

Guidelines

Information developers need to consider the below guidelines when choosing to use a concept topic.

Guidelines for Concept Topics

1. Describe one concept per topic -

- For example, describing how modern car engines work is probably too long for one topic. You should break this information into separate concept topics, each covering subjects such as intake, compression, combustion, and exhaust.
- You can mention how these concepts are related in an overview topic, but separate the details of each concept into its own topic.
- The advantage of separating your concepts is that users can find and read only what they need, and you can more easily reuse those concept topics elsewhere in your documentation.

2. Create a Concept Topic only if the idea cannot be covered more concisely elsewhere

- Use a concept topic to cover an idea that requires something more than a glossary definition or a passing mention in a task topic.
- Be sure that you know how much your users are likely to understand before they use your product so that you don't describe what's obvious or leave out what's not obvious.
- You often need to include concept topics to support your task topics for novice users to get the background information that they need.
- Also, moving lengthy conceptual information from task to concept topics eliminates unwanted clutter from the task topic.

3. Separate Task Information from Conceptual Information -

- If you include steps in a concept topic that walk users through a task, you're not writing a concept topic.
- Move procedural, "how-to" information to a task topic.
- Title your task topics consistently by using verb-based or "how-to" titles. If you follow this guideline users won't expect to find a procedure in a concept topic with a noun-based title.
- You can use concept topics to describe processes, such as how coffee beans are cultivated or how data is sent through fiberoptic cables. In these topics, you can use a numbered list to outline the process. Adding an effective image, such as a flow diagram or illustration, might be even better.

4. Structure of concept topics-

- Write most conceptual information in paragraphs and unordered lists.
- If the explanation is long and complex, use subheadings to break the concept into sections.
- Tables are common elements in reference topics and generally not appropriate in concepts. Exceptions include tables that indicate when to use specific components or features.
- Concepts are likely to be unfamiliar to users, so begin with a definition. Then, expand that definition into an explanation of the things that users must know about the subject. If you are describing a component, feature or tool, explain its benefits and note any limitations or co-requisites for using it.

5. Length of concept topics -

- A concept topic must address only one complete idea.
- In many cases it may make sense to divide a large subject into an overview topic that links to topics about subsidiary concepts such as tables, table spaces, and buffer pools.
- Users often print concept topics to read them, so ensure that a topic includes all essential information about the subject that you are covering.
- In general, keep concept topics to fewer than seven printed pages.