

I am an experienced technical writer and
want to pick up API documentation.

Do I need to know coding?

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The question can be better phrased as:

*"I am an experienced technical writer and want to enter ***REST*** API documentation. Do I need to know how to write code?"*

When a technical writer is asking this question, they are really asking about REST API Documentation for which we see tons of openings these days. They are not talking about API documentation but REST API documentation.

REST APIs

- A way to monetize the cloud

REST API Docs

- [Should I know about them?](#)



API docs - REST API docs - what's the difference?

In this context, the main difference is:

- API Docs = Programming Language specific = Need to know Coding
- REST API Docs = Not programming Language specific = Don't Need to know Coding

REST APIs by definition are coding language agnostic - or they can be embedded in any coding language - usually cURL or Python. So, fundamentally you need not know coding to document REST APIs... but read on:



API Docs Examples:

- [Oxygen API Docs](#) - Docs about using the Oxygen APIs to create additional UI options in Oxygen XML Author - Programming language = Java - so you need to know Java to work with or document this API.
- [MadCap Flare Plugins API docs](#) - Doc about how to create and integrate add customized ribbons, menus, or toolbar buttons to Flare UI - Programming language = C# - so you need to know C# to work with or document this API.
- [Transpose function in the Pandas library of Python](#) - Doc about how to change rows of an excel/CSV file to columns and columns to rows. This is a python library function and users of this doc are experienced Python programmers, so of course, you need to know Python to document/work with this function/API.



REST API Docs Example:

[Google directions REST API](#): You can read the documentation and see it doesn't mention any coding anywhere.

It's about using a URL with

- the base URL,
- key-value pairs of criteria, and
- an authorization key to

make the call the receive the response.

Fundamentally, no coding is required in using this REST API. The programmer can embed the constructs of this in any programming language.

A tool such as **Postman** automatically creates the coding in a bunch of programming languages required to make this call. Another sign that you need not know to program to work with REST API documentation. However, read on...



SDK in addition to the REST APIs?

If SDK = yes

Coding = yes



It's OK if you don't code but coding is not that difficult

Java or C++ induced coding fear in us

Programming need not be beyond us - there are much less verbose and easier programming languages around today, which are just as powerful and much easier to pick up. At least the ability to read the code is not that difficult to develop. Just spending a couple of hours going through courses such as the following online can help us get over our fear of programming:

[Programming Foundations: Fundamentals - The fundamentals of programming](#)

This course starts with the very basics of programming and yet ends with some very useful, tangible knowledge about python programming.

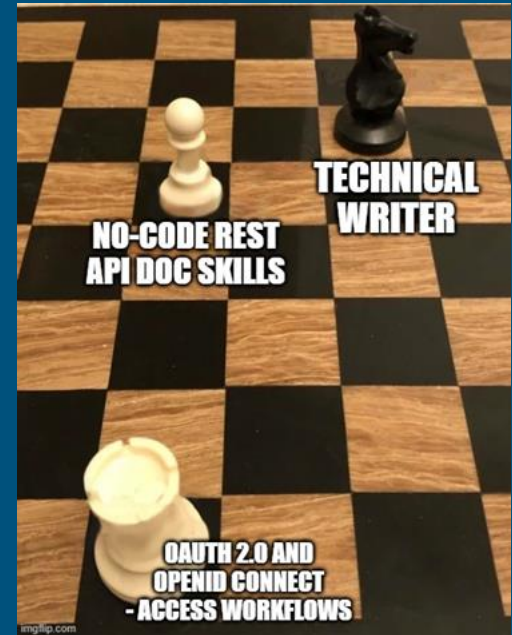


Coding is simple - Authentication workflows are not that simple

Coding skills may not be required there could be other difficulties in picking up REST API Doc assignments, such as Authentication and Authorization workflows, which can be slightly more challenging than just reading code.

The authentication and authorization workflows can be as simple as a single access key or something as complex as a multi-level workflow that even the developers struggle to work with.

Overall, you need to be able to work your way through difficulties, when things are not working.



Not all REST API Doc writers are equal

- In established companies, the technical writers could just be grammatically checking the description of the various REST API Endpoints and their methods in excel sheets, which are later ported to the YAML by the developers and docs are published.
- In a small company, a nervous technical writer could be altering the YAML structure and code that alters the API design and committing it to Git.
- In a medium-sized company, a technical writer would be partnering with the developers, product managers, and developer relations to create excellent use cases that showcase the company's REST APIs in the actual business domain.

So, you could get by without knowing code but can do magic when you do know a bit of code.



The ability to just read a little code is sometimes better than mad coding skills

Technical writers do not need to program, we just need to read the code a little to understand it. A better skills for us...

Coding skills come with a loss of patience to explain things. The developer who is clamoring for docs to understand the SDK and REST APIs also does not bother to write a little readme.md in GitHub about the code he writes.

So, do more with less. It works.



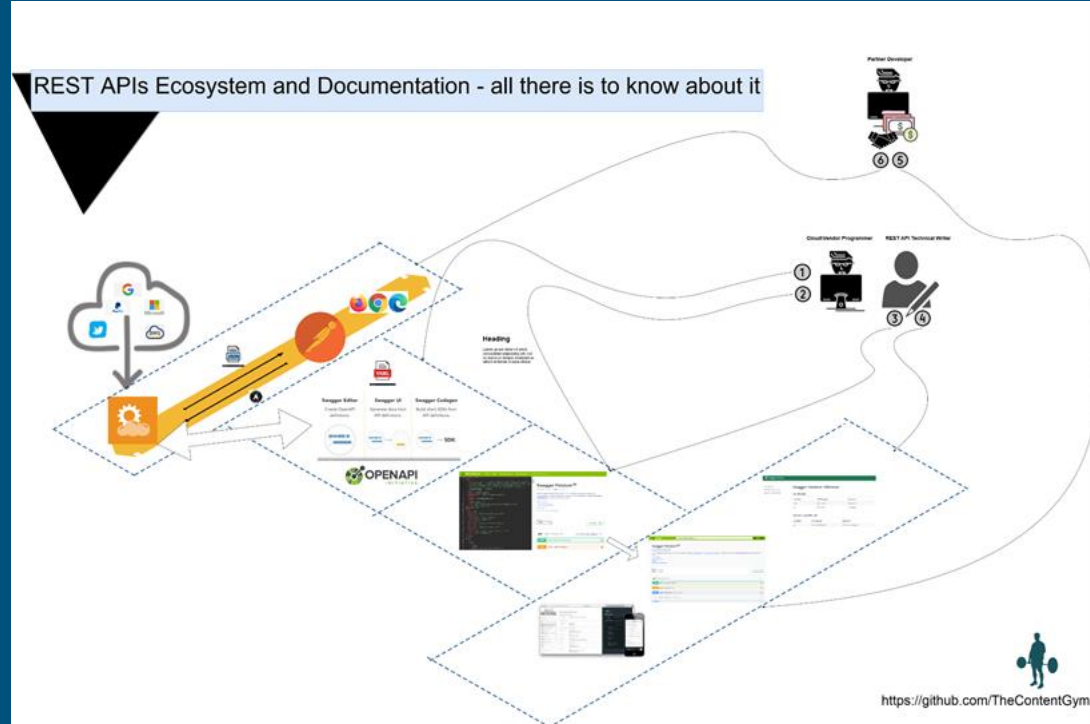
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How REST APIs work?

Why we need them?

How developers develop them?

How partner developers/subscribers access and use them?



Conclusion: REST API docs can use all the help that they can get

A space evolving - full of chaos

Forming Storming Performing Adjourning

Go through self paced learning - be able to read code - be ready for opportunities
- volunteer boldly - own the space

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