, can grasp your topic in a glance and also remember it in future.

You need to know the basic concepts of Information Mapping before you start using them in presenting your content. Basically, most of the technical writing involves instruction writing, which means writing “Procedures”. A “Process” contains so many “Procedures”. If you structure the whole Process in a legible way while parallelly explaining “Concept” (telling the reader what something is) and “Principles” (to tell what the reader should and should not do) of the topic, it is more than enough matter for the reader to grasp what you are trying to explain, easily.

Your paragraphs should never contain more than 5 to 6 lines. Each paragraph should be labeled with a meaningful heading. Throughout the topic, use consistent terminology and wherever you use technical terms, provide the meaning or

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definition in Glossary. Make sure that you expand all the abbreviations when you use them for the first time. The white space between the paragraph lines should be consistent and the combination of white space along with the text should provide the reader a pleasant experience. Check for the ladders, widows, orphans, etc, in paragraphs and remove them.

While creating Online Help, you need to chunk the matter keeping the requirement of the reader in mind. For example, if you are writing about a task, then make sure that you cover all the points related to the task in that page. Do not try to cover all the related topics in the same page but provide links to these topics. This way, whenever the reader wants to read the related topics, s/he can click the link and get routed to the target topic. Chunking the matter to the point, keeping only the relevant information blocks (paragraphs), labeling (headings), and consistency in using terminology throughout the topic are important points to remember while implementing the information mapping on the target text.

Organizing the chunked topics is one more important point to be remembered. For this you need to step in to the shoes

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of the reader and imagine how s/he wants to go through the text for understanding purpose. That way, you get the logic of how to organize the topic in hand.

While presenting screenshots, you need to number them and explain about it in brief, what the screenshot is all about. And what are all the contents the screenshot is presenting to the reader on that page. Highlight the topics in the screenshot using some different bright colors. Do not add the screenshots as an afterthought. Make sure that you present all the text related to the topic (to be explained) along with the screenshots as one big chunk of (all-in-one explanation) to the reader.

In summary, information mapping helps you to present your matter in a legible, impressive, and understandable way to the reader. Follow the universal principles of the information mapping and make sure that your content is read by the readers and understood throughout the world in the same way as you expected.

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5. Macros

Macros are helpful for tech writers, who most of the times brow sweat doing repetitive, boring, and time-consuming editing tasks wasting precious time of their treasured professional life. Therefore Writers! Use macros to do smart content editing instead of slogging hundreds of hours on your documentation collaterals.

Macros are small programs which help you to reduce the time you have been taking to do the redundant tasks. When I started learning word macro coding, I did not get much resources either in hard copy or soft copy. There are a few macros out there on Net, but they are not exactly suitable to my requirements. This scenario forced me to learn and write my own macros, which can suit my needs and requirements. In everyday professional or personal life, whenever we work with Word editor, we come across so many contexts where we need something to do those ridiculous and redundant tasks which consume our precious time. And the exact solution, which rightly fits this kind of context, is nothing but MACRO.

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Once you gain some knowledge in writing macros, then you are the God of your own. You are the creator. You are the code builder. And you are the manipulator of your own code.

While working as an editor, you are expected to insert a few comments wherever you find a mistake in the document. But there are a few common errors which you find quite often in a document and inserting comments for them every time is nothing but redundancy.

The following macro helps you to avoid that.

```
Sub check_comment()
```

```
Dim x As Integer
```

```
Dim y As Integer
```

```
Dim z As Integer
```

```
x = 1
```

```
y = 0
```

```
z = 0
```

```
MsgBox ("I am starting for the phrase 'Yesterday Night'")
```

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With `ActiveDocument.Content.find`
`.ClearFormatting`

Do While.Execute(FindText:="Yesterday Night")

MsgBox (" I found 'Yesterday Night'")

$$y = y + 1$$

MsgBox (y)

Loop

End With

If $y = 0$ Then

MsgBox ("I could not found Yesterday Night")

Exit Sub

End If

```
Set myrange = ActiveDocument.Range(Start:=0,
End:=Selection.End)
```

```
For x = 1 To myrange.Words.Count
```

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```
With Selection.find
.Forward = True
.ClearFormatting
.MatchWholeWord = True
.MatchCase = False
.Wrap = wdFindContinue
.Execute FindText:="Yesterday Night"
```

```
Selection.Comments.Add Range:=Selection.Range, Text:="Use
'Last Night' instead of 'Yesterday Night'."
```

```
MsgBox ("inserted comment for 'Yesterday Night'")
```

```
z = z + 1
```

```
If z = y Then Exit For
```

```
End With
```

```
Next x
```

```
End Sub
```

The above macro, tries to find a phrase - Yesterday Night - in the current active document and wherever it finds it, the macro inserts a comment. Using this macro, you can do the same thing for different other phrases which you feel that

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they should not be used the way they are being used by the writer.

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6. Interviewing SMEs

Subject Matter Experts are usually referred as SMEs; the abbreviated form of subject matter experts. These people, in a company, occupy high places and they are the moving and living knowledge repositories. They possess good knowledge not only about the project or the product but also about the domain they are dealing with.

As a Technical Writer, you are supposed to interact with subject experts and try to extract relevant information about what you are writing. Interacting and interviewing SMEs, about the relevant topics you are dealing with, is a part of your job. But, this is not that much easy. Subject experts have vast knowledge, getting information from them on a specific topic is quite difficult because they start with the topic you have asked for and drift to another one within no time, and you cannot stop them from doing that. They are very busy and getting an appointment with them is tough.

This chapter not only lists out a few problems you face while interacting with your SMEs but also try to explain why things happen like that.

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SME: The users know how to do this.

Technical Writer: Whenever you try to dig in to the topic where the expert is supposed to give an elaborate explanation, in order to save time, s/he says this statement. The only solution to this scenario is to manage a few 15 minute sessions wherein you discuss about a particular topic, pushing yourself into deeper levels each time.

SME: Don't have time to review all this.

Technical Writer: This is a plain excuse on behalf of expert due to lack of time. But being a Technical writer, you need to understand experts' time crunch also and arrange for something alternative because you need to meet your deadline. And that is your priority. The only solution is to get the document divided into parts and get the review done!!

SME: I write it myself

Technical Writer: No. This is waste of time; because the SME writes what s/he thinks and not from the user's point of view. Do not allow that. Do the writing yourself.

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SME: It is a self-explanatory interface; no need for documentation.

Technical Writer: Whatever decision regarding the writing part has to be taken by the Technical Writer i.e., you, but not by the SME. Only gather information from SME; do not take instructions on what and how you write.

SME: It is not possible to give access to this application

Technical Writer: That's right!! Let them have their secured information with them. But, you can always ask to show it. And also try to use the application in the presence of him/her.

SME: Maintains no rapport with you.

Technical Writer: It often happens that people who are highly educated show little bit of pompous nature to their colleagues in their professional life. The only solution is try to bare with the situation. Because it is the personality problem of the expert, you cannot ask him/her to change that.

SME: Explains things very fast which make impossible for you to understand the content

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Technical Writer: There is a solution. Whenever you interview the expert, use your walkman or any other gadget which have the same functionality and record your conversations. This activity not only saves your time but also acts as your reference.

SME: Enhancements or changes done to the product/ project are not intimated to you

Technical Writer: Yes, this happens often on the part of SME. Since, you need to do the document updation, it is better that you do the follow up with the expert in regular intervals and keep a tab on what is happening.

In summary, though the onus of responsibility to complete a documentation project lies even with the SMEs, it is better you, as a Technical Writer, takes the initiative, and gets the work done. This approach even helps you to meet your deadlines properly.

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7. Dealing with Faraway SMEs

Subject matter experts (SMEs) are the people who have loads of knowledge about a particular application, domain, subject, etc. In an organization, the person designated as Subject matter expert (SME) will be a person who knows each process to be followed for a certain task and at the correct time, relevant to the context. Depending upon the nature of the subject and the vastness of the topic-at-hand, the number of experts whom you need to contact in the process of your data gathering may vary. Whatever may be the subject, SMEs guide Technical Writers (TWs) on the specified topic, help them in understanding the subject, make them write about the topic-in-hand clearly and precisely, and finally review the writer's work in detail. After the review, the Technical Writer (TW) incorporates all the corrections pointed out by the SME and releases the final version of the subject document.

Overall, during the writing process, there will be a lot of interaction between the writer and the SME. Since all doubts of the writer are to be cleared by the expert while making him/her understand the topic-at-hand, the role played by the

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SME is so crucial to complete the documentation task. Normally, for the facility of interaction, both the TW and the SME sit at the same place. But, there will be a situation where the TW and the SME do not sit at the same place, but at distant places (sometimes, perhaps countries apart) depending up on the project they both are dealing with. The expert may sit some thousands of miles away from the writer and from there he/she tries to start transferring knowledge to the writer. Even the writer's doubts and the document reviews are also cleared and done by the expert through phone and mails. This chapter talks about the problems faced by those TWs who sit faraway from their SMEs.

There is a big question in the Technical Writing world that whether it is necessary that the TW has to understand the personal nature of the SME to get his/her work done successfully. The answer is Yes. Actually, that increases the understanding level between the writer and the expert. Since the expert has loads of knowledge regarding the topic-in-hand, he/she expresses it at a professional level, whereas the writer has to present the same stuff for a nonprofessional most of the times.

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The onus of responsibility lies with the Technical Writer to understand the topic-in-hand and the Subject Matter Expert's personal nature also. For example, while reviewing the subject matter, the SME may pass comment suggesting a particular point. Sometimes, the comment itself is written in such a way that it is impossible to understand it. The comment is so abstract in nature that to understand it, there is no way but the writer has to become a Sherlock Holmes (the great detective in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stories!!!) to decipher the underlying meaning of the comment. At this point of time, if the writer has some background knowledge of the personal nature of the SME and the way he/she works, then there is a chance that the TW can decipher the stuff and continue the work. If the writer does not know about the personal nature of the SME, then there will be a lot of correspondence on that particular comment, which may not only justify the resources used to understand it but also that will be a drain on the company's resources also.

The problem of understanding the personal nature of SME arises because most of the SMEs, though they are well-versed in their respective subject knowledge, are not good at teaching the same. In another way, they are not trained

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teachers. Teaching again is a different talent altogether. In this case, if the SME who sits faraway from the writer does also have a good talent in teaching, then most of the writer's problems will vanish.

The only antidote for a talented subject expert but with no teaching talent is an intelligent writer, who can understand both the subject-in-hand and the personal nature of the expert also, no matter where he/she sits.

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8. Putting Questions to Your SME

Subject matter expert (SME) is the person who knows a lot about a particular process, application, activity, etc. Technical writer (TW) is a person who knows how to present the matter gathered in a presentable, readable, and understandable way to the reader. The expert can be anybody (your Project Manager, Team Leader, Clerk, Cashier, etc) who can tell or teach you something which you do not know. S/he can make you understand the complicated topics while teaching you the whole thing in his/her own technical jargon. However, you as a writer should know and understand both the technical stuff and the jargon the expert has been using and in turn use the same stuff to explain the critical concepts to your reader minus the technicalities and the complicated jargon.

This chapter deals with the way and technique you (as a Technical/Content Writer) put questions to your SME so that you can extract much stuff in the appointed time. After finalizing the appointment with the expert, you need to do a thorough homework regarding the application or process in hand. Material related to the target process/application

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should be gathered from all known sources. You need to read the stuff to understand what, where, when, why, and how kind of details. Take notes. List your doubts on a separate paper. Jot down the process in a way so that you can refer the same during the SME interview to put more questions in order to touch the bottom of the subject. You need to complete all this homework before the appointment date so that you are fully equipped with all the relevant details and questions.

While interviewing the SME, make sure that most of your questions are open-ended i.e., the question should start with what, when, where, why, and how kind of stuff. Do not go for short-answer questions where the SME simply answers in a quizzical YES/NO kind of stuff. Make sure that the expert is sticking to the question, you asked, while answering it and not discussing things other than the subject, (a few experts have the habit of doing this) in hand.

Paraphrase what the expert tells you at the end of each question. This helps both the subject-expert and you; the expert can understand how far you understood and whether you are on the right track. By paraphrasing, you can also

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summarize the topic in hand (which reflects your understanding of the topic) and can clarify the obstacles/hindrances stopping you to summarize the topic.

DO not interrupt the subject-expert while s/he is explaining something. Always write down your questions/doubts and when the SME has completed his/her explanation then ask your doubts verbally or pass on your doubts page to the SME so that the subject-expert himself/herself will write the answers.

The problem with a few SMEs is that they are always busy and do not attach much importance to answer questions put by you. If your subject-expert has this kind of working nature with you, it is better that you take a walkman to record his/her answers. This is quite important because of the scarcity of the time, you may not write down what your expert is telling you. And your expert would not repeat the matter since s/he feels that is wastage of time.

In summary, do your homework thoroughly; equip yourself for precise and open-ended questions and a walkman or a gadget with similar functionality. Try to ask meaningful and in depth doubts and gather as much stuff as possible.

Writing a User Guide

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1. Before You Start Writing the End-User Guide

Most of the times, you start writing immediately after understanding the product in your own way. It is something like you are participating in a running competition; while everybody stands on a horizontal line and the moment the whistle blows off, you start running without thinking about anything except to finish the race as fast as possible. May be this particular strategy is applicable for running competition, but not for technical writing. Here, you need to do so many things before you start writing about a particular piece of software-in-action. Read further to know what to do.

End-user documentation is nothing but conveying information about a particular piece of software to the lay man (end user) who is supposed to use it to accomplish his/her own purpose/ task. Technical writers have the capability to present a highly complex terminology-driven software functionality in a simple layman like terms. And this is also what end users require. End user is like a layman; s/he is not interested neither in complex terminology nor in the

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software's ultra-advance functionality. S/he wants to do his/her part of work using the piece of software as quickly as possible and effectively. That's it - nothing less, nothing more.

Before you start writing a guide, as a Technical Writer, you need to know your target audience. You have to study them including their working habits. You need to understand how they have been performing the same job, so far, manually and where does this new piece of software will fit in their working lives. Then, you need to think about how can you explain the software functionality to these end users who does not care much about anything except their task in hand.

People seek knowledge. But, they stop doing it if the subject matter becomes complex. As a Technical Writer, it is your duty and job to make the subject matter easy to the reader. If the software is full of complex functionalities, then there is a high possibility that the end user may not understand or tackle it properly. As a writer, you need to step into the shoes of the end user; train your mind to think and ask doubts just like how a end user does. Then, start writing the information in such a way that when the end user reads it, s/he must feel

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that it is easy for them to complete the task using the new software rather than doing that manually. As a matter of fact, technical writer's job does not complete after writing the guide. It completes only when the user feels comfortable with the software and whenever in doubt, refers the guide to clarify his/her doubt instead of looking for other means.

In summary, writing end user documentation is not an easy task. Just by understanding the functionality of the software in your own way and creating a guide without thinking about the end users takes you nowhere. Analyzing your target audience is compulsory before you jumpstart writing about the software in hand.

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2. Screen-based Writing Strategy

Screen-based writing strategy makes Technical Writing easy. As most of the technical writers write different kinds of guides for every web-based product, here is a strategy, which helps you to "write once and fulfil many requirements". Screen-based writing strategy caters different guides' requirements in a single shot. This strategy helps you to create material for your product's linear guide, online guide, training guide, reference guide, task-based guide, etc, in a single go. Read further to know more about Screen-based writing strategy.

In the normal scenario, the strategy that technical writers follow for linear guides is different from writing online guides. While Online guides demand clear, crisp and compact writing skills along with modular way of presenting chunked stuff, linear guides demand more stuff and heavy explanations. Task based guides, while concentrating on tasks the user can do using the product, tries to explain the same in a way so that the user can complete the required tasks spreading across different screens. Like this, every guide has its own way of telling things about the product.

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Frankly speaking, the user does not spend much amount of time reading all the guides what the technical writers creates. They refer guides only when they got stuck up in the middle of a process and do not know what to do. In this case, task based guides work perfectly. Nevertheless, there are a few products in the market where the user ought to know a few functionalities in advance to operate the product; just telling the user "do this" and "do that" does not work here. While chances are there that the user can be imparted this kind of prerequisite knowledge through training, at the same time, there are so many chances that the user may forget what s/he has learned in training and need a reference guide while working on the product, where s/he can read the context related stuff written briefly with a surgical precision. Screen based writing strategy helps you to provide the much-needed information in a clear and crispy way.

Screen based writing strategy covers the product following a 3-pronged approach. In the first step, it tries to explain each screen, concept (if any), and its components present. In the second step, it explains all the tasks the user can do in a single screen. In the third step, it covers all the tasks, which spreads across more than one screen. Therefore, by

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following the preceding three steps, the writer can not only cover the whole product, but also easily gather stuff from the Subject Matter Experts.

Once the stuff has been gathered and put in words, you need to segregate the stuff depending on which guide you want to produce within a short span. For example, if the management asks you whether you can create both a linear as well as an online guide within a short span of 1 month, you can happily say YES provided if you follow the screen-based writing strategy. Since screen-based writing strategy forces you to write stuff in a modular way, it will be easy for you to create the online guide as well as linear guide in a single shot. For training guide, the same stuff can be used except that you need to modify a few sentences and add a few paragraphs, here and there.

In summary, using Screen based writing strategy, you can create a single guide with all the required stuff explained in a clear-cut and concise manner instead of writing hell lot of guides, which do not give additional information but provide the same stuff under different headings in a clumsy manner, finally, confusing the user. With a strategically captured titles

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for Table of Contents, you can create wonders with your guides. You need to have compact and modular writing skills to implement screen-based writing strategy.

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3. Power Proofreading

Process of Publishing your Document

1. Author the text
2. Create Index, Bibliography, and Table of Contents
3. Copyedit
4. Incorporate all the corrections
5. Page Lay Out
6. Proofread

What to Check while Proofreading

1. Check whether all the Corrections done in Copyediting stage were incorporated or not
2. Check Misspelled words
3. Check Grammar like subject/verb agreement, passive voice, parallelism, etc
4. Check Layout and Language (US/UK/Australia/etc) with respect to your style manual

Tips to Proofread Ones Own Document

Authoring a document is one process and proofreading it from reader's point of view is another. It is a difficult process

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in total but is not impossible. Tips to proofread your own write-up following the below points:

1. After you complete the writing part, do not touch the document for the next 24 hours
2. Once you start proofreading the document, go through it as if it is written by somebody else
3. Always proofread in a hard copy
4. Watch for misspelled words, sound similar but different meaning words, awkward sentences structures and sense, etc
5. Use proofreading marks to avoid miscommunication
6. Check for punctuation
7. Try to find typographical errors

Although we are all not professional proofreaders by trade, however, you can learn proofreading if alertness is a part of your attitude. Learning proofreading is easy. To produce professional and polished documents, you need to make proofreading a habit.

Difference between Proofreading and Copyediting

1. While doing proofreading one need to check spelling,

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punctuation, grammar (not in-depth), and check format whether the layout is logical and consistent.

2. Copyediting has three levels. They are 1) High; 2) Medium; 3) Light. While doing copyediting one need to check spelling, punctuation, grammar (in-depth), writing style and meaning.

Using Computer...

Nowadays, proofreaders are using computers installed with advanced and sophisticated editors like MS Word, etc. To proofread using MS Word

1. Open the word document
2. Click on Tools>>Track Changes
3. Word enables Track Changes function

Now whatever changes you make to the document, Word marks the deleted as well as inserted parts in different colors so that you can easily understand.

1. To avail Word's assistance to do Spelling and Grammar check, click on Tools>>Spelling and Grammar
2. Word points to all the spelling and grammatical errors in your document depending on the settings you selected in

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Tools>>Options>>Spelling & Grammar

3. While proofreading others documents you can comment on particular phrases, symbols, letters, etc, using the Word's Comment feature.
4. To use this option, select the target word for which you want to write a comment and click on Insert>>Comment
5. Word displays a text panel, where you can write whatever you want, pointing to your selected text.

Common Errors to Watch

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and format-related stuff; for example:

1. Apostrophes. There is a lot of difference between its and it's. The former represents possessiveness whereas the latter is a contraction of -it is-.
2. Plurals. Plural of FAQ is not FAQ's but FAQs; similarly, plural of Book is not Book's but Books.
3. Spellings. Correcting misspelled words like -familier- / familiar

In summary, small typos that miss during Copyediting are supposed to be caught while proofreading. Validate the

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content and the format against the style manual, what you are supposed to follow, for writing style, meaning, and format logic.

Power Proofreading

You need to...

1. Go through the document once and try to understand the content and the context the author is talking about.
2. To check misspelled words, start reading the document from the last line toward the first line and also from right to left.
3. To check grammatical errors, concentrate on a single sentence every time and check for Subject-Verb agreement, Punctuation, etc.
4. To check for style, go through the style guide and validate the given document against the style mentioned therein.

On the whole Proofreading involves an eagle eye for detail and an uncompromising approach towards errors.

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4. Peer Review

After completing your guide, you need to get that reviewed by someone. There are three types of reviews. First one is Peer Review, second is Subject Matter Expert (SME) review and the third one is Grammar Review. The first review, which is Peer Review, has to be done by your fellow technical writers. During this review, the reviewer goes through the stuff for clarity of instructions, verify and validate written functionality, and check for grammatical errors. Eighty percent of the guide review will be completed during the peer review stage. Unfortunately, most of the times, people do not find time to do a satisfactory peer review. And in some cases, employees' tries to settle personal scores using this as a tool. However, peer review if done properly, then the chances of finding errors in later stages of reviews will deliberately go down.

Technical writing demands a precise, concise, and surgical way of presenting the content to the end user. The writer is supposed to follow the task, understand it, and need to convey the same to the end user in a lucid way. Understanding complex functionalities and presenting them

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in a lucid manner so that a layman can understand the stuff is not so easy. The writer need to know where s/he has to chunk the stuff so that it is properly convey the underlying idea without wasting the precious time of the reader. However, most of the times, it is easier said than done.

After completion of the task or guide, as per Document Development Life Cycle (DDLC), the said document has to undergo different kinds of reviews. The idea is that by the time the document completes its final review stage, the matter in the document represents exactly the original functionality of the product without any errors or deviations. Most of the companies follow a process where the written document will get reviewed at least once or twice for both the functionality and grammar check.

Peer review is the first stage review. In this review, the document is expected to be cleaned from different errors by at least 80%. The colleague technical writers will do this review. Concentration will be on the functionality and grammar part during this review.

Peer review is heavily dependent on good relations and understanding between the colleagues. One can mar the

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advantages by playing office politics and cornering the writer in question. These kinds of problems are so common in organizations. The only remedy for these kinds of problems is to conduct the peer review under the supervision of a Project Manager, who has good experience in managing personnel.

In summary, peer review has many advantages. It has the capacity to filter 80% of the errors in the first stage itself. Peer review, when conducted under the supervision of a good personnel manager, will definitely give best results.

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5. SME Review

As part of the documentation process, each documentation collateral has to undergo certain established review processes to remove the CRUFT factor from the target document. Out of all the industry verified and established reviews, SME (Subject Matter Expert) review plays a vital role in maintaining the document quality from the technical and functional point of view. As a technical writer, you are supposed to get information about the target application/machine process from a SME. S/he is the person who determines the technical scope of the document, provides you about the details and knowledge of the concerned topic-in-hand, and helps you out in understanding the target topic.

The normal documentation procedure, as per the DDLC, happens to be like this: once you understand the topic, the next step is to prepare the table of contents for the target topic, show it to the SME, and get it approved. Then you need to start writing the content for the topic. Content creation needs a lot of understanding about the topic and is not a cakewalk. While writing the content, there may be

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situations where you need to contact the SME to clarify different doubts. After the content is ready from your side, you need to get that reviewed by the SME for technical accuracy.

In real time scenarios, most of the times, SMEs are very busy people and may not allocate much time to interact and explain all the nitty-gritty's of the topic-in-hand to you. They simply suggest you some Web links or titles of few books or forward you a few relevant documents. You are expected to read, understand on your own all the material provided by the SME and come back to him/her for the clarification of the doubts. After clarification of all your doubts, once you complete your content creation task and send it for review to the SME, s/he goes through the written topic and suggests some changes/ additions here and there in the document. S/he may also suggest you to add a flow diagram or ask you to create a video presentation for the task you have been writing. Being a technical writer, you are expected to have certain proficiency in handling tools like SnagIT (helps you in capturing screens), Visio (helps you in creating flow charts), Camtasia (helps you in creating videos), etc. At any point of time, you must be well versed with all the above kinds of

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tools so that to keep your work turnaround time less and make more time available in your documentation schedule to interact with the SME to gain more knowledge and clarity on the topic.

Subject matter experts review the content from technical and functional accuracy point of view. Besides reviewing, many times, they suggest you to give a few external links to the concerned topic which helps the user gain more clarity and understanding of the task s/he wants to accomplish. Since SMEs deal with the crux of the technical matter, out of all the reviews the DDLC suggests, the technical review by the SME is considered as the most important one. Always make it a point that whatever you write better get it checked by one of your peer (peer review) before you pass the same document to the SME. Why because, it is a common point that a writer by himself/herself cannot find many mistakes in his/her own written topic when there is not much time for review. That's why, it is always better to get your document reviewed by a third party (your peer) before you send the document to the SME for the technical accuracy review.

In summary, SME is the person who plays not only a vital role

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in transferring knowledge to you to document a task/process/topic but also in reviewing it. S/he establishes the scope of the document and makes sure that the user gets all sorts of knowledgeable help from the document to accomplish his/her task. SME review is very vital for a technical document and has to be done before the document goes through editorial review.

Note: The CRUFT rating of the document, with 100% being a bad thing, is calculated with the following formula: $100\% - C * R * U * F * T$, where the following factors are measured as percentages:

- C = The percentage of the document that is currently "correct".
- R = The chance that the document will be read by the intended audience.
- U = The percentage of the document that is actually understood by the intended audience.
- F = The chance that the material contained in document will be followed.
- T = The chance that the document will be trusted.

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6. Editorial Review

Every written document has to undergo at least one editorial apart from other review like SME review, peer review, proofreading, etc. In Technical writing, running a document through editorial is must. And it is a vital step as per the DDLC (Document Development Life Cycle). As a technical writer, as and when you write or modify the documents, following your company process, you are supposed to send that for so-called list of reviews. And out of all the listed reviews, editorial review comes at the end of the list, which cleans the document for grammar, spell check, and editorial mistakes. Sometimes, the editor may comment on the layout of the document, alignments, tab specifications, etc, as part of the editorial process.

Editorial review is done in three types: Light Review, Moderate Review, and Substantial review.

- In Light review, the editor just reads through the target document and does corrections in a small way. In this kind of review, the editor corrects the sentences by adding or deleting a few words here and there.

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- In Moderate Review, besides all the things that are covered in Light Review, the editor goes into little bit more depth and modifies the sentences little bit. Means, the editor will add a few phrases and delete some to express the real intent of the author.
- In Substantial Review, the editor rewrites the most part of the content. Here, the editor may rewrite the whole paragraphs depending on the requisition.

As part of the editorial review, the main part what the editor concentrates is Grammar. Every document when it goes through the editorial review irrespective of the kind of editing (Light, Moderate, Substantial), is checked for Subject-verb agreement, Punctuation, Modifiers, Comma Splices, Articles, Voice, Tone, Tense, Parallelism, Subject-Number Agreement, Appositions, Relative Clauses, etc. It all depends on the grammar knowledge depth of the editor how s/he reviews the document. But, on the whole, the editor is not expected to change the intent, meaning, and purpose of the content of the document through his/her editing.

There is a reason to keep the editorial review at the end of all reviews. In the normal course, a Technical Writing

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department following DDLC, has to pass the document through Peer Review, SME (Subject Matter Expert) review, and Editorial Review. Every review involves a number of iterations; means, every iteration involves the document going back and forth to the author and the reviewer. Until unless the author incorporates all the corrections suggested by the reviewer in the target document, the reviewer will not release the document for future reviews; because of this, most of the times, these review iterations take lot of time to complete. A smart Technical Writer can reduce the number of iterations by doing self-review of the document s/he has written before sending the same for other reviews, thereby reducing the time taken by these iterations.

In summary, editorial review happens as a must in every document lifecycle. While doing the editorial review, the editor has to take care of the author's intent, meaning, and purpose of the document and has to take precautions to make sure that s/he won't change that in the name of editing the document. Irrespective of the type of review, the editor has to check the document for a thorough grammar check.

Creating Online Help

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1. How to Build Online Help

Building online help starts with understanding your target audience. If you understand your target audience properly, then you will come to know

- what the user wants,
- what sort of matter the user wants to read when s/he is in doubt, and in
- what way the content has to be presented to the user so that s/he can easily access it without taking much time in retrieving the content.

From the writer point of view, you will come to know

- what strategy you have to adapt to present the content,
- what are all the points to be stressed on depending the user needs,
- for what topics you need to prepare demos (videos),
- which topics need more detail content and references (both external and internal links), what way the instructional set has to be presented depending on the understanding capacity of the target user,

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- how the topics have to be chunked so that to present them under different headings so that the user can easily access them without consuming much time just in searching for the topic,
- what sort of topics are to be covered under table of contents, and
- how to design the indexing for the content to reduce the content searching time of the user.

After you get an overall view about what are all the topics to be covered and stressed upon, you need to gather the content following your table of contents. There is a lot of difference between user guide and online help writing. Both are not same. Some companies present the content in both the user guide and online help, which is nothing but redundant stuff without any value addition. Working on this kind of project is nothing but waste of time. As a technical writer, always ensure whatever you write for the user should provide value addition in terms of his/her knowledge. As long as you provide redundant matter without value addition, you are doing nothing but cheating the user.

Online help writing requires you to understand content

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chunking. The first principle in writing online help says that you should never present the content in such a way that makes the user use scroll bars to see the content that is overflowing the screen. Use screenshots sparingly. Use drop-downs, snippets, hyperlinks, expand/collapse all, pop-ups, etc, kind of widgets wherever you cannot chunk the content but have to show the user all the matter that is required to complete the task to its logical end. And while writing online help, you have to stress upon the tasks what the user is expected to do. You need to tell the user how a task can be done and at the end intimate the user in a conclusion sentence about what the user sees or what the application does once the user follows all the said instructions of the task.

Online help also involves to understand what content to present and what not. For example, there is no need to present error messages, warning messages, etc, in your online help; all these can be added to your user guide. All you require to focus in online help is on tasks. And the user also looks for this kind of content. Online help is used by the user only when s/he stuck up in the middle of completion of a task. At that moment, all the user needs to know is what

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should be done to complete the task. All the concept explanations and other detailed explanations can be done in their respective documents like Concept Guide, End User guide, etc.

Finally, you need to select a HAT (Help Authoring Tool) which helps you to present the content in the way you want it to be by availing you latest lick and snazzy widgets.

Online help maintenance is a vital part of the product lifecycle. At the time of building your content itself, you need to keep the maintenance aspect in view. For example, you need to use minimum number of widgets which you feel very critical to present your content and use them consistently throughout the help. If you add different widgets and present the content in a non-conventional way, then you may have to revisit your help as many times as possible just to keep it update, which kills your precious time.

In summary, building online help requires you to understand your target audience, application content, presentation strategy, widget knowledge, and idea about contents that need to be presented in table of contents (TOC).

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2. Linking Online Help

After the matter is written, it has to be linked to the application. Linking online help is a peculiar task which calls for developer's help to write the 'how to link' code for the application to do the online help linking. Linking can be done through two ways depending on the project:

- Map numbers – for Desktop applications
- URLs & Map numbers – for Web-based applications

Map numbers either can be generated for the whole online help project or be given individually to the target help pages manually using your HAT application. While manually giving the map numbers, you need to remember the numbering sequence. Only unique map numbers work, duplicate map numbers do not retrieve the correct page. Therefore, it is always necessary to remove the duplicate and unused map numbers from the project to avoid unwanted results.

As a technical writer, once you complete writing all the online help pages, all you need to do is to generate the map numbers of all your help pages using your current HAT application, and give those numbers to the developer who is

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writing the linking code. Now, you need to compile the help file and generate the CHM file using those generated map numbers. Once the code is ready, all you have to do is ask your developer to give you the object names of all the application screens. You need these object names to link them with the online help pages. Now, after getting screen object names from your developer, take a notepad/wordpad application and assign the corresponding map number to the target screen object name, save it in a map file format, and handover this map file to the developer to be placed in the appropriate folder in the server (if you are using a separate server from where you are providing online help service). Otherwise, if you are using a desktop application, this map file is bundled along with the application as a package and given to the user.

You can also use URLs of the screens instead of map numbers to link the application to its corresponding online help page. Every HAT comes up with its own online help which details the process of linking the help pages. While linking the online help pages with URL, you need to follow certain path. You need to call a help page only by first calling the START page; then only URLs work. Any topic in the help can be called in

such a way that the user sees the required topic, the navigation pane (TOC, etc) and the toolbar. It is done by using the format

where X is the drive letter.

In summary, depending upon the application, you are call online help using Map numbers or URLs. Every method of calling help has its own way matter of execution.

Miscellaneous Topics – User Guides

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1. Guide Writing For a Legacy Application - Tips

Legacy applications come with heavy baggage. The first problem is that the application is not designed as per the current standards. And there were so many chances that it was developed in a hodge-podge manner. During the initial stages, when the application has been under the process of building, documentation was not taken care of. Once the product started selling in the market, clients started asking for documentation to understand and implement the functionalities. Then, the company understands the importance of documentation and hires a few Technical Writers for Guide-writing. But here, the catch-in is that it is quite difficult at this point to gather product's process-related material because nobody knows completely about the product.

All legacy applications, which lack documentation for their critical processes, project this kind of problem to the writers. The common solution recommended for this kind of typical problem is that writers have to sit and play with the product

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so that they can understand the nuances of the product functionality. The second alternative is to call for a meeting with all the relevant departments including Sales, Pre-Sales, Business Analysts, and Design team and conduct a functionality walkthrough so that everyone can chip-in something about the functionality from their point of view. The third alternative is to take the help of Development team and request them to go through the code so that the functionality behind that particular feature can be understood and documented properly.

In summary, before documenting the functionality of a legacy application, it is always better if the writers take the help of all relevant departments of the company into confidence before they start working on the Guide. Always Understand, Verify and Validate (UVV) the given functionality before you start writing about it.

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2. Who Read Product Guides By the Way?

Is guide writing a waste exercise? There are so many reports, which say that people around the world, always find product guides as unavoidable nuisance. Frankly speaking, most of the customers (end users) do not read guides, which are supplied along with their new products. End users always try to handle new products, as if they know quite well in advance about how to deal or use them although they are handling it for the first time. With imagined functionality knowledge, they press buttons here and there located on the product without making any effort to read the guide. When the product starts behaving bizarrely, only then they try to go through the provided guide in a haphazard manner. They expect that the solution for their current problem should appear instantly when they open the product guide. Moreover, when they cannot find the solution immediately, they pickup the phone, call the Product Support Team to bash them about selling such a lousy product, and to request a readymade solution to fix the product to make it work immediately.

Technical writers do more research before they start writing

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about the product. They try to cover every feature of the product while writing the guide keeping the target audience in mind. A single product needs to be presented in different kinds and categories of guides depending upon the types of end users. Different reviewers will review every guide. The reviewer attempts the tasks explained in the guide makes sure that everything is written properly. Once all the documentation revisions are over, only then, the guide will be shipped along with the new product.

End users won't give much importance to the product guide. S/he concentrates more on the product and its interface to understand about the product functionality. Very rarely, the end user reads the product guide to understand the underlying functionality. However, after reading a few pages, s/he complains about the new terminology used in the guide without going through the glossary, which explains the terminology part that is located at the end of the guide. Overall, it seems that customers need instant knowledge. When they stuck somewhere while operating the product, they show no patience to refer the guide and get the solution. They want solution instantly. No matter how and where it comes from. And one more interesting research

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topic is that the end user is more inclined to listen than to read whenever s/he face problem with the product.

So keeping the preceding context in view, this chapter questions whether is there any need to write linear guides with so much patience by the writer.

TESTING

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1. Documentation Testing

Documentation testing has to be done every quarter. Though this is not a bible rule, this kind of testing allows you to fix the links without things going out of hand. For web-based applications where users are accessing the online help from a particular server, you need to do testing now and then to check for the broken links. The broken links happen during your frequent updates to the online help. In addition, these can be fixed using the same HAT (Help Authoring tool) which you used to create the online help. For desktop applications where every time you send the updated online help .CHM either through mail or CD, you have to test the application's every screen to check whether the corresponding help page is appearing or not when you press 'F1'. Not only for broken links, you need to test for the completeness of new content, and presentation of the content specifically if you are using any new widget for presentation of your content.

Testing for content completeness has to be done by mapping the written online help content with the FSR/BSR (Functional/Business Specification Requirement). Every enhancement or change request, if it has impact on the

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front-end from user point of view, has to be covered. Most of the times, while reviewing the content by mapping BSR/FSR, you come across so many updated features and Note points, which the user needs to know and are not updated in the online help. It is always better to get the content reviewed before you update it in the online help.

It is always better to test the application parallelly while you do the documentation testing. Because you test your online help some time back, and after sometime you are trying to follow your own instruction set to complete a task with a fresh mind, this way you will get a firsthand experience about what sort of problems, if any, the user is facing while following your documentation. The point is wherever you stuck with your application, you need to rewrite it in other way so that user understands better. Moreover, one more important is that sometimes the feature about which you wrote the instruction set has to be enabled in the application and this particular requirement might not have been captured in your documentation. You will come to know about these points only when you start implementing your instruction set while parallelly working on the target feature.

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It is not only the content and links but you need to check the presentation part also, that is, font and font sizes, headings, numbering, etc. Sometimes, the numbering part gets messed up without your knowledge (this happens with most of the editors) and is waiting to be fixed. A few editors cannot handle copy paste part of the matter taken from other editors and because of this the font and font size gets messed up.

In summary, documentation testing involves closely following the feature and its specifications and trying to map them with the already written online help to check whether any updates are missing in the content side or not. All the cross reference links, external links, etc have to be checked. The content presentation part like fonts, font sizes, heading levels, paragraph chunking, etc, have to be checked. The embedded videos which visually display the user how to get the task done have to be reviewed comparing with the 'how to' task completion instruction set and has to be updated wherever there is a gap.

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