Markdown is a lightweight markup language based on the formatting conventions
that people naturally use in email.
As [John Gruber] writes on the [Markdown site][df1]

The overriding design goal for Markdown's
formatting syntax is to make it as readable
as possible. The idea is that a
Markdown-formatted document should be
publishable as-is, as plain text, without
looking like it's been marked up with tags
or formatting instructions.