Process Documentation

**Getting Started:**

After perusing the readings posted throughout this module, I felt as if I had a great understanding of DITA’s purpose and utility. When I first met with my client, in fact, he described my excitement as palpable, because I knew just how useful DITA could be for Insight Green, in which task- and topic-based content would offer immense value to both internal operations and customer-facing documents.

In contrast with the client’s immediate understanding and need for XML documents during our previous module, my client had not, in fact, even heard of DITA until we met in person to discuss the project. Together, we excitedly composed task analysis based on Table 1.2 of Bellamy, Carey, & Schlotfeldt’s “DITA Best Practices: A Roadmap for Writing, Editing, and Architecting in DITA” (2000), intending to develop a topic-based architecture that could provide all the necessary information on Insight Green to potential investors or customers, with both of us feeling particularly excited about multiple media outputs and about the possibility of using some of DITA’s more advanced features for localization purposes. Unfortunately, however, many of the topics we discussed including in this future DITA system involved proprietary applications still in production while Insight Green develops its minimum viable product. Thus, despite our excitement, it soon became clear that we would have to narrow our scope considerably. Accordingly, we chose three tasks that we knew would inevitably appear in one of Insight Green’s customer-facing documents, knowing that we could build upon these in the coming months.

Despite my excitement about DITA, however, this module’s readings left me feeling still completely clueless about how to actually code with it. Accordingly, I felt a certain apprehension while installing the trial version of Oxygen XML Editor, recalling how (during my work on the assignment for our previous module) I felt more confident in knowing just how I would start using Aptana Studios 3. Fortunately enough, starting the Oxygen XML Editor yields a page with a “Learn <oXygen/>,” which I credit for the entirety of my deliverables here. In particular, I learned the most from Oxygen’s “Webinar: Getting started with DITA using Oxygen XML Editor,” which I followed the entire time I composed these documents. I must admit that some subjects still escaped me, such as DITA maps, and while I wish I could have incorporated those and other DITA features into my project, sometimes—perhaps more often than not, when first learning a new technology—we must remember that the perfect is the enemy of the good. Despite what escaped my understanding, however, and despite feeling myself “a stranger and afraid / In a world I never made” (to quote Housman’s “The Laws of God, the Laws of Man”), I nonetheless started off with a sprint, and little more than faith that I could stitch together a DITA system that could at least serve my clients’ simple needs.

**Dazed and Confused:**

Although I’m fascinated with DITA and see its obvious utility, I am beginning to wonder if I might have had a better experience with a program other than Oxygen XML Editor. I had no problem at all composing the DITA files for my project, and felt a sense of both ability and accomplishment. Then, however, I notice the same small error appear in two of the three DITA files I had composed: “The content of element type "steps" is incomplete, it must match "((data|sort-as|data-about)\*,(stepsection?,step)+)".” I did my best to correct this error—for example, through viewing the DITA files in the grid view, and adjusting the contents of the “stepsection” field—but had no luck.

In the end, I sent a message to Mai about this and asked her to take a look, because I simply couldn’t resolve the error myself. She found the error a mystery as well, but helped me begin a second draft of the documents. Unfortunately, however, and without explanation, these same errors appeared in the completed second drafts! Beyond that, I had taken numerous screenshots so that users might have visuals for as many tasks as possible, and asked Mai’s advice on how to organize these images within the project. She advised me to add a folder to the project to contain the source files for those images, and yet—though I can right-click on the .xpr file in the Oxygen sidebar and select “add folder”—I encountered yet another error I couldn’t resolve, with Oxygen informing me that it could not access the very folders which I was using Oxygen to create.

With all this in mind, I can say only that my interest in DITA has driven me to pursue alternative programs for writing these documents in the future. I do not know for a fact that the blame lays with Oxygen for my disorganized, but I simply have had no luck either in organizing my visuals or in determining the source of the files’ errors, and for a pair of second drafts rewritten from scratch to result in the same error that others more advanced than myself also find inexplicable suggests to me that a better resource must exist.