

Style I: Objectives

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
- Exercises
- Topic-based authoring
- Style guides

Discord

<https://discord.com/invite/36aEfa7ret>

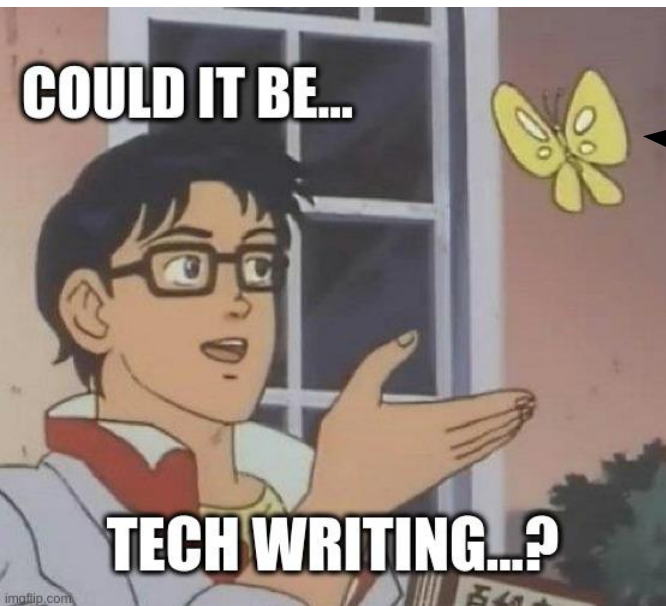




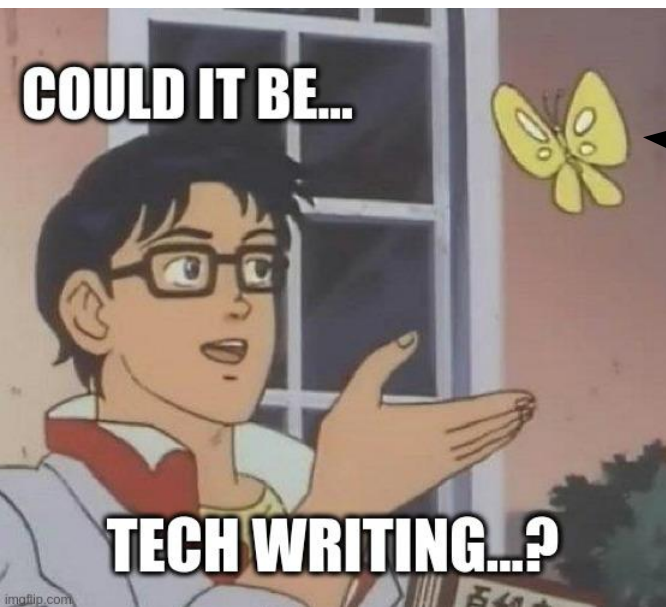
What **is** style in (technical) writing?



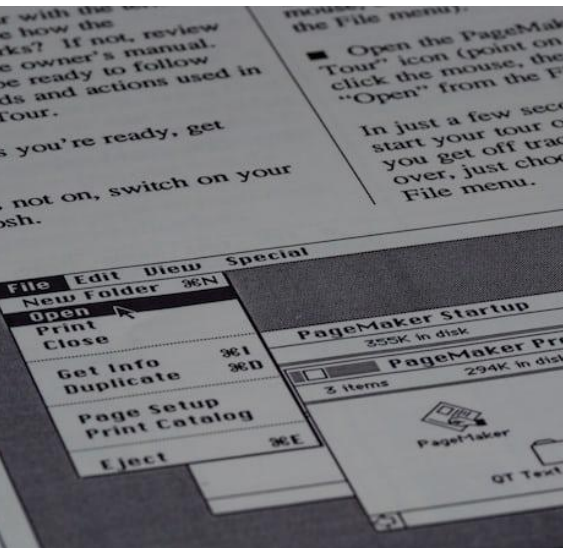
Yo, what's up fam. Today I'm gonna be talkin' 'bout this dope ass operating system known as Fedora. Now, lemme tell ya, if you're still rockin' that old, out-dated, basic ass computer setup, then you're missin' out, fam. But have no fear, cuz Fedora is here to save the day.



Fedora, a Linux-based operating system, is developed and maintained by the community-supported Fedora Project. The Fedora project is governed by the Fedora Project Contributor Agreement (FPCA), which is a legal agreement that contributors must agree to in order to contribute code, documentation, or other materials to the project, or subprojects pursuant thereto. The FPCA is based on the "Developer's Certificate of Origin" (DCO) and it requires contributors to certify that they have the legal right to contribute the materials they are submitting and that those materials are licensed under the open-source license of the Fedora project.



Introducing Fedora - the revolutionary Linux-based operating system that's taking the tech world by storm! With its cutting-edge features and open-source principles, Fedora is the perfect choice for tech-savvy individuals and businesses who want to stay ahead of the curve.



Technical writers do not guess. If you're not sure how to write something, look it up.

Technical writing style

- Purpose: Convey information, task-oriented
- Style: Highly regulated and standardized, brief, unambiguous
- Language: Simple English, no jargon
- Objectives: Accessibility, readability, findability

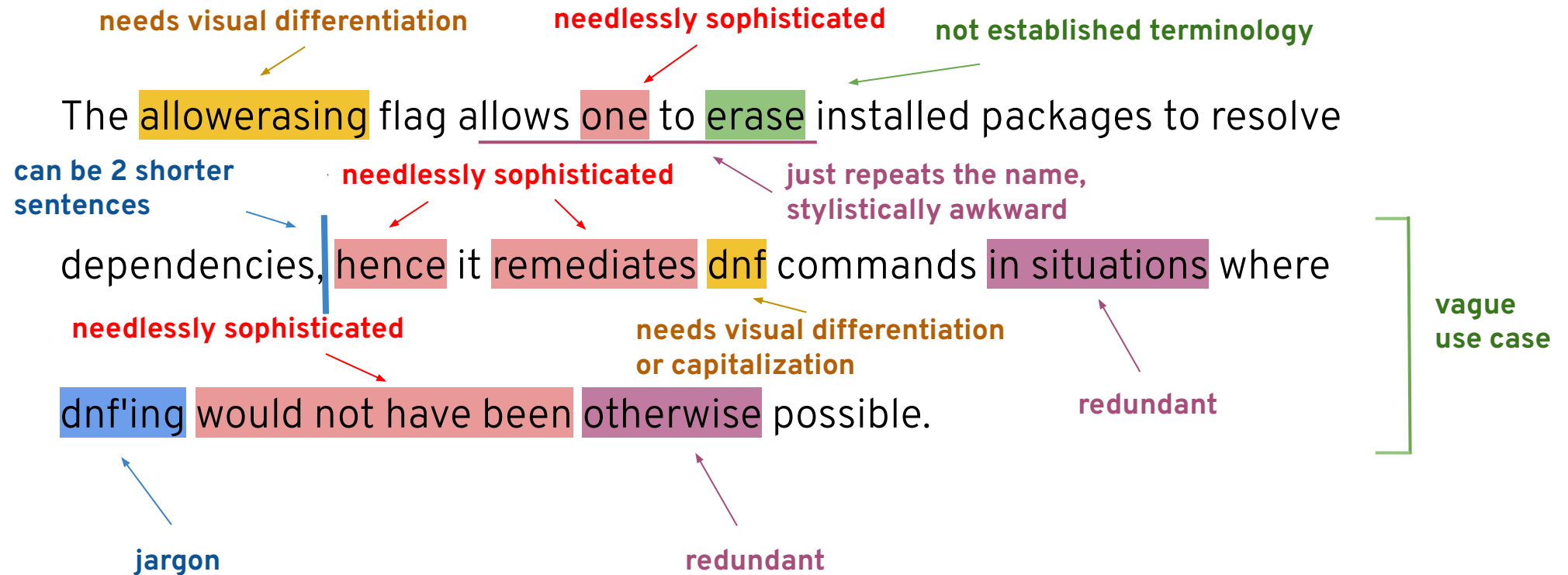
This is who is reading your docs:



Style makes a difference!

The `allowerase` 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.

Style makes a difference!



Style makes a difference!

By using the `--allowerasing` option, you can delete installed packages to resolve dependencies. If you encounter a “*Broken dependencies*” error, using `--allowerasing` might fix it.

Style makes a difference!

short, easily
comprehensible
sentences

By using the `--allowrasing` option, you can delete installed packages to resolve dependencies. If you encounter a “*Broken dependencies*” error, using `--allowrasing` might fix it.

simple, user-focused language

specific
use case

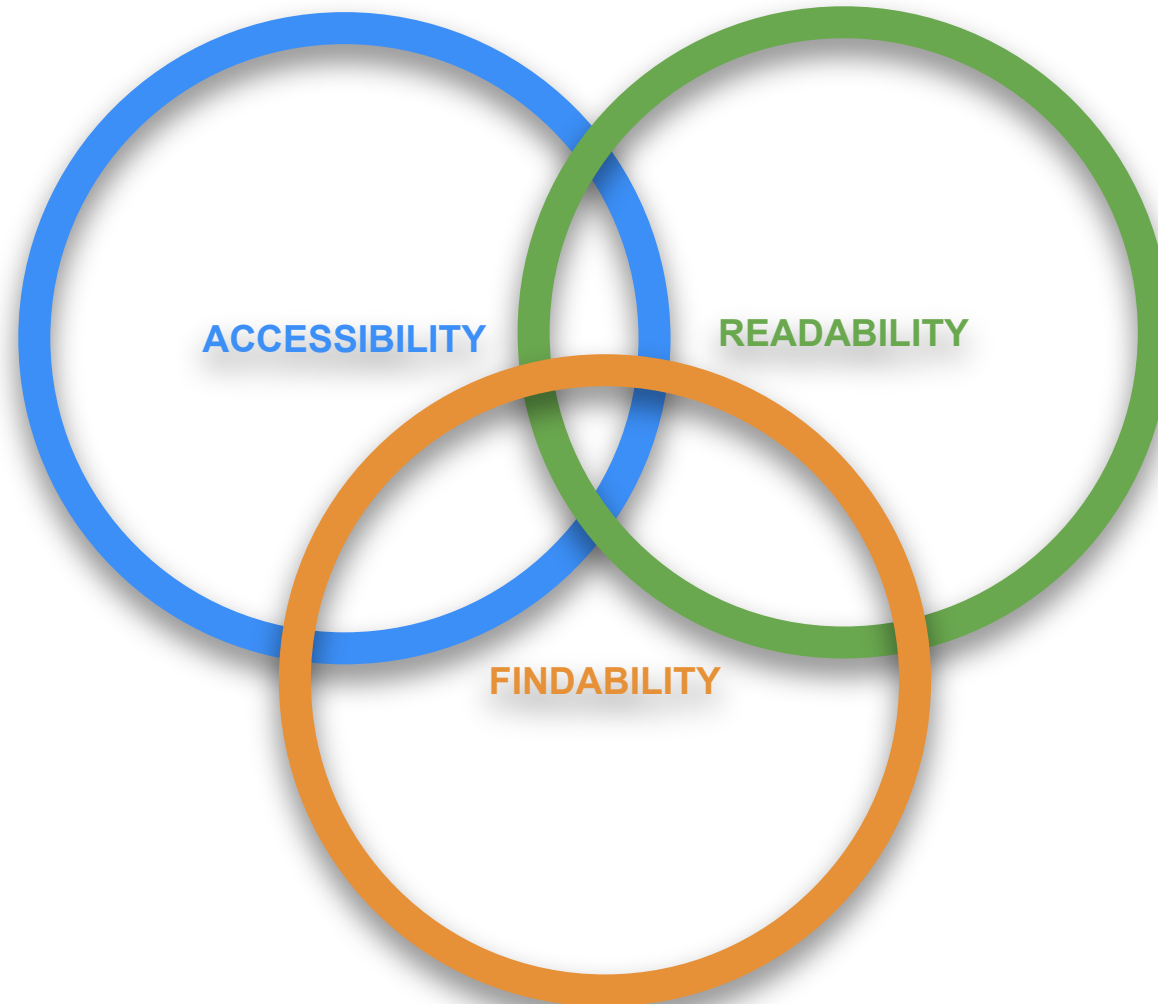
visually distinct literal values

Unleash the power of reliability with Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL)! If RHEL is robust and secure enough for Lufthansa, UPS, or Salesforce, it's going to work for you.

RHEL delivers unparalleled stability and performance for mission-critical applications. Trust in RHEL to seamlessly integrate cutting-edge technologies and stay ahead of the competition with a platform that evolves with your business needs.

While you can stipulate whether you want to resolve any package dependencies on a Content View by Content View basis, you might want to change the default Satellite settings to enable or disable package resolution for all Content Views.

Goals of technical writing



"The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect."

- Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director and inventor of the World Wide Web



Goal 1: Accessibility

- Info should be accessible to anyone regardless of:
 - Levels of English
 - Disabilities (screen readers)
 - Stress
- Easily localized and machine translated
- It's the law (ADA, EAA)

Think about Adam!





Make docs accessible

- 3 Cs: clear, concise, consistent language
- Simple, consistent formatting/layout
- Alternative formats (A/V, [links](#))

“Case studies show that accessible websites have better search results, reduced maintenance costs, and increased audience reach, among other benefits.”
- w3.org

12:34₅

12:34₅



Goal 2: Readability

- Easy to read = easy to follow
- Readable \approx accessible \approx findable
- Minimalism \rightarrow readability

When he was dressed he went down the hall into the kitchen. The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley's birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a racing bike was a mystery to Harry, as Dudley was very fat and hated exercise - unless of course it involved punching somebody. Dudley's favorite punching bag was Harry, [...]

This idea was elaborated by Ptolemy in the second century A.D. into a complete cosmological model. The earth stood at the center, surrounded by eight spheres that carried the moon, the sun, the stars, and the five planets known at the time, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn (Fig 1.1). The planets themselves moved on smaller circles attached to their respective spheres in order to account for their rather complicated observed paths in the sky. [...]

GNNs are a powerful tool for modeling complex data structures. Problems including detecting fake users (Sun et al., [2020](#)), fake news (Michail et al., [2022](#)), and performing recommendations (Ying et al., [2018](#); Tan et al., [2020](#)) on social media to mimicking classic combinatorial optimization (Cappart et al., [2021](#); Veličković et al., [2019](#)) and detecting faults in software (Zhou et al., [2019](#); Allamanis et al., [2018](#); Nguyen et al., [2022b](#)) can be straightforwardly [...]

Grade 5

Grade 14

Post-graduate



Make docs readable

- Focus on reader
- Clear, simple structure
- 3 Cs: clear, concise, consistent language
- Remove unnecessary words
- Short sentences
- Avoid self-referential language



The Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level Formula measures readability as a U.S. grade level:

$$0.39 \times (\text{words/sentences}) + 11.8 \times (\text{syllables/words}) - 15.59$$

Think about Adam!



Grade 15 (difficult)

When a user connects to the FTP service, FTP shows a greeting banner, which by default includes version information that could be used by attackers to identify weaknesses in a system. To prevent the attackers from accessing this information by changing the default banner, please follow the procedure:

Grade 9 (plain English)

When you run the FTP service, the service shows a greeting banner. By default, the banner includes version information. Attackers could use this information to identify weaknesses in your system. You can hide this information by changing the default banner.



Goal 3: Findability

- What is it?
 - Searchability (~external findability)
 - Scannability (~internal findability)
- Why is it important?



External findability (searchability)

-> **Search engine optimization (SEO)**

Google algorithm key factors:

- Relevance and quality (intent vs. keywords)
- EAT factors: Expertise, Authority, Trust
- Structure and organization (headings and subheadings)
- Alt text for images
- UX (loading speed and mobile-friendliness)

Scannability in daily life





Making docs scannable

- Table of contents
- Clear, descriptive titles + abstracts
- Consistent formatting
- Structured text: lists, admonitions

Making docs scannable: Visual structure

Since the beginning of time, since the first little girl ever existed, there have been dolls. But the dolls were always and forever baby dolls. The girls who played with them could only ever play at being mothers. Which can be fun, at least for a while, anyway. Ask your mother.

Since the beginning of time, since the first little girl ever existed, there have been **dolls**.

But the dolls were always and forever **baby dolls**.

The girls who played with them could only ever play at being **mothers**. Which can be fun, at least for a while, anyway.

Ask your mother.

Making docs scannable: Lists

- ▶ Bulleted list vs. Numbered list

Bulleted list:

- ▶ Apples
- ▶ Pears
- ▶ Watermelons
- ▶ Strawberries

Numbered list:

1. Open a book.
2. See page 37.
3. Read the content.
4. Close the book.

- ▶ Parallel structure

The company is looking for a candidate who is:

- ▶ Friendly
- ▶ Organized
- ▶ Punctual



Making docs findable: Titles & headings

- Very important for both scannability and searchability
- Meets and/or sets users expectations
- Good headings should be:
 - Goal-oriented
 - Short and clear
 - Audience focused (as a WHO, I want WHAT, so that WHY)
 - Accurate and correctly represents the content



Text structuring for findability

1.3. SUPPORTED USAGE

Each Red Hat Satellite subscription includes one supported instance of Red Hat Enterprise Linux Server. This instance should be reserved solely for the purpose of running Red Hat Satellite. Using the operating system included with Satellite to run other daemons, applications, or services within your environment is not supported.

SELinux must be either in enforcing or permissive mode, installation with disabled SELinux is not supported. Red Hat Satellite includes supported Puppet packages. The installation program allows users to install and configure Puppet servers as a part of Capsule Servers. Pulp usage is only supported via Satellite web UI, CLI, and API. Similarly, make sure to only interact with Candlepin through the Satellite web UI, CLI, and API as direct interactions with Candlepin is not supported.

Text structuring for findability II

1.3. SUPPORTED USAGE OF RED HAT SATELLITE COMPONENTS

Red Hat Enterprise Linux Server: Each Red Hat Satellite subscription includes one supported instance of Red Hat Enterprise Linux Server. Reserve this instance for the purpose of running Red Hat Satellite only.

Not supported: Using the operating system included with Satellite to run other daemons, applications, or services within your environment.

SELinux: Ensure SELinux is in enforcing or permissive mode.

Not supported: Installation with disabled SELinux.

Pulp: Interact with Pulp only by using the Satellite web UI, CLI, and API.

Not supported: Direct modification or interaction with the Pulp local API or database.

Candlepin: Interact with Candlepin only by using the Satellite web UI, CLI, and API.

Not supported: Direct interaction with Candlepin, its local API, or database.

Text structuring for findability III

1.3. Supported usage of Red Hat Satellite components

	Supported usage	Not supported
Red Hat Enterprise Linux	<p>One instance of Red Hat Enterprise Linux Server is supported within each Red Hat Satellite subscription.</p> <p>NOTE: Reserve this instance for the purpose of running Red Hat Satellite only.</p>	Using the Red Hat Enterprise Linux instance included with Satellite to run other daemons, applications, or services within your environment.
SELinux	Enforcing or permissive mode.	Disabled mode.
Pulp	Interacting by using the Satellite web UI, CLI, and API.	Interacting with the Pulp local API or database directly.
Candlepin	Interacting by using the Satellite web UI, CLI, and API.	Interacting with the Candlepin local API or database directly.

Expand all

Collapse all

Managing systems using the RHEL 9 web console

Making open source more inclusive

Providing feedback on Red Hat documentation

1. Getting started using the RHEL web console

1.1. What is the RHEL web console

1.2. Installing and enabling the web console

1.3. Logging in to the web console

1.4. Connecting to the web console from a remote machine

1.5. Logging in to the web console using a one-time password

1.6. Rebooting the system using the web console

1.7. Shutting down the system using the web console

1.8. Configuring time settings using the web console

1.9. Disabling SMT to prevent CPU security issues using the web console

1.2. Installing and enabling the web console

To access the RHEL 9 web console, first enable the `cockpit.socket` service.

Red Hat Enterprise Linux 9 includes the RHEL 9 web console installed by default in many installation variants. If this is not the case on your system, install the `cockpit` package before enabling the `cockpit.socket` service.

Procedure

1. If the web console is not installed by default on your installation variant, manually install the `cockpit` package:

```
# dnf install cockpit
```



2. Enable and start the `cockpit.socket` service, which runs a web server:

```
# systemctl enable --now cockpit.socket
```



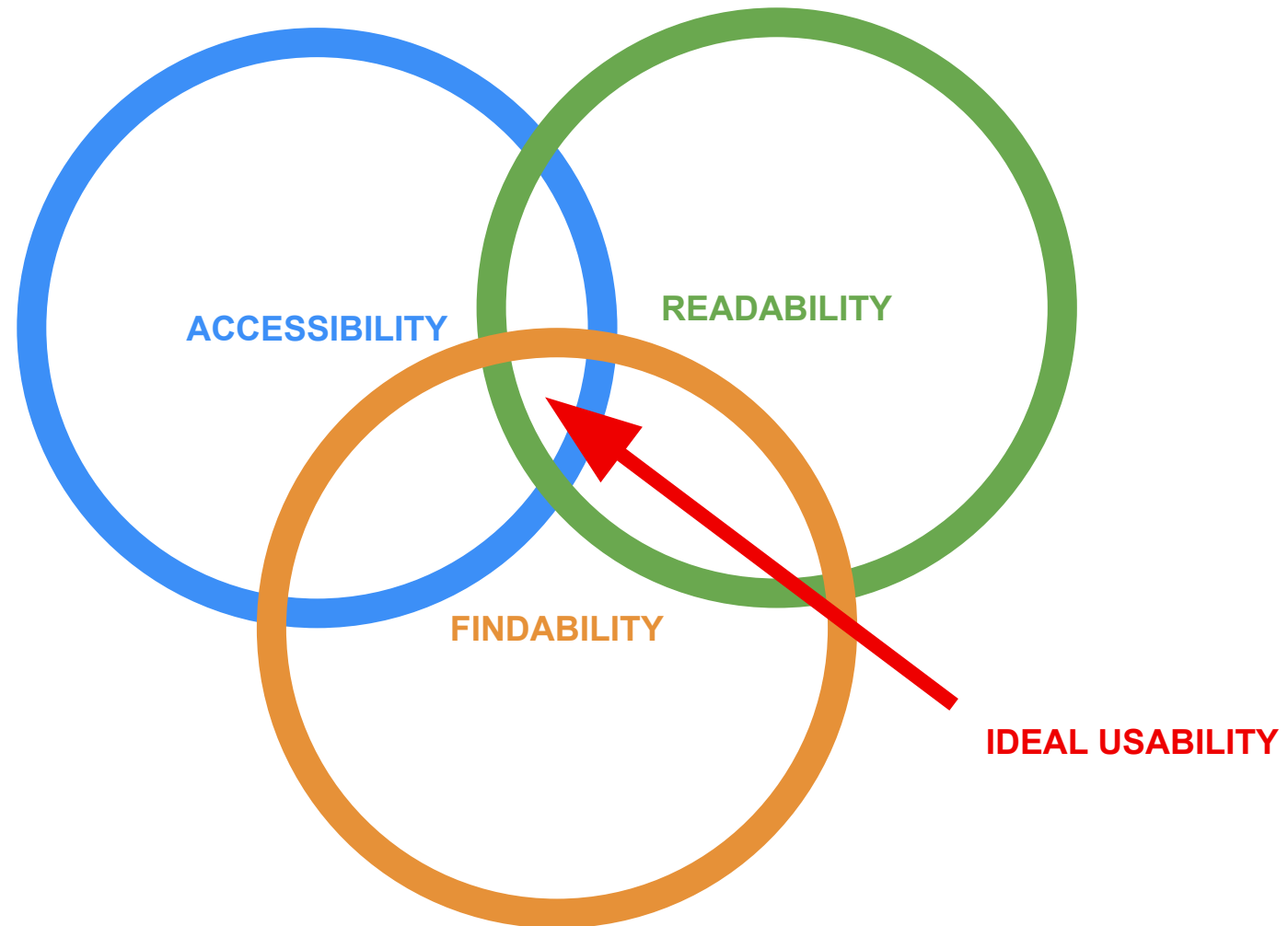
3. If the web console was not installed by default on your installation variant and you are using a custom firewall profile, add the `cockpit` service to `firewalld` to open port 9090 in the firewall:

```
# firewall-cmd --add-service=cockpit --permanent
# firewall-cmd --reload
```



Verification steps

- To verify the previous installation and configuration, [open the web console](#).



EXERCISE: Structure

- ▶ Rewrite the following instructions for RHEL 8 CSB post-installation script for better readability:

Encryption change tool

Please fill out all the fields below.

Your encryption password must contain at least: **14** characters and **3** of the **4** character classes (**uppercase** letter, **lowercase** letter, **number**, **special** character)

(We recommend using your Kerberos password also as encryption password.)

POSSIBLE SOLUTION: Structure

Encryption change tool

Please fill out all the fields below.

Your encryption password must contain at least: **14** characters and **3** of the **4** character classes (**uppercase** letter, **lowercase** letter, **number** , **special** character)

(We recommend using your Kerberos password also as encryption password.)

Setting your hard drive encryption password

Set your encryption password to contain at least **14** characters.

Use **three or all** of the following character classes:

- ▶ **Uppercase** letters
- ▶ **Lowercase** letters
- ▶ **Numbers**
- ▶ **Non-alphanumeric** characters

NOTE:

You can re-use your Kerberos password as your encryption password.

Writing for usability



Understand the
context

**Who is the user?
What do they want?
How do they feel?**



Lead with benefit

**Start instructions with
the purpose or
expected outcome.**



Use positive,
action-oriented
language

**Simple direct sentences
in present tense and
active voice**



3 Cs: clear, concise,
consistent language

**Short sentences and
paragraphs, no
ambiguous or
unnecessary words.**

See [PatternFly guidelines](#) for more detailed examples

Understand the context

Before

The email address that you entered does not match with the required format. Please enter your email address using the standard format.

After

Enter the email address in the format
yourname@example.com.

Lead with benefits

- (...or conditions)

Before
Reboot the system to apply the changes.
Use the “sudo” command if you want to perform this as the root user.
You cannot reconnect without resetting your IP address.

After
To apply the changes, reboot your system.
If you want to perform this as the root user, use the “sudo” command.
Without resetting your IP address, you cannot reconnect.

(But maybe this one
could be even better...)

Positive sentences

- Negative constructions are harder to understand.

Before
You do not need to enter address information when you change the password.
The new password is not sufficiently different from the current password.
Without resetting your IP address, you cannot reconnect.

After
To change the password, enter the user name and the new password.
The new password is too similar to the current password.
To reconnect, reset your IP address.

3 Cs: clear, concise, consistent language

Before

Would you like to save your changes?

You must enter your 6 digit passcode in order to log in.

Make the decision to send a notification to your administrator.

After

Save changes?

To log in, enter your 6-digit passcode.

Notify your administrator.



Think about Adam!

Summary

- Technical docs style \neq general writing style
- Focus on **readability, findability, accessibility**, and ultimately **the user experience**
- Some best practices:
 - Use simple, translation-friendly language.
 - Use visual structure and formatting to make the text easy to read.
 - Focus on helping the reader accomplish a specific goal.
- To be continued in the next class!

IN-CLASS EXERCISE

[\[Click here to create a copy of the assignment doc\]](#)

HOMEWORK!

[\[Click here to create a copy of the assignment doc\]](#)

Thank you