

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:

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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



@caterpillar

This is not worded correctly.

- 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)