Art of the short description

Kristen James Eberlein

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Who I am

- ◆ Information architect and DITA Educator for Systems Documentation, Inc.

- ◆ Previously worked 6 years on contract at IBM:
  - Information developer
  - Team lead
  - Information architect

- ◆ Personal interests:
  - Usability
  - Thoughtfully managing the planning and cultural aspects of DITA migrations
  - Developing hands-on and practical DITA education

Assumptions

- Two audiences:
  - People without knowledge of what a short description is – or what benefit it can serve
  - People who want to create more effective short descriptions

- Interested in the online output generated by the DITA Toolkit

Agenda

1. What is a short description?

2. How <shortdesc> in DITA topics is processed by the DITA Toolkit

3. Short descriptions and usability

4. Guidelines for short descriptions
   a) Task topics
   b) Concept topics
   c) Reference topics

5. How writing short descriptions can affect content and architecture

6. <shortdesc> in other contexts:
   - In DITA maps
   - In element

7. Summary

What is a short description?

- The content of an optional element: <shortdesc>

- Provides a short overview of the topic, its content, and why it matters

- It is valid in two main locations
  - Map level
  - Topic level

Where <shortdesc> is valid

Within a topic

Where <shortdesc> is valid

Within a DITA map

Where the <shortdesc> content is displayed
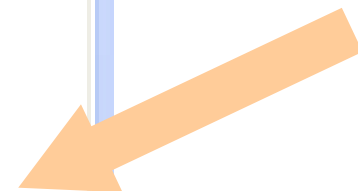
First paragraph of a topic

Plaque

Plaque is a film of bacteria that adheres to the enamel that covers your teeth. If not removed by flossing and brushing, it can cause both tooth decay and gum disease.

Your mouth is a busy place. Bacteria — tiny colonies of living organisms — are constantly on the move on your teeth, gums, lips and tongue. Certain types of bacteria,

Where the <shortdesc> content is displayed

Automatically-generated topic preview

Concepts

This section discusses concepts that will help you understand how to properly care for your teeth.

Cavities
Cavities (or dental caries) are caused by acid erosion of tooth enamel.

Gingivitis
Gingivitis is an inflammation of the gums. It is a form of periodontal disease that is caused by the long-term effects of plaque deposits.

Periodontal disease
Periodontal diseases are serious gum infections that, left untreated, can lead to tooth loss.

Plaque
Plaque is a film of bacteria that adheres to the enamel that covers your teeth. If not removed by flossing and brushing, it can cause both tooth decay and gum disease.

Where the <shortdesc> content is displayed

Topic previews are generated by

- ◆ Nesting in the DITA map
- ◆ Content of the <title> and <shortdesc> in DITA file

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<!DOCTYPE map PUBLIC "-//OASIS//DTD DITA Map//EN" "map.dtd">
<map title="Dental tips">
<topicref href="concepts_c.dita" navtitle="Concepts">
        <topicref href="cavities_c.dita"></topicref>
        <topicref href="gingivitis_c.dita"></topicref>
        <topicref href="periodontal disease_c.dita"></topicref>
        <topicref href="plaque_c.dita"></topicref>
</topicref>
</map>
```

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<!DOCTYPE concept PUBLIC "-//OASIS//DTD DITA Concept//EN" "concept.dtd">
<concept id="concepts_c" xml:lang="en-us">
        <title>Concepts</title>
        <shortdesc>This section discusses concepts that will help you
        understand how to properly care for your teeth.</shortdesc>
<conbody></conbody>
</concept>
```

Where the <shortdesc> content is displayed

Result

Concepts

This section discusses concepts that will help you understand how to properly care for your teeth.

Cavities
Cavities (or dental caries) are caused by acid erosion of tooth enamel.

Gingivitis
Gingivitis is an inflammation of the gums. It is a form of periodontal disease that is caused by the long-term effects of plaque deposits.

Periodontal disease
Periodontal diseases are serious gum infections that, left untreated, can lead to tooth loss.

Plaque
Plaque is a film of bacteria that adheres to the enamel that covers your teeth. If not removed by flossing and brushing, it can cause both tooth decay and gum disease.

Where the <shortdesc> content is displayed

- ◆ Pop-up text over a link

- ◆ Full short description displayed in CHM; truncated in Eclipse help

Parent topic: What are the Derby tools and utilities?

Related concepts
Overview
About Derby databases
JDBC basics

Terms of Use | Most of the Derby tools are JDBC applications. A JDBC application is one that uses the cl...
(C) Copyright IBM Corporation 1999, 2005. All Rights Reserved.
IBM Cloudscape Version 10.1

Interim summary

How the content of <shortdesc> is used – and the value for the reader

- First paragraph
    - Thesis statement
    - Users can quickly access whether content is useful to them

- Generated links
    - Summary of content
    - Helps readers navigate successfully without massive scanning of content

- Hover text
    - Gives the user more information than is in the title
    - Limited to approximately 25 words in Eclipse output

DITA Toolkit guidelines

- Single, concise paragraph.

- Contains one or two sentences of no more than 50 words.

- Use complete sentences, except for very short topics such as APIs.

- If a topic contains only one paragraph, include the text in the <shortdesc>.

Guidelines for ALL topics

Don't …

♦ Restate the title

♦ State the obvious, for example, "You can use XYZ to do A"

♦ Start the short description with phrases such as "This topic describes …" or "This topic is about …"

♦ Use the short description as a lead-in to or build-up that does not stand on its own as a complete information entity.

Guidelines for task topics

Do …

- Explain what the task helps the users accomplish

  - Answer the question: "What are the benefits of the task?"
  - Answer the question: "What is the purpose of the task?"

- Include information about when the users should perform the task or why the task is necessary

- (If applicable) Include information about who should perform the task and where it should be performed

Examples of short descriptions

Ineffective

Changing data types

You can use the ALTER NICKNAME statement to change the data type of a column.

Effective

Changing data types

You can change the data type of a column so that your data types are consistent across tables. Use the ALTER NICKNAME statement to change the data type of a column.

Guidelines for concept topics

Do …

◆ Introduce the concept and provide a concise answer to the question "What is this?" and (if needed) "Why do I care about this?"

◆ Start with a brief definition, if the concept is unfamiliar.

◆ Make sure that the short description contains the main point of the topic.

Examples of short descriptions

Ineffective

> **Crawlers**
>
> This topic is about crawlers, which are programs that search for information.

Effective

> **Crawlers**
>
> Crawlers are programs that search for information on the Web, in databases, or in other data sources. The information that the crawlers gather is added to the search engine index. Crawlers must run regularly to ensure that the search engine index is up to date.

Guidelines for reference topics

Do …

- Explain the following points:

    - What an item is
    - What the item does
    - What the item is used for

- Use consistent phrasing across libraries so that your information can be easily integrated with another product's information.

Guidelines for reference topics

Examples of short descriptions

Ineffective

COUNT command

DB2 Universal Database provides a COUNT command.

Effective

COUNT command

The COUNT command displays the current number of rows in the table. The rows are counted by the SQL SELECT COUNT(*) function.

Writing short descriptions affects ...

Content

- Writing good short descriptions is a difficult and time-consuming task.

- Forces writers to clarify what is the main point or thesis of a topic.

- Iterative process.

- Once a good short description is crafted, often the hardest work is done.

Information architecture

- Can lead to reassessing granularity and scope

- If <shortdesc> doesn't add value, is the topic really needed?

- If <shortdesc> can't be adequately contained in a few sentences, are you trying to do too much in a single topic?

<shortdesc> in a DITA map

- Can override the contents of the <shortdesc> located in a topic

- Only has this functionality for links

topicref href="brushing_your_teeth_t.dita" navtitle="Brushing your teeth" > Brushing your teeth

topicmeta

shortdesc > This text is located in a <shortdesc> element in the DITA map. It overrides the content of the <shortdesc> located in a topic, but only in the generated links.

shortdesc

topicmeta

topicref

Tasks

Brushing and flossing your teeth properly can prevent cavities, gingivitis, and periodontal disease. These dental problems cause at least one-third of adult tooth loss.

Brushing your teeth
This text is located in a <shortdesc> element in the DITA map. It overrides the content of the <shortdesc> located in a topic, but only in the generated links.
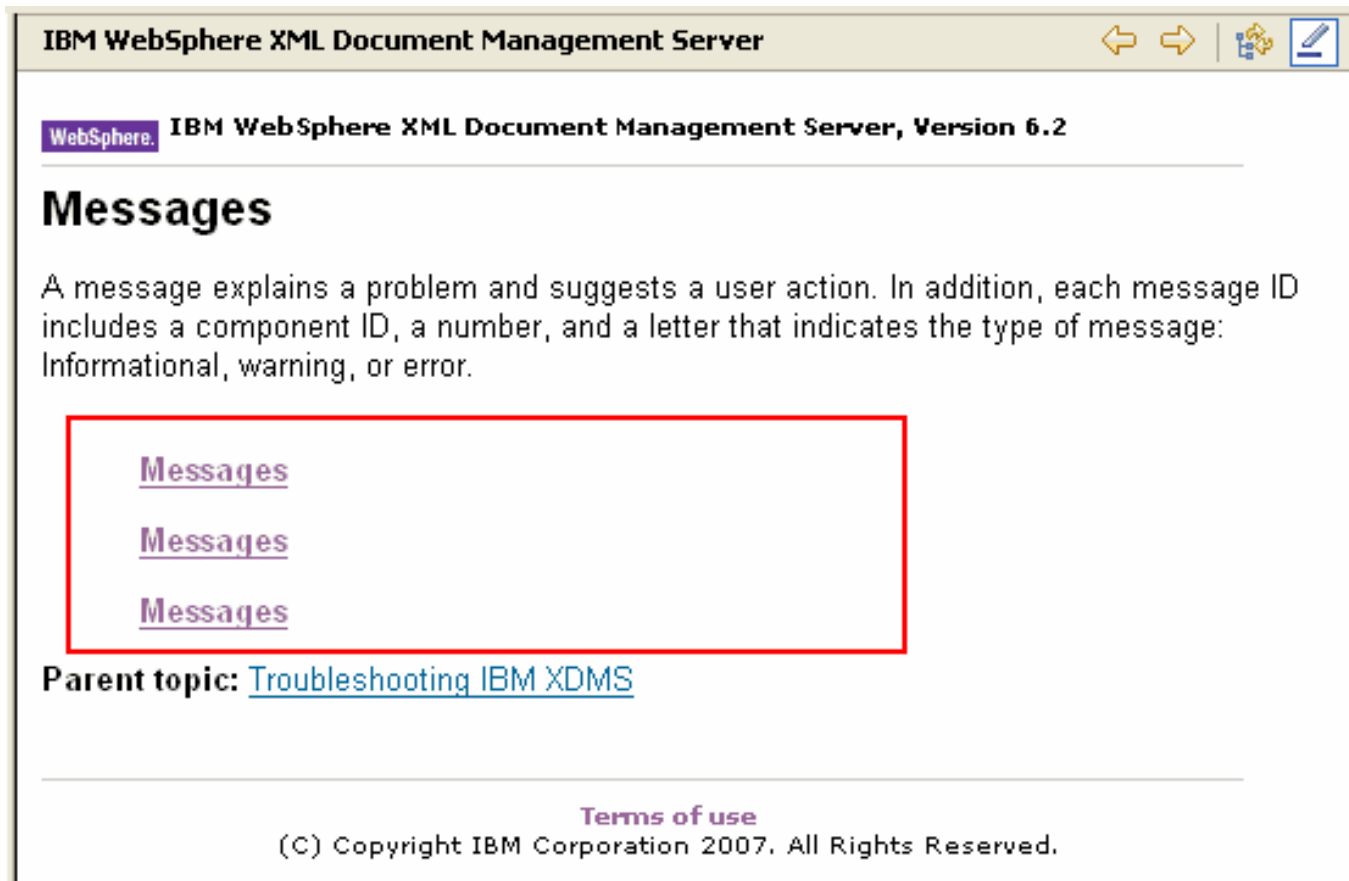
Flossing your teeth
Flossing your teeth removes food debris and plaque that lodge between the teeth and under the gum line.

<shortdesc> in a DITA map

Before

IBM WebSphere XML Document Management Server

WebSphere. IBM WebSphere XML Document Management Server, Version 6.2

Messages

A message explains a problem and suggests a user action. In addition, each message ID includes a component ID, a number, and a letter that indicates the type of message: Informational, warning, or error.

Messages

Messages

Messages

Parent topic: Troubleshooting IBM XDMS

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<shortdesc> in a DITA map

Modify the DITA map

```
...
<topicref href="com_msg_intro_c.dita" navtitle="Messages">
        <topicref href="TAIMsgs.dita" navtitle="TAI error messages">
                <topicmeta>
                        <shortdesc>Error messages generated by the Trust Association Interceptor (TAI)
                        component</shortdesc>
                </topicmeta>
        </topicref>

        <topicref href="XcapErrorMsgs.dita" navtitle="XCAP error messages">
                <topicmeta>
                        <shortdesc>Error messages generated by the XML Configuration Access Protocol
                        (XCAP)</shortdesc>
                </topicmeta>
        </topicref>
        <topicref href="XDMSErrorMsgs.dita" navtitle="XDMS error messages">
                <topicmeta>
                        <shortdesc>Error messages generated by XML Document Management Server (XDMS)</shortdesc>
                </topicmeta>
        </topicref>
</topicref>
...
```
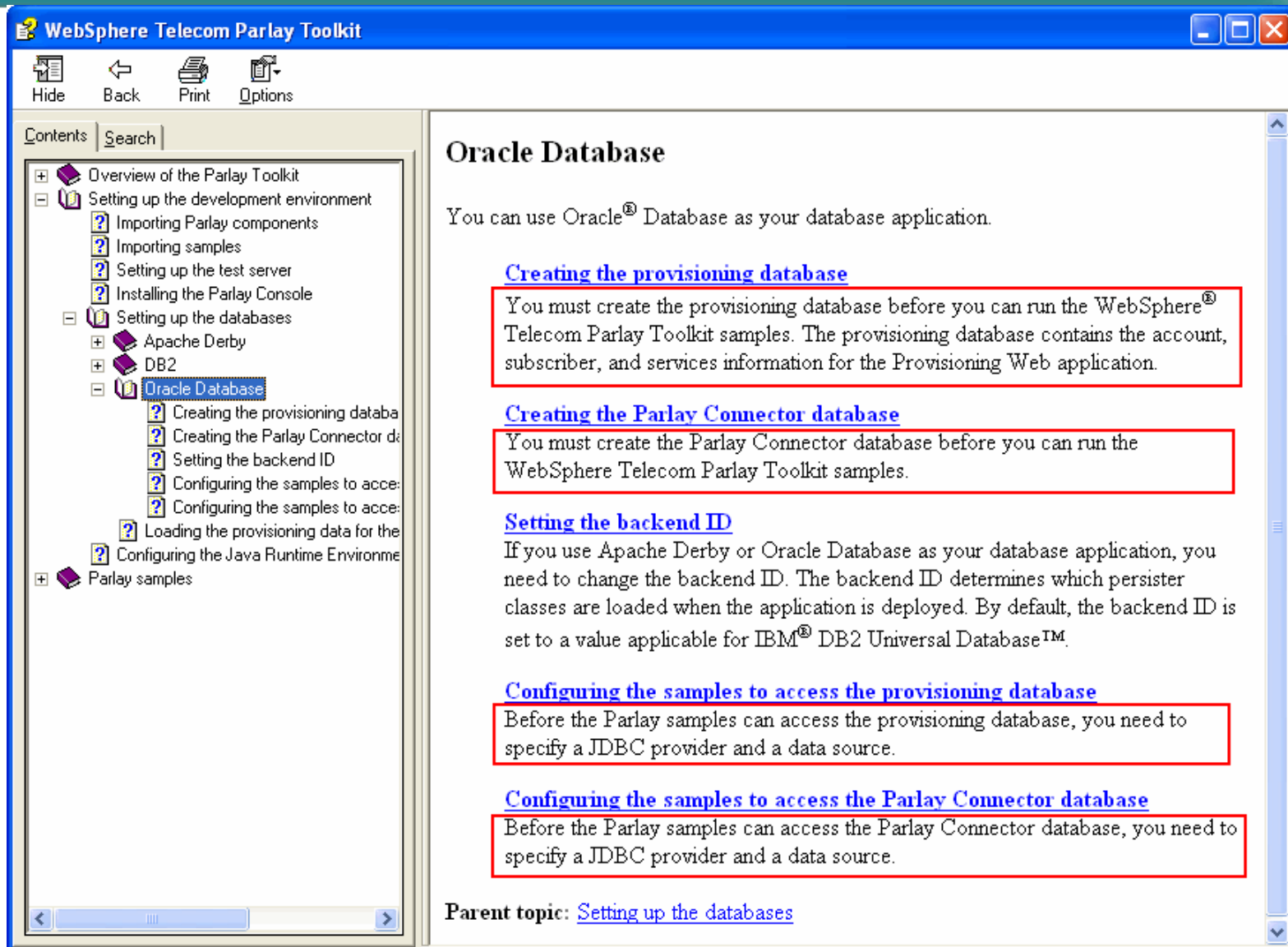
<shortdesc> in a DITA map

After

<shortdesc> in
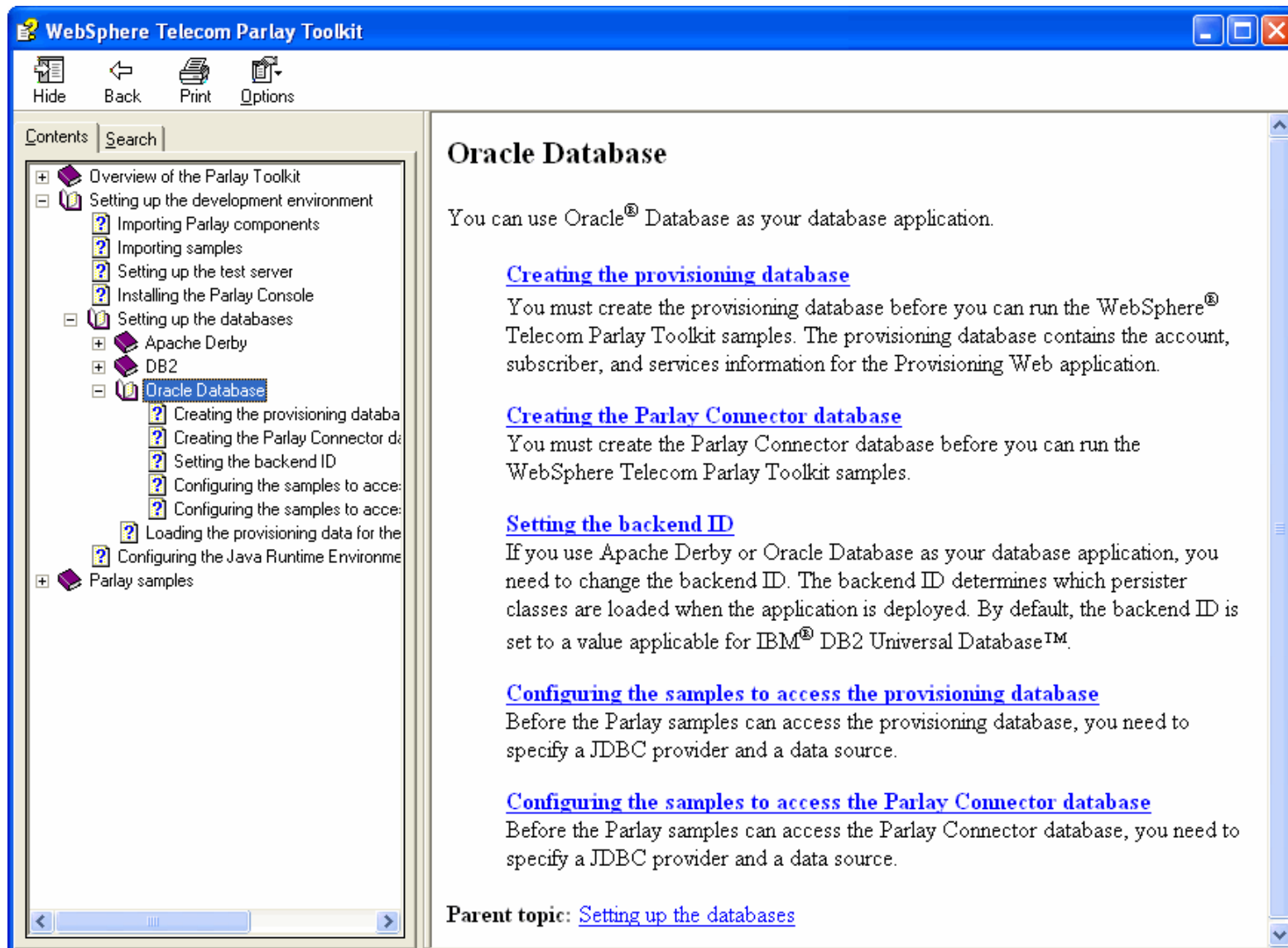
- DITA 1.1 introduced a new element:

- Can contain more complex markup

- Interesting potential uses:
  - Can hold multiple <shortdesc> in a reuse file
  - Can contain more complex thesis statement for printed output
  - Can contain more complex information for online information
  - Can contain multiple <shortdesc> if you want to filter for specific audiences

How content of is displayed

- Full content of is displayed on the topic page

- Content of <shortdesc> within is used in:
  - Automatically-generated link previews
  - Hover text

- If contains multiple <shortdesc>, they are:
  - Concatenated in automatically-generated link previews and hover text
  - Displayed as separate, block-level entities on the topic page

Multiple <shortdesc> in for reuse

Multiple <shortdesc> in for reuse

WebSphere Telecom Parlay Toolkit

Hide Back Print Options

Contents | Search

- Overview of the Parlay Toolkit
- Setting up the development environment
  - ? Importing Parlay components
  - ? Importing samples
  - ? Setting up the test server
  - ? Installing the Parlay Console
  - Setting up the databases
    - Apache Derby
    - DB2
    - Oracle Database
      - ? Creating the provisioning databa
      - ? Creating the Parlay Connector da
      - ? Setting the backend ID
      - ? Configuring the samples to acce:
      - ? Configuring the samples to acce:
    - ? Loading the provisioning data for the
  - ? Configuring the Java Runtime Environme
- Parlay samples

Oracle Database

You can use Oracle® Database as your database application.

Creating the provisioning database

You must create the provisioning database before you can run the WebSphere® Telecom Parlay Toolkit samples. The provisioning database contains the account, subscriber, and services information for the Provisioning Web application.

Creating the Parlay Connector database

You must create the Parlay Connector database before you can run the WebSphere Telecom Parlay Toolkit samples.

Setting the backend ID

If you use Apache Derby or Oracle Database as your database application, you need to change the backend ID. The backend ID determines which persister classes are loaded when the application is deployed. By default, the backend ID is set to a value applicable for IBM® DB2 Universal Database™.

Configuring the samples to access the provisioning database
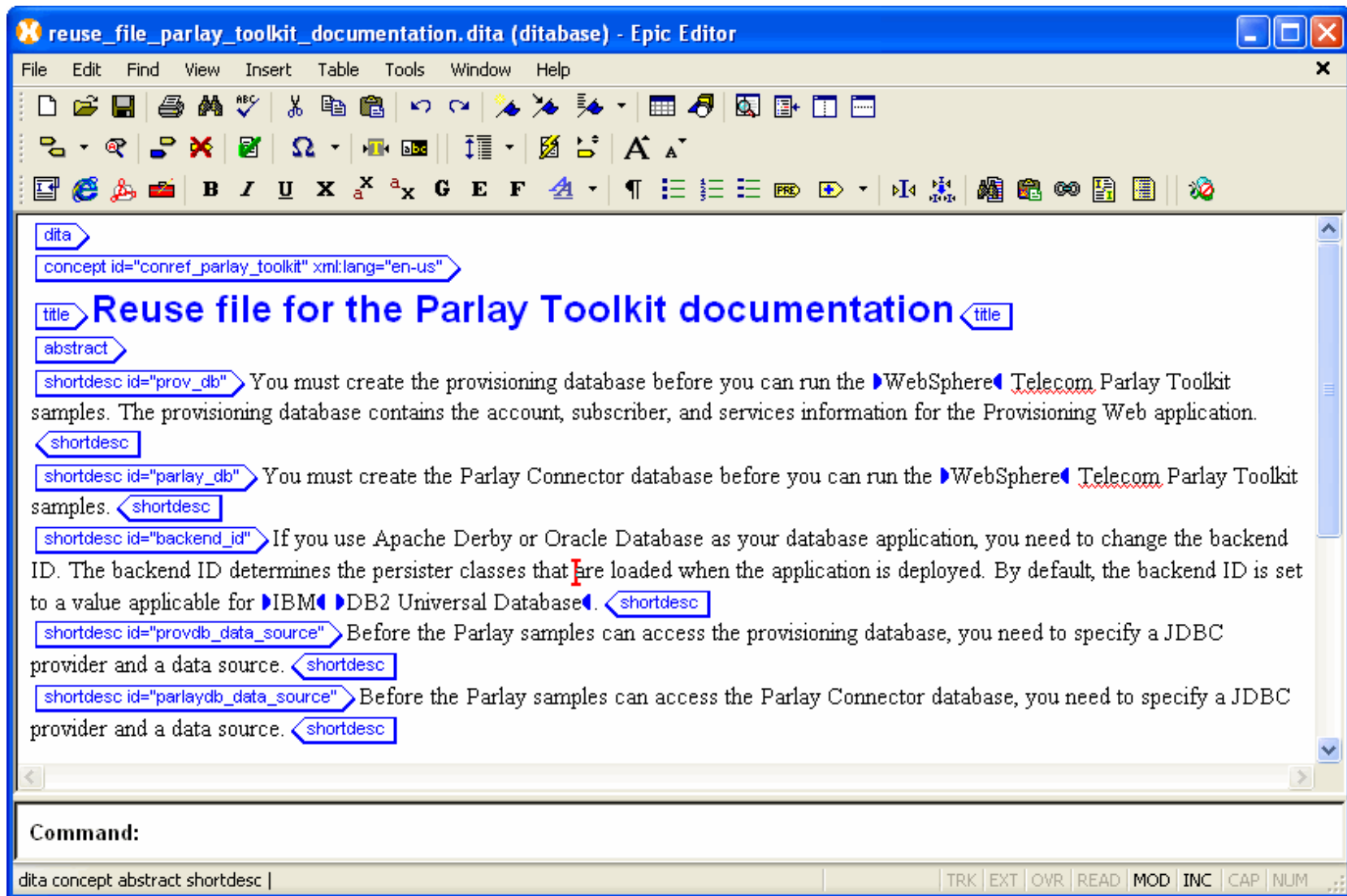
Before the Parlay samples can access the provisioning database, you need to specify a JDBC provider and a data source.

Configuring the samples to access the Parlay Connector database

Before the Parlay samples can access the Parlay Connector database, you need to specify a JDBC provider and a data source.

Parent topic: Setting up the databases

Multiple <shortdesc> in for reuse

More complex information in

Before


```
reference id="Brussels_hotels" xml:lang="en-us"

title  Brussels hotels  title

shortdesc  You have many options for arranging lodging in Brussels: hotels, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels and flats. You can select from a wide price range, level of excellence, location, and character.  shortdesc

refbody  refbody

reference
```

```xml
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<!DOCTYPE reference PUBLIC "-//OASIS//DTD DITA Reference//EN"
 "../dtd/reference.dtd">
<reference id="Brussels_hotels" xml:lang="en-us">
<title>Brussels hotels</title>
        <shortdesc>You have many options for arranging lodging in Brussels: hotels,
        bed and breakfasts, youth hostels and flats. You can select from a wide price
        range, level of excellence, location, and character.
        </shortdesc>
<refbody></refbody>
</reference>
```

More complex information in

After

reference id="Brussels_hotels" xml:lang="en-us"

title **Brussels hotels** title

abstract

shortdesc You have many options for arranging lodging in Brussels: hotels, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels and flats. You can select from a wide price range, level of excellence, location, and character. shortdesc

simpletable

Price category	Description
€	Under 80 euros
€€	80-130 euros
€€€	130-180 euros
€€€€	180-260 euros
€€€€€	Over 260 euros

simpletable

abstract

refbody refbody

```
<reference id="Brussels_hotels" xml:lang="en-us">
<title>Brussels hotels</title>
<abstract>
        <shortdesc>You have many options for arranging lodging in Brussels:
        hotels, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels and flats. You can select from a
        wide price range, level of excellence, location, and character.</shortdesc>

    <simpletable> ... </simpletable>
</abstract>
<refbody></refbody>
</reference>
```

More complex information in

Results

Useful key
to symbols

➡️

Brussels hotels

You have many options for arranging lodging in Brussels: hotels, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels and flats. You can select from a wide price range, level of excellence, location, and character.

Price category	Description
€	Under 80 euros
€€	80-130 euros
€€€	130-180 euros
€€€€	180-260 euros
€€€€€	Over 260 euros

Queen Anne
€€. Close to the De Brouckere metro station, the welcoming Hotel Queen Anne is small, but friendly, with clean, comfortable rooms and a generous buffet breakfast. All rooms have ensuite facilities. The peaceful location and relaxed atmosphere is perfect for families.

Hotel Metropole
€€€. Built 1895, this plush hotel boasts striking architecture and a mix of French Renaissance, Empire and Art Deco styles. High ceilings, stained-glass restaurant, and crystal chandeliers in the lobby, bar and gourmet restaurant. Not all rooms are period decorated. Complimentary breakfast.

Short descriptions …

◆ An elegant progressive-disclosure device

◆ Interesting intersection
- Structured authoring techniques
- Topic-based writing
- Old-fashioned principles of effective writing

◆ Can dramatically improve the following:
- Quality of content and architecture
- Usability of an information set

◆ Large benefit for a small expense

Resources

DITA Open Toolkit documentation

◆ <shortdesc>
http://dita-ot.sourceforge.net/doc/ot-userguide13/xhtml/core_vocabulary/short_description.html

◆
htt:/dita-ot.sourceforge.net/doc/ot-userguide13/xhtml/release_current/abstract_element.html

Resources

OASIS, DITA Version 1.1, Language Specification

◆ <shortdesc>
http://docs.oasis-open.org/dita/v1.1/CS01/langspec/langref/shortdesc.html

◆
http://docs.oasis-open.org/dita/v1.1/CS01/langspec/langref/abstract.html

Resources

- dita-users group on Yahoo!

- *Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors* (2nd edition, 2004)

Questions and comments?

Acknowledgments

DK Eyewitness Travel: Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp
(source of the hotel information)

Special thanks to Karen Mobley, information developer extraordinaire at IBM, and Joanne Hackos for their feedback

And to Elliot Kimber for making me think about travel guides and DITA

Feedback

- ◆ Any suggestions for improving this session are greatly appreciated.

- ◆ Let me know what guidelines your company or team has for short descriptions.

- ◆ Send me examples of both good and bad short descriptions.

- ◆ Contact information:

  Kristen James Eberlein
  Systems Documentation, Inc.
  Durham, North Carolina, USA
  keberlein@sdicorp.com
  +1 919 354 1109