

Writing a great README

#CfgMgmtCamp '24

What is a README for?

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- ~~Documentation?~~
- ~~Introduction?~~
- ~~Usage guide?~~
- ~~Getting started?~~
- ~~Tutorial?~~

What is a README for?

- It's in the name
- Critical information *for people who may have never seen it before*

5 – 30 – 90 rule

- 5 seconds: hook
- 30 seconds: use cases
- 90 seconds: suitability and examples

5 seconds

- The reader is not deciding whether to use your project
- They are deciding whether to keep reading
- Tips:
 - Make your README look welcoming and inviting
 - Short and readable, not dense and impenetrable
 - Pictures, designs, etc.
 - Don't waste time and space being pedantically correct.

Present your project as a compelling solution to a problem.

30 seconds

- Still high level
- Talk about use cases, what can this do?
- Talk about the problems that your project can solve.
- Tips:
 - This is not the place for edge cases
 - Don't talk about features

Show what kind of problems your project will solve.

90 seconds

- Finally you can now show some detail
- But not too much.
- Explain the niche your project fits into
- Tips:
 - Simplified and representative examples.
 - Are there major caveats people should know about?

Convince people to invest real time in trying your project.

The rest!

- Now you've convinced people to try it
- But don't think that you're home free
- Remember that if your README is intimidating, people will not make it past the 5 second hook.
- Tips:
 - Just show people how to install or get started
 - Docs and references go elsewhere

More info

- <https://binford2k.com/2020/04/21/great-readme/>
- Curated list of pretty decent README examples
 - <https://github.com/matiassingers/awesome-readme>