Style II: Minimalism, Structure

The Fundamentals of Tech Writing │ BUT 2025

The Red Hat Customer Content Services team

Style I

- What is style?
- Goals of tech writing
  - Accessibility
  - Readability
  - Findability
- User focus

→ **Style II** ←

- Minimalism
- Topic-based authoring
- Style guides

What do we know about the tech writing style so far?

Think about Adam!

HELP!

Source:
Image attribution:https://unsplash.com/@dtpennington

Minimalism

"I didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one." - Blaise Pascal

Fewest **necessary** words/elements to convey info.

- User focus: action orientation

- No fluff

- Findability

- Titles, headings

- Error recovery, verification, troubleshooting

Minimalism in practice: examples

- Upon completion of the first step, proceed with completely removing the **cruft** file, which at this point is redundant.

  → 2. Delete the **cruft** file.

- In order to load a snapshot that you or somebody else have previously created, there is the eminently useful **virsh snapshot-revert** command, which you can use in the CLI.

  → To load a snapshot, use the **virsh snapshot-revert** CLI command.

Minimalism in practice: homework examples

- Before using virt-sysprep, make sure it's actually installed on your machine.

- When it comes to the templating itself, first off, if you'd like, you can make a copy of the VM's disk image, so you can later check that the sysprep went through hiccup-freely.

Prerequisites:
- *Virt-sysprep* is installed on your syste.

Procedure:

1. Optional: Copy the VM's disk image

   You can later use this image to verify that the procedure succeeded.

Sample homework solution

11.2.1. Creating a virtual machine template by using virt-sysprep 🔗

To create a cloning template from an existing virtual machine (VM), you can use the `virt-sysprep` utility. This removes certain configurations that might cause the clone to work incorrectly, such as specific network settings or system registration metadata. As a result, `virt-sysprep` makes creating clones of the VM more efficient, and ensures that the clones work more reliably.

Prerequisites

- The `guestfs-tools` package, which contains the `virt-sysprep` utility, is installed on your host:

```
# dnf install guestfs-tools
```

- The source VM intended as a template is shut down.

Procedure

1. Ensure you are logged in as the owner of the VM's disk image:

```
# whoami
root
```

2. Optional: Copy the disk image of the VM.

```
# cp /var/lib/libvirt/images/a-really-important-vm.qcow2 /var/lib/libvir
```

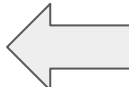This is used later to verify that the VM was successfully turned into a template.

3. Use the following command, and replace /var/lib/libvirt/images/a-really-important-vm.qcow2 with the path to the disk image of the source VM.

[Full document here](#)

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Minimalism ≠ low charcount

"The objective of golf is to play as little golf as possible."

BAD	BETTER	GOOD	NO WAIT GO BACK!	
Below, there is a table that contains a list of cats…	The following table lists cats…	*Table 1: Cats*	Cats	Lacks context
In order to become a better technical writer, you should adhere to the following five simple rules and principles:	To become a better technical writer, adhere to the following five rules:	To become a better technical writer, follow these rules:	Become a better TW by:	Hard to localize
1. Enter the `useradd` command on the command line in order to create a new user, like so: `# plusr`	1. To create a new user, enter the following command: `# plusr`	1. Create a new user: `# plusr`	1. Enter: `# plusr`	Unclear
The `audit` daemon was internally restructured and thereby received a new technique called `incremental_async`.	The `audit` daemon now includes a new technique called `incremental_async`.	The `audit` daemon includes a new `incremental_async` technique.	`incremental_async` added to `audit`	Ambiguous

Simple language

▶ Restricted vocabulary

▶ Restricted grammar

▶ 3 Cs: clear, concise, consistent language

▶ Remove text with low informational value, but:

· Use full sentences.

· Provide necessary context.

Think about Adam!

Tenses

- Simple present (SVO)

  - *Cockpit loads a certificate.* ~~*The certificate will be loaded by Cockpit.*~~

- Imperative

  - *Open the web interface.*

  - *Click* **System**.

  - *Select* **Restart**.

- Infinitive

  - *To verify the previous configuration, open the web interface.*

- Active voice vs. passive voice

  - *Install the* `schmackage` *package.* *vs.* *The* `schmackage` *package is installed.*

  - ~~*The path of the rule is fixed.*~~ *vs. Bash remediation fixes the path of the rule.*

For hosts of non-SCA organizations, there is a new report template called **Host - Installed Products** that displays installed product information along with other metrics unrelated to subscriptions that were previously displayed on the Subscription - Entitlement Report. The subscription entitlement report will no longer list any hosts that are in non-SCA organizations. It will only output information for hosts that are in organizations that use Simple Content Access.

What does SCA mean?

"New"? How new?

"No longer"? When?

"Other metrics"?

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Two template names, only one is bold.
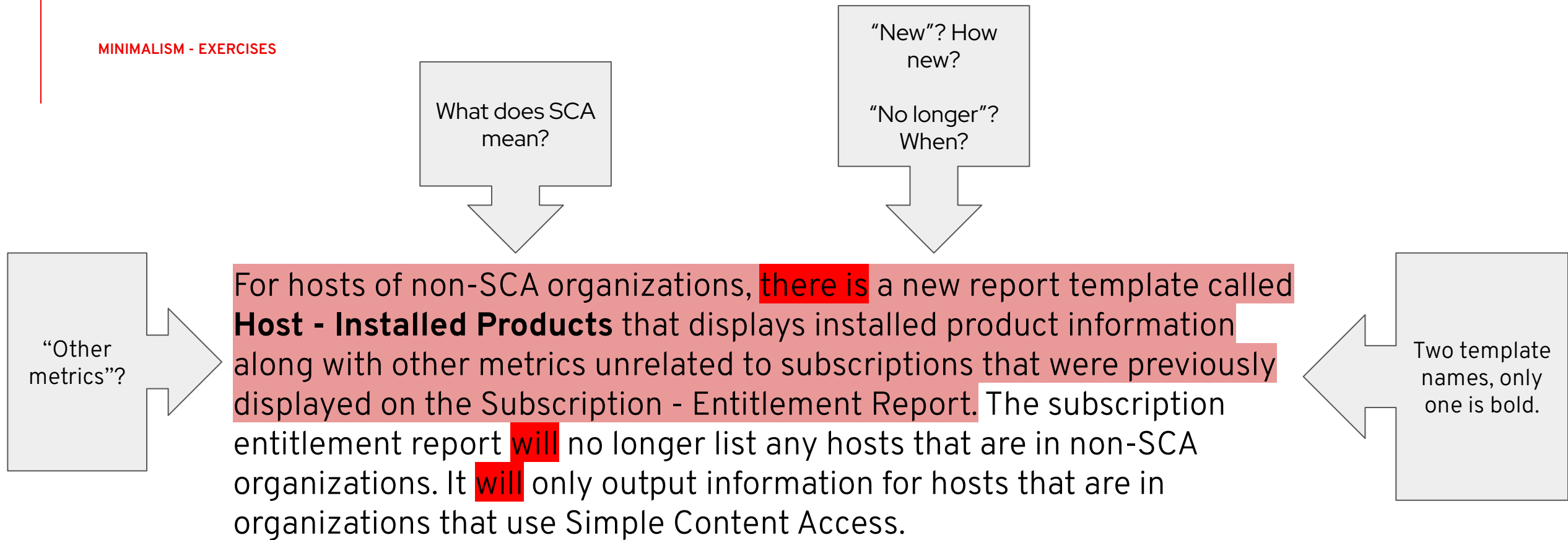
The following templates are available:

Host - Installed Products
Use this report template for hosts that are not part of a Simple Content Access (SCA) organization.
This report displays installed product information and [other metrics unrelated to subscriptions].

Subscription - Entitlement Report
Use this report template for hosts that are part of an SCA organization.
This report displays [other metrics unrelated to subscriptions].

The Satellite web UI features powerful search functionality which is available on most pages of the web UI. It enables you to search all kinds of resources that Satellite Server manages. Searches accept both free text and syntax-based queries, which can be built using extensive input prediction. Search queries can be saved as bookmarks for future reuse.

As you start typing a search query, a list of valid options to complete the current part of the query appears. You can either select an option from the list and keep building the query using the prediction, or continue typing.
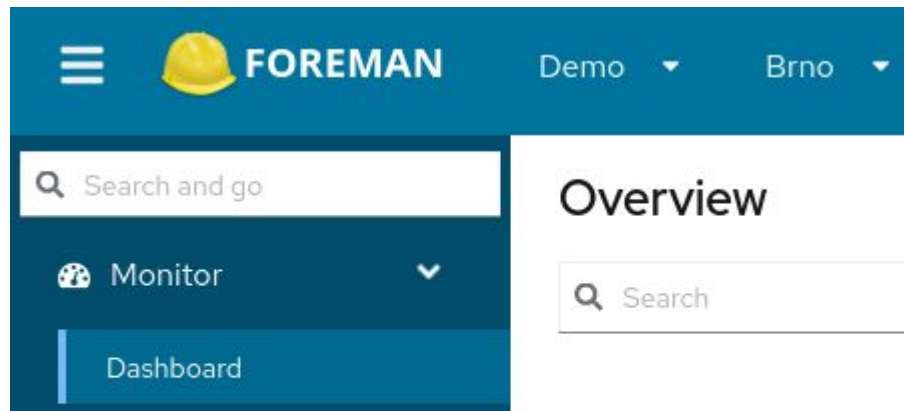
If it's available, I'll see it with my own eyes!

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Yep, that's how search bars work. I know.

As you start typing a search query, a list of valid options to complete the current part of the query appears. You can either select an option from the list and keep building the query using the prediction, or continue typing.
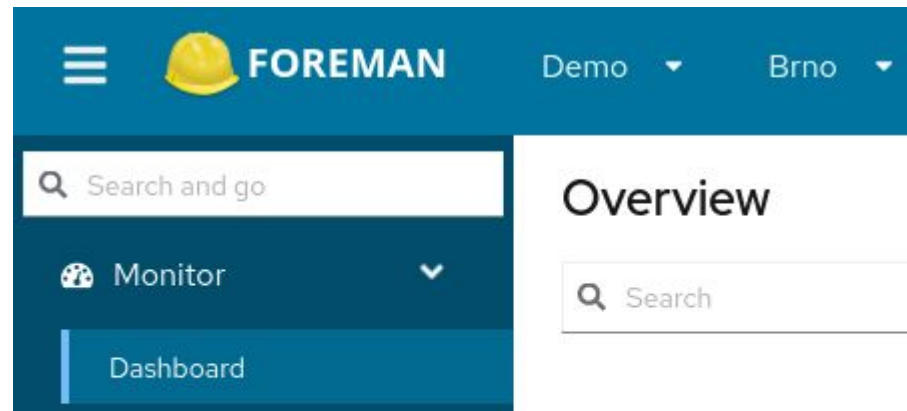
Restoring from backup

1. Copy the backup data to Satellite Server's local file system. Use /var/ or /var/tmp/.
2. Run the restoration script.
   # satellite-maintain restore /var/backup_directory
   Where backup_directory is the time-stamped directory or subdirectory containing the backed-up data.
   The restore process can take a long time to complete, because of the amount of data to copy.

For troubleshooting, you can check /var/log/foreman/production.log and /var/log/messages.

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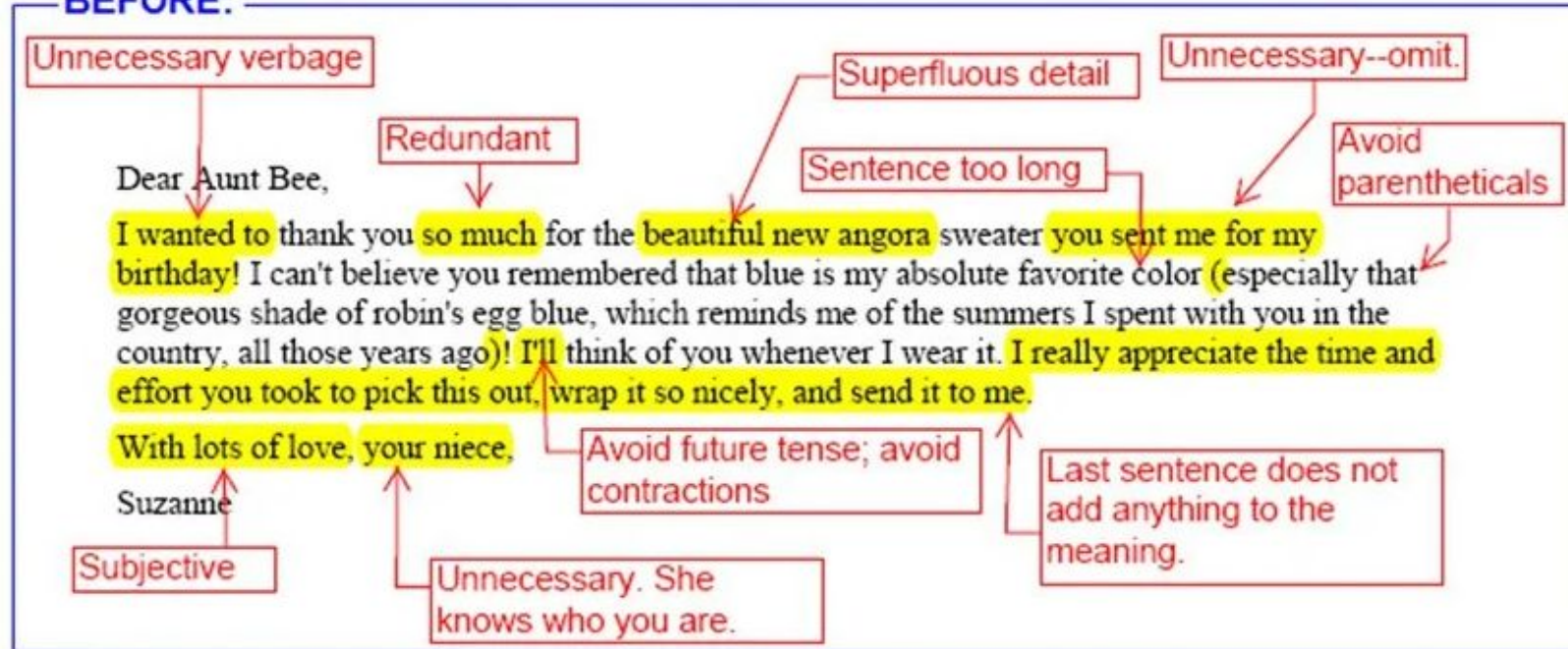
Do we need details about when to choose which to help users decide?

Useful information. Where would be the best place for it?

Do we need details about how to interpret the logs?

How a career in technical communication ruined me as a letter writer

BEFORE:

Unnecessary verbage

Redundant

Superfluous detail

Unnecessary--omit.

Sentence too long

Avoid parentheticals

Dear Aunt Bee,

I wanted to thank you so much for the beautiful new angora sweater you sent me for my birthday! I can't believe you remembered that blue is my absolute favorite color (especially that gorgeous shade of robin's egg blue, which reminds me of the summers I spent with you in the country, all those years ago)! I'll think of you whenever I wear it. I really appreciate the time and effort you took to pick this out, wrap it so nicely, and send it to me.

With lots of love, your niece,

Suzanne

Subjective

Avoid future tense; avoid contractions

Last sentence does not add anything to the meaning.

Unnecessary. She knows who you are.

AFTER:

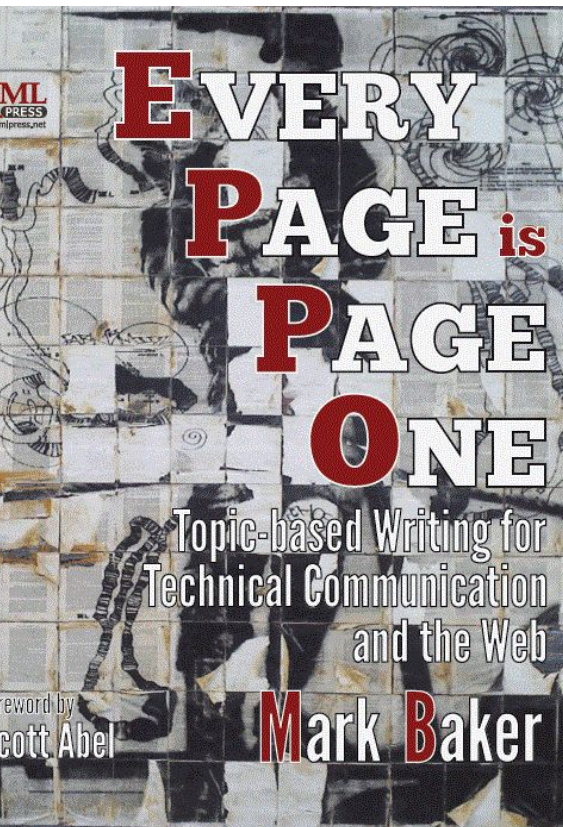Dear Aunt Bee,

Thank you for the sweater. It is:

- Warm
- Soft
- Blue

I think of you when I wear the sweater. I appreciate your kindness.

Sincerely,

Suzanne

Thank you for the sweater.

Topic-based authoring

- Readers always online
- All content accessed through the Web
- Books are hierarchical
- Web-like content is anti-hierarchical
- Each topic must stand on its own

"Even when content is not on line, the reader is. We don't go online anymore, we are online all the time. All content is consumed in the context of the Web where Every Page is Page One."
- Mark Baker

TOPIC-BASED AUTHORING

Shouldn't it be here?

Chapter 6. Recommended steps

Preparing for your RHEL installation consists of the following steps:

Self-ref, low-info

Steps

1. Review and determine the installation method.

How?

2. Check system requirements.

3. Review the installation boot media options.

4. Download the required installation ISO image.

Where?

5. Create a bootable installation medium.

6. Prepare the installation source.

This is only required for the Boot ISO (minimal install) image if you are not using the Content Delivery Network (CDN) to download the required software packages.

What's "this"?

Wonky TOC

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What's the point?

Procedure (task, how–to)

▶ Title

▶ Abstract / Short intro

▶ Prerequisites

▶ Numbered steps

▶ Verification

Source:

https://unsplash.com/@calumlewis

Poorly structured procedure

Poorly readable heading

What is a template Capsule?

Verifying Subnets have a Template Capsule

When am I supposed to do this? Why? How?

Ensure all subnets with discovered hosts have a template Capsule:
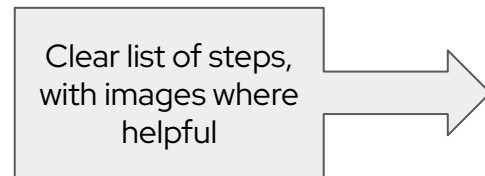
1. In the Satellite web UI, navigate to Infrastructure > Subnets.
2. Select the subnet you want to check.
3. On the Capsules tab, ensure a Template Capsule has been set for this subnet.

Nothing on template Capsules under this link.

For more information about configuring subnets with template Capsules, see <u>Configuring the Discovery Service</u> in the Provisioning guide.

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Clear &
descriptive
title

Well-defined
use case

Explicitly
highlighted
prerequisites

A well-structured procedure

Clear list of steps,
with images where
helpful

Includes
verification
steps
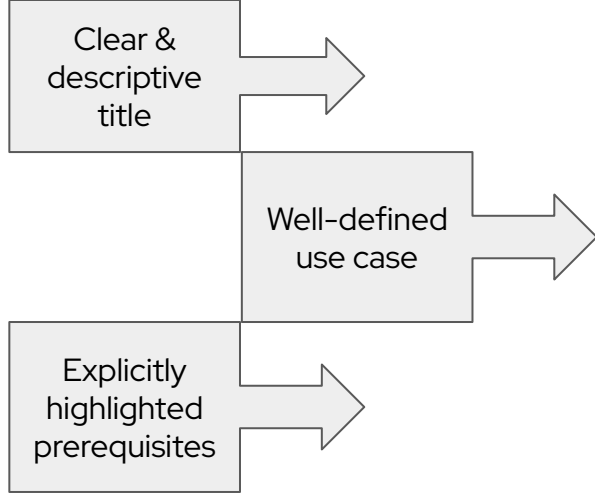
8.3. Renaming virtual machines by using the web console

You might require renaming an existing virtual machine (VM) to avoid naming conflicts or assign a new unique name based on your use case. To rename the VM, you can use the RHEL web console.

Prerequisites

- The web console VM plug-in is installed on your system.
- The VM is shut down.

Procedure

1. In the **Virtual Machines** interface, click the Menu button **[⋮]** of the VM that you want to rename.

   A drop-down menu appears with controls for various VM operations.

2. Click **[Rename]**.

   The **Rename a VM** dialog appears.

   ### Rename VM Grid_v2   ✕

New name	Grid_v2

   Rename   Cancel

3. In the **New name** field, enter a name for the VM.

4. Click **[Rename]**.

Verification

- Check that the new VM name has appeared in the **Virtual Machines** interface.

GROUP EXERCISE

▸ Rewrite in a style more appropriate for documentation. Don't just rewriting the sentences, try to also think about the aim of the text.

The allowerasing flag

The allowerasing flag allows one to erase installed packages to resolve dependencies, hence it remediates dnf commands in situations where dnf'ing would not have been otherwise possible.

Use the respective dnf command including the flag if experiencing difficulties with dependencies. This makes dnf understand it can axe dependencies that get in the way. E.g. please use ***dnf upgrade --allowerasing*** to upgrade your rpms in spite of dependency errors.

This flag could be used as an alternative to the yum swap command where packages to remove are not explicitly defined.

GROUP EXERCISE - possible solution

▶ Focus on the feature -> Focus on the aim of the reader

Troubleshooting DNF commands

- If a DNF command fails with a "*Broken dependencies*" error, use the "*--allowerasing*" option. This makes it possible for the command to remove installed packages, which in some cases fixes the problem.

  For example, to upgrade your system packages:

  # dnf upgrade --allowerasing

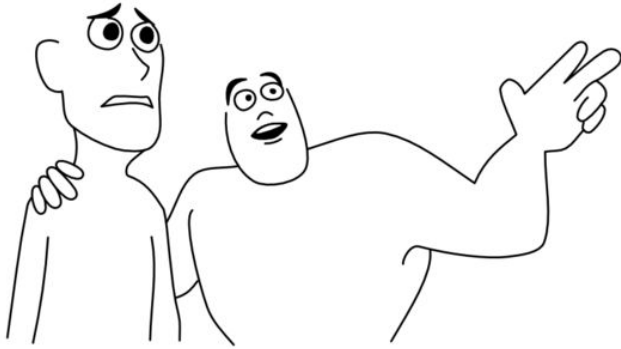- *[...more troubleshooting tips...]*

Style guides

"Follow a style guide, you must."
- Master Yoda, never

"Y u gib me a guiding? Am style."
- all shibas, always

Images:
https://unsplash.com/@kellysikkema
https://unsplash.com/@andredantan19

Rewrite the following sentences as memes

Use https://knowyourmeme.com/ as your style guide.

- Press CTRL+ALT+DEL to open the task manager. (Yoda speak)
- There are bugs occurring. (X, X everywhere)
- It works now. (Doge speak)
- You must be the administrator to do this..(Joseph Ducreux)
- I'm sure I typed the password correctly. (Y U NO)
- Update the system to receive security patches. (1337 sp34k)

Image:

https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/x-x-everywhere
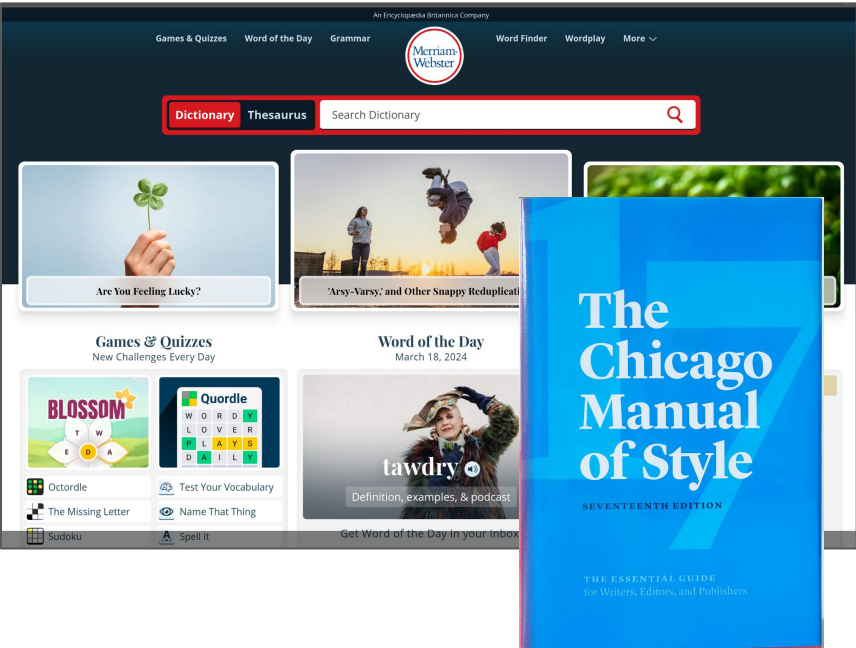
Does this seem familiar?
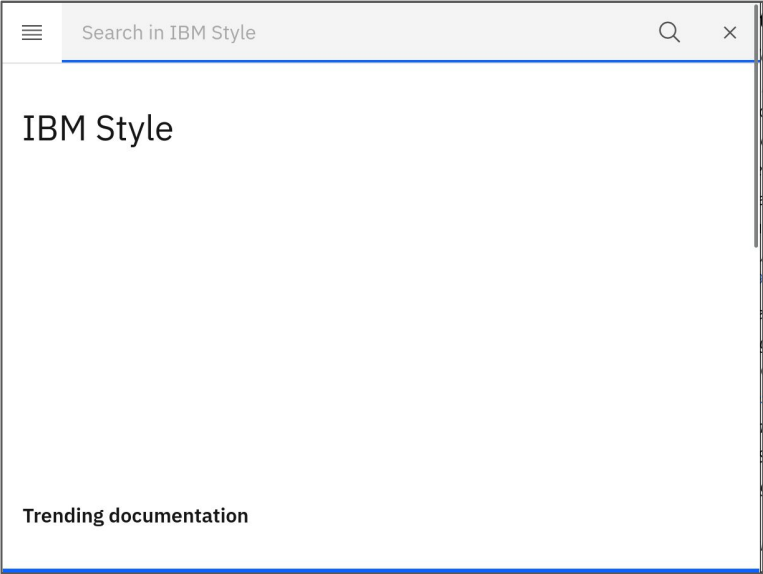
Follow these style rules when doing the assignment:
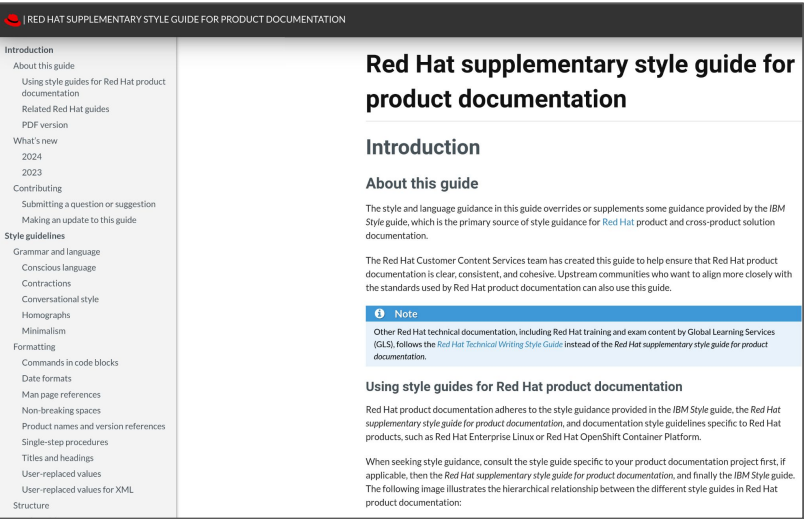- *Use simple language.*
- *Avoid anthropomorphisms.*
- *Avoid the passive voice.*
- *Avoid using 'will'.*
- *Avoid phrasal verbs.*
- *Avoid long sentences.*
- *Avoid using words that are unclear and ambiguous.*
- *Make the names of specific commands, utilities, pathways, and filenames visually distinct by using* `monospaced font`*.*
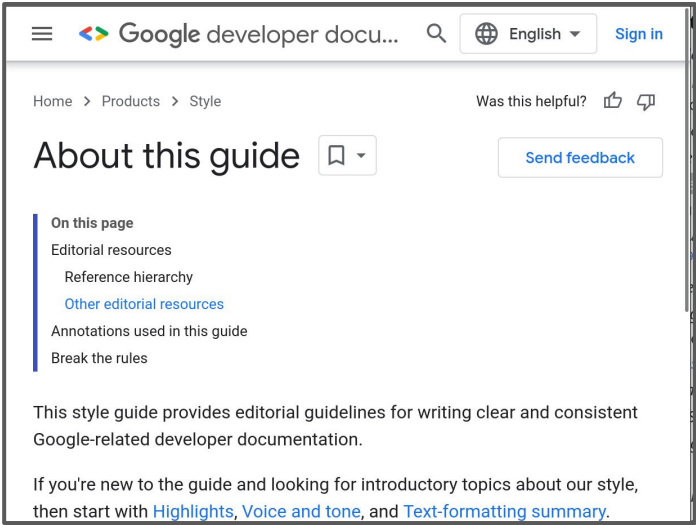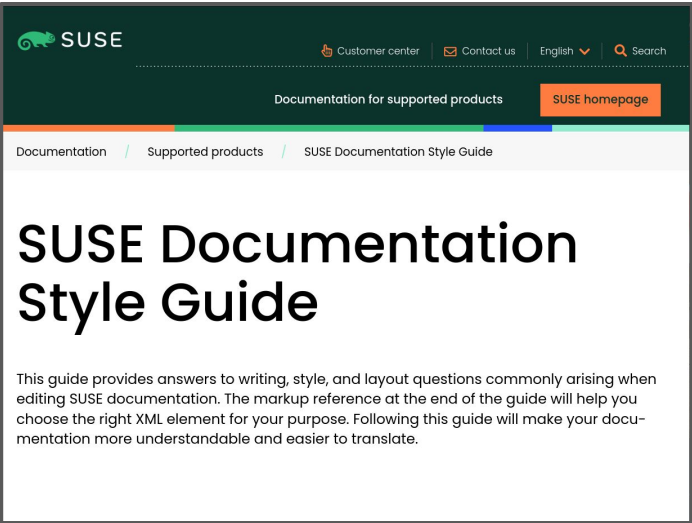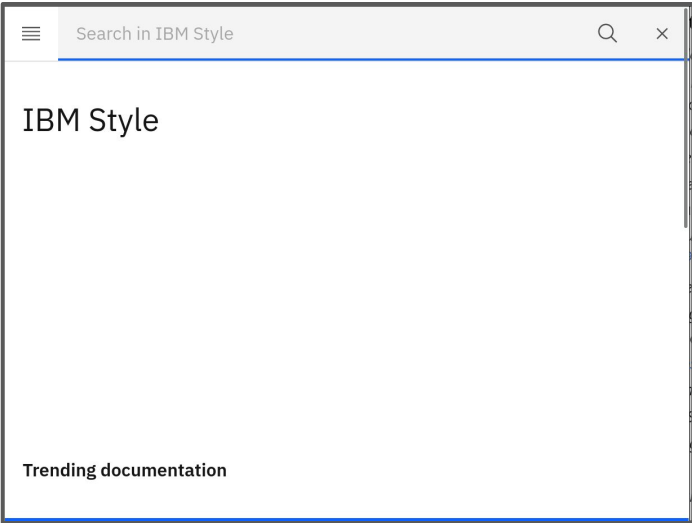
Most specific | Specific | Most general

IBM Style

Search in IBM Style

Trending documentation

SUSE

Customer center   Contact us   English   Search

Documentation for supported products   SUSE homepage

Documentation   /   Supported products   /   SUSE Documentation Style Guide

SUSE Documentation Style Guide

This guide provides answers to writing, style, and layout questions commonly arising when editing SUSE documentation. The markup reference at the end of the guide will help you choose the right XML element for your purpose. Following this guide will make your documentation more understandable and easier to translate.

Apple Style Guide

Apple Style Guide

October 2022

Microsoft   Documentation

Learn / Microsoft Style Guide /

Welcome

Article • 07/11/2023 • 9 contributors   Feedback

Microsoft
Writing Style Guide

Google developer docu...   English   Sign in

Home > Products > Style   Was this helpful?

About this guide   Send feedback

On this page
Editorial resources
  Reference hierarchy
  Other editorial resources
Annotations used in this guide
Break the rules

This style guide provides editorial guidelines for writing clear and consistent Google-related developer documentation.

If you're new to the guide and looking for introductory topics about our style, then start with Highlights, Voice and tone, and Text-formatting summary.
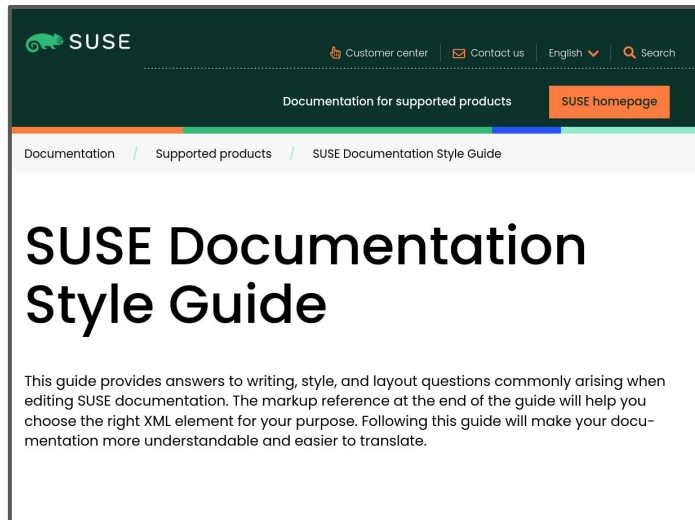
What do style guides govern?

▸ **Tone** – level of formality in various contexts

▸ **Minimalism** – specifics of what is and isn't fluff

▸ **Numbers** – what to write in words, how to write ordinal numbers, etc.

▸ **Capitalization** – when to use uppercase and lowercase

▸ **Abbreviations** – expanding acronyms, using latin abbreviations, etc.

▸ **Punctuation** – using periods in lists, using Oxford comma, etc.

▸ **Highlighting** – what sort of highlighting to use for what elements
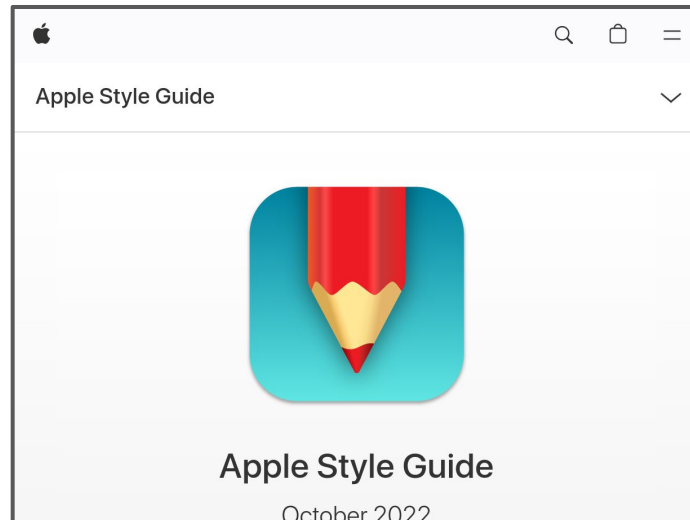
▸ ...and more

EXERCISE 1

Find the guidance for the following features in various style guides:

1. "plug-in" / "plugin" / "plug in"
2. Non-exhaustive lists ("like", "such as", "etc.")
3. Contractions ("don't", "isn't") and possessives ("user's")
4. "above", "below", "upper left"
5. Moving through content on a touchscreen

https://documentation.suse.com/style/

https://support.apple.com/guide/applestyleguide/

https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/style-guide/

What style guides are for

- Unify tone of voice from many writers
  - Different organizations want to convey different tones in their documentation.
    - Formal vs. informal vs. casual
  - Different audiences might be addressed in different tones or terms
    - API documentation vs. an installation guide
- Help resolve difficult questions (such as excessive minimalism over a11y or UX)
- Provide rules and training materials for TWs

What style guides are NOT

- Grammar books or vocabularies
- Markup guides
- Replacements for making stylistic choices
- Docs type templates
- Eternal, immovable entities

Summary

- Best practices for style in tech writing:

  - Use simple, direct, translation-friendly language.

  - Use visual structure and formatting to make the text easy to read. (Topic-based authoring helps)

  - Focus on helping the reader accomplish a specific goal.

  - Say as much as possible in as few words possible (~minimalism).

  - Stick to a single style (guide)

In-class assignment

Team-based workshop on style guides

[Document to copy](#)

Homework!

How to edit other people's content without pissing them off

[Video to watch](#)

Thank you