In this workshop...

- Background
  - Two universities / two hemispheres
- Approaches
  - Different yet similar
- Analysis
  - How effective has assessment shown this to be?
- Sharing
  - How this experience can be extrapolated to the workplace (case studies)

Overview

- Technique changes from linear to modular
- Some existing practices have to be abandoned
- New methods and techniques taken up
- How to develop skills?
  - classroom at university level, or
  - taught in the workplace.
- Lessons from university classroom training can be applied to workplace
Approach

Linear Modular

Modular Document Approach
DITA

- What is DITA?
  - Blah, blah, blah…

Two Universities, Two Hemispheres
Swinburne University of Technology

- Melbourne, Australia
- Until 2011…
  post-graduate Technical Communication programme within the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences
- “Structured Authoring with DITA” subject

Swinburne Tech Comm Programme

- Swinburne
  - Grad Dip Technical Communication
  - 8 units (2 units per semester, part-time)
    - 4 units online
    - 4 units classroom
  - Effective Communication, Technical Documents, Online Help, Software for Tech Communicators
  - Structured Authoring, Standards, Project Management, Usability, Information Design and Delivery
The DITA Communications Revolution Starts at Swinburne University

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The DITA Communications Revolution Starts at Swinburne University
Submitted by auton on Tue, 05/13/2000 - 11:04

Training Courses

Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia, leads to the forefront of technical communication by being the first university in the world to offer a subject in Structured Authoring.

Developed by technical communications expert Mr Tony Self and built

About Rennes

(c) Editions Albert René.
Program Environment

Training center for technical translators, technical writer, terminologists and project managers

Leading program in technical communication:

The Master's Degree of the CFTTR ("Métiers de la traduction-localisation et de la communication multilingue et multimédia") is one of the 34 advanced degree programs in communication multilingue et multimédia. It is part of the EMT network (European Masters in Translation) and the OPTIMALE network (Organisation pour le développement de la traduction et de la médiation linguistique et culturelle). The program is supported by the European Commission's DGII (Direction Générale des Affaires culturelles). With the support of the Cultural Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France (Délegation Générale à la Langue Française et aux Langues de France).

Université Rennes 2 - CFTTR

- Brittany, France
- Starting 2009: post-graduate vocational studies in technical communication disciplines
- “Structured Authoring” subject
- Embedded in the new Technical Communication specialization
Swinburne - Aims

• …to help students understand why structured authoring helps organisations to meet their objectives
• …to teach them how to start, design, manage and work on a structured authoring project
• (both the technical skills to do this and the understanding of the underlying theory)…
• …so that they can create useful, usable DocBook and DITA materials.

Swinburne - Objectives

• Define the purpose, origins, advantages and disadvantages of structured authoring
• Describe the principal elements of DocBook and DITA
• Debate and analyse the arguments for single-sourcing
• Create a plan and outline for a typical documentation suite
• Write procedures in DITA and DocBook formats
• Transform DITA or DocBook content into PDF, XHTML and HTML Help, etc.
Swinburne - Content

- Elementary XML
- XML and DITA – Concepts and Terminology
- Semantic Markup
- Information Types
- Structured Authoring
- Collections and the DITA Open Toolkit
- Creating and Editing Content in DITA
- Content Re-use
- Publishing
- Teams
- Schemas and Specialisation
**Rennes - Aims**

- … help students understand DITA mechanics and translation challenges,
- … help students understand the advantages of a DITA implementation,
- … help students design an effective DITA architecture,
- … provide background theory and enough practice prior to their work placements,
- So that they can access positions as DITA practitioners and/or implementers.

**Rennes - Objectives**

Students produce documentation for several projects, acting as a team with authors, reviewers, and project managers.

- Producing trained professionals for:
  - *DITA authoring and DITA migration teams*

- Act as junior consultants in organisations:
  - *Training others*
  - *Creating documentation*
  - *Setting rules: templates, style guides, and business rules (e.g. convention naming)*
Rennes - Learning

The unit covers the following content areas:

- Translating DITA content
- Modeling new topics
- Migrating documentation to DITA
- Publishing to CHM, XHTML, PDF, EPUB
- Creating templates
- Creating project rules for team collaboration

Applied, using the tools provided
### Université Rennes 2 Course Design

- Master’s degree with specialty in Technical Communication
  - 8 units
  - Specialized and Technical Writing, Software for Tech Communicators, Content Design
  - Structured Authoring, Project Management, Usability, Visual Communication, Quality Assessment & Testing
  - Projects throughout the year (team work)
  - Environment: mark-up languages, terminology, project management

### Audience and Mode

**Swinburne postgraduate**
- Practicing technical communicators
- Career changers
- Classroom
- Part time (3 hours per week for 12 weeks)

**Rennes 2 post and undergraduate**
- School leavers
- Translators, technical communicators, editors, project managers
- Classroom, Full time
  - Master 1: 2 hours/week for 20 weeks + 4 month internship
  - Master 2: 2 hours/week for 10 weeks then 7 hours/week for 10 weeks + 4 month internship
Approach to software

Swinburne
• Commercial with student licences
  - Monkfish xmlBluePrint
  - XMetaL Author
  - XMLmind XML Editor
• Preference for open source
  - WinANT
  - DITA OT
  - Syntax Serna Free

Rennes 2
• Commercial with student licences
  - SyncRO soft oXygen XML Editor
  - JustSystems XMetaL XML Editor
  - Adobe Photoshop
• Preference for open source
  - WinANT
  - DITA OT

Assessment methods

Swinburne
• Assignments
  - DocBook authoring
  - DITA authoring
  - DITA publishing
• Exam (short)
• Class participation

Rennes 2
• Assignments
  - DITA authoring
  - DITA publishing
  - Migration and reuse
  - Authoring templates and style guides
  - Creating business rules
  - Managing a DITA project
  - Exam (paper)
• Project participation & involvement
• Internship (6 months)
Revelation

- What we both found out:
  - DITA is…
    - An architecture
    - A standard
    - Topic-based and structured
    - Constrained by XML rules
    - Unconstrained by business rules
    - Easy to start with, difficult to explain outside the production environment

- But also: a curriculum and professional booster!
Revelation

- Teaching DITA is really about teaching writing

Why is education important for writers moving to DITA?

- Techniques are markedly different
- Need to abandon some practices…
- …focus on core writing skills
- …develop new methods and techniques”
- “Re-educating a technical writer as an information engineer”
Application in the Workplace

- Education <> training
  - Same approaches cannot be exactly applied
- Education Objective
  - Learn facts, principles, and concepts
- Training Objective
  - Acquire a skill
- Education Assessment
  - Ability to apply concepts to solve problems
- Training Assessment
  - Ability to perform a task.
- Education = theory, training = practice

In the workplace

- Nolwenn
  - Technicolor (engineers)
  - Sonovision (tech writers)
- Tony
  - FLE (Malaysia)
  - Tactics
Technical Authoring Core Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Required</th>
<th>Newbies</th>
<th>Experienced</th>
<th>Affected Non-Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Typing</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>No experience, but competing ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic-based modular writing for re-use</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>Experience with linear writing; may have experience with topic-based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimalism</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>May have exposure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of content and form, WYSIWO, interchange</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>Alternative experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software skills</td>
<td>Authoring tools, CCMS</td>
<td>Authoring tools, publishing tools, CCMS, UA</td>
<td>XSL? DTD? JavaScript? CMS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DITA vocabulary</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark-up language and XML skills</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Various? Maybe HTML? Maybe DocBook</td>
<td>Maybe strong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing (doh!)</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Maybe none?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Competency**

- Firm understanding of the concepts of structured, semantic authoring
- Learning *by rote* is not relevant
- DITA is a methodology, not a tool
- Training authors in DITA ends up being very similar to educating students in DITA theory
  - DITA = theory
  - DITA tools = practice

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**Software**

- But…
- Theory needs to be applied in assessment tasks
- Both Swinburne and Rennes subjects require students to use DITA authoring and publishing tools.
  - (Mix of student licences, trial licences, and open source software options)
In the Workplace

- New workplace skills:
  - *information typing*
  - *topic-based writing for reuse*
  - *minimalism*
  - *separation of content and form*
  - *XML and mark-up language*
  - *DITA vocabulary*
  - *Software tools*
  - *Reuse and conditions?*

Starting Point

- If no previous education in structured authoring:
  - *need to be taught all seven skills*
- Education in structured authoring:
  - *may only need training in the software tools*
  - *perhaps in the DITA vocabulary*
Student Outcomes

Case Study - Rennes

- Colin M
- Hired six months after graduating
- Then moved to semiconductor manufacturing group in The Netherlands
- Product Data Analyst and DITA Implementer
- Without this educational…
Case Study - Swinburne

• Peter C
• Already working as a technical communicator in an automotive company in Melbourne
• Confronted with documentation challenges
• Education helped him make informed strategy decisions
• Conceptual knowledge led to large and complex DITA document engineering process

Conclusion

• Writing structured topic-based documents is different
• Formal education can provide the conceptual framework and the core skills
• Workplace training in tools is required
• Approaches to university education and workplace training of DITA theory can be quite similar
• DITA authors must acquire the necessary theoretical and practical skills to make them effective
Exercise A

- Audience analysis/requirements
  - In the “production line”, who do you need to train? How does the organisation need to change?
  - Marketing writers, technical writers, SMEs, experienced, inexperienced, working in team?
  - Volunteers vs conscripts

Exercise B

- Discussion about factors influencing training requirements
  - Worked with Wikis?
  - Worked with CMS and re-use?
  - Topic-based writing?
  - Controlled terminology?
  - Style guides and controlled language (e.g., STE)
  - Tool availability
  - Availability of mentors and consultants
Exercise C

- Discussion about how document type influences training needs
  - PDF?
  - UA?
  - Length, type, structure and complexity

Summarising...
Questions and answers...

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