

Task Elements

The following outlines the main elements associated with a task.

Task Elements

Task topics answer "How do I?" questions, and have a well-defined structure that describes how to complete a procedure to accomplish a specific goal. Use the task topic to describe the steps of a particular task, or to provide an overview of a higher-level task. The task topic includes sections for describing the context, prerequisites, actual steps, expected results, example, and expected next steps for a task. Some of the main task elements are listed below.

Element	Description
title	Provides the topic or section title. This is discussed in more detail here .
shortdesc	Introduces the task. This is discussed in more detail here .
task	The <task> element is the top-level element for a task topic. Tasks are the main building blocks for task-oriented user assistance. They generally provide step-by-step instructions that will enable a user to perform a task. A task answers the question of "how to?" by telling the user precisely what to do and the order in which to do it. Tasks have the same high-level structure as other topics, with a title, short description and body.
taskbody	The <taskbody> element is the main body-level element inside a task topic. A task body has a very specific structure, with the following elements in this order: <prereq>, <context>, <steps>, <result>, </result>, <example> and <postreq>. Each of the body sections are optional.
postreq	The <postreq> element describes steps or tasks that the user should do after the successful completion of the current task. It is often supported by links to the next task or tasks in the <related-links> section.
prereq	The pre-requisite (<prereq>) section of a task should document things the user needs to know or do before starting the current task. Prerequisite links will be placed in a list after the related-links section; on output the <prereq> links from the related-links section are added to the <prereq> section. More information on how to describe prerequisites is listed in the Prerequisite Guideline section .
result	The <result> element describes the expected outcome for the task as a whole.
context	The <context> section of a task provides background information for the task. This information helps the user understand what the purpose of the task is and what they will gain by completing the task. This section should be brief and does not replace or recreate a concept topic on the same subject, although the context section may include some conceptual information. If the task is short or relatively simple and you provide an effective introduction in the <shortdesc> element, omit the <context> element. You also might include a step introduction in the <context> or <stepsection> element to make it easier for users to quickly locate the procedure.
steps	The <steps> section of a task provides the main content of the task topic. The task is described as a series of steps that the user must follow to accomplish the task. One or more <step> elements is required inside the <steps> section.

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steps-unordered	Like the <steps> element, the <steps-unordered> section of a task provides the main content of the task topic, but particularly for cases in which the order of steps may vary from one situation to another. One or more steps is required inside the <steps-unordered> section. This element is presented in further detail in the Writing a procedure section.
step	The <step> element represents an action that a user must follow to accomplish a task. Each step in a task must contain a command <cmd> element which describes the particular action the user must do to accomplish the overall task. The step element can also contain information <info>, substeps <substeps>, tutorial information <tutorialinfo>, a step example <stepxmp>, choices <choices> or a stepresult <stepresult>, although these are optional. More detailed information on the options are listed in Step Options section. Guidelines for writing <step> and cmd is available step guidelines section.
choices	The <choices> element contains a list of <choice> elements. It is used when the user will need to choose one of several actions while performing the steps of a task.
stepxmp	The step example (<stepxmp>) element is used to illustrate a step of a task. The example can be a couple of words, or an entire paragraph.
substeps	The <substeps> element allows you to break a step down into a series of separate actions, and should be used only if necessary. Try to describe the steps of a task in a single level of steps. If you need to use more than one level of substep nesting, you should probably rewrite the task to simplify it.
cmd	The command (<cmd>) element is required as the first element inside a <step>. It provides the active voice instruction to the user for completing the step, and should not be more than one sentence. If the step needs additional explanation, this can follow the <cmd> element inside an info element.
info	The information element (<info>) occurs inside a <step> element to provide additional information about the step.
stepresult	The <stepresult> element provides information on the expected outcome of a step. If a user interface is being documented, the outcome could describe a dialog box opening, or the appearance of a progress indicator. Step results are useful to assure a user that they are on track, but should not be used for every step, as this quickly becomes tedious.
tutorialinfo	The tutorial info (<tutorialinfo>) element contains information that is included in a step when a task is part of a tutorial. The <tutorialinfo> element allows you to turn a task into a learning exercise by including explanatory content about methods for completing the current step. The information should be excluded when a task is processed on its own.
choicetable	The <choicetable> element contains a series of optional choices available within a step of a task.
chrow	The <chrow> element is a container inside the <choicetable> element. The <chrow> element contains both a <choption> and <chdesc> element as a pair.
chhead	The <chhead> element is a container inside the <choicetable> element that provides specific heading text to override the default Options and Description headings. The <chhead> element contains both a <choptionhd> and <chdeschd> element as a pair.
chdesc	The <chdesc> element is a description of an option that a user chooses while performing a step to accomplish a task. It explains why the user would choose that option, and might explain the result of the choice when it is not immediately obvious.

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chdeschd	The <chdeschd> option provides a specific label for the list of descriptions of options that a user must choose to accomplish a step of a task. The default label overridden by <chdeschd> is Description.
choption	The <choption> element describes an option that a user could choose to accomplish a step of a task. In a user interface, for example, this might be the name of radio button.
choptionhd	The <choptionhd> element provides a specific label for the list of options that a user chooses from to accomplish a step. The default label for options is Option.