

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person in a starting crouch on a red running track. The person is wearing black athletic gear with green and purple accents, and their hands are on the ground. The background is a blurred red track with white lane markings.

50% Faster

How To Cut Document
Production Time in Half
with Structured Content

White Paper



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Introduction

Expectations are changing.

Expectations for writing teams are changing. More than ever, readers want information immediately in various forms. Writing teams are expected to keep up with ever-changing demands, and stretch themselves thin trying to write, translate, and publish enough to keep up.

The changes in readers' demands have seismic implications for content production teams. But, they also present opportunities to adapt, to get ahead, and create high-quality documentation faster than ever with structured content.

In this whitepaper we will focus on DITA: a powerful variant of structured authoring. DITA is powerful because it is created within a framework. Through the framework, DITA content is: organized for input, predictable on output, and readable by humans and machines.

This framework enables incredible speed, efficiency, and savings through the automation of mundane tasks like formatting or publishing. This framework also opens the door to the focus of this whitepaper, faster content production.

DITA content is:
organized for input,
predictable on output, and
readable by humans and machines.



DITA Content Production is Faster

Content reuse

DITA has a quantifiable positive impact on the speed of your content creation. Through DITA, content production is not only more organized, but it is much faster for your entire document workflow.

The main reason for this increase in speed is *content reuse*.

Content Reuse - When a source topic or part of a topic is referenced in multiple publications.

A simplified example is an email signature. You “reuse” your email signature as the final “section” on all emails. It’s stored in a single location, works in multiple emails, and so there’s no need to re-write it every time you compose a new email.

Imagine not having to rewrite portions of content every time you create a new document. Imagine selecting some content that’s already written and seeing it included in the new document you’re working on. This level of efficiency applied to your entire documentation workflow means faster content production and significant department savings.

The critical question is, do you use content in a way that lends itself to DITA? Ask yourself, do I:

- Duplicate my content?
- Have multiple sets of content that are similar to one another?
- Translate my content?
- Publish my content in multiple forms?

If you said yes to any of these questions, you have a chance to see significant savings from structured DITA content.



How Content Reuse Works

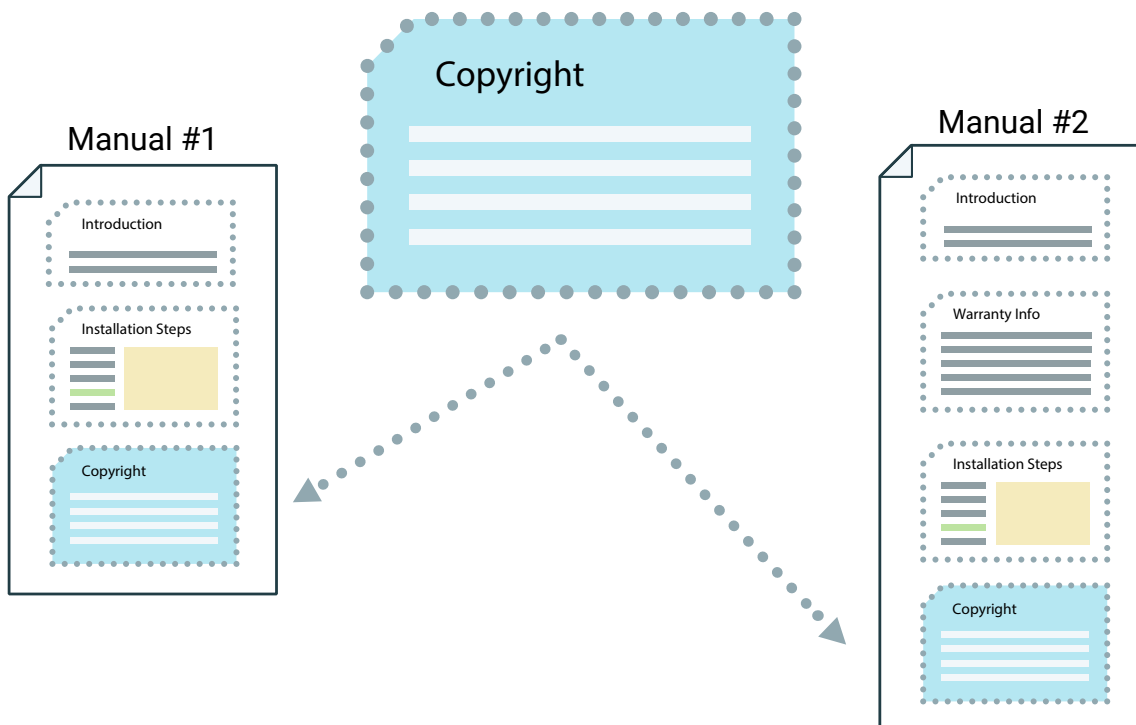
Reuse that's fast and scalable.

Structured DITA is all about constructing larger documents, or publications, from smaller pieces, all of which are in turn available for reuse in multiple publications. This is the key to unlocking the speed and efficiency of content production using DITA.

Publications are produced by reusing existing topics. So, publications are just collections of existing topics. Write those topics once, and use them as many times as you need. Every topic and element has the potential to be reused in as many publications as you'd like. DITA makes this kind of reuse possible.

For example, a brochure introduction could be a topic. A set of assembly instructions could be a topic or a series of topics.

Even a copyright disclaimer could be a topic. These topics are made up of elements such as a title, a body of text, or lists. All these examples can be frequently reused in a variety of situations.



Why Should You Reuse?

Because it's faster ...

By now, you should see that reuse with DITA is fast in a way that unstructured writing is not. But this still leaves the question of "why is faster better?"

...and time is money

The reality of modern workplace efficiency is that departments are valued by their output relative to their cost. As a department, you want to maximize quality output in a timely manner. Flip the ratio and become recognized as a net win for the rest of the organization.

If you are building a case for implementing structured DITA content, it's important to understand how long a document currently takes your organization to create. This enables you to measure the potential value of a shift to DITA. You can do this by measuring the time it takes to create each section of your document and then add those measured amounts together.

Mark Lewis recently performed some experimentation to find how long document production takes in an unstructured environment compared to document producing using structured DITA content. Let's look at an example from his book *DITA Metrics 101*¹. In this example, a technical writer writes documents for a cell phone manufacturer. They are writing about how to add an event to your calendar within the cell phone.

Lewis records the time spent on writing an unstructured document in Word. It takes just under four and a half hours.

Time Cost of Writing an Unstructured "How-to" Documents ¹			
Elements	Occurrences	Time Cost per Occurrence	Total
Short Description	1	1 hour	1 hour
Context or Background	1	15 minutes	15 minutes
Step Instructions	6	30 minutes	3 hours
Description of Task Outcome	1	12 minutes	12 minutes
Subtotal			4 hours, 27 minutes

¹: Lewis, Mark. *DITA Metrics 101: the Business Case for XML and Intelligent Content*. Rockley Publ., 2012.



Time is Money

Now, Lewis records the amount of time used to write the same information but doing so in a structured DITA environment.

When the author wrote the document for reuse, it required that they spend more time on each element (approx. 50% more time) resulting in a total time that jumped to over six and a half hours compared to the four and a half hours needed for an unstructured topic.

Time Cost of Writing a Structured Topic ¹			
Elements	Occurrences	Time Cost per Occurrence	Total
Short Description	1	1 hour	1 hour
Context or Background	1	15 minutes	15 minutes
Step Instructions	6	30 minutes	3 hours
Description of Task Outcome	1	12 minutes	12 minutes
Subtotal			4 hours, 27 minutes
Writing for Reuse			Subtotal x 1.5
Total			6 hours, 41 minutes

So far, there are no savings to be seen. In fact, there is a short-term time cost connected with writing structured content. However, these instructions will appear in more than one phone manual. Every phone manufacturer has multiple models on the market. The corresponding calendar instructions will be very similar if not exactly the same for each phone.

Not to jump the gun, but this means that the documentation written for reuse will offer massive savings in the long run. These savings equate to real hours and hard earned dollars. The time and money that is saved through proper reuse can be utilized towards other projects that you couldn't otherwise justify.

In the example, this phone manufacturer has three phones. All three phones involve very similar calendar event instructions. In fact, all but one of the steps are the same between the manuals.

Now, when someone in an unstructured environment writes the instructions for the second or third phone, they will end up spending the same amount of time on those phone documents as on the first. Approximately 4 hours and 27 minutes per document. Total time of 13 hours and 21 minutes.



¹: Lewis, Mark. DITA Metrics 101: the Business Case for XML and Intelligent Content. Rockley Publ., 2012.

Time is Money

The author working in a structured environment and reusing content will have a different experience. Rather than spending the same amount of time, they will be able to reuse their already-created DITA content.

The author will still take the same amount of time to create the first how-to. But, if only one step is different between the first phone and the other two, then the second phone will only require the time spent on reusing content and adding the different step.

The amount of time referencing the first topic plus the amount of time writing the new topic comes out to just one hour.

Time Cost of Reusing and Writing a Structured Topic ¹			
Elements	Occurrences	Time Cost per Occurrence	Total
Step Instructions	1	30 minutes	30 minutes
Reusing Phone 1 Topic	1	15 minutes	15 minutes
Subtotal			1 hour

If this repeats for the third phone, the total amount of time taken to write and reuse instructions for all three phones using DITA is 8 hours and 41 minutes.

The unstructured authoring of the same topics results in a total time of 13 hours and 21 minutes. Creating unstructured content takes 53% longer than structured authoring and reusing.

Unstructured vs Structure: Time Cost for Three Phone Topics ¹					
Structured vs Unstructured	Contents Sections Written	Time Cost per Section Written	Section Reused	Time Cost per Section Reused	Subtotal
Structured	1	6 hours, 41 minutes	2	1 hour	8 hours, 41 minutes
Unstructured	3	4 hours, 27 minutes	0	0	13 hours, 21 minutes
Percent Change					53%

1: Lewis, Mark. DITA Metrics 101: the Business Case for XML and Intelligent Content. Rockley Publ., 2012.



Time is Money

Let's apply this to your organization. As time goes on, your DITA topic collection will grow. Your opportunities for reuse will increase, and your efficiency will improve. That initial amount of time spent creating DITA content will quickly pale compared to the incredible savings over just a short period of time.

By your fourth instance of reuse, your document production time will be cut by 54%.

Here is a graph illustrating the savings trend with reuse. In this graph, your first topic takes 6 hours and 41 minutes to author for reuse (*yellow line*). After this topic is created, each additional reuse takes 30 minutes to reference.

We also see the time spent by the author who writes their first topic in 4 hours and 27 minutes but has to re-write the content each time (*blue line*).

By your first time reusing, you will already see a 19% reduction in time.

By your fourth time reusing, you will save 5 hours and 40 minutes.

That's a 54% reduction!

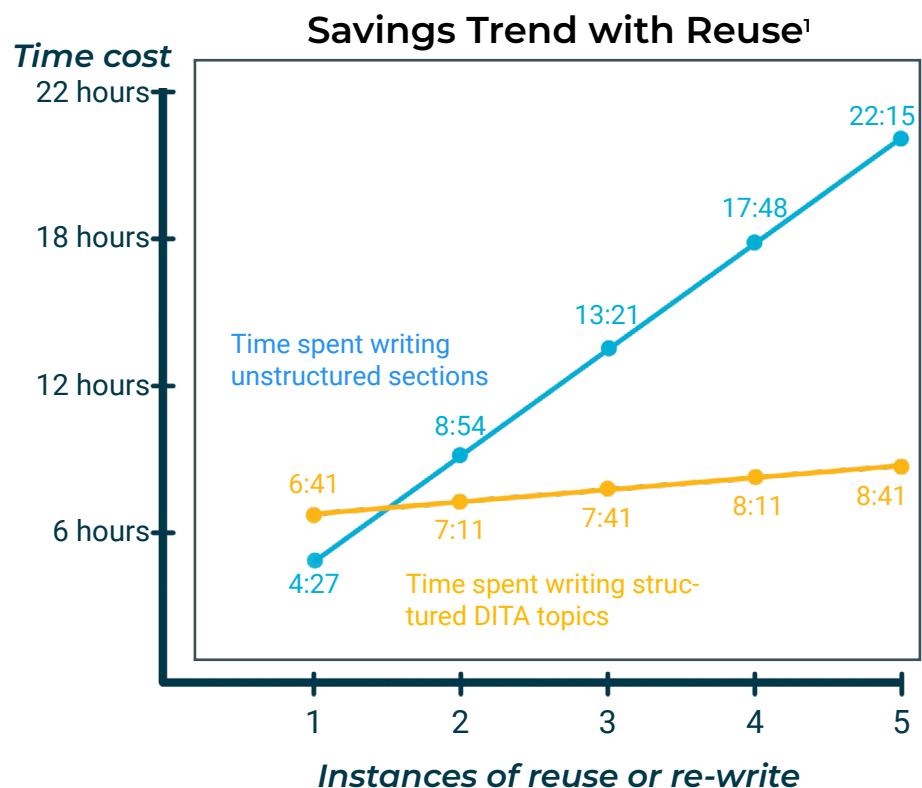
The beauty of content reuse is the scalability.

The savings are only limited by your use.

The more you reuse, the more you save, whether topic or entire manuals.

The savings grow with your demand.

50% is just the start.



1: Lewis, Mark. DITA Metrics 101: the Business Case for XML and Intelligent Content. Rockley Publ., 2012.



Why Not Copy Paste?

What's the difference?

It's a fair question. We often think of copy and pasting as reusing. Copy/paste is helpful, but it is also limited in its scalability and incredibly error prone.

As your content grows, you must keep track of every instance of pasted content for future updating. When you update anything, you must find all applicable cases of pasted content and make your edits there as well. You would need a massive amount of time to update all applicable instances of that content.

DITA utilizes a Single Source methodology. Single Source means that all your content resides in one place and all instances of reused content link to the source document. When you update that original, source document, every single instance of reused content is automatically updated as well. This level of control enables document maintenance in a fraction of the time.

It is also important to remember that writing content in an unstructured environment means that your authors will be less prone to write in a topic based, self-contained manner. Copying and pasting will become messy as the lines between sections intermingle. Every copy and pasting effort will take more time as you determine what to copy and what to leave behind

When you update
pasted content,
you must update
all applicable cases of
pasted content.



It Goes Beyond Writing

Further savings

Content reuse provides incredible savings in authoring time, but the savings continue beyond that. Earlier in this piece, there were four questions asked to determine if DITA is a good option for you. Do you:

- Duplicate your content?
- Have multiple sets of content that are similar to one another?
- Translate your content?
- Publish your content in multiple forms?

The first option applies directly to the subject of this document. DITA reuse removes the need for unstructured duplication. However, there is also significant savings available when you translate and publish your content with DITA.

Translation

With DITA you save time and money throughout your document translation process. DITA component content management systems (CCMS) allow something called translation memory. This means that as your topics are translated, that translation is matched to the topic. If you use the same topic multiple times across your documentation, you only have to pay to translate it once.

Some systems such as Heretto even track your translation status for each topic so you know which ones are up-to-date and which topics need to be re-translated. This leads to significant savings over the lifespan of your documentation.

Multi-Channel Publishing

Typical modes of publishing require significant time from the author to format the documents for output. A recent report indicated that for Microsoft Word users “on average, 30 to 50% of the total document development labor hours were dedicated just to formatting.”¹

With DITA, the styling is divorced from the authoring. Through the use of stylesheets, authors focus on writing. Once stylesheets are established for publishing output, content is published with the push of a button. This saves time, allows writers to write more, and keeps your branding and styling consistent across publishing channels.

1: “How much does it cost to format a document?” 2016. 28 September 2016.
<<http://proceduresolutionsmgmt.com/formatting/>>



Using the Right Tool

Implementing reuse in Heretto

As we already mentioned, the power of reuse is not simply limited to existing content, but it enables a host of benefits for authoring new content.

Authoring in Heretto simplifies writing and streamlines content reuse.

Within the editor, we wanted reuse practice to be accessible, and to make sense. As our name implies, we believe that ease of use is at the core of a quality DITA experience.

However, ease of use doesn't mean sacrificing functionality. Though the interface is clean and minimal, the power at your fingertips is immense. With just a few clicks, writers can start inserting references and creating documentation quickly and efficiently.

In addition to enabling easy reuse, Heretto simplifies management. The content manager indicates instances of reuse and gives you fast insight into how often your team uses content reuse mechanisms. This view quickly indicates if reference links are broken and not pulling referenced content. This saves time and headaches as you can identify these problems before publishing your documentation.

Heretto
simplifies writing
and streamlines
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1: ""How much does it cost to format a document?" 2016. 28 September 2016.
<<http://proceduresolutionsmgmt.com/formatting/>>



Further resources

With DITA you can more efficiently:

- Update your documentation
- Manage your single source of truth
- Review your work
- Localize your content
- Publish to multiple channels with ease

If you want to learn more about how DITA enables all of this and more, contact us directly or check out our resources written by our structured authoring enthusiasts. Visit our [Resources page](#).

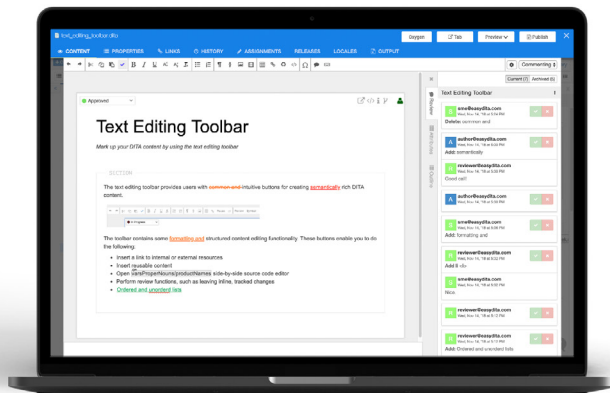
For more about DITA strategies, best practices, guides, or answers to common questions, visit our [Documentation Site](#). We are excited to help you along your journey to a faster, more efficient document creation process.



Heretto, Building Better Knowledge Experiences

We're here to help companies transform their knowledge, product, and reference content into customer and employee experiences worth talking about.

Our solution is a leading Content Operations platform designed to optimize creating, controlling, and deploying knowledge, product, and reference content for companies with complex products and services, global audiences, and intricate regulatory requirements.



Join us for a [demo](#) to get started today!

About Heretto

Heretto, a content operations platform for knowledge management, is a SaaS-based solution used by many of the world's top brands. Heretto increases customer satisfaction, efficiency and time-to-market by providing organizations with a powerful platform to create, control, and deploy knowledge, product, and reference content to any audience at any time. Content can be authored, updated, recycled, translated and published to web, PDF, chatbots, and applications in an intuitive workflow. Teams can collaborate on a single document simultaneously to minimize cost of content and increase quality and consistency from anywhere in the world. Clients include many of the world's top companies across industries such as high-technology, manufacturing, insurance, and medical devices. Heretto is a global company headquartered in Rochester, New York.

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