# Documenting Library Work: Lessons We Can Learn from Technical Writers

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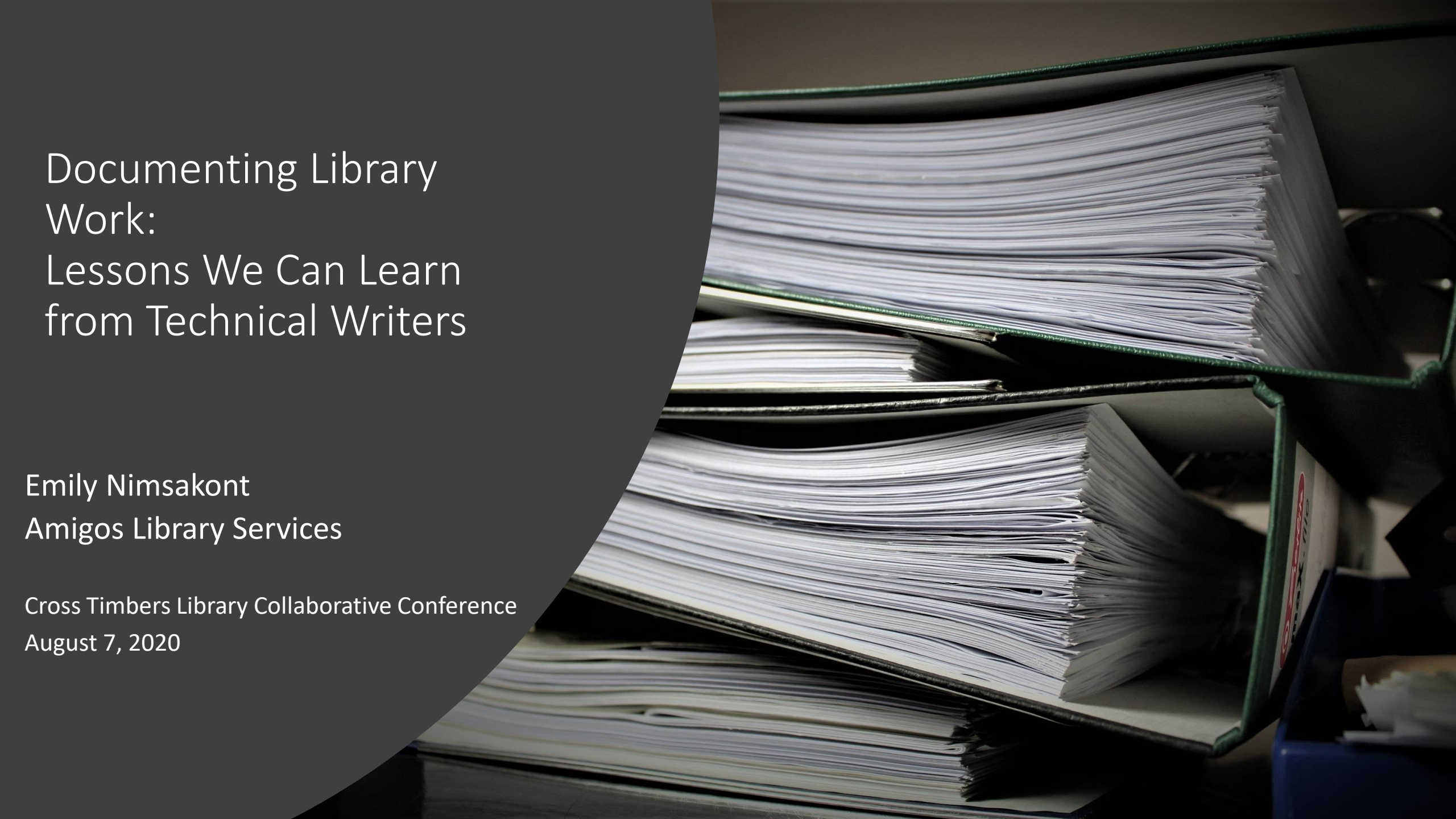
Cross Timbers Library Collaborative Conference
August 7, 2020



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Uniting Libraries for Action and Strength

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# The problem: why do we need documentation?

# Multiple people doing the same work

# Only one person knows how to do something

# Organizational changes

# What is a technical writer?

"A writer who develops (writes, edits, curates, etc.) technical documents."

Morgan, K. (2015). *Technical writing process: the simple, five-step process that can be used to create almost any piece of technical documentation such as a user guide, manual or procedures*. St Leonards, NSW: Better On Paper Publications.

# What is a technical document?

“A document of a technical nature which assists someone to carry out a process or procedure, or use a product. Examples of technical documents include user guides, procedures, manuals and quick reference guides.”

Morgan, K. (2015). *Technical writing process: the simple, five-step process that can be used to create almost any piece of technical documentation such as a user guide, manual or procedures*. St Leonards, NSW: Better On Paper Publications.

# How can technical writing help?

"Technical writing is a definable, repeatable, predictable process. It can be planned, scheduled, and executed in a manner that leads to predictable outcomes, quality, and timing."

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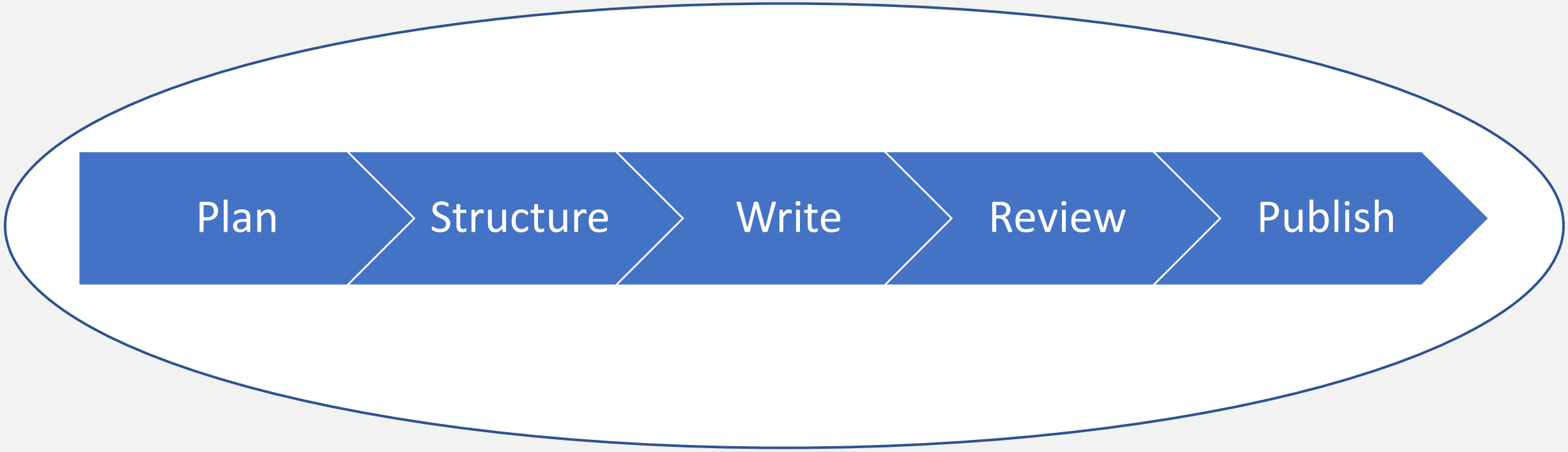
# The technical writing process




Source: Morgan, K. (2015). *Technical writing process: the simple, five-step process that can be used to create almost any piece of technical documentation such as a user guide, manual or procedures*. St Leonards, NSW: Better On Paper Publications.

Plan | Structure | Write | Review | Publish

- Define scope and stakeholders
- Gather information
- Check for templates or style guides
- Schedule project and track progress

Plan | Structure | Write | Review | Publish

## Select techniques and tools

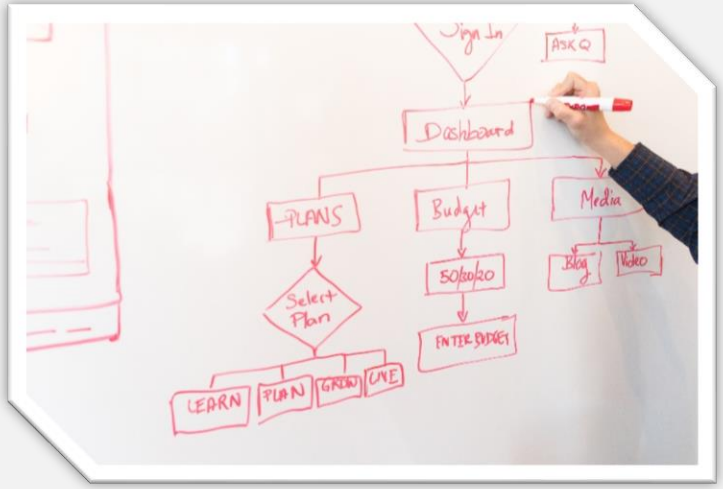
- Word processing software
- Image editing software
- Desktop publishing software

- Help authoring tools
- Content management systems
- Flowchart/process mapping software

Plan | **Structure** | Write | Review | Publish

# Create structure (table of contents)

- Process-based
- Library

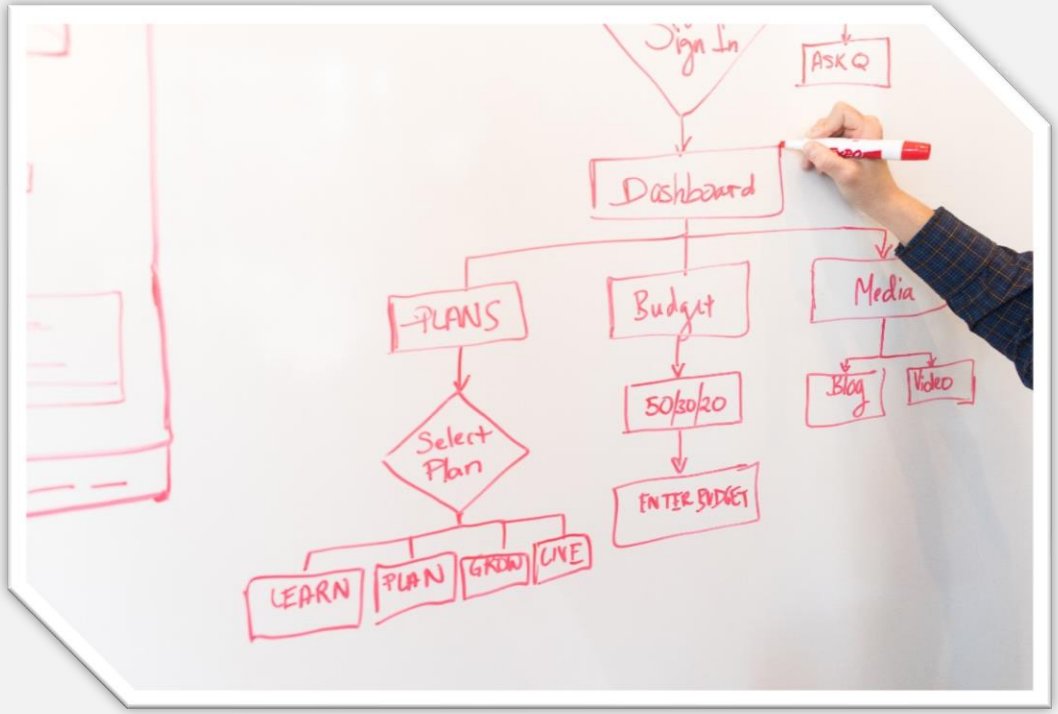


Plan | **Structure** | Write | Review | Publish

Process-based structure

Based on a sequence of activities or tasks

Usually involves verb-noun format



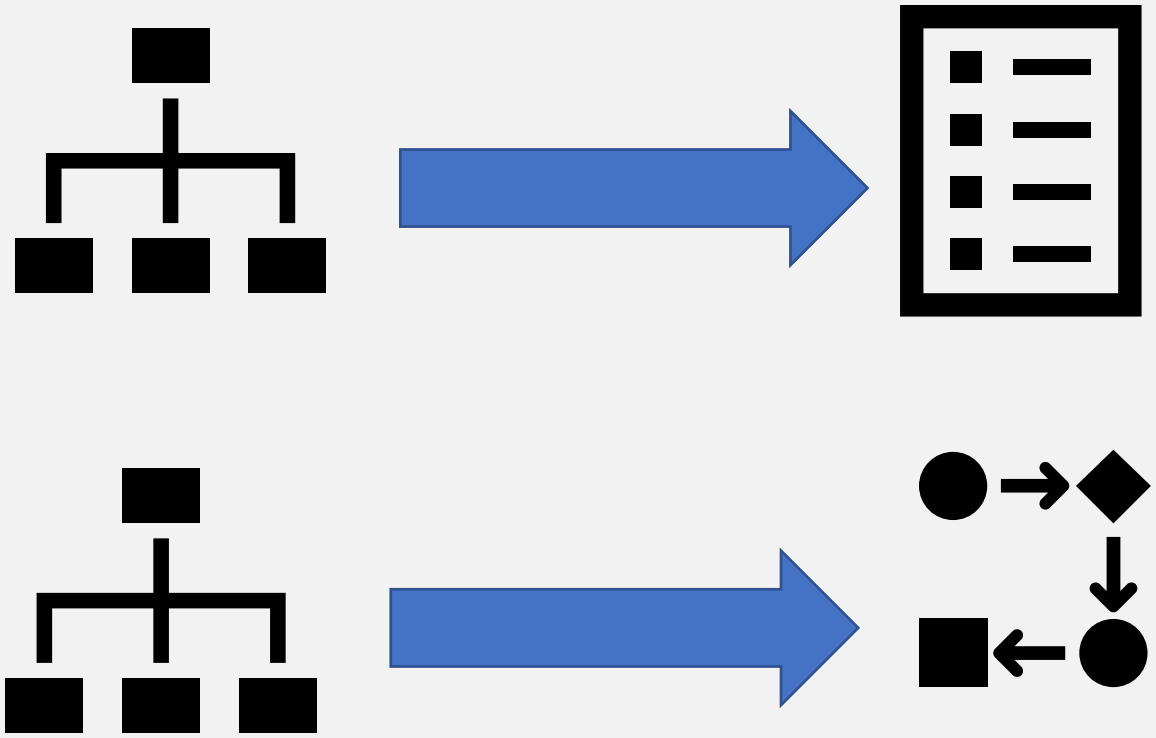
Plan | **Structure** | Write | Review | Publish

Create a process model

Map the model to a table of contents

OR

Formalize it into a flowchart



Plan | Structure | Write | Review | Publish

Library structure

Content is a set of individual units (articles, documents, etc.) that can stand on their own

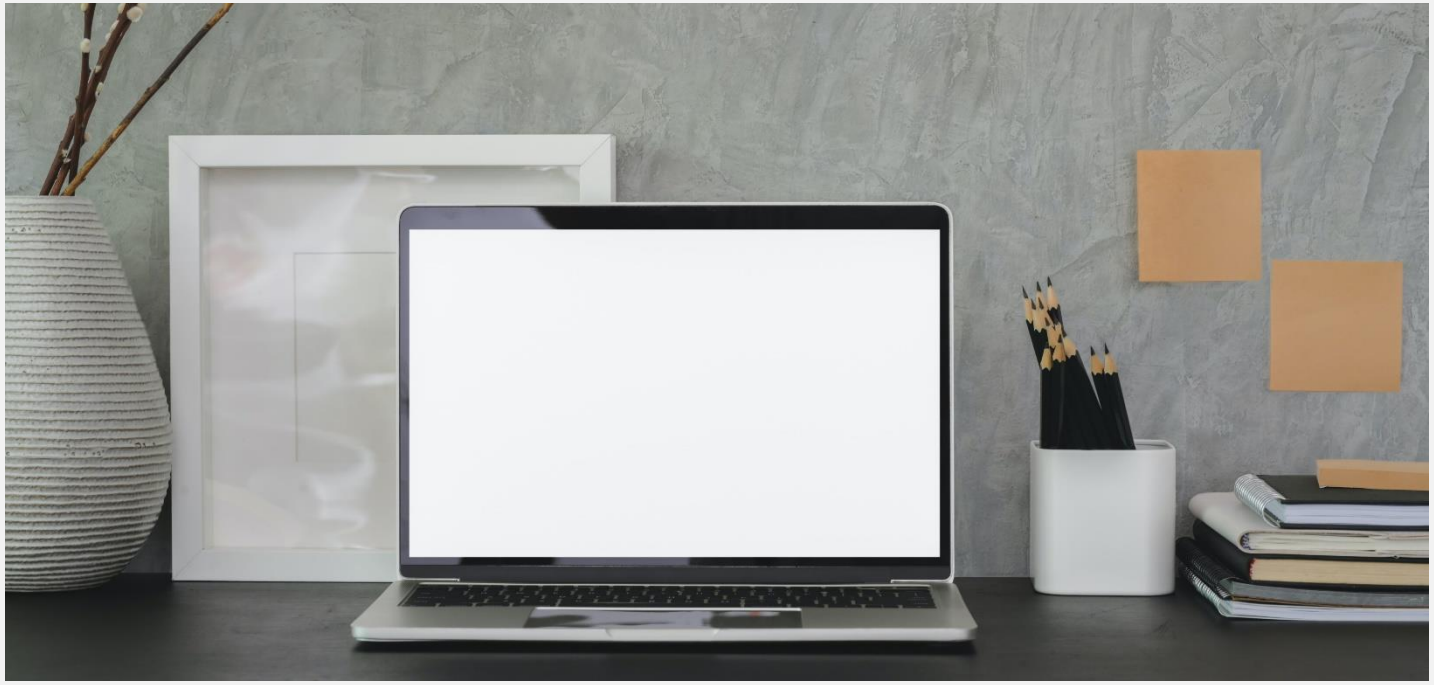
Tips for organizing a library structure

- Names/Titles
- Tagging
- Breadcrumbs

Plan | Structure | **Write** | Review | Publish

## Write first draft

"It is always possible to edit a bad page, but not a blank page"

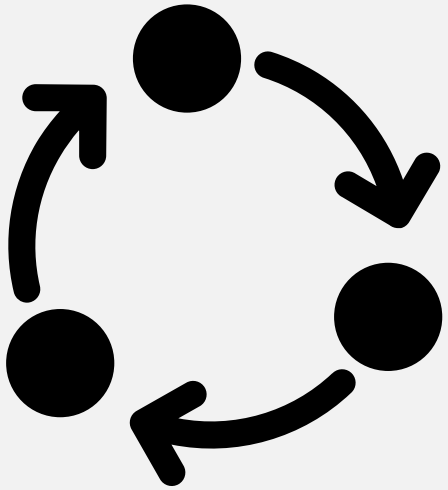


Singh, A. (2016, October 13). 5 Exercises That Improved My Technical Writing. Retrieved from https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/283694

Plan | Structure | **Write** | Review | Publish

Review draft with subject matter experts/stakeholders

- Beware “unconscious competents”
- This is an iterative process



# Use review matrix to define review team and their roles

| Name and Title | Review Responsibility |
|---|---|
| Nancy Drew, Library Director | Adherence to style guide |
| George Fayne, Head of Technical Services | Language, spelling, and grammar |
| Bess Marvin, Head of Circulation | Process accuracy |

# Use a review log to collate and track feedback

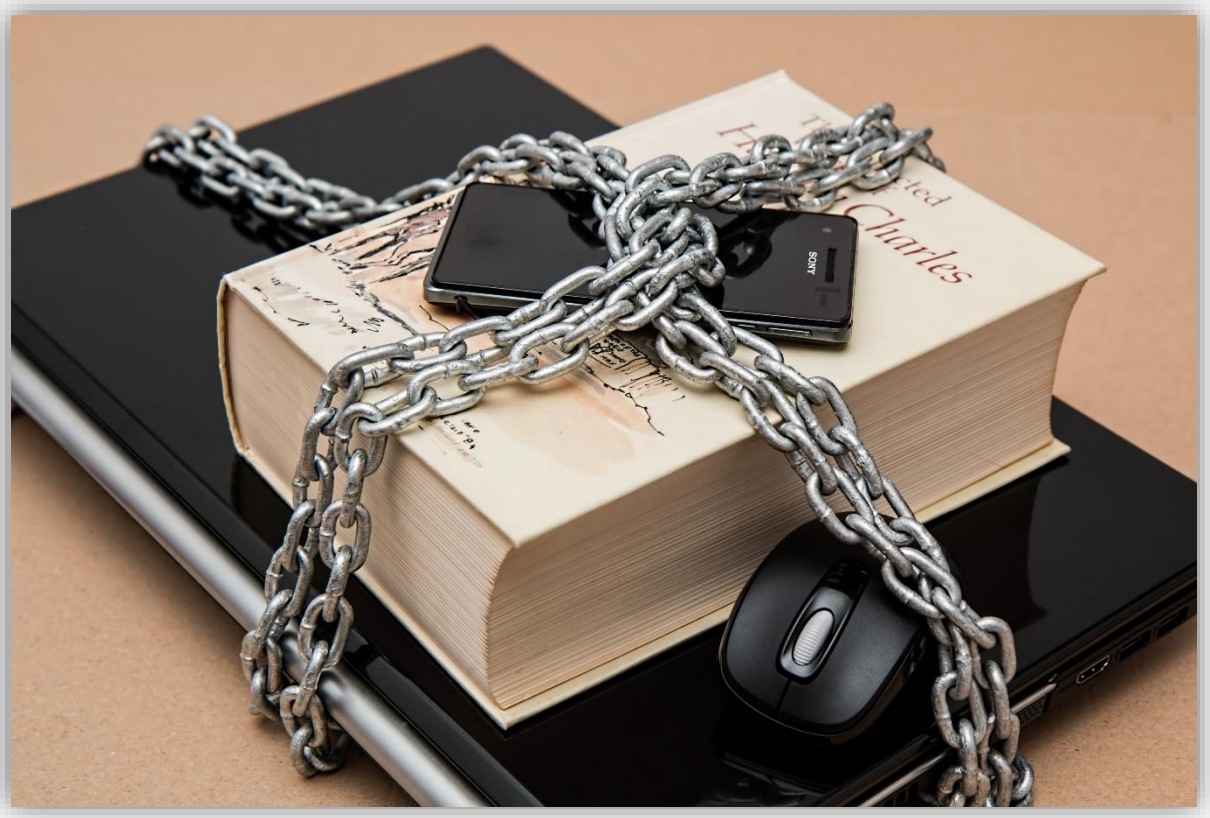
| Item | Page | Who | Date | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Incorrect version of logo is used | 3 | Nancy Drew | 3/20/2020 | Closed |
| Wrong URL for report page | 5 | Bess Marvin | 3/25/2020 | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Plan | Structure | Write | **Review** | Publish

Obtain approval to publish

Plan | Structure | Write | Review | **Publish**

# Establish document control



Plan | Structure | Write | Review | **Publish**

## Publish final draft

## Communicate with stakeholders

# How do we fit this in?

# Why ~~How~~ do we fit this in?

Do the heavy lifting once
to make it easier later on

# Create consensus

# How do we fit this in?

This process
can be flexible.

Questions?

# Thank you!

Emily Nimsakont

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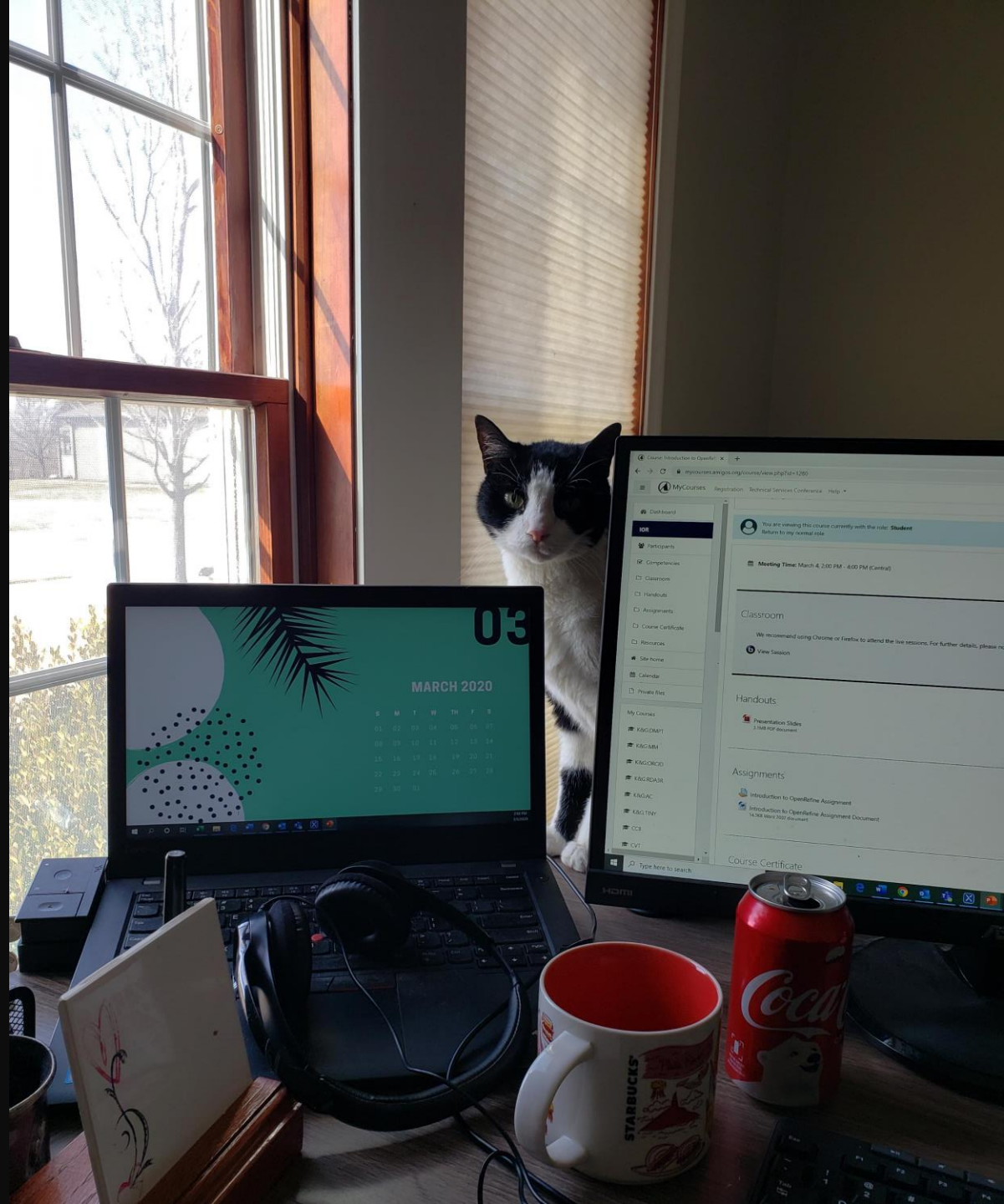
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