Getting Started With Pandoc Markdown

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# Overview

Documenting with the [Markdown language](https://www.markdownguide.org/getting-started/) is wonderfully simple and clean. When combined with the capabilities of the [Pandoc](https://pandoc.org/) command set then many options exist for generating elegant documents from a Markdown document.

Though [many output formats](https://pandoc.org/MANUAL.html#options) are possible with Pandoc, the tools provided with this guide generate *html*, *pdf* and *docx* output.

There are some issues with ‘docx’ documents (!! I need to check some of these points with MS Word once I borrow a laptop from the family):

* A *table of contents* is not generated for Libreoffice/Openoffice. You must open the document in your word processor and ask it to generate a table of contents.
* If you wish to modify the default document style then you can either modify the style of the reference docx file using your word processor, or you can unpack the reference document, modify the *styles.xml* file, and the repack the document. I describe [how to unpack the reference file](#i-docxref) further in this document.
* Images are not elegantly scaled in the docx presentation. Therefore you need to adjust images to fit the required placement.
* You will need to enable a footer in the page style and add the page number for page numbering.

These tools focus on writing computer technical documentation; however they can easily be adapted for other purposes, like writing presentation slides, or scientific latex documents. By modifying style and template parameters you can adapt the tools to your needs.

The platform used for this project is Ubuntu LTS 22.04 on a Raspberry Pi, as documented at:  
[https://github.com/deatrich/linux-home-server](https://deatrich.github.io/linux-home-server/latest-version/linux-server.html#doc)

The version of Pandoc used is 2.9. Any other Linux distribution or UNIX-based system with a recent installation of *Pandoc* should work as well.

If you discover issues with instructions in this document, or have other comments or suggestions then you can contact me via my email address shown on [my github project repository page](https://github.com/deatrich/), or you can file specific issues under the ‘Issues’ tab [on the project page](https://github.com/deatrich/doc-with-pandoc-markdown).

## About this Document

In this guide command-line sessions appear in a pale-yellow box, using a customized *.console* syntax highlighting convention described in my [*console syntax highlighting* project](https://deatrich.github.io/console-syntax/).

Simplified command-line prompts have syntax highlighting. As well, explanatory comments starting with two slashes are italicized and are coloured blue:

// Usually your prompt would be more complex, something like this:  
// myname@ubuntu:~/.vim/syntax$  
// or like this:  
// [desktop /tmp]$   
// But I simplify its appearance when illustrating command-line sessions.  
// Normal Users' command-line prompt, coloured 'green':  
$ some-command  
  
// The root superuser's prompt, simplifed also, and coloured 'red':  
# some-other-command

A few other command-line programs with a shell-like interface – *mysql*, *mariadb* and *virsh* – also have syntax highlighting:

// mariadb session:  
$ mysql -u root -p  
Enter password:   
Welcome to the MariaDB monitor. Commands end with ; or \g.  
...  
  
MariaDB> select concat(user, '@', host) from mysql.global\_priv;  
+-------------------------+  
| concat(user, '@', host) |  
+-------------------------+  
| ro@192.168.1.% |  
| rw@192.168.1.% |  
| mariadb.sys@localhost |  
| mysql@localhost |  
| root@localhost |  
+-------------------------+  
5 rows in set (0.001 sec)  
MariaDB> exit;  
Bye  
  
// virsh session:  
$ sudo virsh  
Welcome to virsh, the virtualization interactive terminal.  
  
Type: 'help' for help with commands  
 'quit' to quit  
  
virsh # list --all  
 Id Name State  
------------------------------  
 - rocky8 shut off  
 - rocky8.2 shut off  
 - ubuntu22.04 shut off  
  
virsh # exit

Sometimes command output is long and/or uninteresting in the context of this guide. I might show such segments with a ellipsis (**…**)

Sometimes a double-exclamation (**!!**) mark might appear somewhere – this is only a reminder for myself to fix an issue at that point in the documentation. These reminders will eventually disappear.

You can of course use syntax highlighting for various languages in Pandoc’s Markdown. Here is an example of a bash script:

#!/bin/bash -e  
  
unalias -a  
PATH=/usr/bin:/bin  
  
## get the timestamp from the file argument and apply it  
update\_file\_timestamp() {  
 file\_time=$(git log -1 --pretty=format:%ai "$1")  
 touch -d "$file\_time" "$1"  
}  
  
OLD\_IFS=$IFS  
IFS=$'\n'  
  
for file in `git ls-files`  
do  
 if [ -f "$file" ] ; then ## check for file existence  
 update\_file\_timestamp "$file"  
 fi  
done  
  
IFS=$OLD\_IFS  
  
git update-index --refresh

## Guide outline

In this guide I cover the following topics. It should be enough to get you started writing documentation in Markdown.

We start by setting up your workspace. We install Pandoc, as well as my favourite editor (or your favourite editor) and a few PDF viewers. Other viewers like Firefox and LibreOffice are typically already installed.

Though spell checking is primitive, we take a look at *aspell*, and I show how to install the needed Lua filters and how to use them.

Then we pull the files from this project and from the ‘console syntax’ project on *github.com* and install them into your home directory. We also test the installation by running ‘make’ on the initial generated project.

I give a quick overview of the purpose of the provided tools and files.

The final section of this guide is an outline of Markdown elements so that you have a quick start on common Markdown elements.

# Creating a Pandoc workspace

An installation of Pandoc along with the requisite latex support files is needed. In this document I install Pandoc on Ubuntu LTS 22.04. Other Linux distributions will have differing package name and differing package dependencies.

## Installing the packages

### Pandoc

// Let's see what would be installed, without actually installing it:  
$ sudo apt install pandoc  
The following additional packages will be installed:  
 libcmark-gfm-extensions0.29.0.gfm.3 libcmark-gfm0.29.0.gfm.3 pandoc-data  
Suggested packages:  
 texlive-latex-recommended texlive-xetex texlive-luatex pandoc-citeproc  
 texlive-latex-extra context wkhtmltopdf librsvg2-bin groff ghc nodejs  
 php python ruby r-base-core libjs-katex citation-style-language-styles  
 ...  
Do you want to continue? [Y/n] n  
Abort.

I have installed pandoc a few times now, and I know how important some of the suggested packages are. Since we will be generating PDF formats then TeX and its various flavours and support files will also be needed.

// So I install the suggested packages ... over 100 packages will be pulled in:  
$ sudo apt install texlive-latex-recommended texlive-xetex texlive-luatex \  
 pandoc-citeproc texlive-latex-extra context texlive-fonts-recommended wkhtmltopdf  
...  
The following NEW packages will be installed:  
 context context-modules dvisvgm feynmf fonts-gfs-artemisia  
 fonts-gfs-baskerville fonts-gfs-bodoni-classic fonts-gfs-didot  
 fonts-gfs-didot-classic fonts-gfs-gazis fonts-gfs-neohellenic fonts-gfs-olga  
 ...  
 tex-gyre texlive-base texlive-binaries texlive-extra-utils  
 texlive-font-utils texlive-fonts-recommended texlive-latex-base  
 texlive-latex-extra texlive-latex-recommended texlive-luatex  
 texlive-metapost texlive-pictures texlive-plain-generic texlive-xetex tipa  
 tk tk8.6 wkhtmltopdf  
 ...  
Running updmap-sys. This may take some time... done.  
Running mktexlsr /var/lib/texmf ... done.  
Building format(s) --all.  
 This may take some time... done.  
Running mktexlsr /var/lib/texmf ... done.  
Building format(s) --all.  
 This may take some time... done.

Now we install pandoc, which pulls in ‘pandoc-data’

$ sudo apt install pandoc  
 ...  
The following additional packages will be installed:  
 pandoc-data  
 ...

### Editors

My editor of choice is *gvim* – that is – *graphical vim*. You will need to use a decent editor. It would be painful I think to write Markdown documentation with a minimalist text editor (like [*nano*](https://help.ubuntu.com/community/Nano) or [*le*](https://manpages.ubuntu.com/manpages/impish/man1/le.1.html)).

Perhaps you already have a favourite editor on the Linux platform. Some other text editors in my version of Ubuntu LTS are:

* pluma ($ sudo apt install pluma)
* gedit (if not installed then: $ sudo apt install gedit)
* kate ($ sudo apt install kate)
* emacs ($ sudo apt install emacs-gtk)

I provide help syntax highlighting the *console input/output fenced code* with both ‘vim/gvim’ and ‘kate’. If you are not documenting console input/output then it will not matter which editor you use. There are after all more than 130 computer ‘languages’ which Pandoc’s Markdown is able to highlight.

// To install graphical vim:  
$ sudo apt install vim-gtk3

### PDF viewers

I like the *evince* PDF viewer on my Ubuntu desktop. The ‘table of contents’ outline shows up in the left pane on ‘evince’, and you can toggle it on/off by clicking the ‘Side pane’ icon in the upper left.

Another PDF viewer is *qpdfview*. In order to see the ‘outline’, select:

View -> Docks -> Outline

// Install the PDF viewers:  
$ apt install evince qpdfview

An excellent, but non-free PDF viewer is [Master PDF Editor](https://code-industry.net/masterpdfeditor/).

*The unregistered version can be used only in personal, noncommercial purposes to view documents, fill PDF forms, comment and print documents. In order to use the application for commercial purposes, and with its full functionality you are required to purchase a license.*

For Ubuntu, Debian and OpenSuse / Red Hat / CentOS you can [download a free version](https://code-industry.net/free-pdf-editor/#get). If you are interested in using it for more complex reasons like form-filling, PDF document editing and digital signing, then buy a license.

For x86/x86\_64 architectures there are software packages available. However the version of Master PDF Editor for the *arm64* architecture must be installed from the supplied [tarball](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tar_(computing)):

Here is an example of installing it on Ubuntu LTS on a Raspberry Pi:

$ mkdir ~/temp/  
$ cd ~/temp/  
$ tar zxf /path/to/master-pdf-editor-5.9.50-qt5.arm64.tar.gz  
$ ls -CpF  
master-pdf-editor-5/  
$ mkdir -p ~/bin/mpdf  
$ cp -a master-pdf-editor-5/ ~/bin/mpdf/  
// Remove the temporary installation directory  
$ rm -rf ~/temp  
  
// A few extra libraries are needed to run this program:  
$ sudo apt install libqt5xml5 libqt5concurrent5   
  
$ cd ~/bin/mpdf/  
$ ls -CpF  
fonts/ license\_en.txt masterpdfeditor5.desktop stamps/  
lang/ masterpdfeditor5\* masterpdfeditor5.png templates  
$ file masterpdfeditor5  
masterpdfeditor5: ELF 64-bit LSB executable, ARM aarch64,  
version 1 (GNU/Linux), dynamically linked, interpreter  
/lib/ld-linux-aarch64.so.1, for GNU/Linux 3.7.0,  
BuildID[sha1]=94ca9680e3f0ae39e622aa4e2ab9cbc9c189e63e, stripped  
  
$ cd  
$ ~/bin/mpdf/masterpdfeditor5 -h  
  
Master PDF Editor 5  
Build 5.9.50, arm 64 bit  
 ...

### Spell checking software

The larger the document, the more likely it is that you will appreciate some form of spell checking.

#### Spell checking in editors

A good editor will offer spell checking as an option; it is typically found in a *Tools* menu of your favourite editor. If you decide that your editor’s spell checking is useful then proceed with it. Embedded spell checking is available on gvim, pluma, emacs, kate and gedit. It is even better to have spell checking which is *markdown-aware*; by that I mean it does not try to spell check inside Markdown syntax and elements. You will need to experiment with your editor’s spell checking.

#### Spell checking with native programs

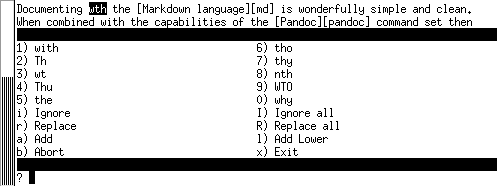
Two widely used open source spell checkers are [*aspell*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_Aspell) and [*hunspell*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunspell). Both programs have dictionaries in dozens of languages:

$ apt list | egrep '^aspell-' | wc -l  
69  
  
$ apt list | egrep '^hunspell-' | grep -v tools | wc -l  
75

For markdown-based documentation ‘aspell’ has a markdown-aware option. I gave it a try and at least for me I found it somewhat useful. Here I invoke ‘aspell’ using the *Markdown* mode on a file named *overview.md*:

$ aspell check --dont-backup --mode=markdown overview.md

Its spell checking is fairly easy to navigate – the image below shows a terminal session with ‘aspell’:



*aspell* in Markdown mode in a terminal window

#### Spell checking with the Lua filter

Another option is to use the [Lua](https://www.lua.org/about.html) filtering capability of Pandoc. It is primitive, but it has a few useful options:

* you can quickly generate a list of technical words that you can ask *aspell* to ignore
* by eliminating technical words you can quickly find the odd spelling mistake even though it is simply a list of possibly misspelled words.

Software packages for these filters do not exist (or at least I did not find them), so you would need to pull them from github:

// get the files  
$ mkdir ~/git  
$ cd ~/git  
$ git clone --depth=1 'https://github.com/pandoc/lua-filters'  
$ cd lua-filters

You can install only the spell checking file, or you can install all of the filters:

// The filters need to be installed in your pandoc configuration directory:  
$ mkdir -p ~/.pandoc/filters  
  
// copy only the spelling filter to your work area  
$ cp -up spellcheck/spellcheck.lua ~/pandoc/filters/  
  
// or copy all the filters to your work area using 'find' and looping over them:  
$ find . -type f -a -name \\*.lua | \  
 while read f ; do \  
 echo $f; \  
 cp -up $f ~/.pandoc/filters/; \  
 done  
$ ls -l ~/.pandoc/filters/\*spell\*  
/home/myname/.pandoc/filters/spellcheck.lua

Invoke the filter and get a list of possibly misspelled words. You can add them to [your personal dictionary](http://aspell.net/man-html/Format-of-the-Personal-and-Replacement-Dictionaries.html):

// As an example, use the filter on 'overview.md'  
$ pandoc --lua-filter spellcheck.lua overview.md   
docx  
wth  
  
// So I add docx to my personal dictionary (and fix the spelling of 'with'):  
$ nano ~/.aspell.en.pws  
$ head ~/.aspell.en.pws   
personal\_ws-1.1 en 37  
backticks  
CentOS  
css  
dev  
docx  
fsck  
 ...

# Installing the project files

## Getting the files

The files provided with this project can be downloaded from these two relevant projects found on ‘github’:

* <https://github.com/deatrich/doc-with-pandoc-markdown>
* <https://github.com/deatrich/console-syntax>

You can either use *git* to clone the projects, or pick up *zip* files of the projects.

// Make a directory where you can temporarily put the files  
$ mkdir ~/temp  
$ cd ~/temp  
  
// If you use git:  
$ git clone https://github.com/deatrich/doc-with-pandoc-markdown.git  
$ git clone https://github.com/deatrich/console-syntax.git  
  
// If you use zip:  
// For the zip files, browse to the project web sites, click on 'Code' and then  
// click on 'Download ZIP'  
// Then move each downloaded file named 'main.zip' to your temporary directory  
// and extract, or unzip, its contents.  
  
// You will have a directory named 'doc-with-pandoc-markdown' and another  
// named 'console-syntax'

## Generating your document working area

The provided shell script named *generate-new-guide.sh* will generate a new document area where it copies all of the needed files described in this section, and it creates the top-level Markdown file.

Once you have obtained the files as described above, then you can use this script to set up your work area:

$ cd ~/temp/doc-with-pandoc-markdown  
  
$ ./generate-new-guide.sh  
USAGE: generate-new-guide.sh -d SOME\_DIR -t FILE\_NAME  
WHERE: SOME\_DIR specifies a new, non-existent directory  
WHERE: FILE\_NAME specifies the name of the top document without '.md' ending  
Example: ./generate-new-guide.sh -d ~/docs/how-to-guide -t How-to-guide  
  
$ ./generate-new-guide.sh -d ~/docs/pet-project -t pet-project  
'../console-syntax/console.xml' -> './console.xml'  
'../console-syntax/vim.ftdetect' -> './vim.ftdetect'  
'../console-syntax/vim.syntax' -> './vim.syntax'  
'../console-syntax/vimrc.example' -> './vimrc.example'  
Done. Do not forget to modify 'metadata.md' and possibly 'Makefile.project'  
Please visit /home/myname/docs/pet-project/  
  
// When you are done with the temporary files then delete them if you wish:  
$ cd  
$ rm -rf ~/temp

To test the setup, the generated work area contains an extra Markdown file (overview.md). Once you start writing your own markdown files then add them to the contents.txt file and remove overview.md from the list:

$ cd ~/docs/pet-project/  
$ ls  
console.xml editorfiles/ metadata.md style.css  
contents.txt Makefile overview.md template.htm  
custom-highlight.theme Makefile.project pet-project.md template.latex  
custom-reference.docx md\_templates/ scriptfiles/  
  
$ cat contents.txt  
metadata.md  
overview.md  
  
// run the 'make' command to generate your documents  
$ make  
pandoc -s metadata.md overview.md ... -V lastupdate="`date +'%d %B %Y'`" -o pet-project.html  
pandoc -s metadata.md overview.md --toc ... -o pet-project.docx  
pandoc -s metadata.md overview.md --toc ... --pdf-engine=xelatex -o pet-project.pdf

## Files provided with this project

Here is a list of the pertinent files provided with this project and their purpose.

* Shell scripts:
  + [generate-new-guide.sh](#i-script)
  + [generate-table.sh](#i-tabscript)
* Build tools:
  + [Makefile and Makefile.project](#i-make)
  + [contents.txt](#i-filelist)
* Markdown files:
  + [guide-template.md](#i-guide)
  + [chapter-template.md](#i-chapter)
  + [metadata.md](#i-metadata)
  + [metadata-docx.md](#i-metadata-docx)
* Pandoc templates affecting document content and presentation:
  + [template.htm](#i-temphtm)
  + [template.latex](#i-temptex)
  + [custom-reference.docx](#i-docxref)
* Style files:
  + [custom-highlight.theme](#i-theme)
  + [style.css](#i-css)
* Editor files and syntax definition for console syntax highlighting:
  + [console.xml](#i-xml)
  + [vim.syntax and vim.ftdetect](#i-vimsyn)
  + [vimrc.example](#i-vimrc)

### Shell scripts

#### *generate-new-guide.sh*

This is the shell script which generated a new document area for you.

#### *generate-table.sh*

If you find yourself creating tables in Markdown then sometimes it is useful to start with an empty table. The included script will print out an empty table, using the specified number of rows and columns; and the table width and the column height in characters. You should copy it into your PATH - normally this means you copy it into ~/bin/

$ cp -p /path/to/generate-table.sh ~/bin/  
$ chmod 755 ~/bin/generate-table.sh  
// We create a table 1 row by 3 columns, 60 chars wide. Row height is 3 chars  
$ /generate-table.sh -r 1 -c 3 -w 60 -rh 3 -header yes  
+--------------------+--------------------+--------------------+  
| | | |  
+====================+====================+====================+  
| | | |  
| | | |  
| | | |  
+--------------------+--------------------+--------------------+

If you are using the Gvim editor, then you can map a control-key sequence to insert a table into the document by altering your .vimrc file:

$ grep generate-table ~/.vimrc  
" call generate-table.sh when Control+Z is pressed:  
map <C-z> <esc> !} generate-table.sh -r 4 -c 3 -w 70 -rh 3 -header yes<C-m><esc>

### Build tools

#### Control document handling: *Makefile* and *Makefile.project*

To avoid entering in repetitive and complex commands it is useful to have a [makefile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Make_(software)) which runs the commands on your behalf.

Take a careful look at these files. The generator script edits Makefile.project and sets the correct name for the project’s top file. Other variables that the makefile includes are the PDF, Office and the HTML viewers. Change them if you prefer other viewers.

The rules in this file are mentioned if you ask for help:

$ make help  
make all -- update all file types  
make test -- modify then run a test target  
make html -- update the html file  
make pdf -- update the pdf file  
make docx -- update the docx file  
make showhtml -- show the html file  
make showpdf -- show the pdf file  
make showdocx -- show the docx file  
make copies -- push html and pdf copies to generated area  
make publish -- push html and pdf copies to publishing area  
make clean -- clean up generated files  
  
// because the very first rule is 'make all' then when you type  
// 'make' it will make all generated files, for example:  
$ make  
pandoc -s metadata.md ... -c style.css --toc ... -o my-guide.html  
pandoc -s metadata.md ... --pdf-engine=xelatex -o my-guide.pdf  
pandoc -s metadata.md ... --reference-doc=custom-reference.docx -o my-guide.docx  
  
// you can clean up the generated files at any time:  
$ make clean  
rm -i \*.html \*.pdf  
rm: remove regular file 'my-guide.html'? y  
rm: remove regular file 'my-guide.pdf'? y  
rm: remove regular file 'my-guide.docx'? y

#### Ordered list of Markdown files: *contents.txt*

When you start a documentation project it might end up quite large, with many chapters or sections in it. It is annoying to edit one big file. Instead it is more manageable if you create, for example, one file per chapter.

The purpose of *contents.txt* is to simply list the chapters or sections by filename. They must be listed in the order you expect to find them in your final document. Note that *metadata.md* must be the first file.

The ‘Makefile’ will get the list of Markdown files from this file, and pass the list to the pandoc program.

### Markdown files

There are two Markdown files which you can copy to other filenames. They are found in the *md\_templates* sub-directory.

#### Template for the top-level document: *guide-template.md*

This file’s sole purpose is the act as the place holder for your named top-level document. In the example above you specified that the document’s name would be *pet-project*. The script which set up your work area simply copied *guide-template.md* to *pet-project.md*. Do not bother editing this file, since it is just used by the Makefile as the target name when generating output files.

#### Template for a new chapter or section: *chapter-template.md*

When creating new Markdown files which are part of your project you can copy *chapter-template.md* to your new file instead of starting from scratch. This file has skeleton Markdown lines in it.

#### Metadata needed by pandoc: *metadata.md*

The ‘metadata’ file is used by pandoc to fill in some variables used when generating documents. Most but not all of the metadata are used when generating PDF output. Some variables like ‘lastupdate’ are auto-generated, so you do not need to change that value.

A note at the top of the file reminds you to change the *title*, *author* and *date* (date is the initial creation date).

### Files which affect document content and presentation

Pandoc provides template files which control metadata placement and content ordering for most output formats. You can get the default template by asking pandoc for it on the command-line:

// The latex template is used whenever PDF output is generated.  
// There is no template for docx, but there is a reference data document.  
$ pandoc -D latex > template.latex.default  
  
$ pandoc -D html > template.html.default  
  
$ pandoc --print-default-data-file reference.docx > reference.docx

I made a few changes for HTML and for PDF to add a ‘Last update’ field and I removed the class for the ‘date’ value. As well, for PDF I modified the latex template to get the table of contents to appear in the bookmarks of a PDF viewer.

#### *template.htm*

$ cp -p template.html.default template.htm  
$ nano template.htm  
$ diff template.html.default template.htm   
41,42c41  
< <p class="author">$author$</p>  
< $endfor$  
---  
> <p class="author">$author$  
44c43,46  
< <p class="date">$date$</p>  
---  
> <br />Created: $date$  
> $endif$  
> $if(lastupdate)$  
> <br />Last update: $lastupdate$  
45a48,49  
> </p>  
> $endfor$

#### *template.latex*

$ cp -p template.latex.default template.latex  
$ nano template.latex  
$ diff template.latex.default template.latex  
390c390,394  
< \date{$date$}  
---  
> \date{Created: $date$  
> $if(lastupdate)$  
> \normalsize{ Last update: \today}  
> $endif$}  
>   
432a437  
> \pdfbookmark[0]{\contentsname}{toc}  
440a446

#### *custom-reference.docx*

You can always generate your own reference.docx file using pandoc rather than using the file included with this project:

$ pandoc --print-default-data-file reference.docx > custom-reference.docx

Then you can use your word processor and modify the document styles. Note that only modifications that impact the document style are used; any other kind of modification will be ignored by Pandoc.

The provided ‘custom-reference.docx’ file was modified directly; here are the modifications made:

// Start by unzipping the file so that you can access 'styles.xml'  
$ mkdir ~/styles  
$ cd ~/styles  
$ cp /path/to/custom-reference.docx .  
$ unzip custom-reference.docx  
$ rm custom-reference.docx  
$ ls  
'[Content\_Types].xml' docProps/ \_rels/ word/  
  
$ ls word/  
comments.xml fontTable.xml numbering.xml settings.xml theme/  
document.xml footnotes.xml \_rels/ styles.xml webSettings.xml  
  
// Edit the styles.xml file:  
$ gvim word/styles.xml  
  
// In case you modified the reference docx file with your word processor  
// then you might need to first reformat the styles file so that you are able  
// to edit it:  
$ xmllint --format styles.xml > styles.xml.new  
$ mv styles.xml.new styles.xml  
  
// When you are finished then you zip the file back up again. Be sure to  
// create the zip file outside of the your work directory. In this example  
// we used ~/styles/  
$ pwd  
/home/myname/styles/  
$ zip -r ../custom-reference-new.docx \*

Here are the XML changes made to the supplied ‘custom-reference.docx’ file:

1. Make fenced code blocks use a better font as well as a smaller font size:

<!-- Locate the styleId 'VerbatimChar' -->  
 <!-- We change Consolas font to 'Courier New' and set the size to 18 -->  
 <w:style w:type="character" w:customStyle="1" w:styleId="VerbatimChar">  
 <w:name w:val="Verbatim Char" />  
 <w:basedOn w:val="BodyTextChar" />  
 <w:rPr>  
 <w:rFonts w:ascii="Courier New" w:hAnsi="Courier New" />  
 <w:sz w:val="18" />  
 </w:rPr>  
 </w:style>

1. Set the default paragraph alignment to *justified*:

<!-- Locate the styleId 'BodyText' -->  
 <!-- Set the default alignment to be justified, which is named 'both' -->  
 <w:style w:type="paragraph" w:styleId="BodyText">  
 <w:name w:val="Body Text" />  
 <w:basedOn w:val="Normal" />  
 <w:link w:val="BodyTextChar" />  
 <w:pPr>  
 <w:spacing w:before="180" w:after="180" />  
 <w:jc w:val="both"/>  
 </w:pPr>  
 <w:qFormat />  
 </w:style>

1. Insert a page break before each ‘Heading1’:

<!-- Locate the styleId 'Heading1' and add a pageBreakBefore -->  
 <w:style w:type="paragraph" w:styleId="Heading1">  
 <w:name w:val="Heading 1" />  
 <w:basedOn w:val="Normal" />  
 <w:next w:val="BodyText" />  
 <w:uiPriority w:val="9" />  
 <w:qFormat />  
 <w:pPr>  
 <w:pageBreakBefore/>  
 <w:keepNext />  
 <w:keepLines />  
 <w:spacing w:before="480" w:after="0" />

### Files which control style

#### *style.css*

Only for HTML (and EPUB) output you can provide your own CSS[[1]](#footnote-72) files. You can add as many style sheets as you want simply by adding multiple *-c* options:

*-c thisfile.css -c SOME\_URL -c anotherfile.css*

Remember that later stylesheets can override previous stylesheet items when the same element’s style is defined; therefore order is important.

The included *makefile* uses the following css style file order. I rather like [this latex-like css style](https://github.com/vincentdoerig/latex-css) file. You can obviously update the Makefile and use other style files which you prefer.

$ pandoc ... -c https://latex.now.sh/style.css -c style.css ...

### Files which control syntax highlighting

Pandoc allows you to add syntax highlighting to enhance and differentiate the syntax in computer languages, scripting or other relevant digital output. Highlighted text immediately clarifies the different functionality in the target text.

You can get a list of the languages which Pandoc can present with syntax highlighting:

// There are 134 'languages' which can be highlighted:  
$ pandoc --list-highlight-languages | wc -l  
134  
$ pandoc --list-highlight-languages | tail  
yaml  
yacc  
zsh  
dot  
noweb  
rest  
sci  
sed  
xorg  
xslt

And there are 8 different styles. To see the effect of these styles see [Garrick’s examples](https://www.garrickadenbuie.com/blog/pandoc-syntax-highlighting-examples/).

$ pandoc --list-highlight-styles  
pygments  
tango  
espresso  
zenburn  
kate  
monochrome  
breezedark  
haddock

But you can also add your own syntax highlighting rules and styles, which is what I have done. I introduced a new syntax highlighting mode for command-line sessions for Markdown documents which is named **console**.

Then *pandoc* consumes these 2 files and generates the new highlighting in target documents:

$ pandoc ... --syntax-definition=console.xml --highlight-style=custom-highlight.theme ...

#### *console.xml*

This file describes how some console text strings are recognized, and assigns a pre-defined style to them.

#### *custom-highlight.theme*

Then this theme file provides the pre-defined text styles specified by the *console.xml* file.

### Editor files for *vim*/*gvim*

While it is nice to have customized syntax highlighting in your final document, it is also extremely helpful to have your text editor know about the customized syntax highlighting and present similar highlighting.

I have created a syntax configuration file for [vim and gvim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vim_(text_editor)), my editors of choice. At version 8.2 the editor recognizes over 600 computer languages, scripts and console input/output.

#### Set syntax for ‘console’ I/O: *vim.syntax* and *vim.ftdetect*

Install these files into \*~/.vim/:

$ mkdir -p ~/.vim/ftdetect ~/.vim/syntax  
  
$ cp -p /path/to/vim.ftdetect ~/.vim/ftdetect/console.vim  
$ cp -p /path/to/vim.syntax ~/.vim/syntax/console.vim

This simple syntax definition file works because it piggybacks on the existing *Markdown* syntax highlighting file that vim uses:

//   
$ head /usr/share/vim/vim82/syntax/markdown.vim   
" Vim syntax file  
" Language: Markdown  
" Maintainer: Tim Pope <vimNOSPAM@tpope.org>  
" Filenames: \*.markdown  
" Last Change: 2020 Jan 14  
...

#### Example **~/.vimrc** configuration file: *vimrc.example*

The *vimrc.example* is a minimal startup file that should be renamed or added to your current vim configuration file which is named *~/.vimrc*

For the *console.vim* file to work in a vim editor when editing Markdown files you need to add it to the array of Markdown fenced languages; that is:

$ cat ~/.vimrc  
...  
let g:markdown\_fenced\_languages = ['console', 'sh', 'php', 'mysql', 'css']

# Examples of Pandoc’s Markdown usage

There are many resources about using Pandoc’s Markdown flavour; here are some detailed links to look at:

* [The official Pandoc manual](https://pandoc.org/MANUAL.html#pandocs-markdown)
* [Introduction to Pandoc](https://uoftcoders.github.io/studyGroup/lessons/misc/pandoc-intro/lesson/)
* [A tutorial on Markdown and Pandoc](https://www.flutterbys.com.au/stats/tut/tut17.3.html)
* [A cheat sheet for generic Markdown](https://www.markdownguide.org/cheat-sheet/)
* [A rundown on Markdown elements](https://users.ssc.wisc.edu/~hemken/Stataworkshops/stmd/Markdown/markdownelements1.html)
* [Pandoc Markdown](https://garrettgman.github.io/rmarkdown/authoring_pandoc_markdown.html)

In this chapter I want to show a summary of common Pandoc’s Markdown elements. Not all elements are shown here – I picked the ones that I tend to use. The web links above provide greater detail.

Most elements are easy to remember since Markdown is all about writing simple text.

Except for the example *table* element, all other example elements are embedded in a table with the *element name* in the left column, the *markdown code* in the centre column, and the *generated output* in the right column.

Markdown elements are sometimes explained the way HTML elements are - generally speaking they are divided into two categories: [*block* elements and *inline* elements](https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/gluedown/vignettes/literal-programming.html).

**Block elements** are further divided into *container* blocks and *leaf* blocks. Container block elements may contain other block elements as well as *inline* elements. Leaf elements may only include *inline* elements – the exceptions in this group are code blocks and horizontal rules which cannot contain anything.

Block elements typically span at least an entire line. Block elements are very sensitive to having some white space around them. It is a good idea to put an empty line before and after them.

**Inline elements** are rather solitary, and typically occur in less than a line of text. The main defining feature though is that an inline element cannot contain other elements.

## Leaf Block Elements

### Paragraph structures and Headings

Paragraphs are simply text sequences of lines separated by at least one blank line.

Headings are the elements that provide a *table of contents* and give the document a hierarchical structure. I use the ATX-style headings, which use the pound sign – **#** – and consist of up to 6 levels of heading markers, one for each pound sign. The level with one pound sign is the top level.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Headings** | #### Heading 4th level  ##### Heading 5th level | Heading 4th levelHeading 5th level |

### Fenced code blocks

These code blocks are surrounded by a ‘fence’ in that they are surrounded by a sequence of 3 or more backticks or tildes. All text inside the fence is rendered as-is, without interpretation by the Markdown processor.

Moreover, the code block can be marked by an attribute that labels the kind of code inside the fence. In this guide I use the [*console*](https://deatrich.github.io/console-syntax/) attribute.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Code Blocks** | ```console // This is a comment $ echo I am a user # echo I am root  ``` | // This is a comment $ echo I am a user # echo I am root |

### Horizontal rule

Horizontal rules are also known as *theme breaks*.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Horizontal rule** | --- |  |

## Container Block Elements

### Block quotations

Quoting something is done with with the greater-than character – **>** – in front of each line (or in lazy mode, only the first line).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Block quote** | Here is a quote:  > \*this is a quote\* | Here is a quote:  *this is a quote* |
| **Block quote** | This one is nested:  > this is a quote > > > a deeper quote | This one is nested:  this is a quote  a deeper quote |

### Lists

Here are 3 kinds of lists; only the *definition list* is typically not implemented in many flavours of Markdown:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Bullet List** | \* item x  \* item y  \* item z | * item x * item y * item z |
| **Ordered List** | #. item x  #. item y  #. item z | 1. item x 2. item y 3. item z |
| **Definition List** | Some Term:  : Definition 1 : More information : And more info | Some Term:  Definition 1  More information  And more info |

### Tables

There are a few kinds of tables, but the kind I am using in this document are *grid tables*. Note that tables might confuse your editor if it is trying to do syntax highlighting – that has been my experience with gvim at least.

Generally speaking, tables are a bit fussy to create in many document types. I wrote a [shell script to generate empty grid tables](#i-tabscript) that makes it a bit easier to get started with a table.

Tables in Pandoc Markdown act as container block elements, in that they may contain other elements. The exception I have found is other tables; you cannot yet embed a table inside another table.

Here is a modified table borrowed from the [Pandoc manual](https://pandoc.org/MANUAL.html#pandocs-markdown). It also contains alignment hints. Alignment (left, centre, right) in Markdown is indicated by the *colon* character at the upper edge of the first row in the table. So in the following table the left column is left-aligned, the center column is centred, and the right column is right aligned:

This is a table caption.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Fruit | In Stock | Price |
| *Bananas* | Yes | $1.34 |
| **Oranges** | No | $2.10 |

In Markdown language it looks like the following:

+--------------+------------+-------------+  
| Fruit | In Stock | Price |  
+:=============+:==========:+============:+  
| \*Bananas\* | Yes | $1.34 |  
+--------------+------------+-------------+  
| \*\*Oranges\*\* | No | $2.10 |  
+--------------+------------+-------------+  
  
Table: This is a table caption.

### Footnotes and ‘inline’ notes

To generate a note or footnote, the caret character – **^** – is used:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Inline note** (no reference needed) | Inline Eg^[my \*\*note\*\*] | Inline Eg[[2]](#footnote-101) |
| **Footnote** (a reference is needed) | Footnote Eg[^note] | Footnote Eg[[3]](#footnote-102) |
| (This is the footnote reference) | [^note]: I am here.. | (See me at page bottom) |

## Inline elements

### Formatting elements

These elements alter the appearance of enclosed words or phrases:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Strikeout** | ~~Example~~ | ~~Example~~ |
| **Emphasis** (italics) | \*Example\* | *Example* |
| **Strong Emphasis** (bold) | \*\*Example\*\* | **Example** |
| **Superscript** | this^Example^ | thisExample |
| **Subscript** | this~Example~ | thisExample |
| **Underline** (works in html output) | [Example]{.underline} | Example |
| **Underline** (works in pdf output) | \underline{Example} |  |
| **Small Caps** | [Example]{.smallcaps} | Example |
| **Inline Code** | `# echo Eg`{.console} | # echo Eg |

### Links

There are two kinds of links:

Links to external resources

I like to mark a link with a label and list the marked link at the end of the section or at the end of the document.

Links to internal document information

Typically you want to link to a heading somewhere in the document. You can add a *label* to a heading so that you can link to it elsewhere. Pandoc automatically generates label names for headings in order to link a table of contents at the beginning of the document.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **External Link** with a label | Try out [this link][tiny]   [tiny]: https://t.ly/ | Try out [this link](https://t.ly/) |
| **Internal Link** | Look at [topic X](#top-x)  (later in the document)  #### Topic X {#top-x} | Look at [topic X](#top-x) Topic X |

### Images

The *docx* output format does not handle scaling of images in the output presentation. The first image is 640x480 pixels; the second is 128x96 pixels. Both images are properly presented with *html* and *pdf* output formats.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Markdown | Output |
| **Image** | ![Pi](dood.png){width=100%} | Pi  Pi |
| **Image** *scaled* | ![Pi](dood2.png){width=100%} | Pi  Pi |

1. Cascading Style Sheet [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
2. my **note** [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
3. I am here.. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)