



Webinar On



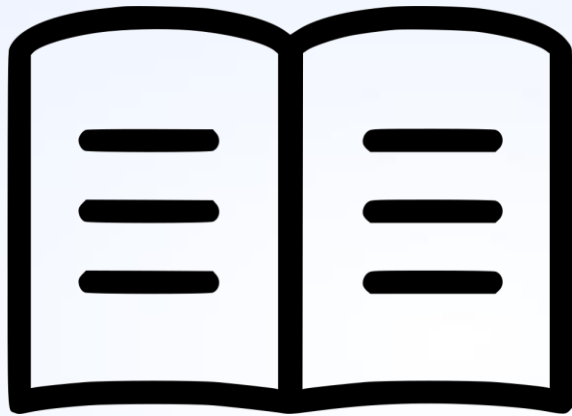
Make Your Docs Stick Out: Strategies to Make Your Writing Shine



Speaker

Natalia Kloda
Technical Writer
SAP

Overview



- The Psychology of Technical Writing (A fresh perspective)
- The Power of Minimalism in Documentation (Less is more)
- The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation (Uncover hidden insights)

The Psychology of Technical Writing

Cognitive Load Theory, developed by **John Sweller**, explains how the brain processes and retains information.

It states that working memory has **limited capacity**, and if you overload it with too much information at once, learning and comprehension suffer.

The Psychology of Technical Writing

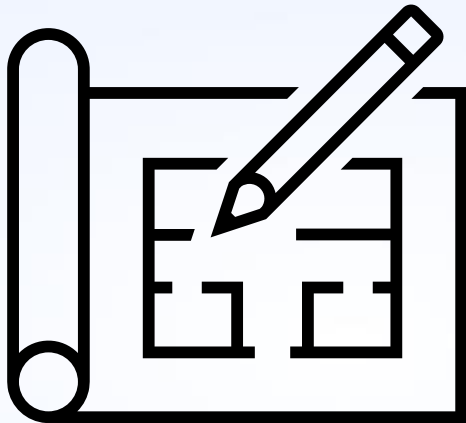
Three Types of Cognitive Load:

Intrinsic Load: The natural complexity of the information or task itself.

Extraneous Load: The unnecessary mental effort caused by poor presentation.

Germane Load: The productive cognitive effort that helps learners process, understand, and retain information.

The Psychology of Technical Writing



How the Cognitive Load Theory Applies to Technical Writing:

- Break down complex concepts into **smaller chunks**
- Use **simplified language**
- Reduce **extraneous load**
- Use **schemas**
- Provide a **scaffolding**

The Psychology of Technical Writing

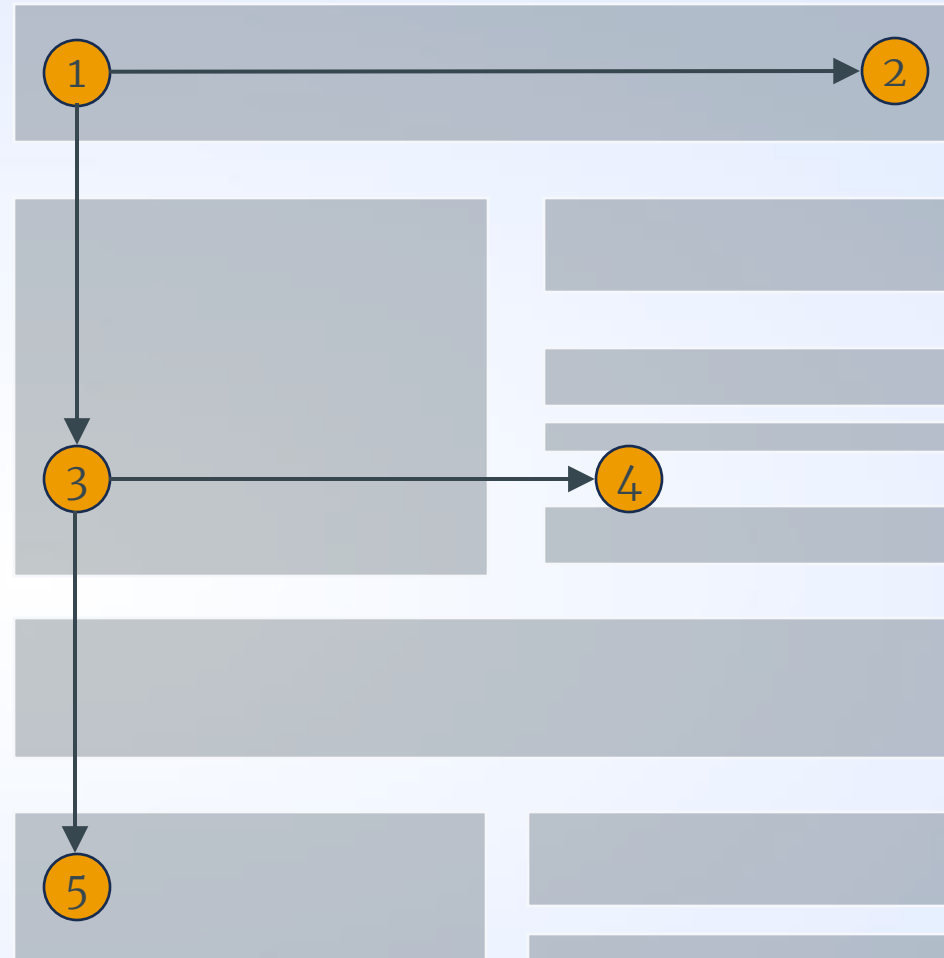
Eye-tracking studies have shown that people read web pages and documents in predictable **scanning patterns**.

The Psychology of Technical Writing

F-Pattern (Dense Text/Long Documents)

- Users first read across the top (main heading).
- Then scan down the left side (looking for keywords or subheadings).
- They only glance at parts of the middle text, forming an "F" shape.
- **Best Practice:** Put critical information in headlines, first paragraphs, and bolded keywords.

The Psychology of Technical Writing

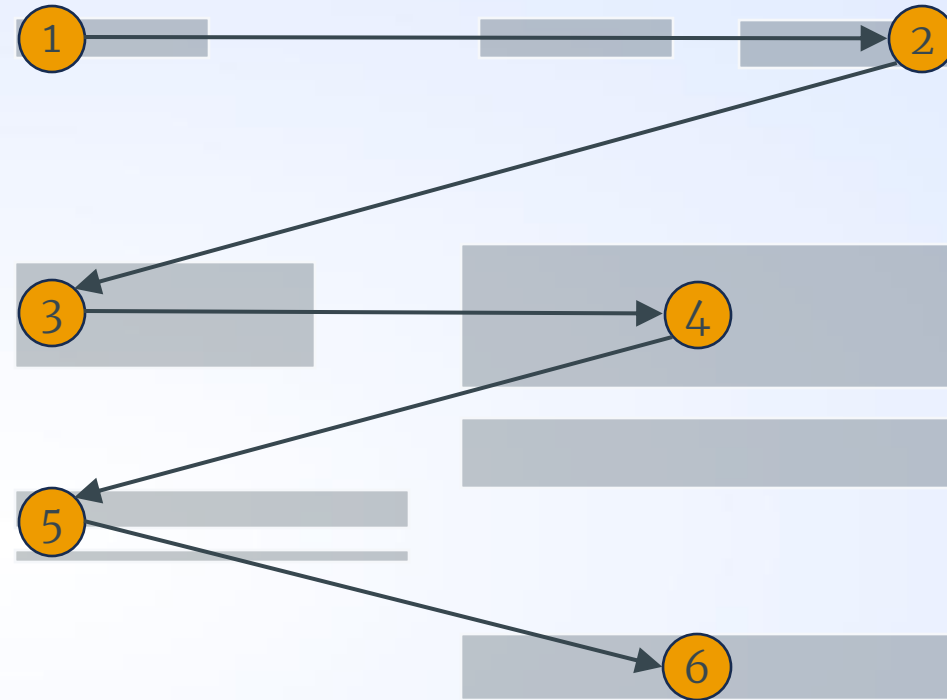


The Psychology of Technical Writing

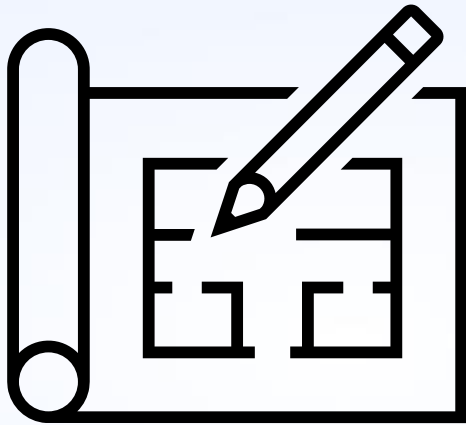
Z-Pattern (Common in Visual or Shorter Content)

- Users first read across the top.
- Then their eyes move diagonally down to the bottom-left.
- Finally, they scan across the bottom.
- **Best Practice:** Use this for slides, web pages, or infographics—place key content at top-left, top-right, and bottom-right.

The Psychology of Technical Writing



The Psychology of Technical Writing



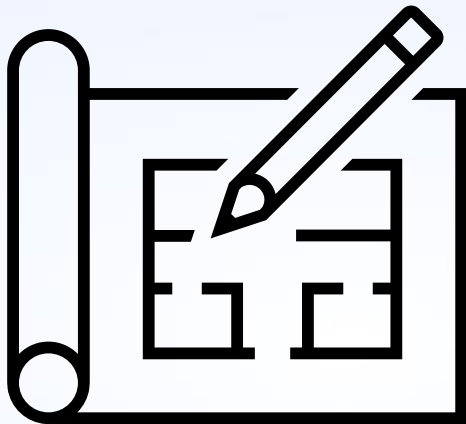
How It Applies to Technical Writing:

- **F-Pattern** → Great for user manuals, knowledge bases, long-form documentation.
- **Z-Pattern** → Works well for landing pages, presentations, and quick-start guides.

The Psychology of Technical Writing

Dual Coding Theory (DCT), developed by Allan Paivio, states that we process visual and verbal information separately in our brains. When you present content in both text + visuals, you engage two cognitive pathways, leading to better comprehension and retention.

The Psychology of Technical Writing



How It Applies to Technical Writing:

- Pair text with meaningful visuals.
- Use icons to reinforce concepts.
- Leverage color & spacing to create associations.
- Explain visuals with captions to enhance understanding.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

The 30% Rule: Cut the Clutter, Keep the Meaning

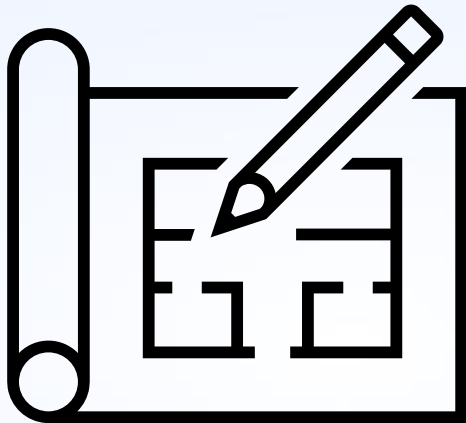
Concept: Most documents contain at least 30% unnecessary words. Cutting them improves clarity without losing meaning.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Why It Works:

- Reduces cognitive load—readers process information faster.
- Eliminates redundancy and keeps content concise.
- Improves scannability for busy users.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation




How to Apply It:

- Write first, edit later - don't worry about length initially.
- Trim filler words:
 - in order to → to
 - due to the fact that → because
- Avoid redundant phrases:
 - final outcome → outcome
- Use active voice:
 - The file is saved by the system.
→ The system saves the file.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Example Before & After:

 “In order to access the settings menu, you will need to click the gear icon in the top right corner.”

 “To access settings, click the gear icon in the top right.” → **40% reduction in word count!**

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Progressive Disclosure: Show Info When It's Needed

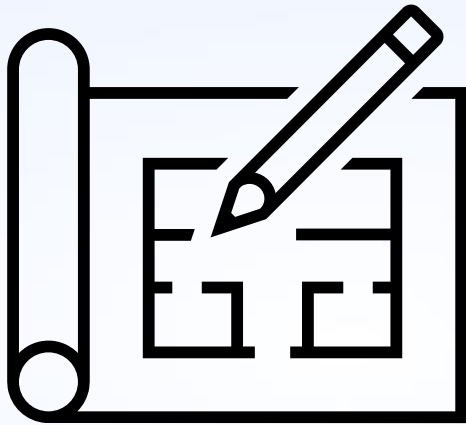
Concept: Instead of overwhelming users with everything at once, reveal details gradually based on user context.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Why It Works:

- Prevents cognitive overload—users focus only on what's relevant.
- Guides users step-by-step, improving learning and comprehension.
- Reduces friction in documentation—keeps interfaces and text cleaner.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation




How to Apply It:

- Use expandable sections (for example, collapsible FAQs, “Learn More” buttons).
- Prioritize essential info first, then offer details if needed.
- Use tooltips & hover text for in-depth explanations.
- Break complex steps into smaller, digestible sections.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Example:

 Long API documentation with 50+ error codes in one table.

 Better Approach: Show 5-10 most common errors upfront, with a “See More” button for advanced users.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front): Start with What Matters

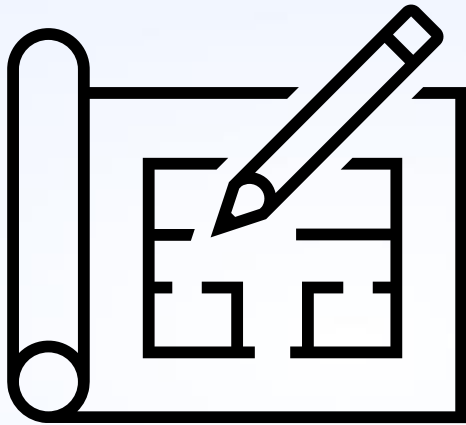
Concept: Place the most important information first, then add supporting details later.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Why It Works:

- Aligns with how users scan content—they want answers fast.
- Reduces frustration by getting straight to the action.
- Works well in instructions, FAQs, and troubleshooting guides.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation



How to Apply It:

- Start with the key takeaway.
- Use bold or highlight key actions.
- Move explanations to later sections.
- Use bullet points for clarity.

The Power of Minimalism in Documentation

Example Before & After:

✗ “If you forget your password, go to the login page. Select ‘Forgot Password’, enter your email, and follow the instructions in your inbox.”

✓ BLUF Version:

Reset your password:

1. Click Forgot Password on the login screen.
2. Enter your email.
3. Check your inbox for instructions.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation

User-Generated Documentation: The Invisible Knowledge Base
Users create their own guides in:

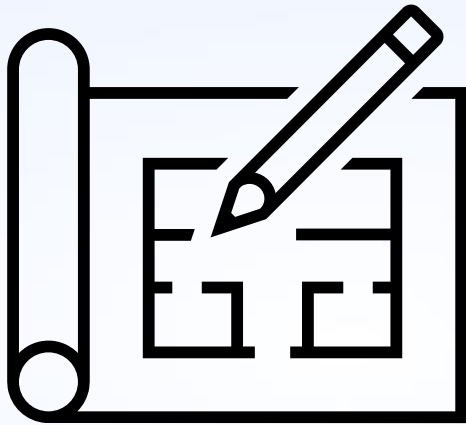
- Community forums (Reddit, Stack Overflow, Discord, Microsoft Tech Community)
- Internal team wikis (Confluence, Notion, Google Docs)
- GitHub repositories & open-source documentation
- Social media threads & blog posts

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation

Why It Matters:

- Provides real-world use cases and troubleshooting steps that official docs may miss.
- Often more up-to-date than official documentation.
- Reveals common pain points that users experience.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation



How to Leverage It:

- Monitor forums & GitHub discussions to identify missing documentation topics.
- Engage with power users who contribute to unofficial guides.
- Incorporate frequently asked questions from these sources into official docs.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation

Shadow Workflows: The Processes Users Invent Themselves

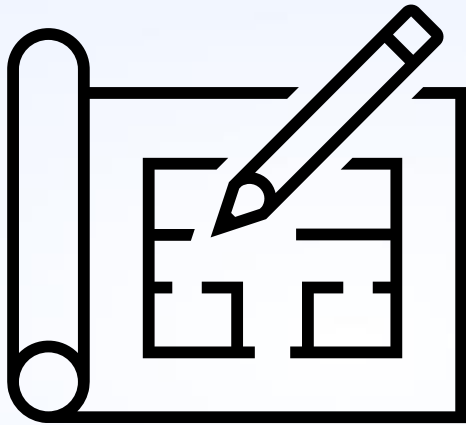
Users often create their own shortcuts, scripts, and undocumented processes to work around product limitations.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation

Why It Matters:

- Reveals gaps in the official documentation or UI.
- Shows how users actually interact with the product, not just how it's designed to be used.
- Helps identify new features that could be documented - or even developed!

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation



How to Leverage It:

- Interview power users to uncover undocumented workflows.
- Analyze support tickets—look for repeated questions that suggest users have “hacked” a solution.
- Host user research sessions to see how people use the product in real-world scenarios.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation

Tracking & Incorporating Hidden Insights into Official Docs

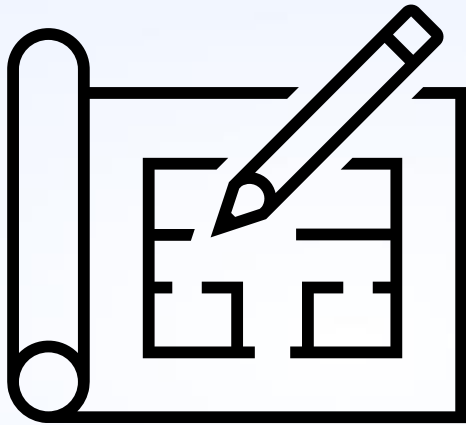
Turning user-generated documentation into validated, structured, and official knowledge.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation

Why It Matters:

- Makes official documentation more relevant & user-friendly.
- Reduces reliance on unverified or outdated external sources.
- Strengthens the connection between tech writers, developers, and users.

The Secret Power of User-Generated Documentation



How to Leverage It:

- Set up alerts for key discussions (use Google Alerts, Feedly, or Stack Overflow tracking).
- Create a documentation feedback loop - let users suggest topics through a form or GitHub issues.
- Develop an “Unofficial Insights” section in documentation—acknowledge useful community-driven solutions while clarifying official recommendations.

Questions?

Thank You!

