Style II: Minimalism, Structure

Technical writing course MUNI 2024

The Red Hat Customer Content Services team

Style I

- What is style?
- Goals of tech writing
  - Accessibility
  - Readability
  - Findability

Style II

- Minimalism
- Topic-based authoring

Style III: Style guides

Discord

https://discord.gg/2pnCqYze

What do we know about the tech writing style so far?

Source:
Image attribution:https://unsplash.com/@dtpennington

Minimalism

“I didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one.” - Mark Twain

Fewest **necessary** words/elements to convey info.

- User focus: action orientation
- Findability
- Titles, headings
- No fluff
- Error recovery, verification, troubleshooting

Source:
Image attribution: unsplash.com/@oddityandgrace

Minimalism in practice: examples

- Upon completion of the first step, proceed with completely removing the ***cruft*** file, which at this point is redundant.

→ 2. Remove the ***cruft*** file.

- In order to reload a snapshot that you or somebody else have previously created, there is the eminently useful ***virsh snapshot-revert*** command, which you can use in the CLI.

→ To reload a snapshot, use the ***virsh snapshot-revert*** CLI command.

BAD	BETTER	GOOD	NO WAIT GO BACK!
Below, there is a table that contains a list of cats…	The following table lists cats…	*Table 1: Cats*	Cats
In order to become a better technical writer, you should follow these simple rules and principles:	To become a better technical writer, follow these rules:	Improve your technical writing by following these rules:	To become a better TW:
The diagram shown below describes the differences between two images:	The following diagram compares two images:	*Figure 1: Comparison of images*	Comparison
1. Enter the `useradd` command on the command line in order to create a new user, like so: `# useradd`	1. To create a new user, enter the following command: `# useradd`	1. Create a new user: `# useradd`	1. Enter: `# useradd`
The `audit` daemon was internally restructured and received a new technique called `incremental_async`.	The `audit` daemon now includes a new technique called `incremental_async`.	The `audit` daemon includes a new `incremental_async` technique.	`incremental_async` added to `audit`

Lack of context

Hard to localize

Unclear

Ambiguous

Simple language

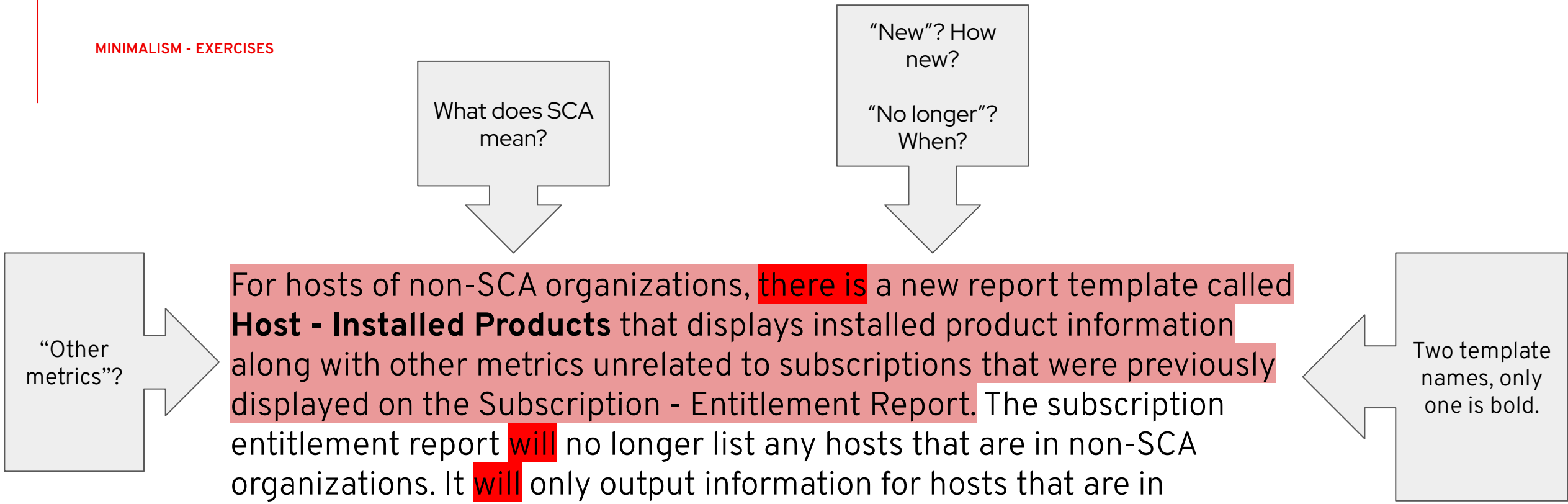
- Restricted vocabulary
- Restricted grammar
- 3 Cs: clear, concise, consistent language
- No fluff
- Use full sentences
- Provide necessary context

Think about Adam!

Tenses

- Simple present (SVO)
  - *Cockpit loads a certificate.* ~~*The certificate will be loaded by Cockpit.*~~
- Imperative
  - *Open the web interface.*
  - *Click **System**.*
  - *Select **Restart**.*
- Infinitive
  - *To verify the previous configuration, open the web interface.*
- Active voice vs. passive voice
  - *Install the* `schmackage` *package.* *vs.* *The* `schmackage` *package is installed.*
  - ~~*The path of the rule is fixed.*~~ vs. *Bash remediation fixes the path of the rule.*

For hosts of non-SCA organizations, there is a new report template called **Host - Installed Products** that displays installed product information along with other metrics unrelated to subscriptions that were previously displayed on the Subscription - Entitlement Report. The subscription entitlement report will no longer list any hosts that are in non-SCA organizations. It will only output information for hosts that are in organizations that use Simple Content Access.



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The following templates are available:

Host - Installed Products

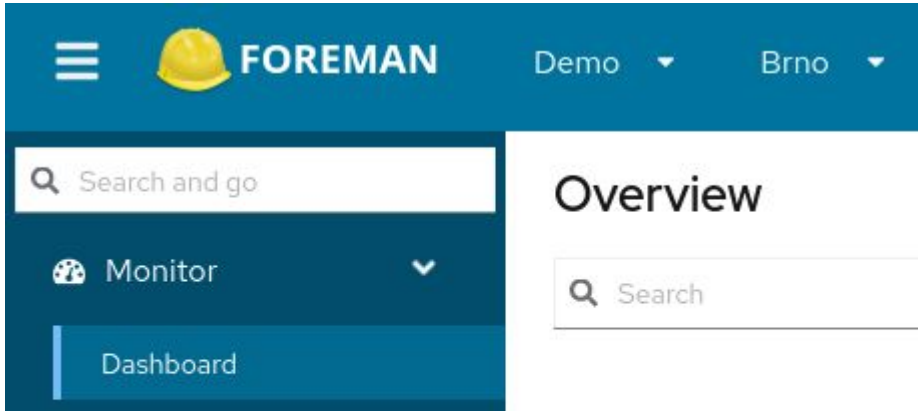
Use this report template for hosts that are not part of a Simple Content Access (SCA) organization.
This report displays installed product information and [other metrics unrelated to subscriptions].

Subscription - Entitlement Report

Use this report template for hosts that are part of an SCA organization.
This report displays [other metrics unrelated to subscriptions].

The Satellite web UI features powerful search functionality which is available on most pages of the web UI. It enables you to search all kinds of resources that Satellite Server manages. Searches accept both free text and syntax-based queries, which can be built using extensive input prediction. Search queries can be saved as bookmarks for future reuse.

As you start typing a search query, a list of valid options to complete the current part of the query appears. You can either select an option from the list and keep building the query using the prediction, or continue typing.



If it's available, I'll see it with my own eyes!

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Yep, that's how search bars work. I know.

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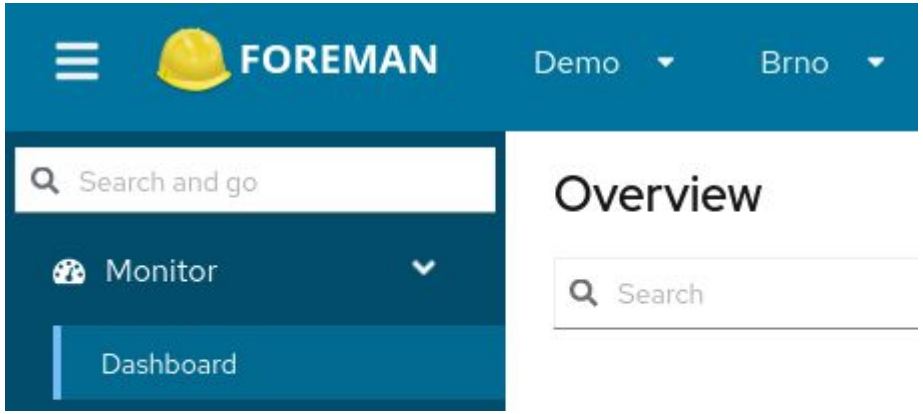

Restoring from backup

1. Copy the backup data to Satellite Server's local file system. Use /var/ or /var/tmp/.
2. Run the restoration script.
   # satellite-maintain restore /var/backup_directory
   Where backup_directory is the time-stamped directory or subdirectory containing the backed-up data.
   The restore process can take a long time to complete, because of the amount of data to copy.

For troubleshooting, you can check /var/log/foreman/production.log and /var/log/messages.

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Do we need details about when to choose which to help users decide?

Useful information. Where would be the best place for it?

Do we need details about how to interpret the logs?

Minimalism ≠ Charcount

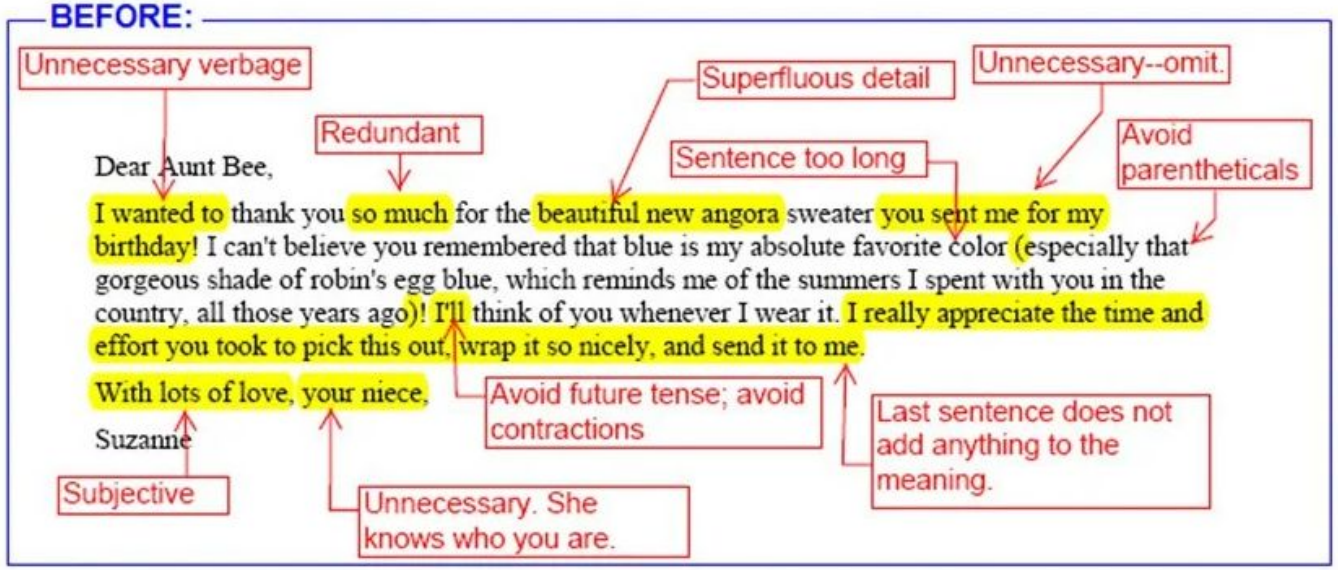
Added minimal bit lengths for RSA keys to prevent unintentional use of too short keys.

New option in OpenSSH supports setting the minimum RSA key length

Accidentally using short RSA keys makes the system more vulnerable to attacks. With this update, you can set minimum RSA key lengths for OpenSSH servers and clients. To define the minimum RSA key length, use the new `RequiredRSASize` option in the `/etc/ssh/sshd_config` file for OpenSSH servers, and in the `/etc/ssh/ssh_config file` for OpenSSH clients.

How a career in technical communication ruined me as a letter writer

BEFORE:



AFTER:

Dear Aunt Bee,

Thank you for the sweater. It is:

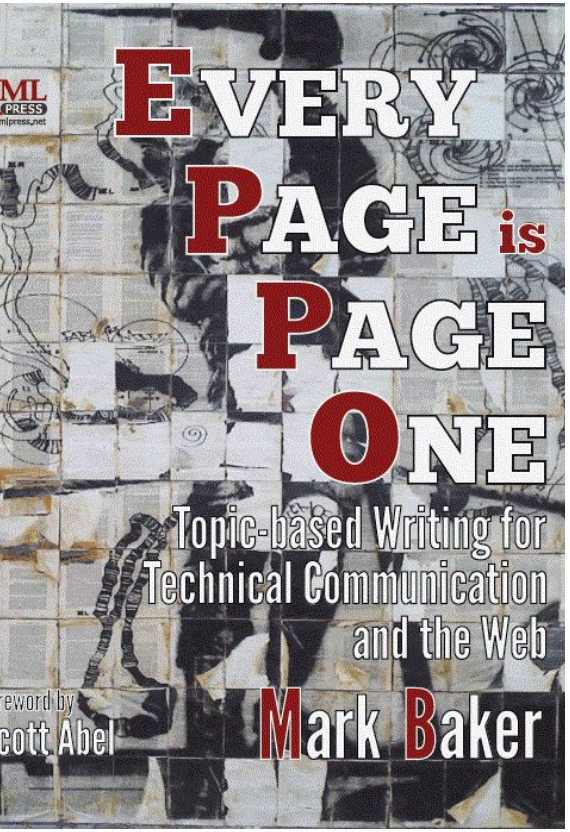
- Warm
- Soft
- Blue

I think of you when I wear the sweater. I appreciate your kindness.

Sincerely,

Suzanne

Thank you for the sweater.



Topic-based authoring

- Readers always online
- All content accessed through the Web
- Books are hierarchical
- Web-like content is anti-hierarchical
- Each topic must stand on its own

"Even when content is not on line, the reader is. We don't go online anymore, we are online all the time. All content is consumed in the context of the Web where Every Page is Page One."
- Mark Baker

Source:
https://everypageispageone.com/the-book/
https://www.oxygenxml.com/dita/1.3/specs/archSpec/base/topicover.html

I. Preparing for your Red Hat Enterprise Linux installation

1. Supported RHEL architectures and system requirements
2. RHEL installation methods
3. Downloading a RHEL installation ISO image
4. Creating a bootable installation medium for RHEL
5. Preparing an installation source

II. Installing Red Hat Enterprise Linux on AMD64, Intel 64, and 64-bit ARM

6. Recommended steps
7. Booting the installation
8. Installing RHEL using an ISO image from the Customer Portal

Shouldn't it be here?

Wonky TOC

Chapter 6. Recommended steps

Preparing for your RHEL installation consists of the following steps:

Self-ref, low-info

Steps

1. Review and determine the installation method.
2. Check system requirements.
3. Review the installation boot media options.
4. Download the required installation ISO image.
5. Create a bootable installation medium.
6. Prepare the installation source.

How?

Where?

What's "this"?

This is only required for the Boot ISO (minimal install) image if you are not using the Content Delivery Network (CDN) to download the required software packages.

What's the point?

Topic-based authoring

Table of Contents

Providing feedback on Red Hat documentation

Satellite overview and concepts

1. Content and patch management with Red Hat Satellite
   - 1.1. Content flow in Red Hat Satellite
   - 1.2. Content views in Red Hat Satellite
   - 1.3. Content types in Red Hat Satellite
   - 1.4. Additional resources
2. Subscription management with Red Hat Satellite
   - 2.1. Simple content access (SCA) in Red Hat Satellite
   - 2.2. Additional resources
3. Provisioning management with Red Hat Satellite
   - 3.1. Provisioning methods in Red Hat Satellite
   - 3.2. Additional resources
4. Major Satellite components
   - 4.1. Satellite Server overview
   - 4.2. Organizations and locations in Red Hat Satellite
   - 4.3. Capsule overview
   - 4.4. Overview of hosts in Satellite
   - 4.5. List of key open source components of Satellite Server
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   - 4.7. Capsule networking
   - 4.8. Additional resources
5. Tools for administration of Red Hat Satellite

1.1. Content flow in Red Hat Satellite

Content flow in Red Hat Satellite involves management and distribution of content from external sources to hosts.

Content in Satellite flows from *external content sources* to *Satellite Server*. *Capsule Servers* mirror the content from Satellite Server to *hosts*.

External content sources

You can configure many content sources with Satellite. The supported content sources include the Red Hat Customer Portal, Git repositories, Ansible collections, Docker Hub, Puppet Forge, SCAP repositories, or internal data stores of your organization.

Satellite Server

On your Satellite Server, you plan and manage the content lifecycle.

Capsule Servers

By creating Capsule Servers, you can establish content sources in various locations based on your needs. For example, you can establish a content source for each geographical location or multiple content sources for a data center with separate networks.

Hosts

By assigning a host system to a Capsule Server or directly to your Satellite Server, you ensure the host receives the content they provide. Hosts can be physical or virtual.

Each piece of content must have a clear structure

Modular documentation

- ★ Concept
- ➔ Procedure
- ❑ Reference

DITA

- ★ Concept
- ➔ Task
- ➔ Troubleshooting
- ❑ Reference
- ❑ Glossary Entry

Diátaxis

- ★ Explanation
- ➔ How-to guide
- ➔ Tutorial
- ❑ Reference

Source:
https://redhat-documentation.github.io/modular-docs/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwin_Information_Typing_Architecture
https://diataxis.fr/

Procedure (task, how-to)

- Title
- Abstract / Short intro
- Prerequisites
- Numbered steps
- Verification

Source:

https://unsplash.com/@calumlewis

The Best (and Easiest) Ice Cream You'll Ever Make

Rich and creamy homemade vanilla ice cream recipe that only requires five ingredients!

Prep Time	Total Time
5 mins	5 mins

★★★★★
4.66 from 410 votes

Course: Dessert Servings: 6 servings (about 1.5 quarts)
Calories: 373kcal

Ingredients

- 1¾ cups heavy cream
- 1¼ cup whole milk
- ¾ cup sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract or 1 vanilla bean split in half lengthwise or
- Optional: 2 cups of add-ins - soft brownies, cookies, and blondies work great

Instructions

1. Pour 1 cup of the cream into a saucepan and add the sugar, salt. Scrape the seeds of the vanilla bean into the pot and then add the vanilla pod to the pot. Warm the mixture over medium heat, just until the sugar dissolves. Remove from the heat and add the remaining cream, milk, and vanilla extract (if using extract). Stir to combine and chill in the refrigerator.
2. When ready to churn, remove the vanilla pod, whisk mixture again and pour into ice cream maker. Churn according to the manufacturer's instructions. Transfer the finished ice cream to an airtight container and place in the freezer until ready to serve. Enjoy!

WHAT?! I don't have an ice cream maker!

YES! Whoever wrote this knows me!

DIRECTIONS

1. Remove odd pots and pans from oven.
2. Preheat oven to 350º / 180º.
3. Cream together butter and sugar.
4. Add eggs and crushed bananas.
5. Combine well.
6. Sift together flour, soda and salt. Add to creamed mixture. Add vanilla.
7. Mix just until combined. Do not overmix.
8. Pour into greased and floured loaf pan.
9. Bake at 350º / 180º for 55 minutes.
10. Keeps well, refrigerated.

INGREDIENTS

UNITS: US

- ½ cup **butter**, softened
- 1 cup **granulated sugar**
- 2 **eggs**, beaten
- 3 **bananas**, finely crushed (for serious and extreme moist and delicious, try 4 bananas)
- 1 ½ cups **all-purpose flour**
- 1 teaspoon **baking soda**
- ½ teaspoon **salt**
- ½ teaspoon **vanilla** (optional)

Poorly structured procedure

Poorly readable heading

What is a template Capsule?

Verifying Subnets have a Template Capsule

When am I supposed to do this? Why? How?

Ensure all subnets with discovered hosts have a template Capsule:

1. In the Satellite web UI, navigate to Infrastructure > Subnets.
2. Select the subnet you want to check.
3. On the Capsules tab, ensure a Template Capsule has been set for this subnet.

Nothing on template Capsules under this link.

For more information about configuring subnets with template Capsules, see Configuring the Discovery Service in the Provisioning guide.

Clear & descriptive title

Well-defined use case

Explicitly highlighted prerequisites

A well-structured procedure

Clear list of steps, with images where helpful

Includes verification steps

8.3. Renaming virtual machines by using the web console

You might require renaming an existing virtual machine (VM) to avoid naming conflicts or assign a new unique name based on your use case. To rename the VM, you can use the RHEL web console.

Prerequisites

- The web console VM plug-in is installed on your system.
- The VM is shut down.

Procedure

1. In the **Virtual Machines** interface, click the Menu button **[⋮]** of the VM that you want to rename.

   A drop-down menu appears with controls for various VM operations.
2. Click **[Rename]**.

   The **Rename a VM** dialog appears.

3. In the **New name** field, enter a name for the VM.
4. Click **[Rename]**.

Verification

- Check that the new VM name has appeared in the **Virtual Machines** interface.

EXERCISE 2

- Rewrite in a style more appropriate for documentation. Don’t just rewriting the sentences, try to also think about the aim of the text.

The allowerasing flag

The allowerasing flag allows one to erase installed packages to resolve dependencies, hence it remediates dnf commands in situations where dnf'ing would not have been otherwise possible.

Use the respective dnf command including the flag if experiencing difficulties with dependencies. This makes dnf understand it can axe dependencies that get in the way. E.g. please use ***dnf upgrade --allowerasing*** to upgrade your rpms in spite of dependency errors.

This flag could be used as an alternative to the yum swap command where packages to remove are not explicitly defined.

EXERCISE 2 - possible solution

- Focus on the feature -> Focus on the aim of the reader

Troubleshooting DNF commands

- If a DNF command fails with a "*Broken dependencies*" error, use the "*--allowerasing*" option. This makes it possible for the command to remove installed packages, which in some cases fixes the problem.

  For example, to upgrade your system packages:

  # dnf upgrade --allowerasing

- *[...more troubleshooting tips...]*

Summary

- Best practices for tech writing:
  - Use simple, translation-friendly language.
  - Use visual structure and formatting to make the text easy to read.

    (Topic-based authoring helps)
  - Focus on helping the reader accomplish a specific goal.
  - Say as much as possible in as few words possible (~minimalism).
  - Stick to a single style (guide) - more on them in a future class

Source:
unsplash.com/@kellysikkema

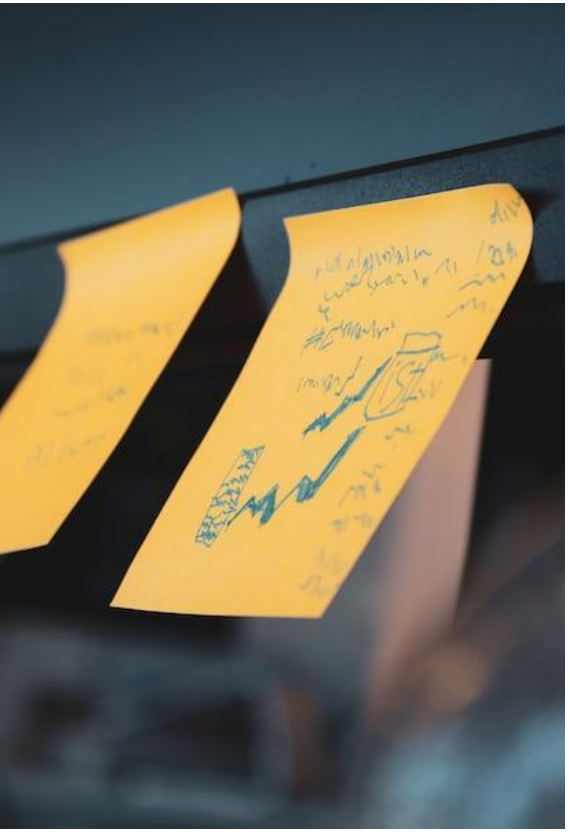
Homework feedback (from Intro Class)

- Great job overall!
- Pay attention to the sequence of steps the user takes.
- Think about what the user needs before they start, get them on the same page.
- … now we all have hummus cravings.

Source:
https://unsplash.com/@loudmotion

HOMEWORK !

WiP draft here



Homework assignment

[gdoc here]

Source:
Image attribution: unsplash.com/@sigmund

Thank you

… more examples in case there is time left