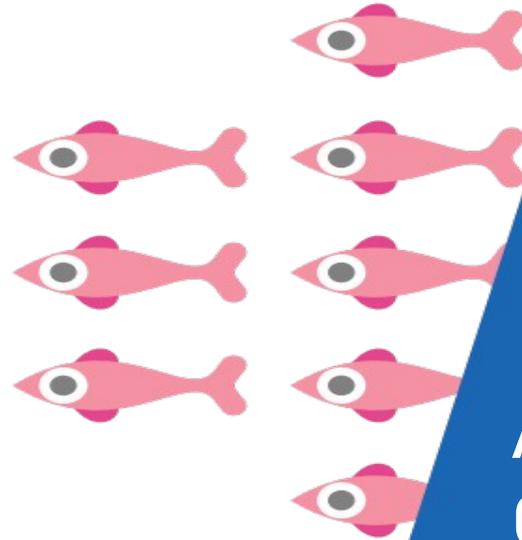
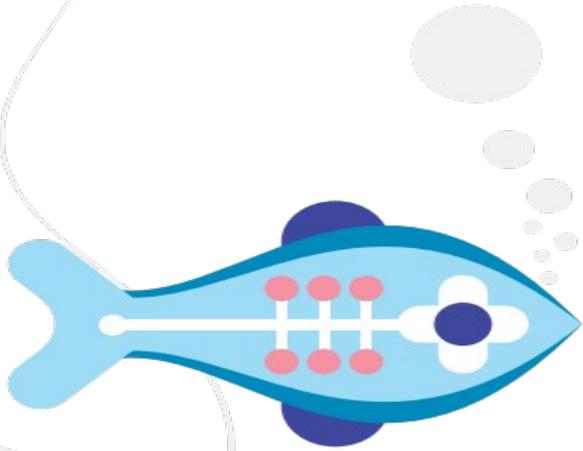


**TŪi**



SEPTEMBER 27 2018

# A CASUAL CONTRIBUTOR'S LEARNING AID FOR DITA STRUCTURING

**Shirley McDonnell**

# The Challenge

- Technical writers work with software trainers (SMEs) to develop content
- SMEs receive training in DITA structuring
- SMEs provide content to the technical writers for training materials
- Technical writers create the training materials following the DITA structure
- SMEs tasked with updating content
  - SMEs spend a few days every two to three months updating training material following a software release
- Technical writers receive updated content
- Sometimes there are issues with the content:
  - Procedures within concepts
  - Concepts discuss more than one topic
  - Incorrect use of graphics

How do you help a busy person maintain the know-how required to perform a short but complex task occasionally – a task vastly different from their day-to-day work?



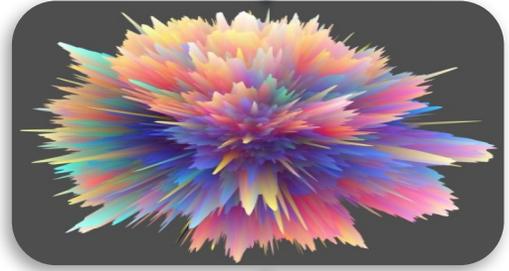
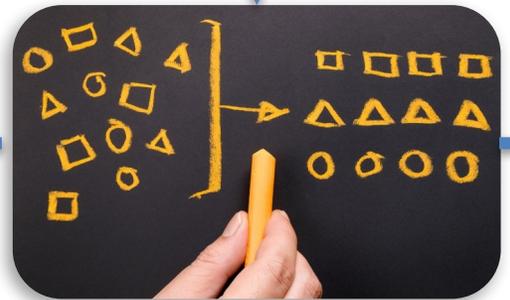
# The Solution

The technical communications team at Technically Write IT (TWi) developed a visual aid for the SMEs. Today we will take a look at the reference tool that the team developed, which provides casual contributors or novice writers with a systematic method of maintaining a DITA structure when updating or adding content.

# Content Development

Task

Concept



Present task as procedural steps

Consider localization

Write the procedure

Ensure content is granular

Classify content

Remove redundant content

Present content visually

Decide on type of graphics

Write the concept

# Ensure content is granular



Does the content discuss more than one topic or task?

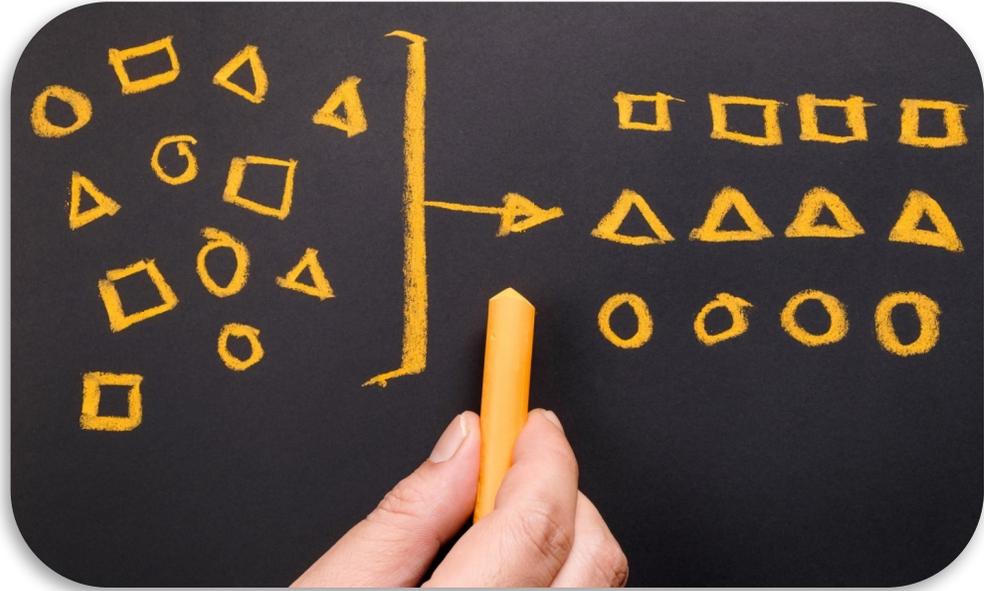
Yes

No

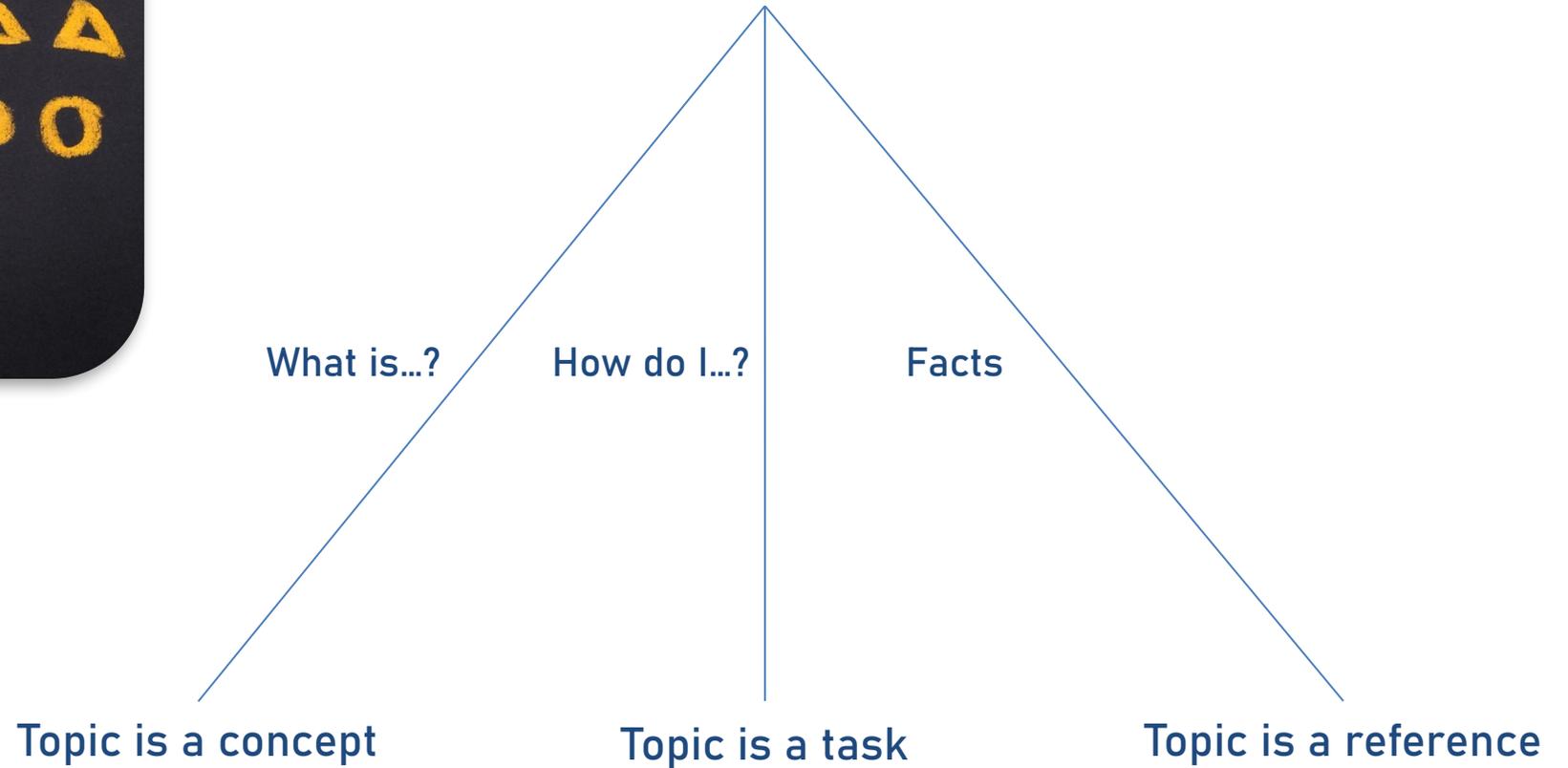
Split the content into multiple topics or tasks that each focus on a single idea.

The content is granular.

# Classify content



Does the content answer a "What is ...?" or "How do I...?" question or does it reference some factual information?



# Concepts

Concepts provide background that helps readers understand essential information about a product, a task, a process, or any other conceptual or descriptive information. Conceptual information might explain the nature and components of a product and describe how it fits into a category of products. Conceptual information helps readers to map their knowledge and understanding to the tasks they need to perform and to provide other essential information about a product, process, or system.

<https://www.oxygenxml.com/dita/1.3/specs/archSpec/technicalContent/dita-task-topic.html>

# Tasks

Tasks are the essential building blocks to provide procedural information. A task information type answers the How do I? question by providing step-by-step instructions detailing the requirements that must be fulfilled, the actions that must be performed, and the order in which the actions must be performed.

<https://www.oxygenxml.com/dita/1.3/specs/archSpec/technicalContent/dita-task-topic.html>

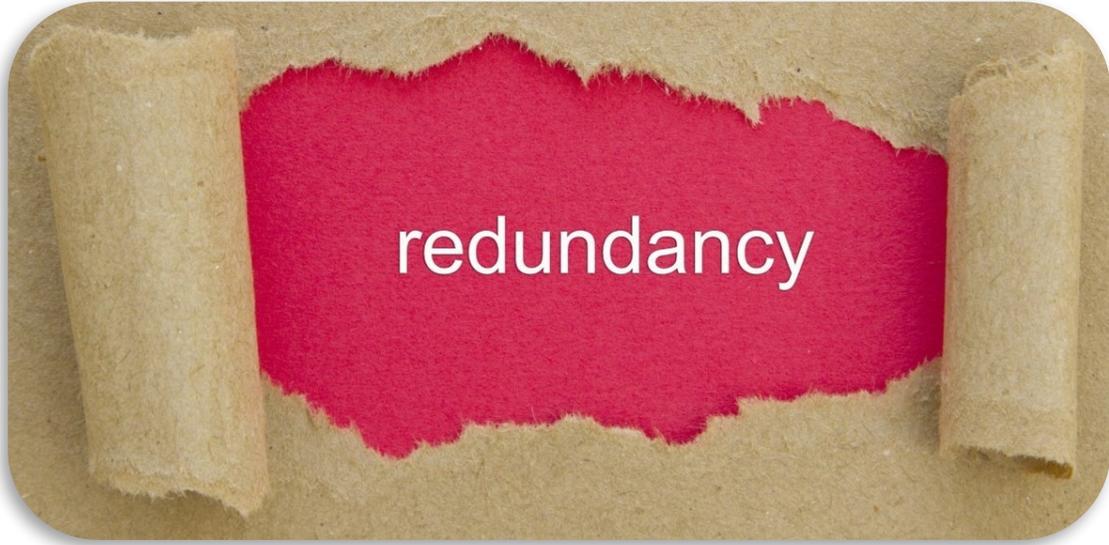
# References

Reference topics provide data that supports users as they perform a task. Reference topics might provide lists and tables that include product specifications, parts lists, and other data that is often looked up rather than memorized.

Reference topics provide quick access to fact based information. In technical information, reference topics are used to list product specifications and parameters, provide essential data, and provide detailed information on subjects such as the commands in a programming language.

<https://www.oxygenxml.com/dita/1.3/specs/archSpec/technicalContent/dita-task-topic.html>

# remove redundant data



Is knowledge of the concept required to perform the associated tasks?

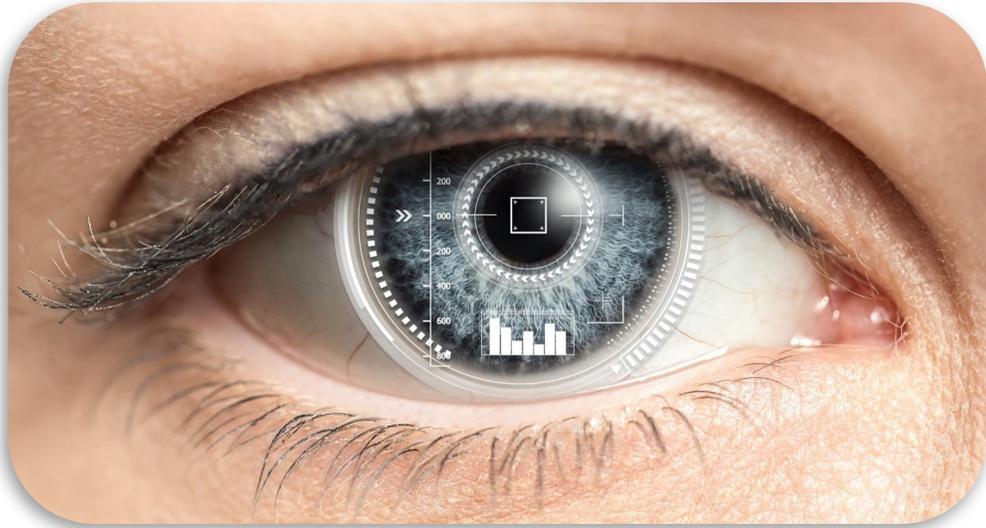
Yes

No

Structure the content

Remove the concept

# Should the concept be presented visually?



Would using a graphic provide the user with an additional perspective that can't be achieved with written content?

YES

Decide on graphic type to use.

NO

Describe the concept using simple concise language and the active voice. See [Concept Guidelines](#).

# Decide on type of graphics to use



Does the concept describe a physical object or an abstract idea?

Physical object

Abstract idea

Consider complementing written content with a photo, augmented photo, or exploded view illustration

Consider complementing written content with an illustration, flow chart, or matrix.

# Write the concept



- Write the concept title as a noun phrase.

Examples:

- SQL Statements Overview
- SQL Statements Structure
- Data Types
- Null Values

- Use section headings to chunk content.
- Break long sections into short, clear paragraphs.
- Use concise language and short sentences.
- Use the active voice and the present tense.
- Use tables, lists, and graphics to break up text.
- Precede lists and tables with introductory sentences.

# Present the task as procedural steps



Do the procedural steps describe a process in a UI or a practical task, for example, manufacturing operation or assembly procedure?

UI

Task

Consider if the user interface will require localization.

Consider creating a video demonstration, AR/VR immersive experience, or textless instructions.

# Consider



Will the procedure require localization or regular updates?

Yes

No

Omit screenshots and provide inline graphics to represent UI elements. Ensure text is descriptive enough that the steps can be carried out.

Consider including screenshots. However, limit them to steps where they aid comprehension.

# Write the procedure

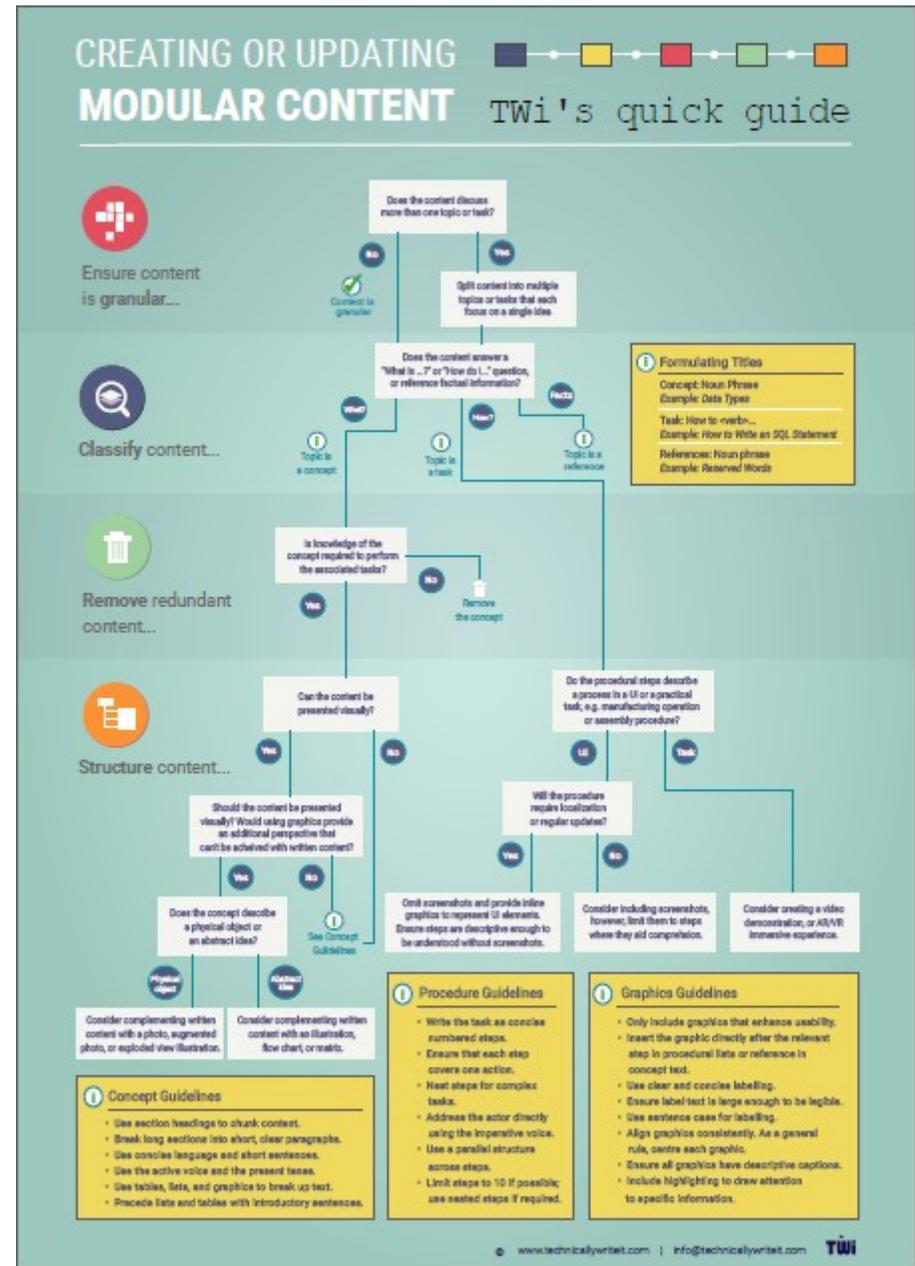


- Write the procedure title as: How to <verb>...  
Examples:
  - How to Write an SQL Statement

- Write the task as concise numbered steps.
- Ensure that each step covers one action.
- Nest steps for complex tasks.
- Address the actor directly using the imperative voice.
- Use a parallel structure across steps.
- Limit steps to 10 if possible; use nested steps if required.

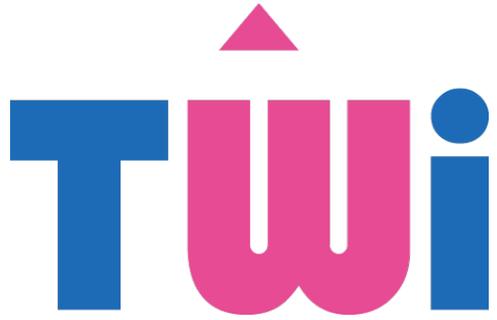


# TWi's Quick Guide - Creating or Updating MODULAR CONTENT



**Thank You**

**Any Questions?**



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