



# Writing. In Small. Chunks.

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# Writing. In Small. Chunks.

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Chunk 1: Before we start.

Chunk 2: Concepts.

Chunk 3: Writers' block.

Chunk 4: Commercial.

○(Acknowledgements throughout to Michael Priestley and others at IBM who devised DITA, and continue to be involved in developing and refining it)



# Chunk 1

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Before we start

- what's a markup language?
- what do technical writers want?



# Markup languages

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- Use tags to describe text  
(`<h1></h1>`)
- Use rules to control the use of tags  
(DTD)
- Stylesheets map tags to display  
properties (CSS)
- Methods of mapping tags or  
structures to other tags and  
structures (XSLT)



## “Single-sourcing” and “Re-use”

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- “Holy Grail” for technical writers:
  - Write once
  - Publish multiple times
- Single-sourcing = same information in multiple presentation formats – some conditionality
- Re-use = same information in different publications – complex conditionality



## Problems with single-sourcing

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- “Dumping” books online doesn’t work
- Customisations are difficult to undo
- Need to repeat all conversion processes every time there’s an update



## Chunk 2

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### Concepts

- XML for technical authors
- DITA



# Potential of XML

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- Standard for defining markup languages
- Theoretically useful
  - Separate form from content
  - Describe content with tags
  - Conform to a standard



## Problems with XML

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- DTDs tend to be book-based
- DTDs take time and effort to create
- Technical publications have a very short life span



## Where did DITA come from?

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- Developed at IBM “to make life easier for technical writers, and to enable content re-use”
- Previous widespread use of markup with SGML and XML
- To be useful, markup was specific, hence more difficult to share, and more expensive



# What is DITA?

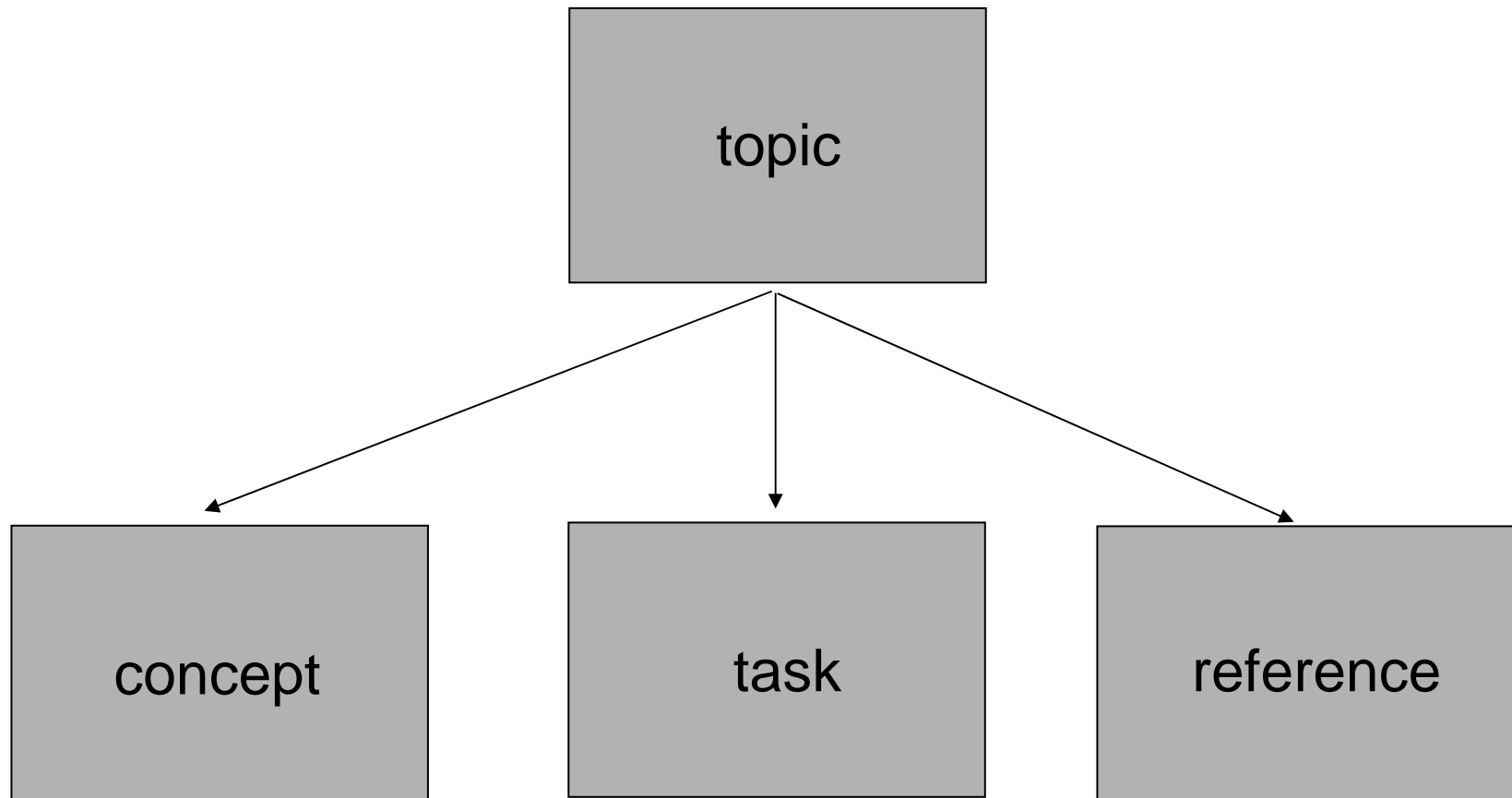
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- Darwin Information Typing Architecture
- Darwin
  - Uses principles of inheritance for specialisation
- Information Typing
  - Uses three basic kinds of topic: Concept, Task, and Reference
- Architecture
  - A model for extending design and processes



# Core DITA topic types

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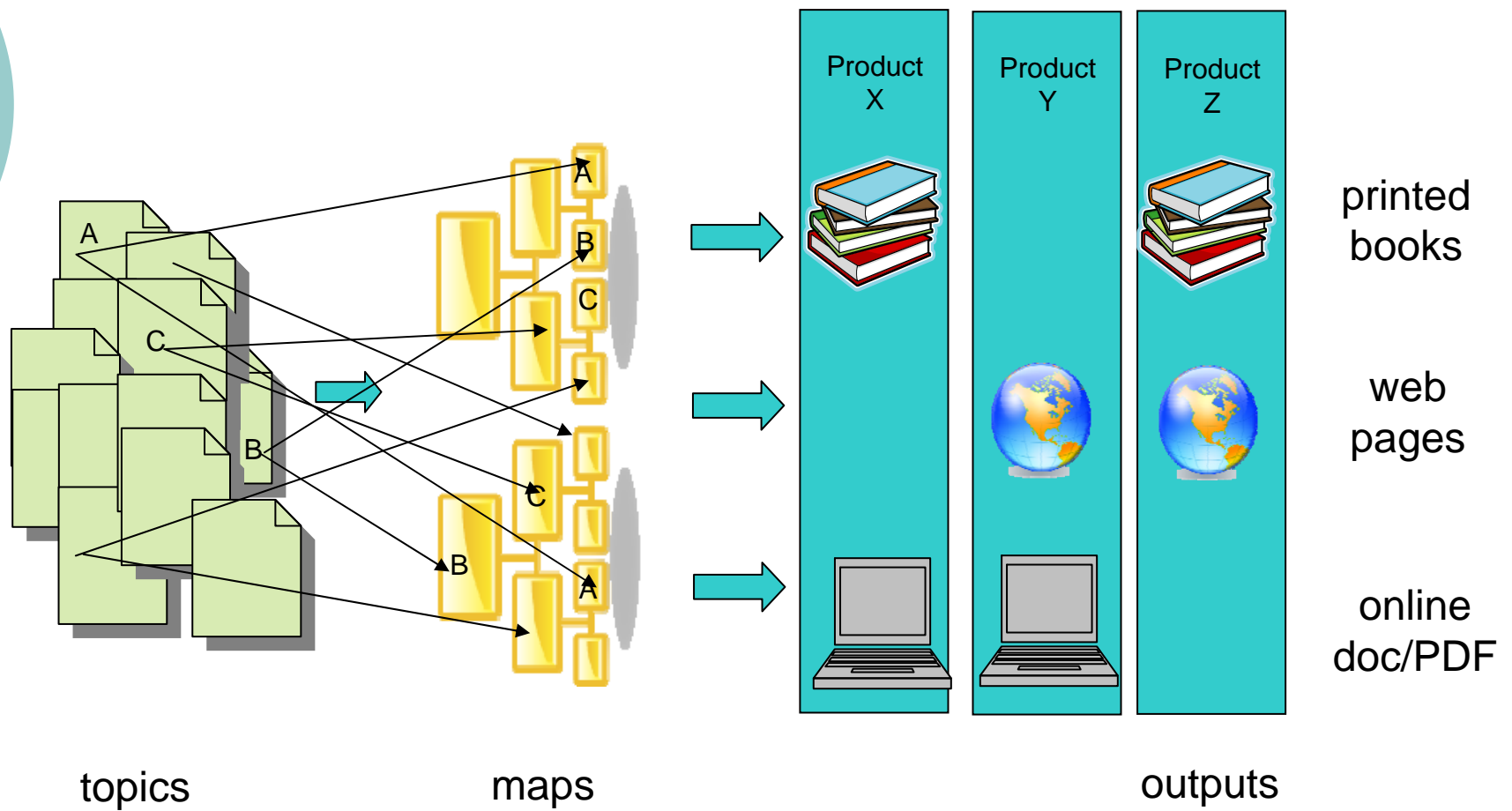


# DITA specialisation

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- Specialisation from core Topic
- Each specialisation is a design delta
  - Task is a specialisation of Topic
  - Business Task is a specialisation of Task
  - Sales Business Task is a specialisation of Business Task
- Processing can also be specialised

# Re-use of DITA topics with DITA maps





# Where is DITA now

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- Open-source OASIS standard
  - Technical Committee and subcommittees
- DITA Open Toolkit
- DITA Maturity Model
  - six levels of adoption and integration building a semantic ecosystem
- Online user communities
- Conferences
- Commercial tools



## Chunk 3

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### Writers' Block

- what tools or techniques could help technical writers?



## Goals for technical writers

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- Re-use content for efficiency, accuracy, consistency, and cost savings
- Focus on getting the content correct, rather than on “font fondling” and “format fixing”



# Topic-based approaches

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- Help systems and help tools
- Information Mapping
- 'Database' publishing
  - example: Author-it™



# Paradigm Shift for Authors (1)

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- Pre-1970s: writing, editing, typography, typesetting each required different professionals
- Pre-1980s: automation of production processes
- WIMP PC era/DTP era – WYSIWYG
- XML authoring – a return to separate professions?
  
- (Acknowledgements to Sarah O’Keefe, Scriptorium Publishing)



## Paradigm Shift for Authors (2)

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- Not WYSIWYG but WYSIOO
  - (What you see is one option)
- Loss of control
  - Presentation format
  - Content organisation



## “Old school”

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- WYSIWYG
- Templates optional
- (Styles optional)
- Layouts tweakable
- Writing Chapters
- Some conditional markup possible
- Familiar environment
- Mature products



## “New World Order”

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- WYSIOW
- Templates mandatory
- No tweaking allowed
- Writing chunks
- Complex metadata
- New challenges
- Tools are all quite new



# XML is “good” for managers

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- Control over
  - Content
  - Costs
- Reuse leads to efficiency leads to savings



# Sidebar on Content Management

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- In many organisations, content management projects have by-passed the content creation specialists
- DITA can enable component content management
- Content Management and DITA are completely independent but when they come together the returns can be huge
- In the Tech Comms world leading content management practitioners are spearheading the DITA adoption movement



## XML is “bad” for writers

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- Less control of content organization
- No control of formatting
- Poor tools
- Other people get the benefits



## But XML might be “good” for writers because...

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- No more formatting headaches
- Consistent content
- Complex re-use
- Learn new tools and technologies
- Moving into new roles



# Reports from the field (1)

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- DITA makes some things easier but isn't a "magic wand"
- Take great care in choosing a tool that meets your business needs – tech writers may need help to do this
- Develop a solid business case – with measurable goals – before you start
- (Acknowledgements to Scott Abel, The Content Wrangler)



## Reports from the field (2)

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- Can all your writers actually write reusable content?
- Converting legacy documents is a serious issue
- DITA specialisation is tempting but might not be necessary
- Allow plenty of time for planning, training, and getting up to speed



## Tools today

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- Tools are improving all the time
- Several tools successfully hide the DITA infrastructure from your technical writers (so you need some techie staff to help them)
- Tools are available for Linux and Windows
- User communities are active and growing



# Conclusions

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- Moving to DITA requires planning and investment both on the macro level and the micro level
- Many authors remain sceptical because the change in their working habits is so profound
- XML/DITA benefits are long term but can be considerable



# Chunk 4

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Commercial  
- DITA Exchange for MOSS

# DITA Exchange

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- web-based using Microsoft SharePoint Server 2007 (MOSS)
- form editor – hides code from writers
- uses MOSS's content management features



- rapid implementation – faster RoI
- coming soon – OBA for Microsoft Word 2007



# Acknowledgements and References

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- OASIS DITA Technical Committee  
[http://www.oasis-open.org/committees/tc\\_home.php?wg\\_abbrev=dita](http://www.oasis-open.org/committees/tc_home.php?wg_abbrev=dita)
- DITA Online Committee  
<http://dita.xml.org/>
- DITA Users  
<http://www.ditausers.org>
- DITA Europe Conference 2008  
<http://www.infomanagementcenter.com/DITAEurope/index.htm>



# Acknowledgements and References

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- Michael Priestley  
<http://dita.xml.org/blog/25>
- Scott Abel  
<http://www.thecontentwrangler.com>
- Sarah O'Keefe  
<http://www.scriptorium.com>
- DITA Exchange  
<http://www.farbey.co.uk/dita-exch.htm>

Thank you

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