

Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms



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What we'll cover in this breakout

- Which tools are available today?
- What should your selection criteria be?
- What are the various development paradigms?
- How should you make your tool selection?

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Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

The tools on today's market

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ActiveHelp Web - AuthorIT - doc-o-matic - Doc-To-Help for Word - Doc-To-Help Enterprise - EasyHelp/Web - FAR HTML - Flare - HDK - Help & Manual - HelpBreeze - Help Development Studio - Help Magician - Help Publisher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HelpStudio - Hypertext Studio - Mif2Go - OfficeHelp - ReWorX - RoboHelp Office - Sevensteps - WebWorks ePublisher Pro - XDK |
|--|---|

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Selection criteria

- Don't be preoccupied with feature charts

■ Cell borders on all edges
 ■ Cell border colors
 ■ Cell border thickness
 ■ Cell background colors
 ■ Cell background shading
 ■ Row and column spanning
 ■ Nested tables (up to 9 levels)

Outputs Supported		
WinHelp 4.0	✓	✓
HTML Help 1.x	✓	✓
Cross-platform HTML 4.0	✓	✓
JavaHelp 1.1	✓	✓
Printed Documentation	✓	✓

Select Skin
 XP Blue

- What really differentiates the tools is their underlying work flows and development paradigms

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Questions for discussion

- What are your top three criteria for choosing a Help authoring tool?

“It must be able to...”

- What do you like most about your current Help authoring tool?

“It’s very good at...”

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Critical factors: Current authoring environment & workflow

- What format is your existing information in?
- Are you producing paper documentation?
If so, what tool are you using?
- Who will have responsibility for creating and updating information?
- Which word-processing environment do you want your content editors to use?
- To what extent do you need to:
 - reuse your source content for different media and purposes?
 - restructure the information for each purpose?
- Which is your **primary** output format, paper or online Help?

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Other critical factors:

- What type of application are you developing Help for (Web-based, C++, Java, etc.)?
- Which online formats do you need to produce?
- What HTML-specific technologies and techniques do you want to exploit?
- What platforms will you be supporting?
- What are your localisation needs?

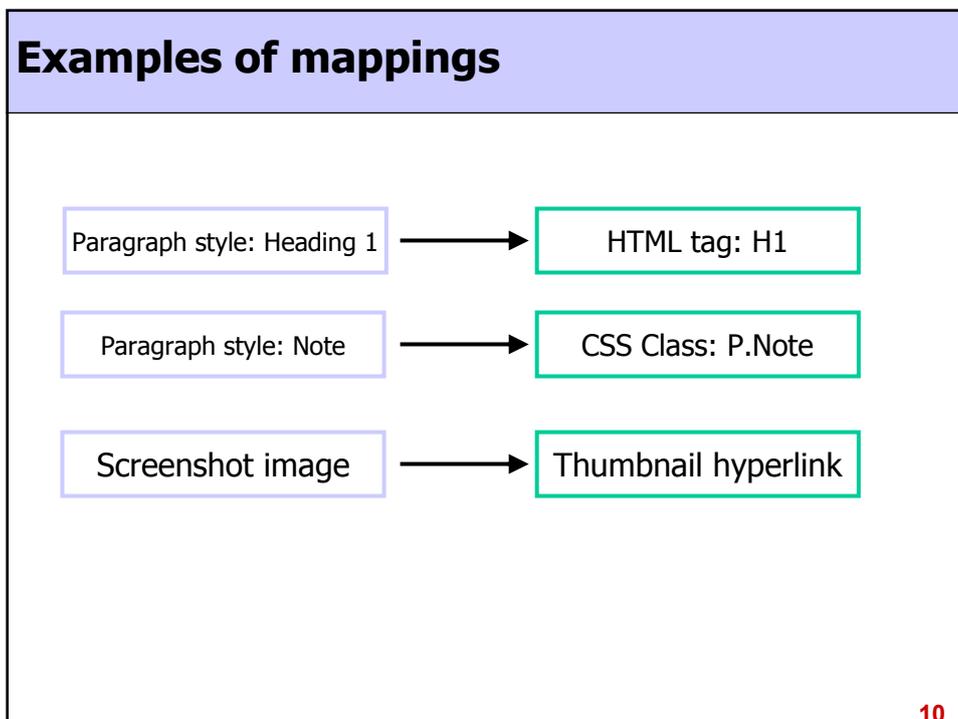
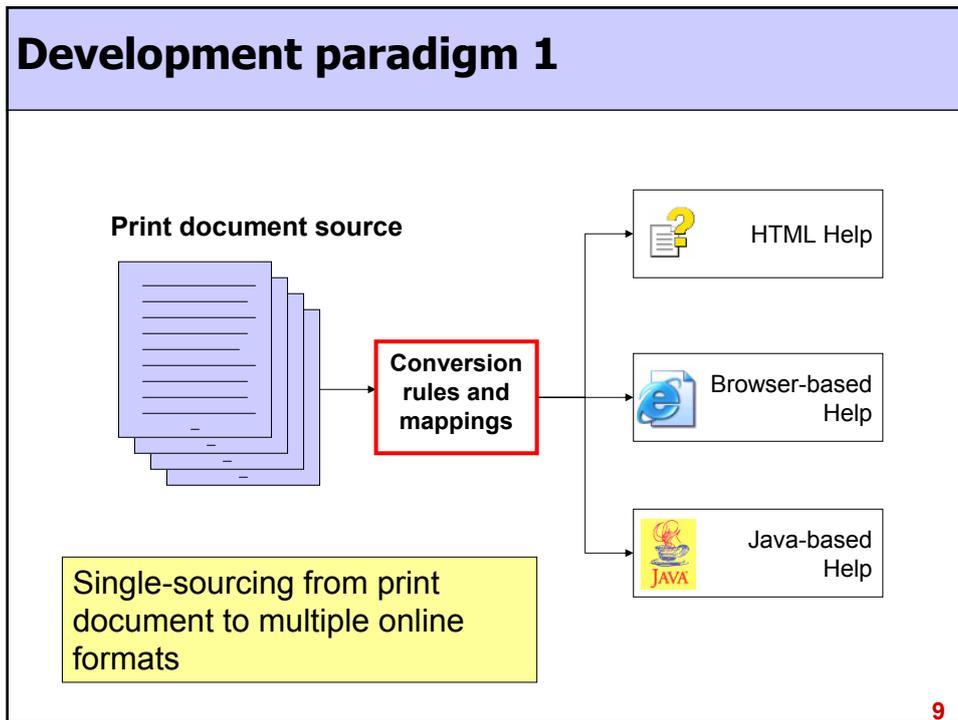
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Development paradigm 1

- Author content within a print-based publishing tool
- Convert the print document to the required online Help format(s)

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Potential advantages of paradigm 1

- A single source for all outputs
- Printed manual is created using tool designed for that purpose
- Content is created and edited outside of a specialist Help tool environment
- Can continue to use in-house word-processing/DTP skills

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Potential disadvantages of paradigm 1

- You have to create a print manual even if you don't need one
- Help features are generated from document counterparts
- May be more difficult to create custom HTML or scripts within Help topics

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Tools that use paradigm 1

- WebWorks ePublisher Pro (Quadralay)
 - Source documents: Word or FrameMaker
- Mif2Go (Omni Systems)
 - Source documents: FrameMaker
- Doc-To-Help for Word (ComponentOne)
 - Source documents: Word
- ReWorX 2004 Professional (Virtual Media Technology)
 - Source documents: Word

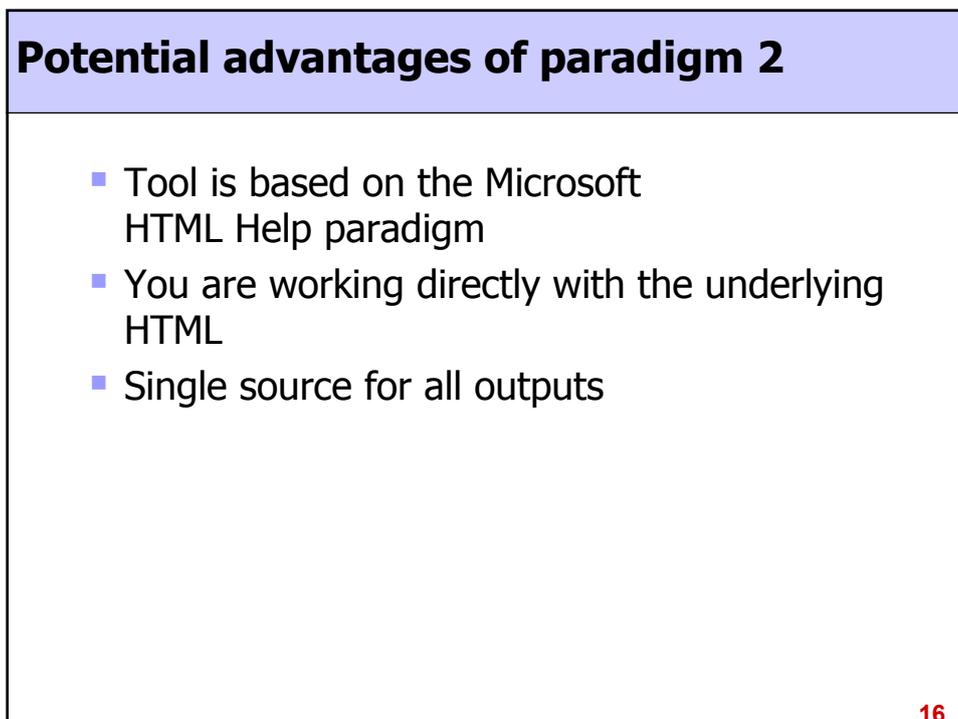
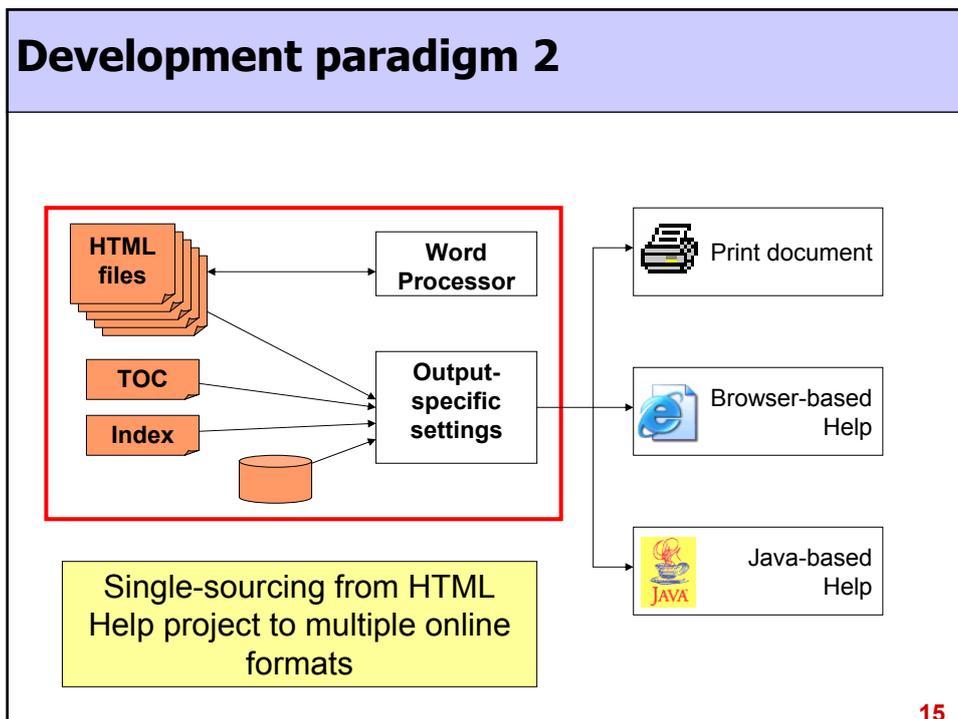
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Development paradigm 2

- Work directly with the source HTML required by the Help compiler
- Convert the source files for any other required outputs

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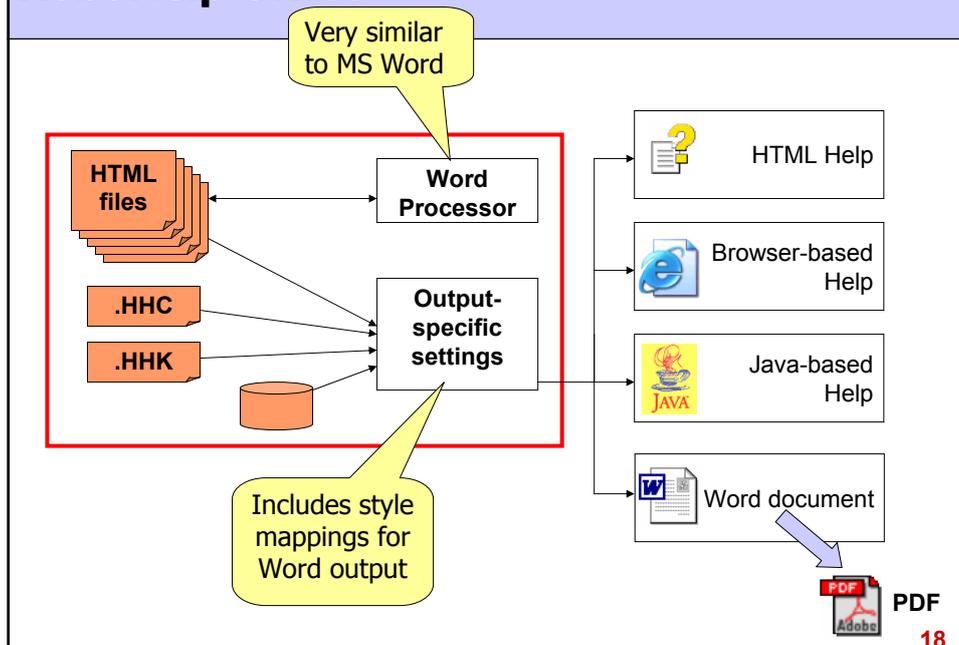
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Potential disadvantages of paradigm 2

- Tied to a specific Help technology
- HTML Help paradigm is not suited to print output
- HTML files are not well suited to managing and re-purposing content

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RoboHelp Office



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Other tools that use paradigm 2

- HelpStudio (Innovasys)
 - Stores HTML topic markup in single XML database
- Doc-To-Help Enterprise (ComponentOne)
 - Can be used with any HTML editor
- FAR HTML (The Helpware Group)
 - Not really a tool for authoring content
- Help Publisher for Dreamweaver (Indigoware)

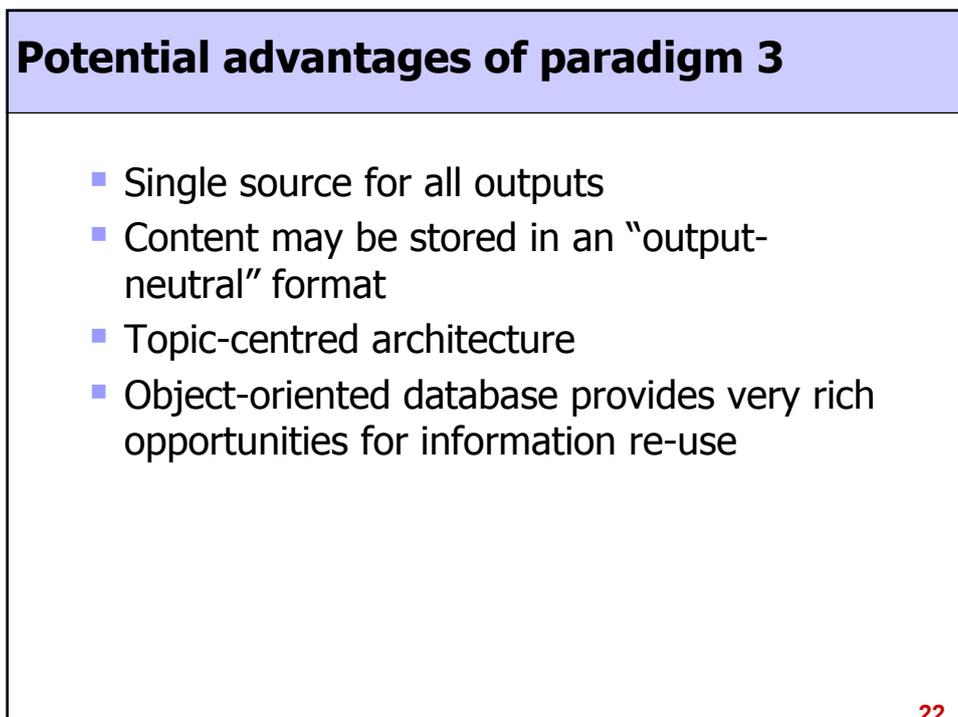
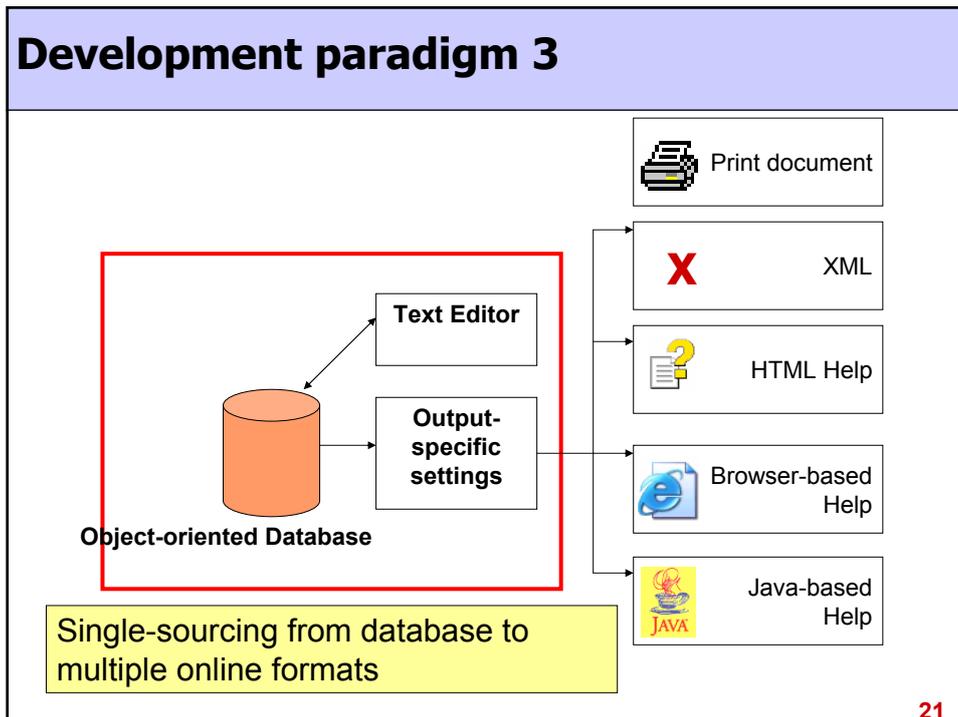
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Development paradigm 3

- Create and manage content in a database
- Output to all required outputs from the database

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Potential disadvantages of paradigm 3

- Content authors have to learn a new text editor
- You're not creating any specific output format directly
- May be more difficult to create custom HTML or scripts within Help topics
- May have less control over presentation of printed output

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Tools that use paradigm 3:

- AuthorIT (only!)

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Development paradigm 4

- Work in a proprietary Help Authoring Tool that stores content at XML “under the hood”
- Output to all required outputs from the XML source

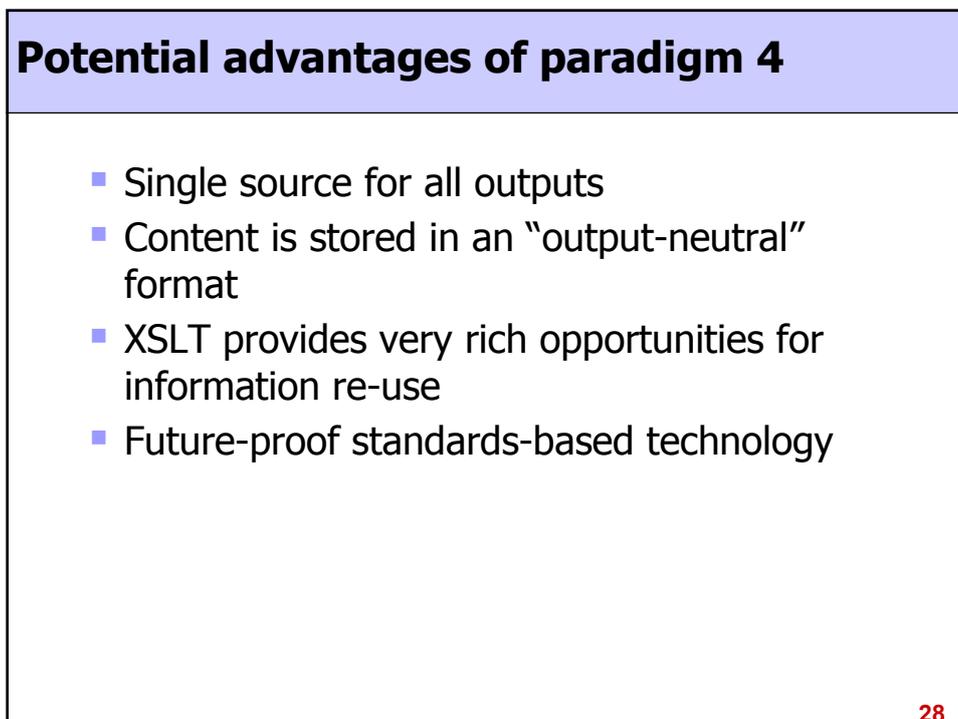
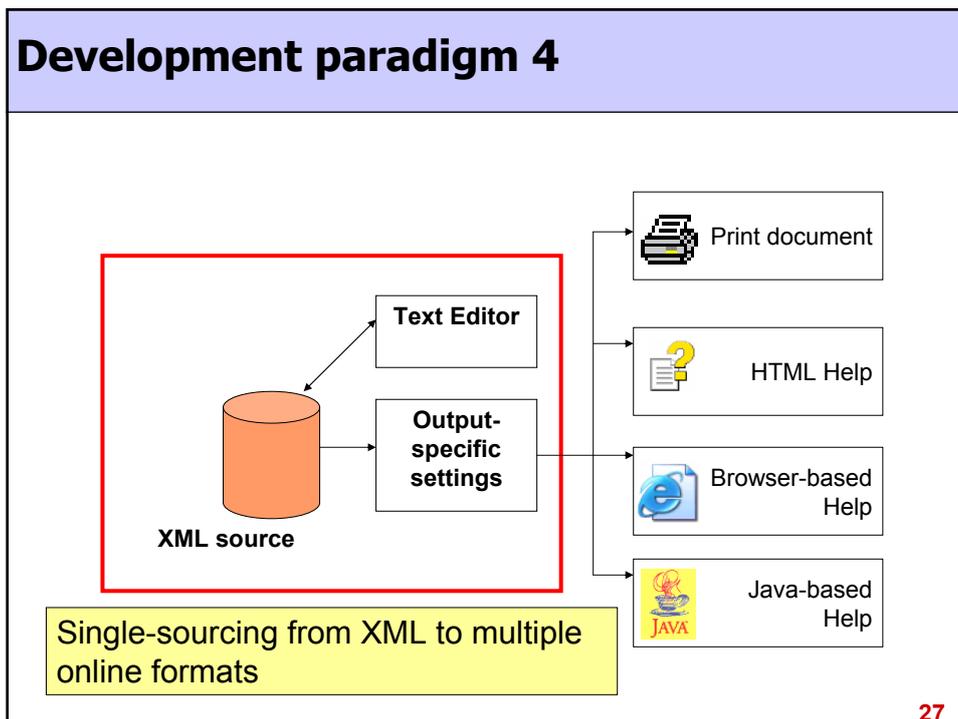
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A note about XML

- It’s been the “in” buzzword for about six years or so
- If a tool uses/supports XML, find out why and how
 - Is it simply for the convenience of the tool developers?
 - What benefits does it offer you?
 - Ask not what XML can do for the authoring tool – ask what it can do for you!

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Potential disadvantages of paradigm 4

- Content authors have to learn a new text editor
- You're not creating any specific output format directly

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Tools that use paradigm 4:

- MadCap Flare (MadCap Software)
 - May also support paradigm 1 in the future
- Help & Manual 4 (EC Software)
 - An easy-to-use XML-based authoring tool

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Development paradigm 5

Non-proprietary XML-based content management:
Create source content as XML and then transform to
required formats

Pros:

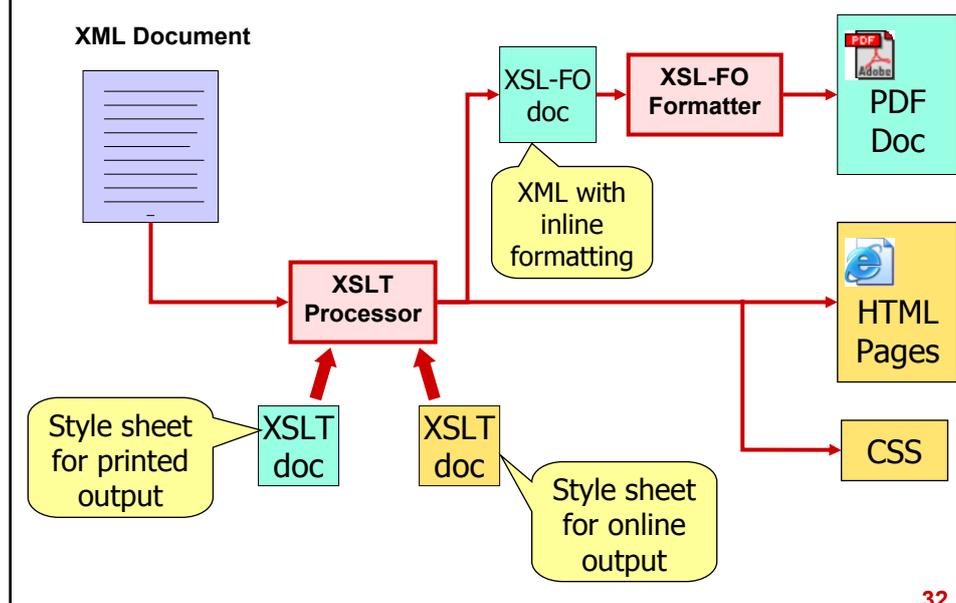
- Non-proprietary format
- Enables structured authoring
- Enables flexible re-purposing of content
- Many transformation engines available

Cons:

- New and more complex authoring environment
- Technology requires steep learning curve

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XML Transformation process



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Tools

XML editors:

- Arbortext Editor (PTC)
- XMetaL (Justsystems)
- Structured FrameMaker (Adobe)

XML-based content management systems:

- Documentum (EMC Software)
- RedDot (RedDot Solutions)
- SiberSafe (SiberLogic)
- Vasont (Vasont Systems)

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Summary 1

Develop online Help only:

- RoboHelp Office
- Help Publisher for Dreamweaver

Single-source from:

- MS Word:
 - Doc-To-Help for Word
 - WebWorks ePublisher Pro
 - ReWorX
- FrameMaker:
 - WebWorks ePublisher Pro
 - Mif2Go

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Summary 2

Single-source from:

- HTML:
 - RoboHelp Office
 - HelpStudio
 - Doc-To-Help Enterprise
- XML
 - Help & Manual
 - Flare
- Object Oriented Database:
 - AuthorIT

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Summary 3

- Base your choice on your required development paradigm and processes
- Also take into account your primary output format
- Consider whether you require the flexibility of topic-centred re-use
- Test-drive a shortlist of tools to find which you are most comfortable with
- All the tools we've seen today have outstanding qualities

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Further reading

- www.HAT-matrix.com
- Adobe solutions for technical communications:
www.adobe.com/products/special/crossproduct/tech_communication/faq.html
- A Revived Future for RoboHelp:
<http://www.writersua.com/articles/rh2/index.html>
- Flare, RoboHelp, and FrameMaker (monkeyPi):
<http://monkeypi.net/?p=61>
- Review of Doc-to-Help 2006:
www.devcity.net/Articles/249/1/article.aspx
- Review of MadCap Flare:
<http://www.cherryleaf.com/flarearticle-1.htm>
- Review of Innovasys HelpStudio 2:
www.stcuk.org/newsletters/October2005/articles/article1.htm

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Further reading (continued)

- Review of Help & Manual 4:
www.writersua.com/articles/helpman/index.html
- Comparison of HTML Produced by HATs
(David Knopf, Char James-Tanny, Paul Neshamkin, MJ Plaster, Dana Cline):
<http://www.knopf.com/resources/hatcomp/index.html>
- Review of AuthorIT 4.0
<http://www.winwriters.com/aitv4review.htm>
- Review of Doc-To-Help 6.0:
<http://www.winwriters.com/dth6.htm>
- Review of ReWorX 2003:
<http://www.winwriters.com/articles/reworx/index.html>
- Review of RoboHelp 2002:
http://www.winwriters.com/robohelp02_pt1.htm
- Review of WebWorks Publisher 2003:
<http://www.winwriters.com/articles/webworks/index.html>

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