

# Documentation and AI

How to Write Right Now

Me as baby writer



# Things I learned as a technical writer



Most people  
reading docs  
are already frustrated



Most people  
writing docs  
are also frustrated



Tech writing is  
boring  
on purpose



So we should  
automate it, obvs



# We think of writing as content

## Ideal line length for legibility is about 66 characters

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago - never mind how long precisely - having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off - then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship.

## Indented paragraphs are ideal for extended prose

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary.

I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

## Generous leading often improves legibility

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago - never mind how long precisely - having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically

## Spaced paragraphs are often used for technical docs

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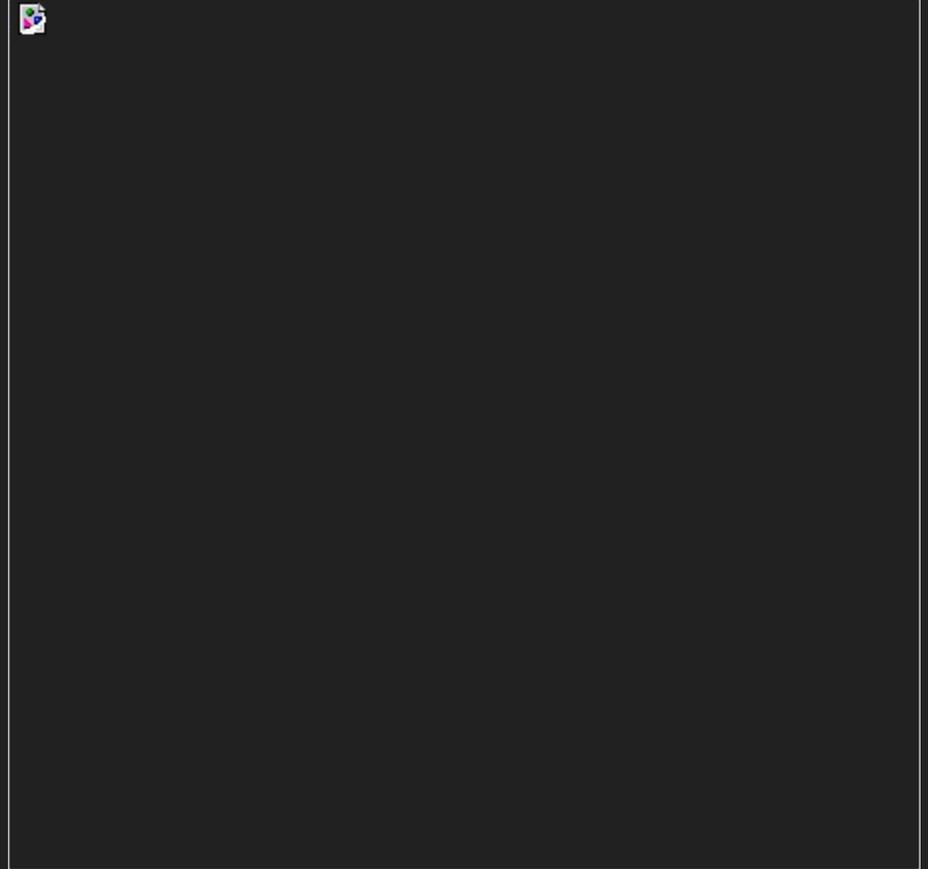
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But context is just  
as crucial



# Throwback: Contextual help



# Docs for Developers



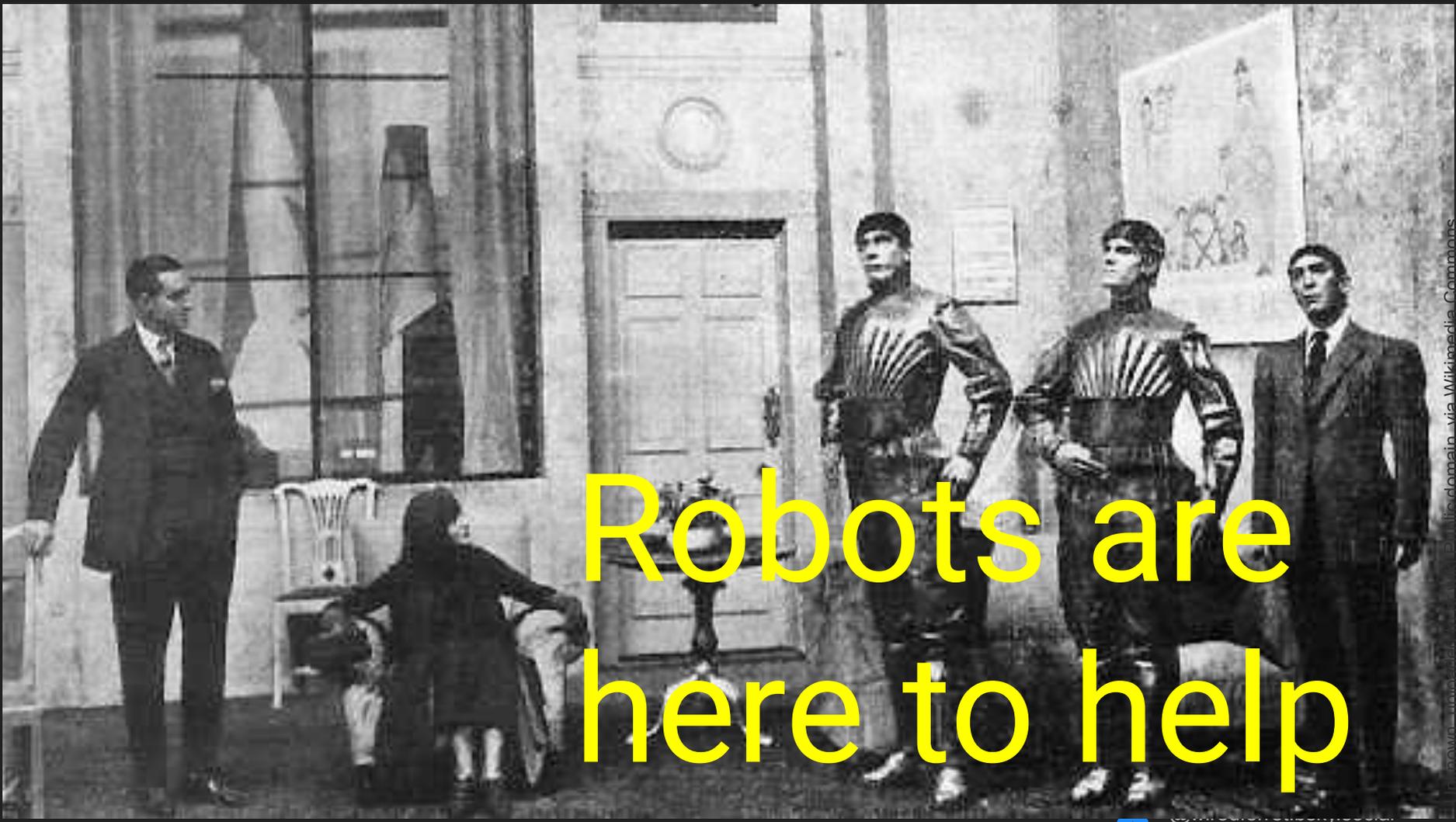
# Docs for Developers

An Engineer's Field Guide  
to Technical Writing

—  
Jared Bhatti  
Sarah Corleissen  
Jen Lambourne  
David Nunez  
Heidi Waterhouse

*Foreword by Kelsey Hightower*

Apress®



Robots are  
here to help

What would an ideal  
docs AI provide?

**MARY  
POPPINS**



@wiredferret.bsky.social

# What would an ideal docs AI provide?

- Reduce toil

MARY  
POPPINS



# What would an ideal docs AI provide?

- Reduce toil
- Understand code

**MARY  
POPPINS**



# What would an ideal docs AI provide?

- Reduce toil
- Understand code
- Capture business logic

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POPPINS**



# What would an ideal docs AI provide?

- Reduce toil
- Understand code
- Capture business logic
- Organize itself

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POPPINS**



# What would an ideal docs AI provide?

- Reduce toil
- Understand code
- Capture business logic
- Organize itself
- Perfect synchronicity

MARY  
POPPINS



# What would an ideal docs AI provide?

- Reduce toil
- Understand code
- Capture business logic
- Organize itself
- Perfect synchronicity
- Accessible
- Cheap
- Accurate
- Never feed us cod liver oil

MARY  
POPPINS



What if we live in an  
imperfect world?



In the imperfect world,  
no androids,  
only robots



# Extract

- Discovery
- Content collection



TexasGirly 1979

Glean, Algolia, Unblocked, Swimm, Mintlify, Documatic, Slackbots

Keyword: Enterprise search software



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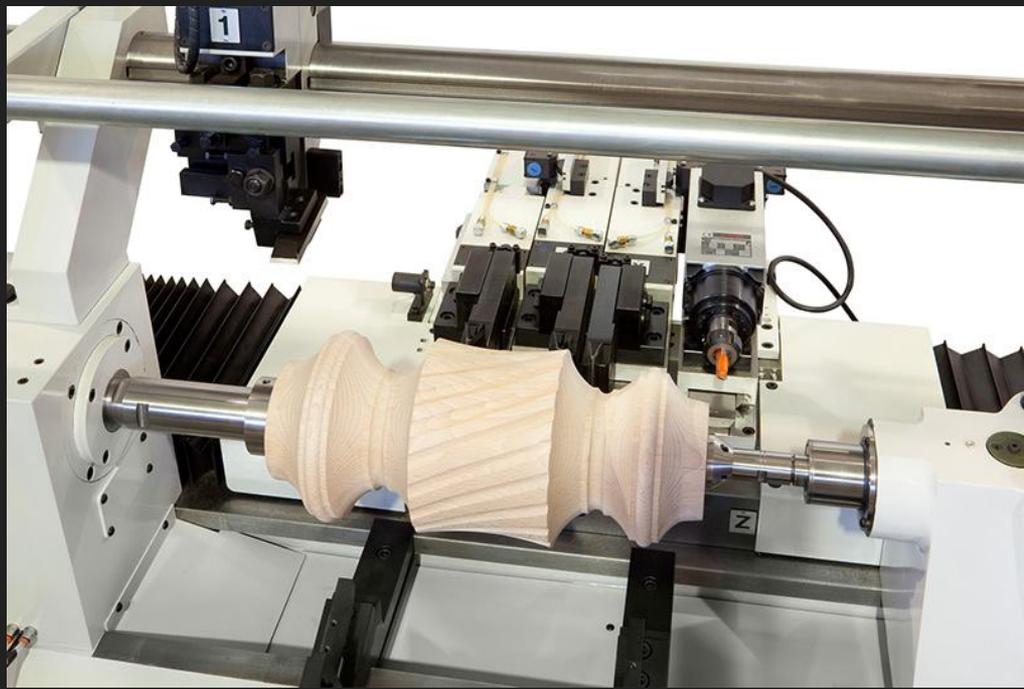
# Refine

- Grammar and spelling checkers
- Linters

Acrolinx, DocRock, Sikich, Relevance

Keywords:

- Knowledge/Content management
- Writing refinement



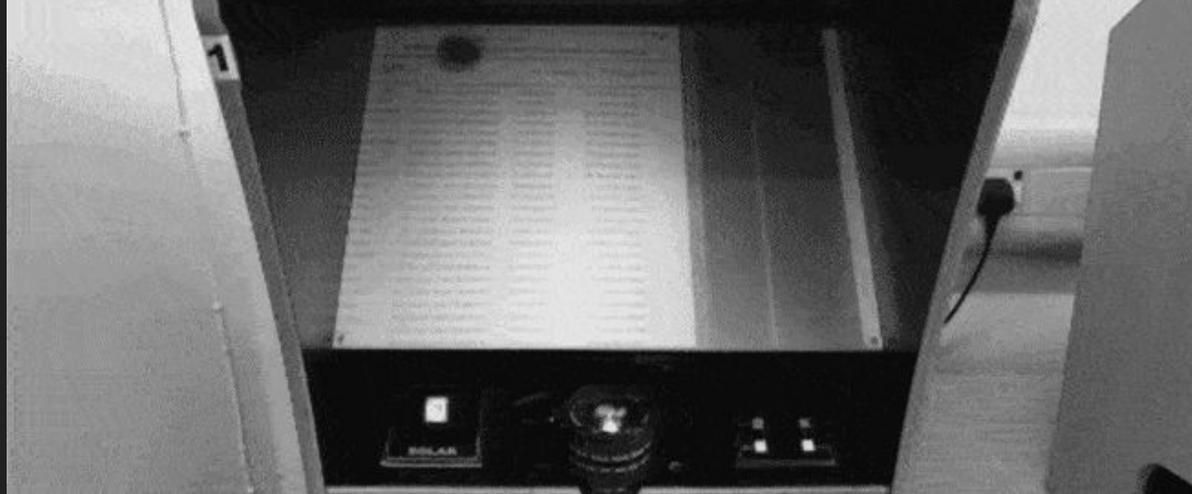
# Present

- Context
- Accessibility
- Translation

GitHub, ClickHelp,  
Doxygen,  
Docusaurus,  
Sharepoint,  
Confluence

## Keywords:

- Information Architecture
- Content Management
- Knowledge Hub



# Iterate

Only half robot, sorry.

Did this doc help you?



When the user click either the *thumb up* or *thumb down* button, nothing is sent yet. Instead, a small form appears. A textarea where the user can type on optional message and an email field. Both are optional to fill before sending the feedback.

Did this doc help you?



Let us know what we do well Optional

If we can contact you with more questions,  
please enter your email address Optional

If you need a reply, please contact support  
instead.

Cancel

Send



# Tool Must-Haves

Export text, meta-text, context

Audit

Integrate



# Where does AI help?

- Raw power
- Rote tasks
- Predictable contexts



# Where is AI an impediment?

- New things
- Weird contexts and crossovers
- Business decisions
- Feelings



AI cannot understand  
But it is a good machine  
at what it does



# Progressive Delivery

<https://tinyurl.com/PD-mailing>



James Governor, Kim Harrison,  
Heidi Waterhouse & Adam Zimman

# PROGRESSIVE DELIVERY

Build The  
Right Thing

For The  
Right People

At The  
Right Time

# Resources

<https://youtu.be/6p6LttjaSNM>

[Contextual Help, and how it can lead to happier users](#)

