The Writing Process

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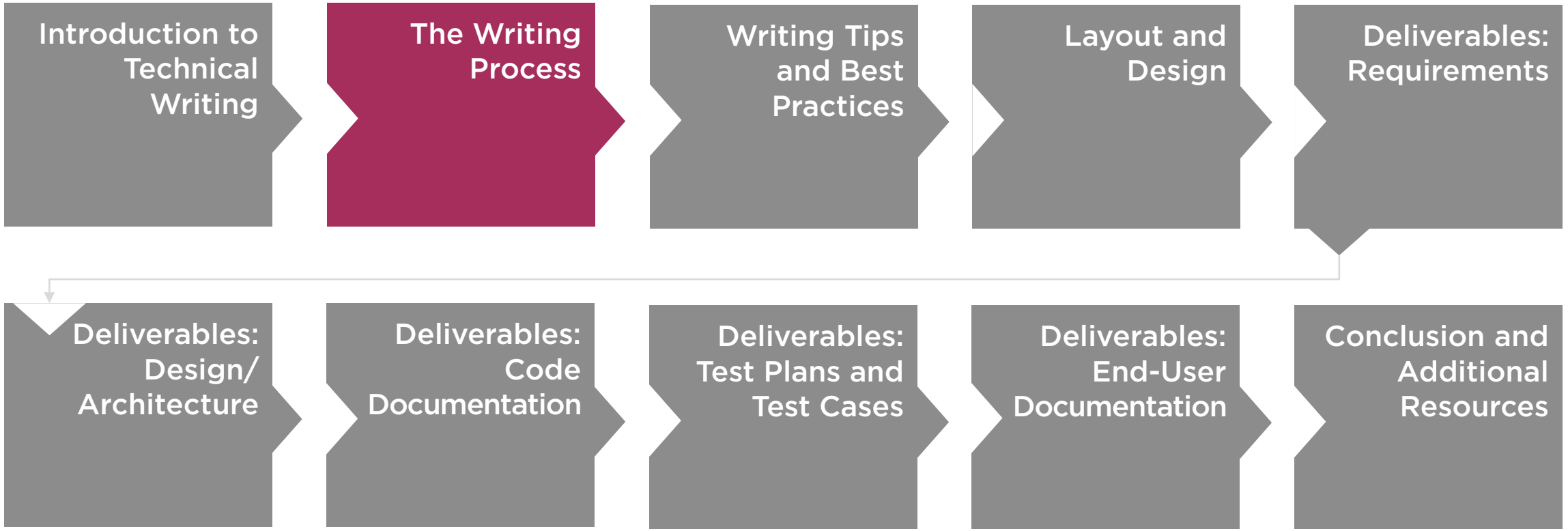
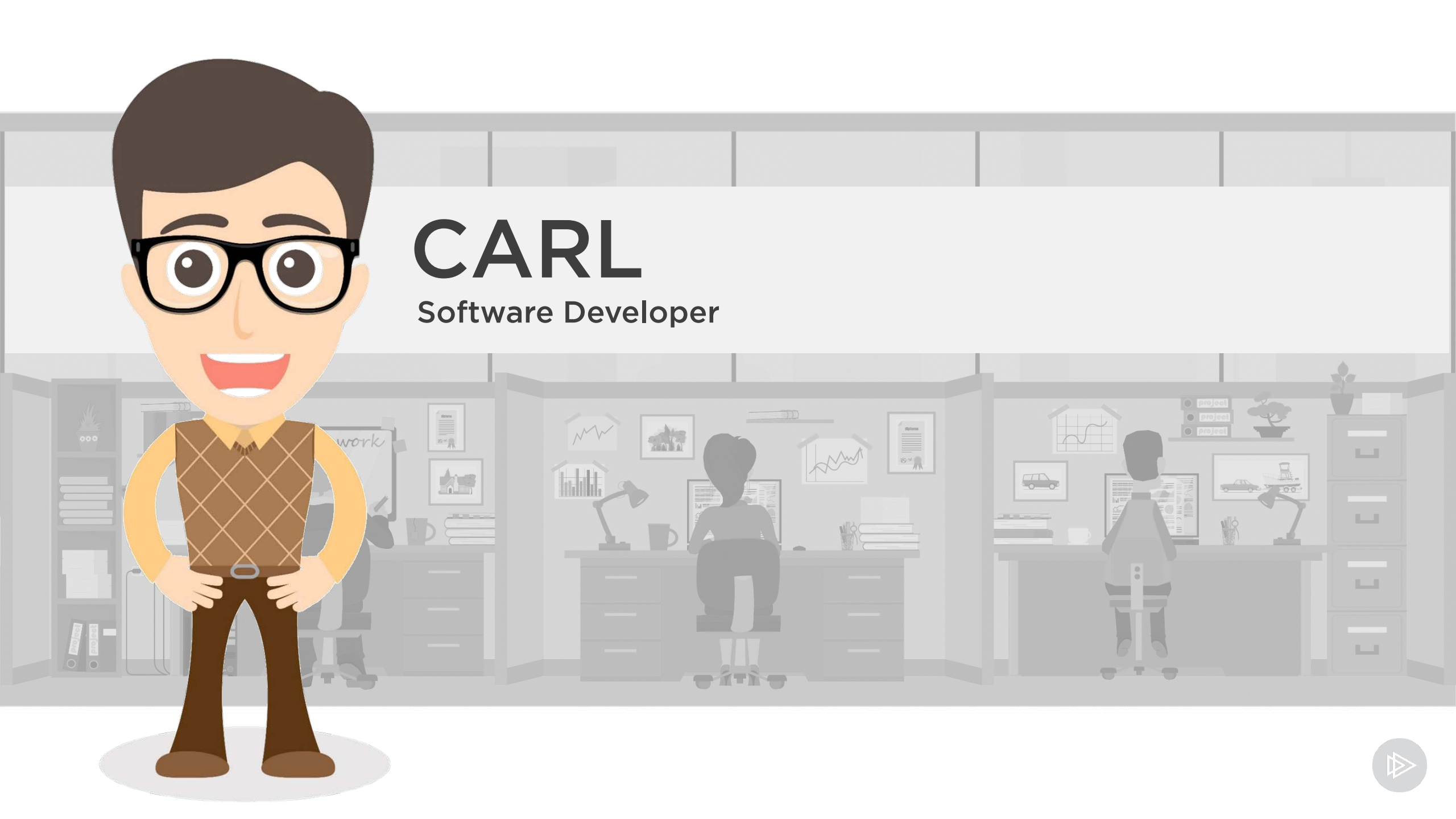
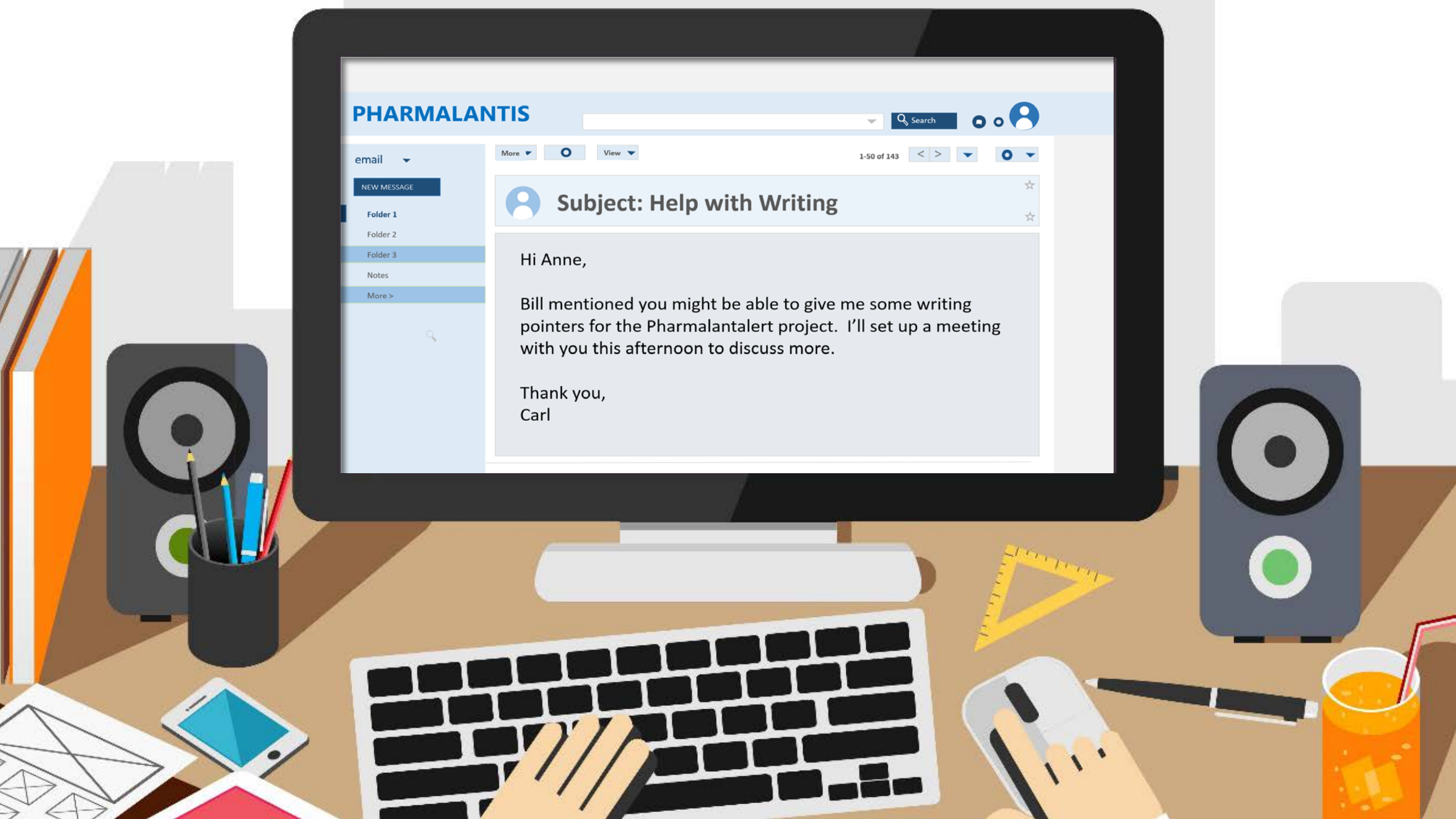
Course Outline

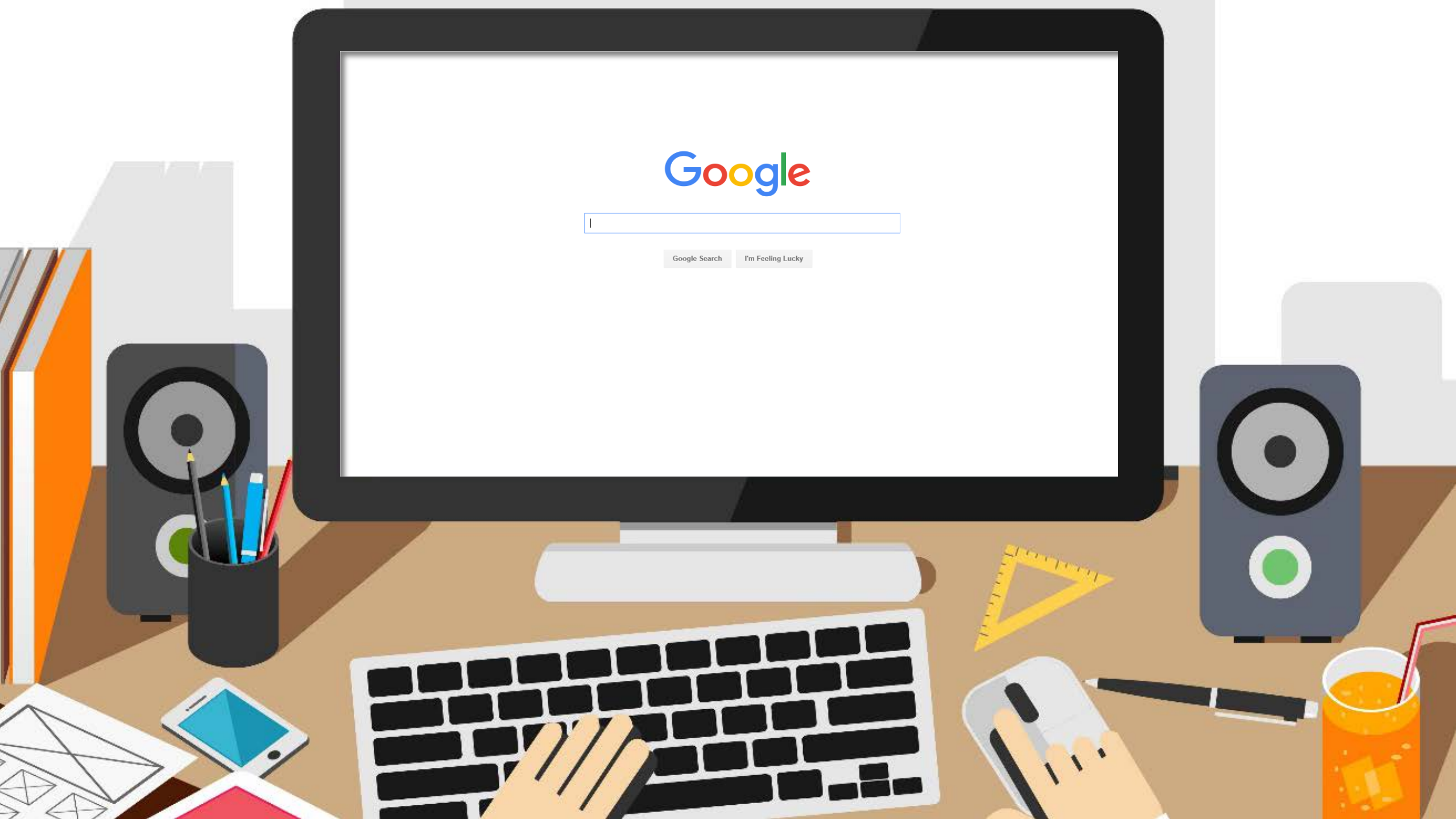



CARL
Software Developer

I need you to write all of the documentation.

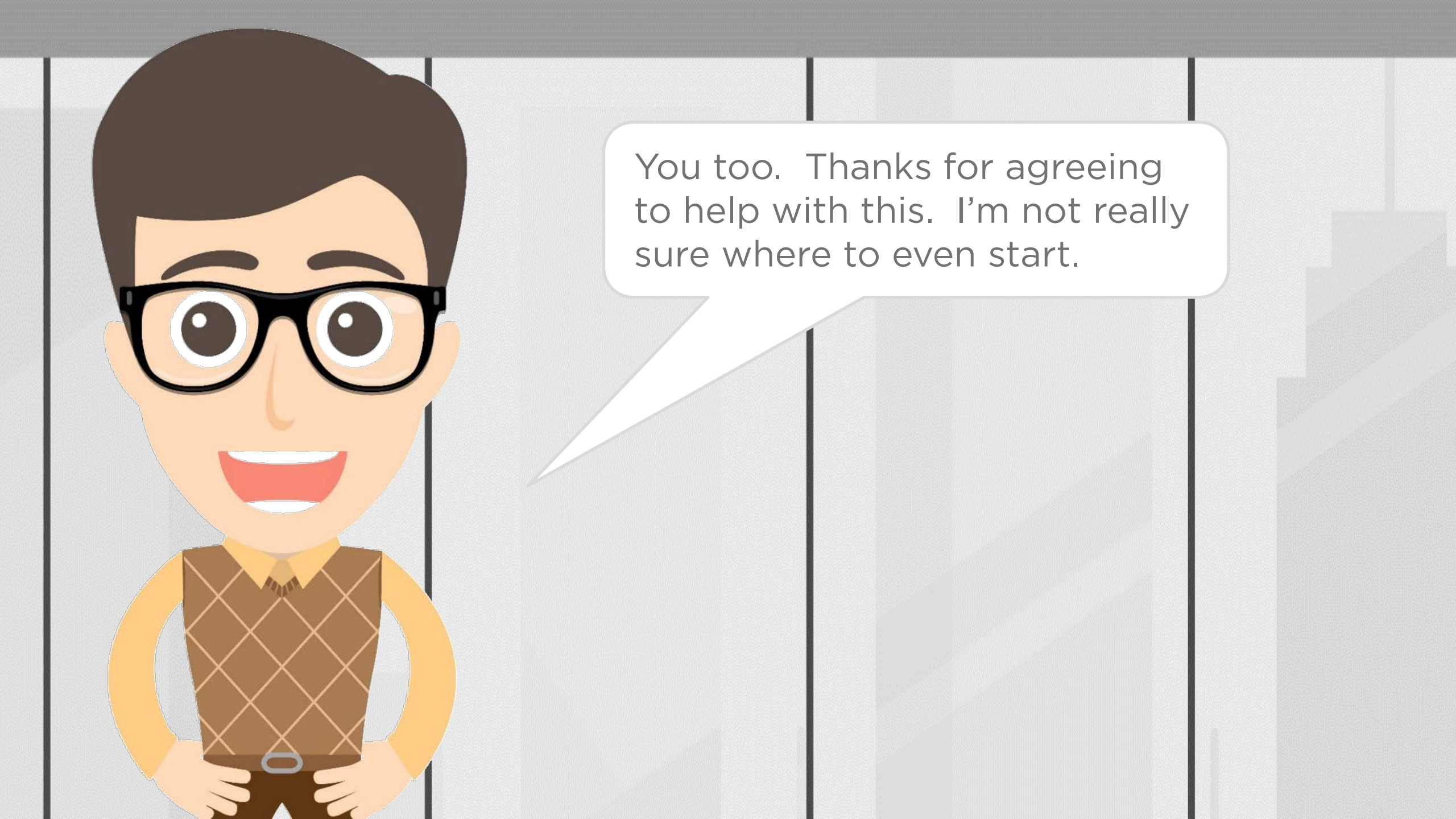
Maybe Anne from the team across the hall can give you some pointers.


PHARMALANTIS
Search
email
NEW MESSAGE
Folder 1
Folder 2
Folder 3
Notes
More >
More
View
1-50 of 143
Subject: Help with Writing
Hi Anne,
Bill mentioned you might be able to give me some writing pointers for the Pharmalantalert project. I'll set up a meeting with you this afternoon to discuss more.
Thank you,
Carl


Google
Google Search
I'm Feeling Lucky

Later that day...

Hi Carl. Good to see you.


You too. Thanks for agreeing to help with this. I'm not really sure where to even start.

Well, you’re in luck. I’ve done quite a bit of technical writing so I should be able to give you some pointers.

Let’s start by talking
about the overall process.

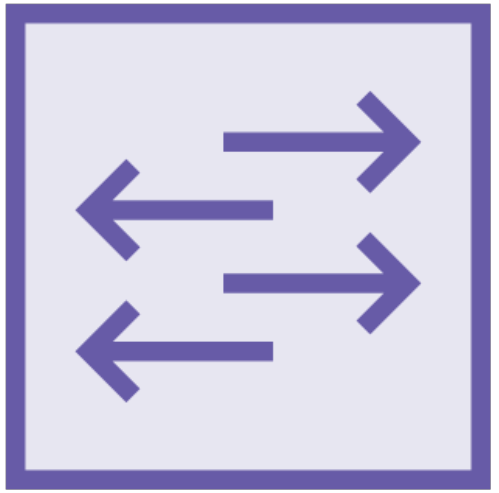
The Writing Process

Plan
Research
Write
Review/Edit
Launch

Plan Phase

Purpose

Audience

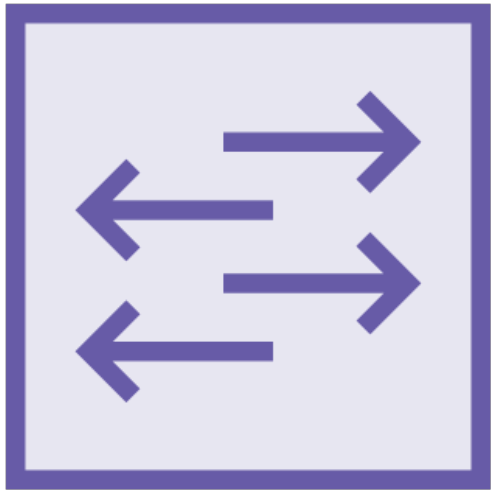


Delivery

Plan Phase

Purpose

Audience



Delivery

Purpose:
Why will the document exist?

If a document doesn't have a purpose, it shouldn't exist

Document Purposes

- Persuade readers to think or act a certain way
- Enable them to perform a task
- Help them understand something
- Change their attitude

What about your documents?
What's the purpose?

Well, I have several...

Purpose of Software Documentation

Requirements

Identify what is to be built, and to verify we're meeting stakeholders' expectations

Design/Architecture

Defines how the system will be constructed, describing critical components and how they fit together

Code/Technical

Enable task completion and understanding

Test Plans/Test Cases

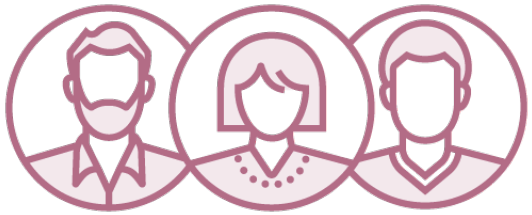
Define the approach to testing; expose errors or demonstrate correct behavior

End-User

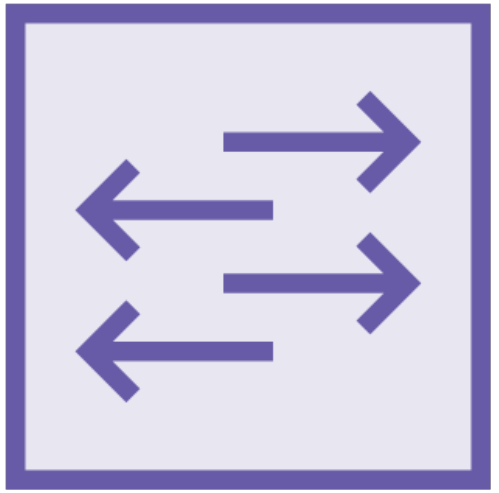
Enable task completion; provide support and troubleshooting

Plan Phase

Purpose



Audience



Delivery

Analyzing Your Audience

Who will be reading it (demographics)?

What do they already know?

Why are they going to be reading it?

In what environment will they be reading it?

What is their state of mind?

ACK!
I just spilled hazardous waste!
What am I supposed to do?

Analyzing Your Audience

Who will be reading it (demographics)?

What do they already know?

Why are they going to be reading it?

In what environment will they be reading it?

What is their state of mind?

What do they NEED to know?

What tone is appropriate?

Hi guys,

Welcome to the project! Here are the steps to set up your development environment.

1. Download and install Visual Studio from the file share
2. Connect to Team Foundation Server
    1. Server name: pharmaTFS
    2. Port: 8080
3. Do a “get” on the latest code base
4. Code up some awesomeness! ☺

Let me know if you have any questions.

Amber

Writing Styles by Audience

Technical Level	Description	Users	Writing Style
Non-Technical	• Novice user • No experience with the product or concept	• Sales & Marketing • Prospective clients • New team members	• Step-by-step instructions • Definitions • Full explanations and details
Semi-Technical	• Intermediate user • Some experience with the product or concept	• Sales & Marketing • Existing clients • Developers	• Facts and figures • Brief explanations • Moderate amount of detail
Technical	• Advanced user • Very experienced with product or concept	• Developers • System admins • Testers	• Limited definitions and amount of detail • Step-by-step instructions not necessary

What if I have more than one audience?

PRIMARY AUDIENCE

Target reader
Requested the document
Often a decision maker

SECONDARY AUDIENCE

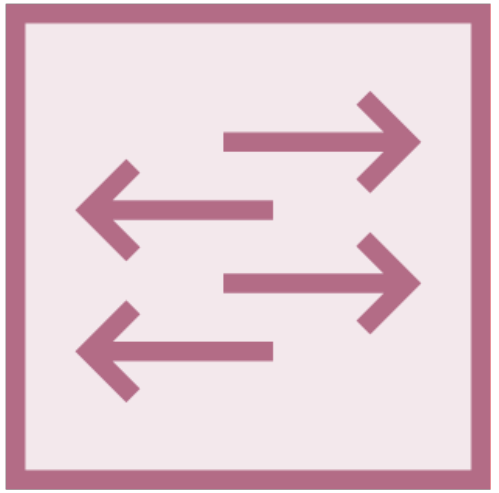
May come into contact with the document
But not the intended reader

You may have to create multiple documents

Plan Phase

Purpose

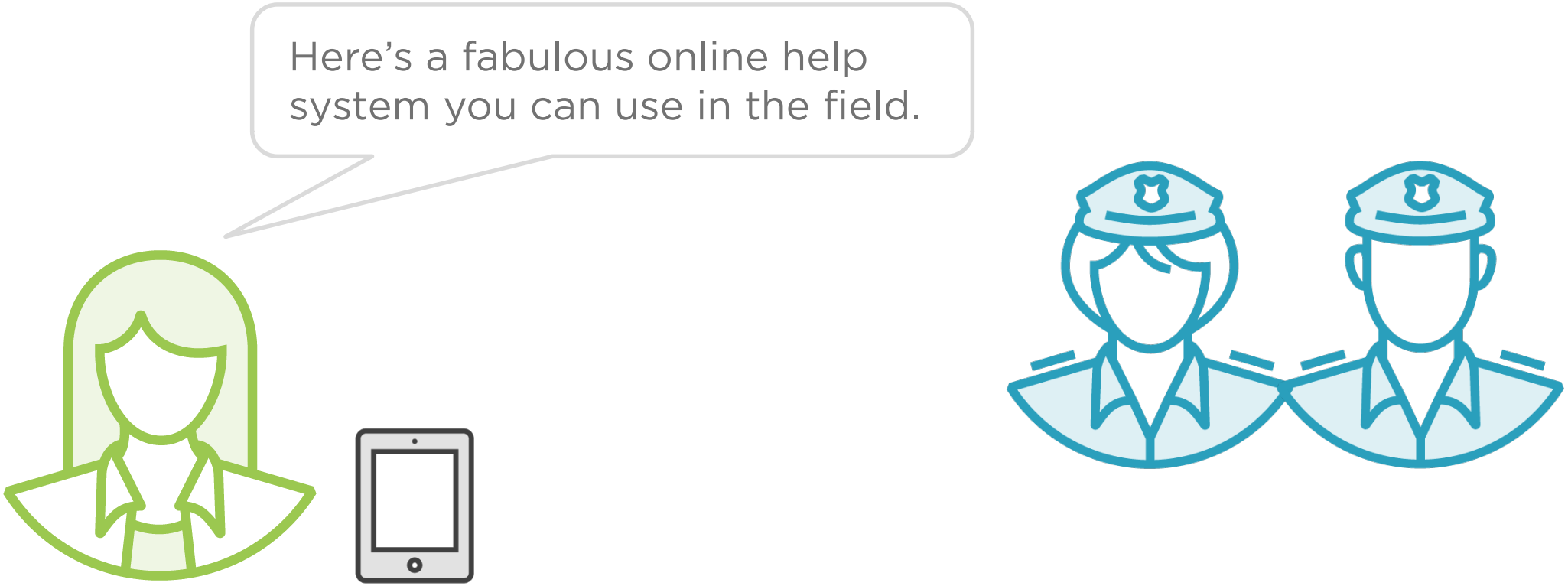
Audience



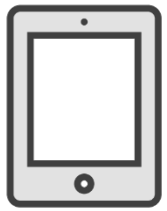
Delivery

Delivery:

What's the best way to deliver the information to the audience?


Here’s a fabulous online help system you can use in the field.

Ummm...but we don't have reliable Internet service.

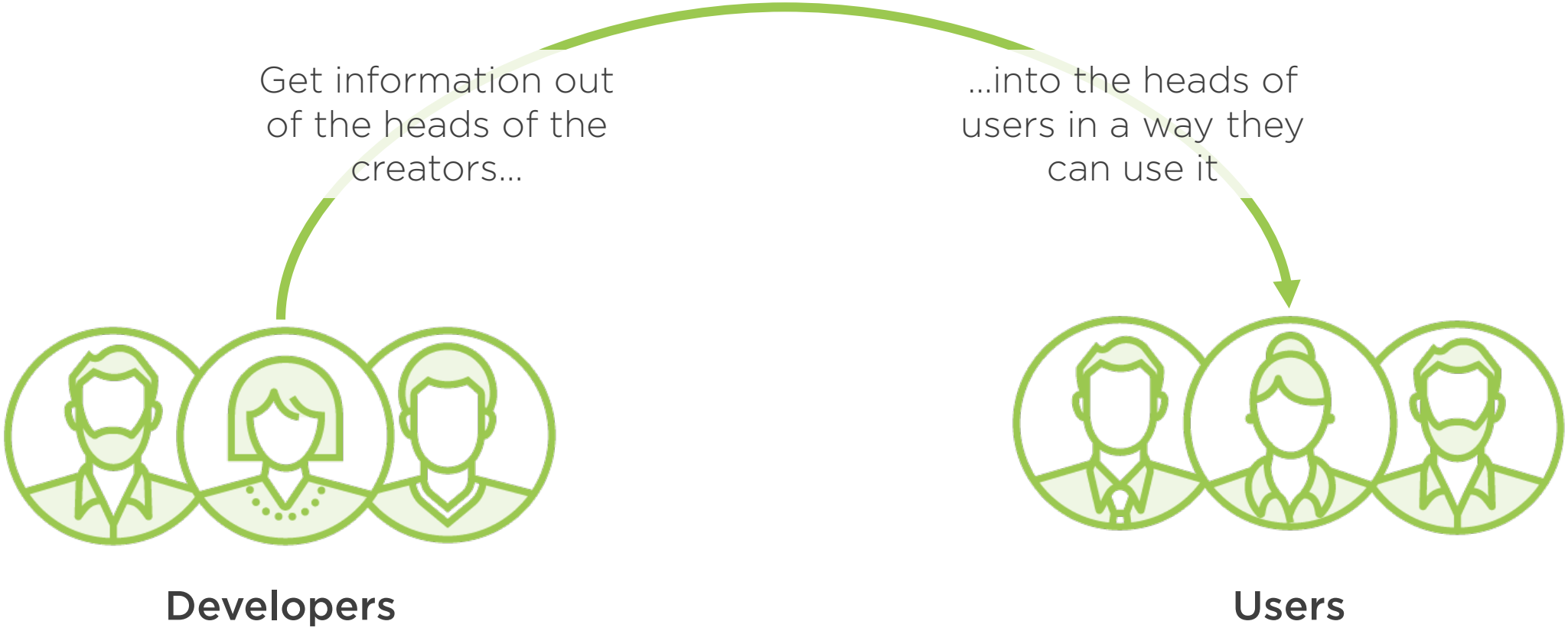


Good point. My audience will be other developers, as well as pharmacists and patients getting their prescriptions.

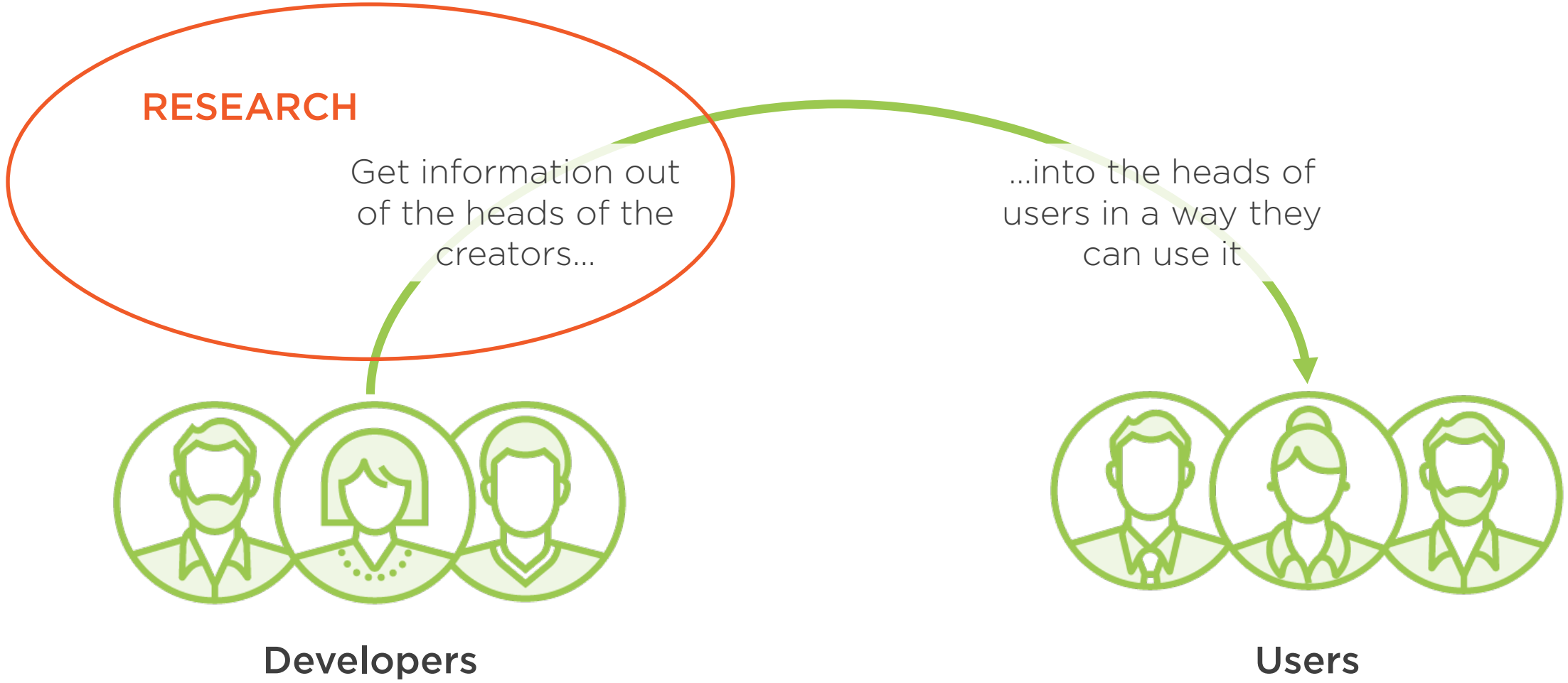
The pharmacists are probably busy and stressed out. And the patients might not be feeling well. Or they might be elderly with poor eyesight.

Plan
Research
Write
Review/Edit
Launch

The Purpose of Technical Writing



The Purpose of Technical Writing



RESEARCH

Interview Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

Review Existing Documentation

Use the Software

RESEARCH

Interview Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

Review Existing Documentation

Use the Software

Preparing for the SME Interview

Prepare interview questions

- Who, what, when, where, why, how
- Open-ended
- Each question should focus on one thing

Anticipate possible directions of the interview and think about your response (i.e., how you will get back on track)

Scheduling the SME Interview

Decide if the interview will be recorded

- Get permission

Provide 2-3 timeslots of 60 minutes or less

Communicate high-level topic areas

Schedule in a conference room to minimize distractions

Conducting the SME Interview

- Start on time
- Build rapport with small talk
- Acknowledge expertise on both sides
- State goals and topics of the interview
- Be confident and relaxed
- Practice active listening
- Observe body language
- Tune out distractions
- Ask for additional thoughts before changing topics
- Review and confirm action items
- Thank them for their time

For my project, I already know a lot of the information. But I should talk to the rest of the team as well.

I also need to look at the documentation that Justin started before he left on sabbatical.

Great ideas!

Plan
Research
Write
Review/Edit
Launch

Get it on paper!

1. **Organize your content and ideas**
   (e.g., chronological, parts of an object, simple to complex, specific to general)
2. **Write the first draft**
3. **Review and revise**

Questions to Ask

Does the document fulfill its purpose?

Is anything missing?

Can anything be taken out?

What questions will the reader have? And answer them.

Is the writing easy to understand?

Also Check:

Sentence and paragraph structure

Grammar

Word choice

Spelling

Plan
Research
Write
Review/Edit
Launch

Purpose

Adjust and reorganize content

Editing for style

Editing for grammar and punctuation

Revise to incorporate test results

Tips for Reviewing and Editing

Have someone else do it

Walk away

Read out loud

Print it out/change margins

Edit with a knife

Usability Testing

Line-by-line testing of a document to ensure it makes sense and the instructions work as expected

Tips for Usability Testing

Have someone else do it

Test against a live system

Observe the session

I think I'll need to recruit some reviewers and testers. I'm probably too close to everything.

That’s a great idea. It’s always best to have actual users try it out.

Plan
Research
Write
Review/Edit
Launch

Ship it!

Launch

- Handle translations, if applicable
- Bundle up final deliverables (e.g., READMEs, web pages, PDFs, etc.)
- Coordinate with development team and other writers to release (usually in conjunction with software)
- Create a plan for updates

Summary

Plan

- Purpose, Audience, Delivery

Research

- Get the information out of the heads of the creators

Write

- Get it on paper

Review/Edit

- Recruit others to help
- Usability testing is key

Launch!

Up next >>