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**DITA Assignment Process**

Before this assignment, I briefly heard of DITA through students and the professors in the technical writing program mention it as an important tool for technical communicators. To get a clear sense of what DITA is and how it works I read the first two chapters of *DITA Best Practices: A Roadmap for Writing, Editing, and Architecture in DITA* by Laura Bellamy, Michelle Carey, and Jenifer Schlotfeldt. The book first explains what a topic means in DITA. They define it as “a self-contained unit of information. An effective topic covers only one subject. Each topic is long enough to make sense on its own, but short enough to stick to one point without expanding into other subjects.” They go on to note that “A topic typically answers one of these questions: How do I do it? What is it? What is the process? How do I fix it?” (chapter 1).

With that in mind, my client and I decided that documenting the process of snowmaking in DITA would be very useful for the site. Creating the list of steps for snowmaking involved interpreting what my client described because they did not explain the process in an orderly way. Many times, they would add in new information as they remembered it. Throughout the process of writing in DITA I used Chapter Two- Task Topics from *DITA Best Practices* as a roadmap for my task. I heavily relied on Table 2.1 because it let me know some of the most common DITA elements for writing tasks. This helped me feel much more comfortable while working in Oxygen XML Editor even though the program would predict the tag you wanted to type. When I was writing the title, description, and prerequisites for this task I basically followed the “roadmap” as set up by *DITA Best Practices* that was also set in the Oxygen XML Editor. By the time I was writing the steps for the task I was mostly working in the editor instead of stopping to look at what the book said. Before I settled on *DITA Best Practices* as my main source of information, I tried reading some of the provided slideshows and felt a little overwhelmed by the use of jargon and expectations that I could interpret what they meant from a limited amount of information.

There’s a lot of Oxygen XML Editor I don’t fully understand, but I couldn’t really find any tutorials that were helpful so I dove right into trying different things and seeing what worked. The nice thing was that when I selected a type of DITA document (for example, a task), it opened a document with some “starting” pieces already in place that helped me know which pieces I would need for the rest of the document. When I ran into errors, it was a little hard to understand Oxygen’s description of the error and I found that the best way to solve the problem was to try changing, adding, or removing the piece of XML that was causing the problem.