

Topic-Based Authoring: Getting Your Feet Wet

A workshop developed and presented by Linda Urban

About Topic-based Authoring

Topic-based authoring is a technique for writing content as discrete, stand-alone pieces (“topics”) that can be combined and reused in different ways.

The topic-based approach has been getting a lot of attention recently because it is an integral part of DITA (the Darwin Information Typing Architecture) and other XML-based solutions. However, topic-based authoring has actually been around for quite some time, and does not require DITA or XML.

Using a topic-based approach can improve consistency and usability of information, and can make it easier to reuse topics in different contexts. It can also simplify maintenance, speed up the review process, and facilitate shared authoring.

Workshop Description

This hands-on workshop provides an overview of topic-based writing concepts and principles, and then lets you try your hand at using a topic-based approach. We will define key concepts (such as topic, information type, and element), look at examples of different types of topics, and discuss pros and cons of a topic-based writing approach.

You will get a chance to work with actual content, as you

- Identify and define information types
- Chunk linear information into topics
- Assess what kinds of changes are required to make individual topics work effectively for users
- Consider how to connect and cluster topics, to provide a cohesive collection of information for users, even when content is complex

Along the way, we will touch on related questions such as:

- How long should a topic be?
- Can a topic-based approach work for complex, highly-technical information?
- What’s the difference between topic-based writing and structured writing?
- Do you need to use the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) to benefit from topic-based authoring? Do you need a content management system?
- What benefits can you realize by following topic-based writing principles?
- When might you benefit from the assistance of additional tools and technologies?
- Just how hard is the shift to a topic-based approach?

Participants are encouraged to bring a sample of their own content to consider during the workshop (10 to 15 pages or topics, *printed single-sided*).

A laptop computer is NOT required.

Time and Duration Options

Single-day workshop: 6 to 7 hours (Example: 9:30 to 12:30, 1:30 to 5)

This format is suitable as a general introduction to the subject and includes a range of hands-on activities.

Two-day workshop: 9 to 12 hours, over two days (Exact duration to be determined through discussion.) This format allows additional time to explore and expand on concepts, and to consider how they apply to specific content. This is especially suitable for teams working together to collaboratively consider a topic-based approach.

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