# Conventional Comments

...and how we elevated Code Reviews to a new level

## About Me



(Please kindly add the grey hair in your imagination.)

### **Career:**

- Engineering Manager at DataGuard
- Before: Software Engineering since 2000 (mostly freelance, mostly Ruby)

### **Contact:**

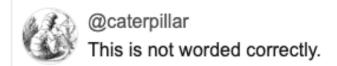
- <a href="https://clemenskofler.com">https://clemenskofler.com</a>
- GitHub: clemens
- Twitter (do we still care?): clemensk

### Context

- September 2020:
  - 20 (or so) engineers
  - none of them English native speakers
  - regular misunderstandings, especially in Code Reviews
- Code Reviews = tool to ensure quality, but also probably the most critical feedback tool in our inventory

=> We need to ensure people understand the reviews that they're given and that the reviews that they give are understood

# Example



- Fact or opinion?
- What's the call to action? Will you (or someone else) fix it?
  Should I fix it?
- Last but not least: People from various "less direct" cultures will probably find this comment offensive

# Ask yourself: What would you say if you were pairing?

## **Enter: Conventional Comments**



#### @cheshirec

**suggestion (security):** I'm a bit concerned that we are implementing our own DOM purifying function here...

Could we consider using the framework instead?

- Use a label (e.g. "suggestion")
- Add an optional decoration (e.g. "security")
- Describe the situation/problem
- Elaborate on situation/problem, offer a proposed solution etc.

## Conventional Comments at DataGuard

- Most of our comments are suggestions or questions
- Issues are used sparingly (e.g. security concerns)
- Especially for minor **suggestions**, we like to use GitLab's "Insert suggestion" feature
- We mostly avoid decorations and use defaults:
  - suggestion, nitpick, thought, praise => non-blocking
  - issue, question, todo, chore => blocking

## Our Experience

- Fewer misunderstandings and generally positive attitude to Code Reviews for both author(s) and reviewer(s)
- Healthy discussions, especially for suggestions
- Additional benefit for Juniors (and people with lower confidence): clarity on what really needs to be addressed (issues, questions) vs. where changes are optional (suggestions)