Topic Based Writing & DITA XML Basics

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24 March 2020

Managing Information Literacy Instruction

01
There aren't as many interactive elements as I had planned! ☹

02
We'll still try a few methods of real-time collaboration

03
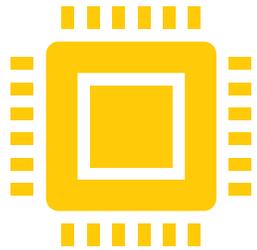When you see this icon on a slide, feel free to un-mute yourself so we can talk!

A few notes before beginning

Assumptions

Today, you are all interns! Congrats on the new position!

- Undergraduate level, arts & humanities or social sciences background – you understand something about formal academic writing and research

- Your internship duties are to write process documents and other technical documentation for employees. You need to use topic-based writing to do this.

- You're currently going through orientation along with other new interns in similar roles. It's day 2 or 3, so you know a little bit about the company and the resources available to you. But not about TBW!
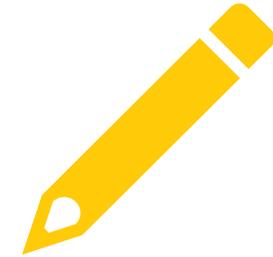
By the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

Describe, on a basic level, what DITA XML is

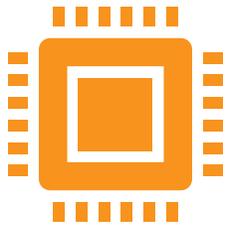Understand how DITA XML's structure relates with topic-based writing

Construct a simple process document using topic-based writing

Agenda

DITA XML: What is it? How does it work?

Topic based writing: What is it? How does it work?

How are these two concepts related?

What is XML?

eXtensible Markup Language (XML)

Semantic markup language

HTML is machine-readable and tells browsers how to render content (formatting, sizing)

XML is human- and machine-readable, does not do any formatting

HTML

```html
<nav style="background-color: #dcdcdc;">
    <div class="container">
        <div class="too-many-divs">
            <div class="navbar-group">
                <ul class="navbar-list">
                    <li class="nav-item"><a href="/Home">Home</a></li>
                    <li class="nav-item"><a href="/Products">Products</a></li>
                    <li class="nav-item"><a href="/Services">Services</a></li>
                </ul>
            </div>
            <div class="navbar-group">
                <ul class="navbar-list"...>
            </div>
        </div>
    </div>
</nav>
```

XML

```xml
<email>

        <subject> Hey SIM Students! </subject>

        <body>  Our Year End party will likely take place on Saturday, April 4, 2020.
                Ticket prices and location are still to be determined. We hope
                to see you there!

                <signature>
                        Cheers,
                        Katherine Luber
                        Communications Chair
                        School of Information Management Student Association (SIMSA)
                </signature>

        </body>


</email>
```

What is DITA?

⚙️ Darwin Information Typing Architecture

✏️ Industry standard for publishing and technical writing

🔒 Governs how XML is used in these fields

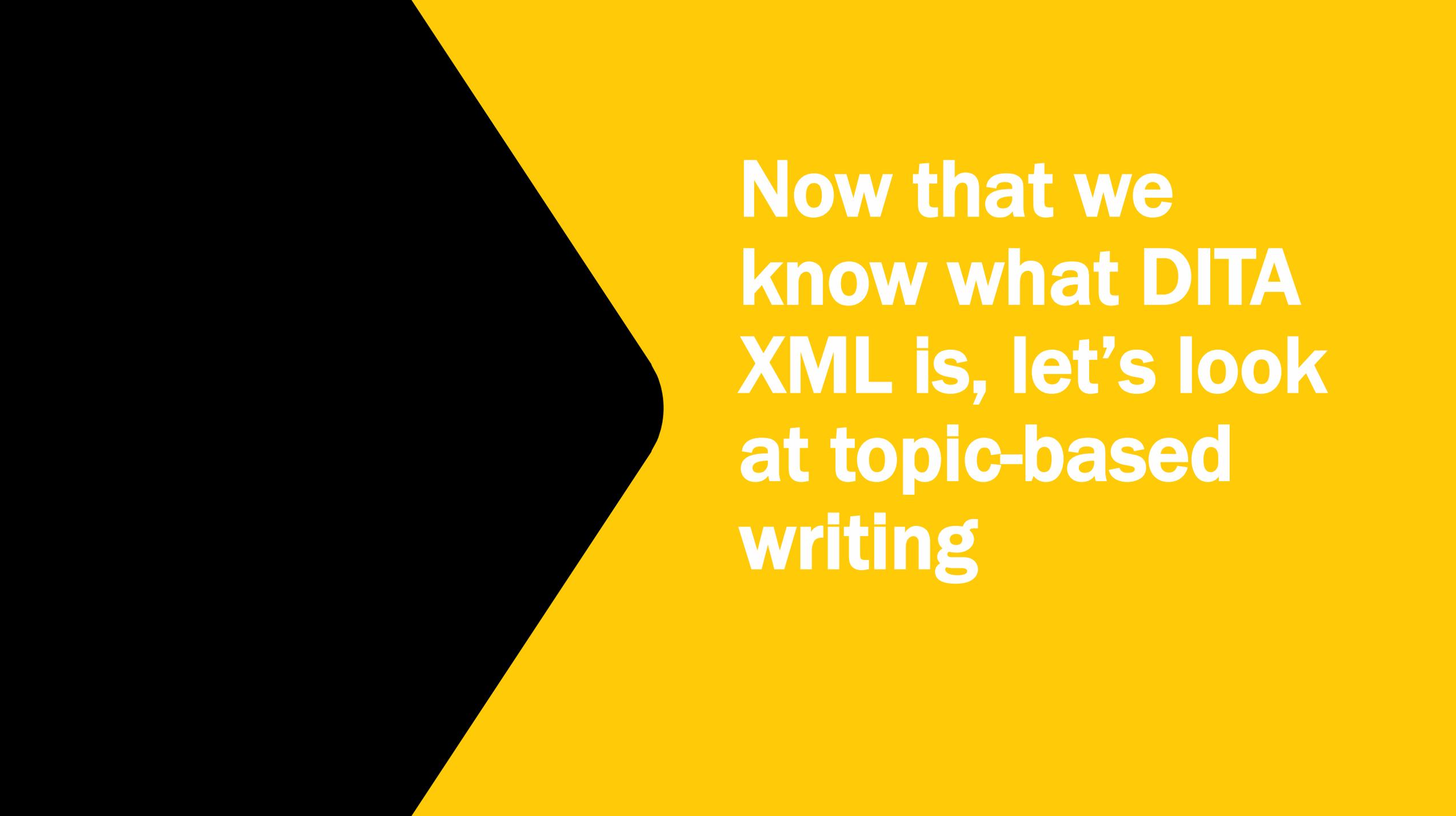💻 What gives topic-based writing its structure

DITA XML

```
<topic id="powerpoint_image_desktop">

        <title> Adding an Image from Desktop to a PowerPoint Slide </title>

                <steps>
                        <step> <cmd> 1. Navigate to the slide that should contain the image. </cmd> </step>

                <step> <cmd> 2. Under the Insert tab, select Pictures. </cmd>

                        <stepresult> A dialogue box will appear.</step>

                <step> <cmd> 3. Select the image. </cmd> </step>

                <step> <cmd> 4. Click Insert. </cmd>

                        <stepresult> The image will appear on the slide. </step>

                <step> <cmd> 5. Resize and drag to relocate, as needed. </cmd> </step>

</topic>
```

XML

```
<email>

        <subject> Hey SIM Students! </subject>

        <body>  Our Year End party will likely take place on Saturday, April 4, 2020.
                Ticket prices and location are still to be determined. We hope
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                <signature>
                        Cheers,
                        Katherine Luber
                        Communications Chair
                        School of Information Management Student Association (SIMSA)
                </signature>

        </body>

</email>
```

Now that we know what DITA XML is, let's look at topic-based writing

The aim of this study is to understand how teenagers use Internet forums to search for information. The activities of asking for and providing information in a forum were explored, and a set of messages extracted from a French forum targeting adolescents was analyzed. Results show that the messages initiating the threads are often requests for information. Teenagers mainly ask for peers' opinions on personal matters and specific verifiable information. The discussions following these requests take the form of an exchange of advice (question/answer) or a coconstruction of the final answer between the participants (with assessments of participants' responses, requests for explanations, etc.). The results suggest that discussion forums present different advantages for adolescents' information-seeking activities. The first is that this social medium allows finding specialized information on topics specific to this age group. The second is that the collaborative aspect of information seeking in a forum allows these adolescents to overcome difficulties commonly associated with the search process (making a precise request, evaluating a result).

Introduction

To fulfill their needs for information in the context of their studies and personal lives (e.g., related to health, leisure activities), adolescents often question the members of their immediate circle (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Edwards & Poston-Anderson, 1996; Julien, 2004; Latrobe & Havener, 1997). Adolescents also frequently search for information on the Internet, for example, via Google or Wikipedia (Kredens & Fontar, 2010). Discussion groups are an additional useful source of information, where Internet users can interact and make friends, ask questions, or read online discussions on the topics in which they are interested. In the field of health, adolescents often use Internet forums to obtain the information they need (Skinner, Biscope, Poland, & Goldberg,

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2003). Kredens and Fontar (2010) reported that French teenagers often utilize specialized sites and forums that provide access to extracurricular socialization.

However, to date, very few studies have examined how adolescents search for information on Internet forums, despite their current widespread use. A forum is an interesting online space for information seeking because information sharing constitutes an important aspect compared with other social media. Moreover, the characteristics of forums can facilitate ever... forums have the po... of individuals wh... necessary resources at any time of day, in any location, and anonymously.

Thus, the aim o... information-seekin... Knowledge of thes... the benefits and risks of using this information source and for proposing guide... agers to support th... information literac...

There are two p... Internet forum: an... (by reading the me... useful information) or participate more actively in that forum (by posting a request for information or responding to other Internet users' questions). Here we focus on the more active form of participation because this appears to be the most specific type of information seeking that occurs in forums. Participation involves both communication and collaborative activities because the information-seeking process is conducted by a group of participants.

The first part of this article presents an overview of teenagers' information needs and the sources that they utilize. We also illustrate the general behavior of teenagers in forums and the potential advantages of forums for information seeking. The second part describes the methodological setting of the study (e.g., the purposes, forum, data collection, and method of analysis). We analyzed a sample of

JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, 67(1):43–55, 2016

BROWNIE BATTER OVERNIGHT PROTEIN OATS

AUTHOR: DERYN MACEY · PREP TIME: 5 MINS · TOTAL TIME: 5 MINS · YIELD: 1 [1X]
CATEGORY: BREAKFAST · METHOD: SOAKING · CUISINE: VEGAN

These thick brownie batter overnight protein oats are like eating dessert for breakfast. Spend just a few minutes to prep the night before and in the morning, you'll be ready to dig into a ...atter! Top with banana, peanut butter and chocolate chips for an extra decadent treat.

★★★★☆

4.5 FROM 15 REVIEWS

🖶 PRINT RECIPE   📌 PIN RECIPE   RATE RECIPE

SCALE [1x] [2x] [3x]

...ed oats
...ed almond milk

• 1 serving (44 g) Vega Performance Protein in Chocolate (*Sub Vanilla or Mocha Flavour*)
• 2 tbsp (14 g) cocoa powder or raw cacao powder
• 1 packet stevia or stevia drops, to taste (*optional for added sweetness*)
• 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
• 1/4 tsp sea salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add all ingredients to a glass container or bowl and mix well with a spoon. Make sure everything is mixed in and there are no dry clumps.

2. Cover and place in the fridge overnight.

What differences do you notice?

What are the purposes of these documents? How can you tell?

Can you tell which of these documents is written using *topic based writing* principles?

Gauducheau, N. (2016). An exploratory study of the information-seeking activities of adolescents in a discussion forum. Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology, 67(1), 43-55. doi: 10.1002/asi.23359
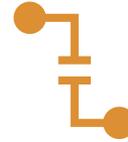
https://bit.ly/2Q2TglI

What is topic based writing?

Originates from technical writing

Moves away from a narrative style of documentation

Focuses on modular content

Allows for content re-use

Example: Manufacturer manual for a car

What are topics?

- Unique "chunks" of content that are designed to be standalone if needed

- Three types:
  - Concept: Gives readers general or important information about a topic
  - Task: Gives the reader step-by-step instructions to do something
  - Reference: Other helpful resources, info, or links the reader may need

CONCEPT

BROWNIE BATTER OVERNIGHT PROTEIN OATS

AUTHOR: DERYN MACEY   ⏱ PREP TIME: 5 MINS   ⏱ TOTAL TIME: 5 MINS   🍴 YIELD: 1   1X
CATEGORY: BREAKFAST   🔲 METHOD: SOAKING   🚩 CUISINE: VEGAN

These thick brownie batter overnight protein oats are like eating dessert for breakfast. Spend just a few minutes to prep the night before and in the morning, you'll be ready to dig into a bowl of brownie batter! Top with banana, peanut butter and chocolate chips for an extra decadent treat.

★★★★⯪

4.5 FROM 15 REVIEWS

🖨 PRINT RECIPE   📌 PIN RECIPE   RATE RECIPE

SCALE   1x   2x   3x

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup (50 g) rolled oats
- 3/4 cup unsweetened almond milk
- 1 serving (44 g) Vega Performance Protein in Chocolate (*Sub Vanilla or Mocha Flavour*)
- 2 tbsp (14 g) cocoa powder or raw cacao powder
- 1 packet stevia or stevia drops, to taste (*optional for added sweetness*)
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1/4 tsp sea salt

TASK

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add all ingredients to a glass container or bowl and mix well with a spoon. Make sure everything is mixed in and there are no dry clumps.

2. Cover and place in the fridge overnight.

Example processes

Adopting a Cat

- About Adoption
- Finding a Rescue
- Selecting Your Cat
- Bringing Her Home
- List of Local Rescues

Fostering a Cat

- About Fostering
- Preparing to Foster
- Finding a Rescue
- Bringing Her Home
- List of Local Rescues

Purchasing a Cat

- About Breeding
- Determining a Breed
- Finding a Breeder
- Selecting Your Cat
- Bringing Her Home

CONCEPT: They give us context about these processes

TASK: How to do one specific task. Combining these tells the user how to complete the overall *process.*

REFERENCE: Non-essential but helpful information. Not as "structured" as info in a concept topic would be
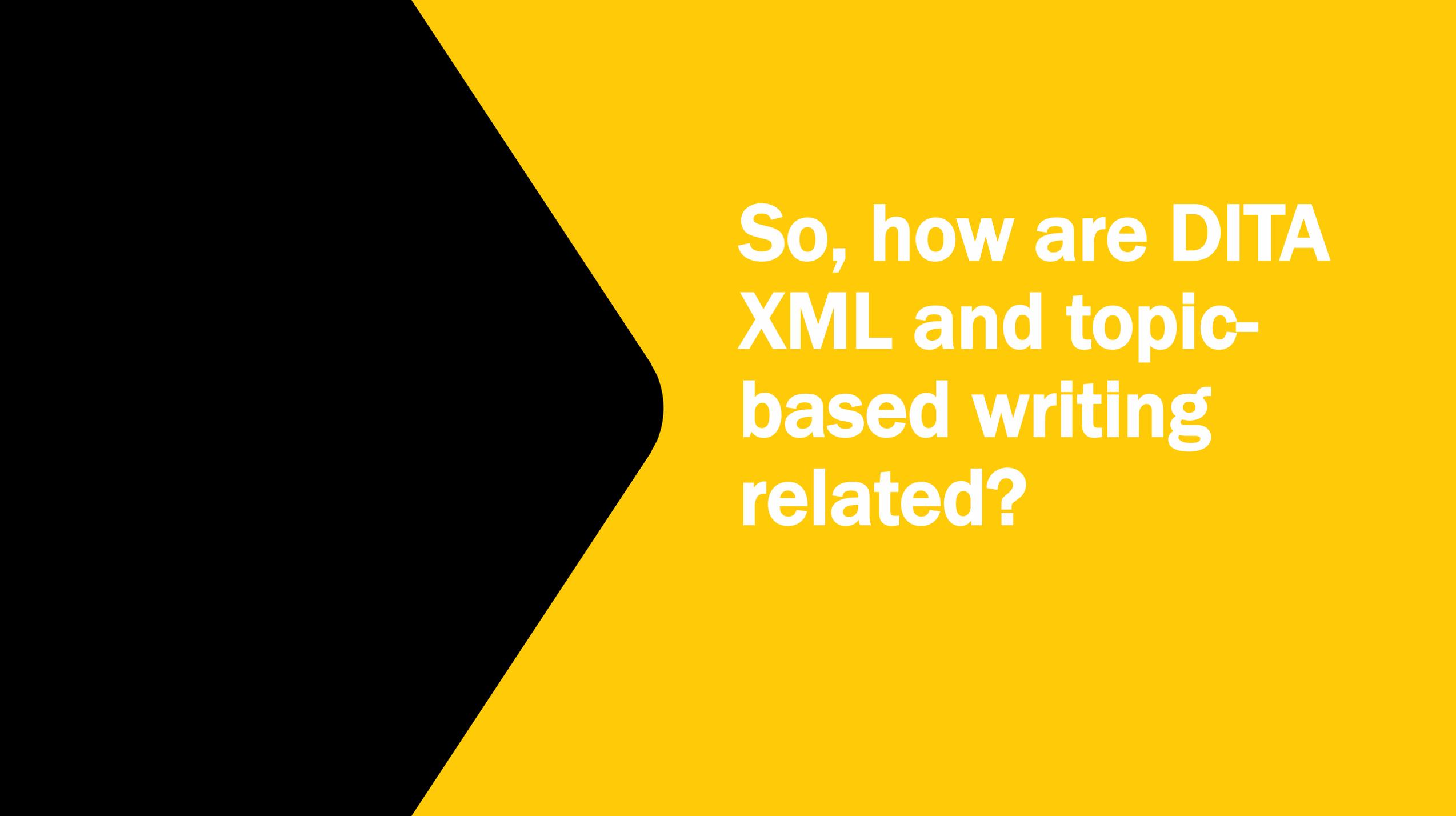
Let's try it out!

- Pick an ACTIVITY (as a class)
  - Buying a Cell Phone
  - Finding a Job
  - Writing an Essay
- Let's try this together in real time
- Click this link to get started:
  https://www.webwhiteboard.com/board/ddb728db

Great work everyone!

We've just made a process document using topic-based writing principles.

So, how are DITA XML and topic-based writing related?

How are DITA XML and topic-based writing related?

Topic based writing creates small "chunks" of content that can be re-used across different kinds of documentation (like manuals)

DITA helpfully defines set content types that all technical documentation must fit into
- Concept
- Task
- Reference

Applying DITA XML to topic based writing allows machines to understand how to organize and re-use content, usually via a component content management system (CCMS)

If you have any QUESTIONS from today:

Check the company knowledge base

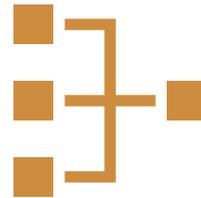**Post them to our Community of Practice site on the company intranet**

Ask for help from other pros!

DITA Awareness Group: LinkedIn

Oxygen Style Guide for DITA

In your next session, you will:

Learn more about content reuse

Get introduced to Eclipse, our component content management system (CCMS)

Practice writing a process document using the CCMS

Before you go...

○ Please take this brief evaluation about today's workshop!

○ https://bit.ly/3bmZ0ze