**Symmetric Distribution**

If you don’t know whether your LDA distribution is symmetric or asymmetric, it’s most likely symmetric. Here, **alpha represents document-topic density -** with a higher alpha, documents are made up of more topics, and with lower alpha, documents contain fewer topics. Beta represents **topic-word density** - with a high beta, topics are made up of most of the words in the corpus, and with a low beta they consist of few words.

**Asymmetric Distribution**

Asymmetric distributions are similar, but slightly different: higher alpha results in a more specific topic distribution per document. Likewise, beta results in a more specific word distribution per topic.

In general, higher alpha values mean documents contain more similar topic contents. The same is true for beta, but with topics and words: generally a high beta will result in topics with more similar word contents. Also, [an asymmetric alpha is helpful, where as an asymmetric beta is largely not](http://dirichlet.net/pdf/wallach09rethinking.pdf).