Something about technical documentation

Introduction

- technical documentation is very important for team works, for example, software development, scientific researching.

- For team work:

  - communication and coorporation are important

  - the final success not relies on the individual hero, but on the efforts from the whole team.

- Socail programming is more and more popular

  - best example, github.com

- Good style of documentation is one of the most important things in social/team work.

category

- There are four key different functions of technical document: tutorials, how-to guides, explanation and technical reference.

- each of them requires a distinct mode of writing

Category

TUTORIALS

A tutorial:

- is **learning-oriented**
- allows the newcomer to get started
- is a lesson

Analogy: teaching a small child how to cook

HOW-TO GUIDES

A how-to guide:

- is **goal-oriented**
- shows how to solve a specific problem
- is a series of steps

Analogy: a recipe in a cookery book

EXPLANATION

An explanation:

- is **understanding-oriented**
- explains
- provides background and context

Analogy: an article on culinary social history

REFERENCE

A reference guide:

- is **information-oriented**
- describes the machinery
- is accurate and complete

Analogy: a reference encyclopaedia article

How to write good tutorial

- allow the user to learn by doing

- get the user started

  - The point of a tutorial is to get your learner started on their journey, not to get them to a final destination.

- make sure your tutorial works

- repeatable

- focus on concrete steps, not abstract concepts

- provide minimum necessary explanation

requirement of how-to guide

- a list of steps, followed in order

- focus on results

- solve a problem

- don't explain concepts

- allow for some flexibility

Reference guides

Information oriented

- structure the documentation around the code

- be consistent

- do nothing but describe

- be accurate

explanation

understanding oriented

- provide context

- discuss alternatives and opinions

- do not instruct , or provide technical reference

  – Explanation should do things that the other parts of the documentation do not.