

How long is a topic?

UA Europe?
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
5-6 June 2014, Kraków, Poland

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UA Europe?

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What we'll cover in this session

- Influence of minimalism on topic length
- What we can learn from wikis and blogs
- Topics as articles
- The issue of narrative flow
- Sizing topics for searching & browsing
- Content re-use and granularity
- Signposting and navigation within topics

Influence of minimalism on topic length

- Some key principles of John Carroll's minimalism:
 - modular
 - task-based
 - get the user up and running as soon as possible
 - make use of prior knowledge
 - guided exploration



Windows 95 Help - based on Minimalist Model?

The screenshot shows the Windows 95 desktop with several icons on the left: My Computer, Network Neighborhood, Inbox, Recycle Bin, and The Microsoft Network. Two help windows are open. The 'Windows Help' window displays a list of topics under the heading 'More ways to customize Windows'. The 'What's New' window provides details on 'Display properties'.

Windows Help

Help Topics Back Options

More ways to customize Windows

There are many new ways to customize Windows.

- Shortcuts on the desktop
- Display properties
- Fonts folder
- User profiles
- Accessibility options for people with disabilities
- System properties

What's New

Display properties

You can customize almost any screen element in Windows by using the right mouse button to click the desktop, and then clicking Properties.

In the Display Properties dialog box, you can change the background color or add a bitmap to your desktop; you can change the font used for your menus, title bars, and other elements; and you can choose different screen savers.

Windows Help

Help Topics Back Options

To put a shortcut on the desktop

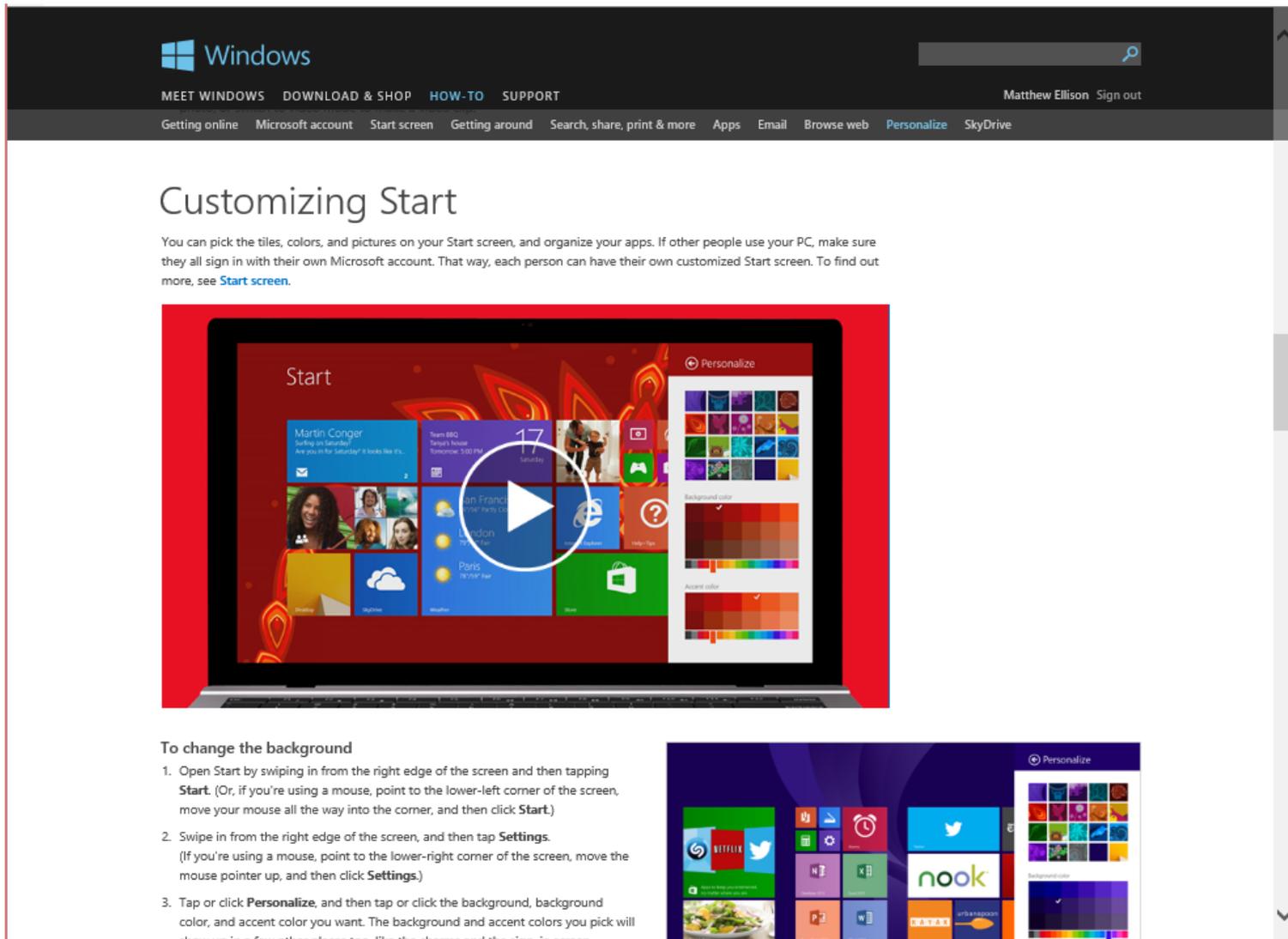
- 1 Click the item, such as a file, program, folder, printer, or computer, that you want to create a shortcut to.
- 2 On the File menu, click Create Shortcut.
- 3 Drag the shortcut icon onto the desktop.

Tips

- You can use the shortcut as a fast way to open the item.
- To change any settings for the shortcut, such as what kind of window it starts in or what key combination is used to access it, use your right mouse button to click the shortcut, and then click Properties.
- To delete a shortcut, drag it to the Recycle Bin. The original item will still exist on the disk where it is stored.

Related Topics

How things have changed!



Windows

MEET WINDOWS DOWNLOAD & SHOP HOW-TO SUPPORT

Matthew Ellison Sign out

Getting online Microsoft account Start screen Getting around Search, share, print & more Apps Email Browse web Personalize SkyDrive

Customizing Start

You can pick the tiles, colors, and pictures on your Start screen, and organize your apps. If other people use your PC, make sure they all sign in with their own Microsoft account. That way, each person can have their own customized Start screen. To find out more, see [Start screen](#).

To change the background

1. Open Start by swiping in from the right edge of the screen and then tapping **Start**. (Or, if you're using a mouse, point to the lower-left corner of the screen, move your mouse all the way into the corner, and then click **Start**.)
2. Swipe in from the right edge of the screen, and then tap **Settings**. (If you're using a mouse, point to the lower-right corner of the screen, move the mouse pointer up, and then click **Settings**.)
3. Tap or click **Personalize**, and then tap or click the background, background color, and accent color you want. The background and accent colors you pick will show up in a few other places, too, like the charms and the sign-in screen.

How things have changed!

The image shows a vertical scroll of a Microsoft support page titled "Personalize your PC". The page is divided into several sections, each with a heading and a list of steps. A red rectangular box highlights the "Personalize your PC" section, which includes a screenshot of a Windows 10 desktop with various settings tiles. The sections visible on the page are:

- Personalize your PC** (highlighted with a red box)
- Protecting your location**
- Signing in with a picture password**
- Tip**
- Choosing when you get when pages in**
- Customizing your lock screen**
- Changing your account picture**
- Setting up your PC**
- Customizing your lock screen**
- Tip**
- Setting your settings**
- Customizing Windows**
- Support topics**

What about Information Mapping?

- Should topics have 7 ± 2 chunks?
- How long should those chunks be?
- Is seven really such a magic number when it comes to information design?

What we can learn from blogs and wikis

“The predominance of blogs on the web has set a trend for expected article length and attention span online”

[Tom Johnson]

- Blog posts should be 300+ words for SEO purposes
- 500 words is commonly said to be the ideal length

What we can learn from blogs and wikis



WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

- Wikipedia's recommendation on article size (in a nutshell):

Articles should be neither too big nor too small

What do we mean by a topic?

- One idea, one topic?
- A topic supports one task?
- An answer to a question?
- The shortest effective piece of communication?

Let's agree on:

- a standalone piece of content

My attempt to define a topic

a self-contained cluster of
chunks of information,
each of which depends on the
others for context,
on a single theme
with an overall narrative flow

Example 1

Adobe Captivate Help / Edit audio

Adobe Community Help

Search

Applies to:
Adobe Captivate

Contact support

Give feedback

- Edit audio files
- Edit audio timing
- Add silence to an audio file
- Edit audio using Adobe Audition
- Add closed captions to an audio file
- Delete audio from a slide
- Delete background audio

Edit audio files

To the top

You can edit the audio files in your Adobe Captivate project at any time. Using the Edit Audio dialog box, you can listen to an audio file, insert silence, adjust volume, and change numerous other options.

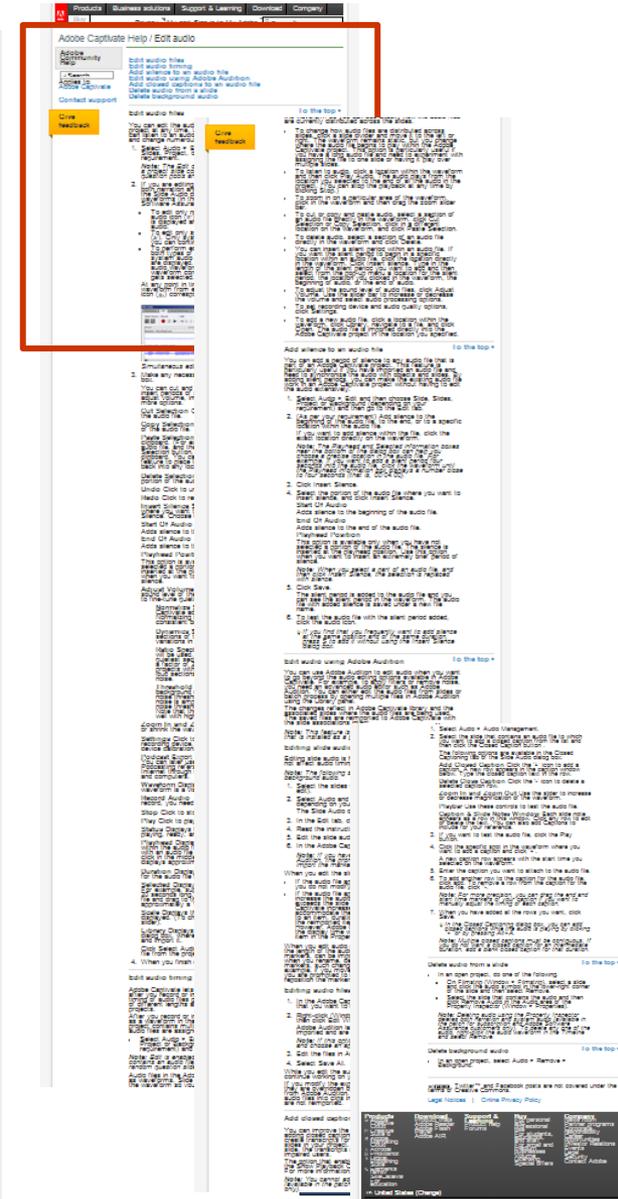
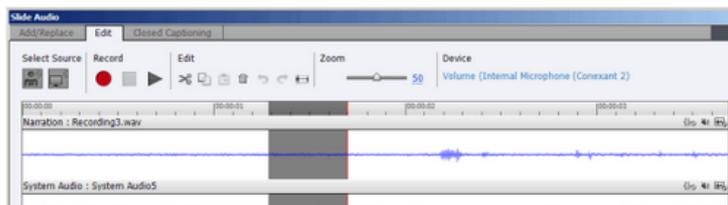
1. Select Audio > Edit and then choose Object, Slide, Slides, Project, or Background depending on your requirement.

Note: The Edit option is enabled if a question slide or a project slide contains an audio file. It is disabled for question pools and random question slides.

2. If you are editing slide audio and the slide contains both narration and system audio, then the Edit tab in the Slide Audio dialog box displays both the audio waveforms (in the patch for subscription and Adobe Software Assurance customers only).

- To edit only narration audio, click the system audio icon (🔊). Only the narration audio waveform is displayed and you can continue editing the audio.
- To edit only system audio, click the narration icon (🗣️). Only system audio waveform is displayed and you can continue editing the audio.
- To perform editing operations simultaneously on both types of audio, click both narration and system audio icons. Both the audio waveforms are displayed. When you select a portion of one audio waveform, the portion of the other audio waveform corresponding to the selected time, also gets selected.

At any point in time, if you want to exclude an audio waveform from editing, click the Remove Selection icon (🗑️) corresponding to the waveform.



Example 2

Photoshop Help / Levels adjustment

Adobe Community Help

Search

Applies to:
Photoshop

Adobe Photoshop CC

[Learn more](#)

[Try](#)
[Join](#)

[Contact support](#)

Give
feedback

Levels overview

[From an expert: Levels command](#)

[Adjust tonal range using Levels](#)

[Adjust color using Levels](#)

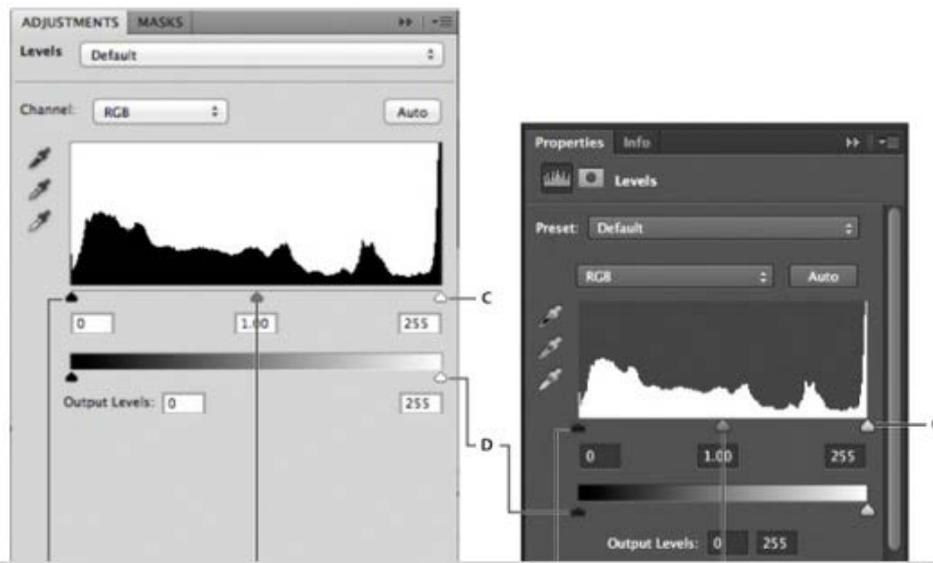
[Add contrast to a photo with Levels](#)

Levels overview

[To the top](#)

You use the Levels adjustment to correct the tonal range and color balance of an image by adjusting intensity levels of image shadows, midtones, and highlights. The Levels histogram is a visual guide for adjusting the image key tones. For more information on how to read a histogram, see [About histograms](#).

You can save Levels settings as a preset, then apply them to other images. See [Save adjustment settings](#) and [Reapply adjustment settings](#).



Example 3

You are here: [Features](#) > [Movies](#) > [More About Movies](#) > [Adding](#)

Adding Multimedia Files to Projects

This feature is supported in EPUB and in all online outputs (DotNet Help, Eclipse Help, Microsoft HTML Help, WebHelp, WebHelp 2.0 (HTML5), WebHelp AIR, WebHelp Mobile, and WebHelp Plus).

You can add many types of multimedia files (both video and audio) to your project, which can then be inserted into topics or snippets.

The following steps show you how to add a multimedia file to your project, without inserting it into a topic (or snippet). If you follow the steps for inserting movies or audio (see [Inserting Movies](#) and [Inserting Audio Files](#)), the multimedia file is added to the project as well.

The traditional location to store a multimedia file in the Content Explorer is in the Resources\Multimedia folder. However, you can store it anywhere in the Content Explorer that you like.

▶ FILE TYPES

▶ HOW TO ADD A MULTIMEDIA FILE TO A PROJECT

▶ NOTE

☰ SEE ALSO

▶ PDF DOWNLOADS

▶ VIDEOS

▶ SUPPORT LINKS

▶ FOLLOW THE DOC TEAM

The issue of narrative flow

“For whatever minimum amount of content that reader needs in order to get back to their task, they will get to their task faster if there is good narrative flow within that content.”

[Mark Baker]

Topics as articles

- Google, Microsoft, and Adobe now label their Help topics as “Articles”
- The term “Article” implies:
 - Longer
 - More independent

Topics as articles

“If I ... approached technical instruction as a series of articles, which fit together coherently, somewhat like on a blog, I would do a much better job.”

[Tom Johnson]

- Tom favors longer topics
- “The real focus in help should be on expanding the concepts, and the concepts should be written in a way that fits together coherently. ”

Sizing topics for searching & browsing

- Trade-off between:
 - too many search results (short topics)
 - too much scrolling/scanning (long topics)
- Important to consider browsing too
 - argument for longer topics?
 - breadcrumbs and “related topics” links are vital

More about lists

[Change bullet style](#)

[Turn your text into a bulleted list](#)

[Create an outline](#)

Related Topics

[Basic Steps in Improving Photographs](#)

[How to Approach Colour, Contrast, and Saturation Adjustments](#)

[Common Problems and How to Solve Them](#)

[Improving Colours](#)

[Improving Saturation](#)

[Removing Source Defects](#)

[Removing Image Defects and Noise](#)

[Correcting Image Distortions](#)

[Retouching Photographs](#)

[Improving Image Clarity](#)

Adobe also recommends

- [Making quick tonal adjustments](#)
- [Adjusting image color and tone](#)

Parent topic: [Packaging assets for reuse](#)

Related concepts

[RAS assets](#)

Related reference

[RAS asset icons](#)

Feedback

(C) Copyright IBM Corporation 2004, 2005. All Rights Reserved.

[Tips and advice can be found here:](#)

⇒ [Tips for Optimizing System Startup](#)

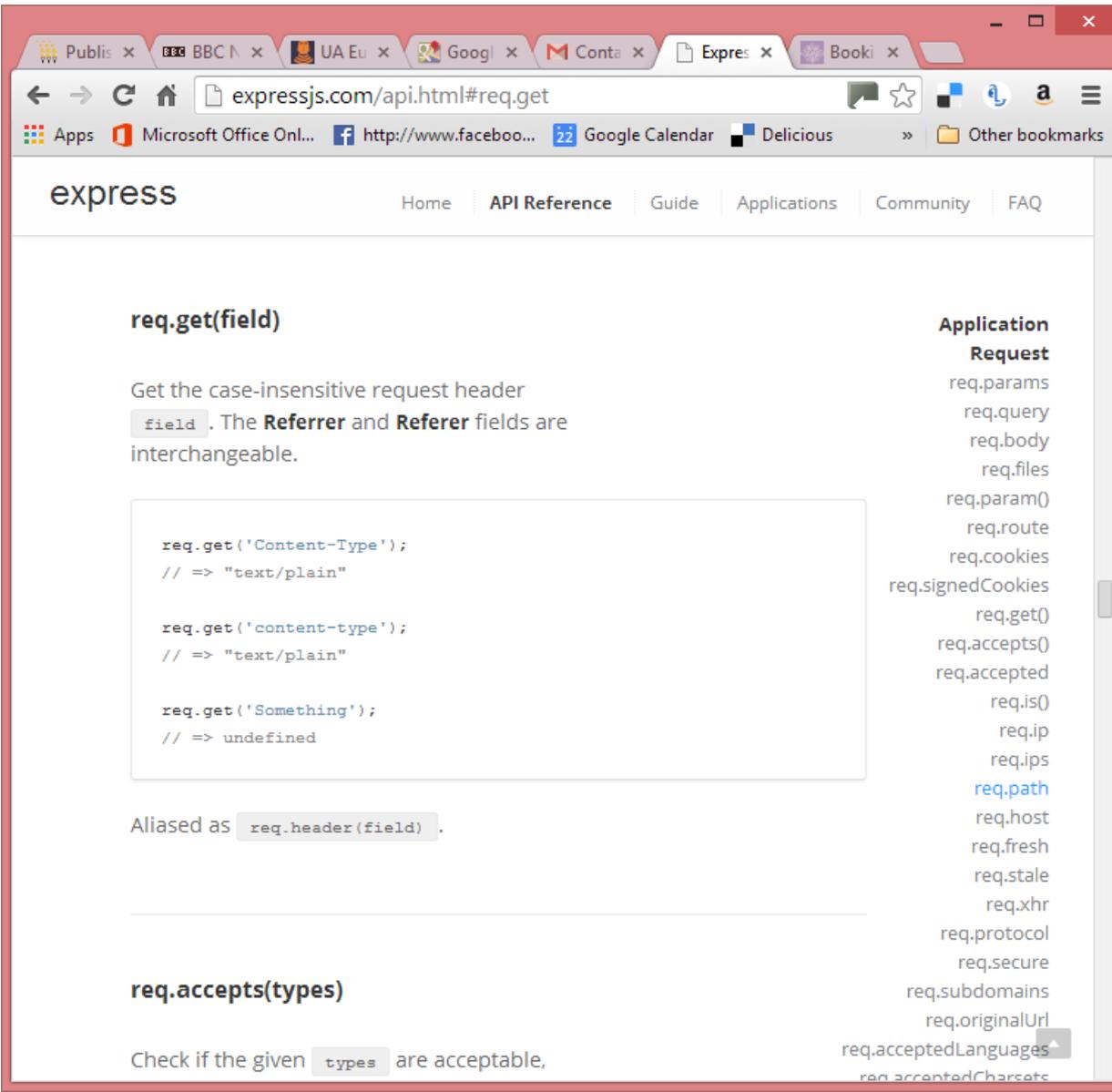
[Back to Overview:](#)

⇒ [Disabling Startup Programs](#)

☰ SEE ALSO

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| ▶ PDF DOWNLOADED | <input type="checkbox"/> | Building a Single Target |
| ▶ VIDEOS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Building Output |
| ▶ SUPPORT | <input type="checkbox"/> | Building Output Using a Batch Target |
| ▶ FOLLOW | <input type="checkbox"/> | Building Targets Using the Command Line |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | Building the Primary Target |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | Improving the Processing Performance of the Target |

Taking longer topics to the extreme...



express

Home | **API Reference** | Guide | Applications | Community | FAQ

req.get(field)

Get the case-insensitive request header `field`. The **Referrer** and **Referer** fields are interchangeable.

```
req.get('Content-Type');  
// => "text/plain"  
  
req.get('content-type');  
// => "text/plain"  
  
req.get('Something');  
// => undefined
```

Aliased as `req.header(field)`.

req.accepts(types)

Check if the given `types` are acceptable,

Application Request

- req.params
- req.query
- req.body
- req.files
- req.param()
- req.route
- req.cookies
- req.signedCookies
- req.get()
- req.accepts()
- req.accepted
- req.is()
- req.ip
- req.ips
- req.path
- req.host
- req.fresh
- req.stale
- req.xhr
- req.protocol
- req.secure
- req.subdomains
- req.originalUrl
- req.acceptedLanguages
- req.acceptedCharsets

- Single Page Docs
 - stop the click insanity
- [Brandon Philips]

Content re-use and granularity

- “Narrative isn’t one of the genres meant for any kinds of re-use.”

[Rahel Anne Bailie]

- Shorter topics have more potential for re-use
- Re-use can be at a more granular level than topics

Content re-use and granularity

- “Technical documentation is something else that’s far more structured than other kinds of writing. There are sections and subsections and tables and lists of tasks, etc. Each of these things brings with it some kinds of content boundaries that encapsulate it, and allow it to stand on its own, and thus be managed somewhere else and then reused.”

[Deane Barker]

So, how long should a topic be?

It depends

As long as it needs to be to
answer the reader's question



Create a bulleted or numbered list

1. Type * (asterisk) or Shift+Ctrl+L to start a bulleted list or 1. to start a numbered list, and then press SPACEBAR or the TAB key.
2. Type some text.
3. Press ENTER to add the next list item.

Applies to:
Word 2013

Word automatically inserts the next bullet or number.

4. To finish the list, press ENTER twice, or press BACKSPACE to delete the last bullet or number in the list.

TIP You can use a different bullet or numbering style by clicking the arrow next to Home>Paragraph>Bullets or Home>Paragraph>Numbering and clicking a new style.

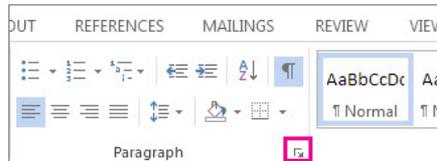
If bullets and numbering do not begin automatically

1. Click File>Options>Proofing.
2. Click AutoCorrect Options, and then click the AutoFormat As You Type tab.
3. Under Apply as you type, select the Automatic bulleted lists check box and the Automatic numbered lists check box.

Spread out the items in a list

Increase the space between the lines in all of your lists by clearing a check box.

1. Click Home>Paragraph Dialog Box Launcher.



2. On the Indents and Spacing tab, under Spacing, clear the check box for Don't add space between paragraphs of the same style.

More about lists

[Change bullet style](#)

[Turn your text into a bulleted list](#)

[Create an outline](#)

Did this article help you?

Search all of Office.com
4. **Preview and complete the merge.** You can preview each message before you send the whole set.
Set up the email message main document

Use Word ma
If you want to send a do
each person is address
has the same informati
An example of this migh
this invitation to every o
personalized, just to—an
In a nutshell, these are th
Open/create a Word docume

Select your recipients

IMPORTANT Be sure y
Outlook 2013.
The mail merge process
very straightforward with
1. **Set up the email mes**
you've already create
2. **Connect the message**
merge. It's a file that
3. **Add placeholders, call**
the mail merge fields

1. Start Word
2. Click Mailing
3. Add placeholders, call

browse to your list.

| EventMailingList.x... | Carbonati | Cyril |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Dempsey | Molly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dixon | Andrew |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dow | Jane |

Buttons: Edit..., Refresh, Validate address

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Buttons: Edit...

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| State |
| ZIP_Cod |
| Country |
| Home_P |

Sort record
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(Z to A).

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Entry and ty

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during the me
You can also a
For more info

Formatting
A spreadsheet program such as Excel stores the information that you type inside cells as raw data. When you merge information from an Excel spreadsheet into a Word document, you are merging that raw data without any Excel formatting. If your spreadsheet includes dates, times, currency values, or postal codes that begin or end in 0, read about **formatting mail merge numbers, dates, and other values.**

Preview and finish the merge
After you add fields to your email message's main document, you're ready to preview the merge results. When you're satisfied with the preview, you can complete the merge.

Preview the merge
Click Mailings, and a couple of groups to the right, you'll see Preview Results.

Now you can do any or all of the following:

- Click Preview Results. (This option is available only if you chose one or more placeholder fields, such as greeting, name, address, etc.)
- Page through each email message by clicking the blue arrows.
- Preview a specific document by clicking Find Recipient.
- Edit your recipient list—who's getting this message—by clicking Mailings > Edit Recipient List.

Complete the merge and send the messages

1. Click Mailings > Finish & Merge > Send E-mail Messages.
2. In the To box

NOTE Word s
can't add attach
3. In the Subject
4. In the Mail fo

IMPORTANT If
formatting or gr

When you save the email message's main document, you also save its connection to the data file you chose. The next time you open the email message main document, Word prompts you to choose whether to keep the connection to the data file.

- If you click Yes, the document opens with information from the first record merged in.
- If you click No, the connection between the email message main document and the data file is broken. The email message main document becomes a standard Word document.

Did this article help you?

Yes No Not what I was looking for

Site Directory Contact Us Submit Feedback Legal Trademarks Privacy and Cookies Accessibility



So, how long should a topic be?

It depends

As long as it needs to be to answer the reader's question

But:

users must be aware of the full scope of the topic

Signposting and navigation within topics

- Enable users to see full scope of topic

Examples

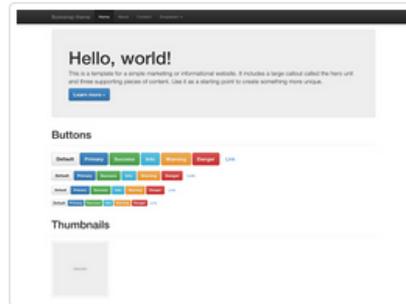
Build on the basic template above with Bootstrap's many components. See also [Customizing Bootstrap](#) for tips on maintaining your own Bootstrap variants.

Using the framework



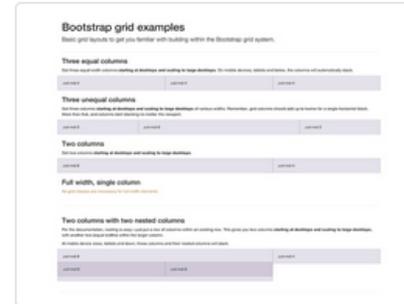
Starter template

Nothing but the basics: compiled CSS and JavaScript along with a container.



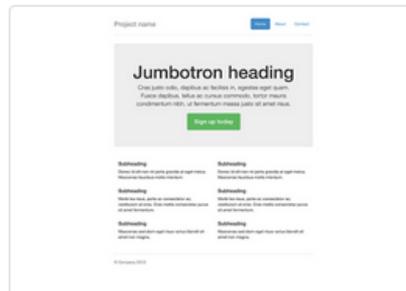
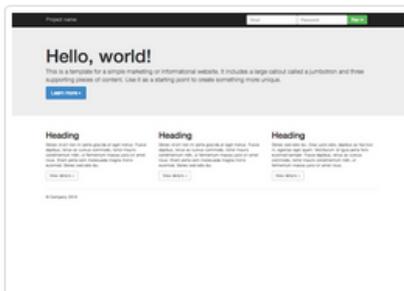
Bootstrap theme

Load the optional Bootstrap theme for a visually enhanced experience.



Grids

Multiple examples of grid layouts with all four tiers, nesting, and more.



[Download](#)

[What's included](#)

[Basic template](#)

Examples

[Using the framework](#)

[Navbars in action](#)

[Custom components](#)

[Experiments](#)

[Community](#)

[Disabling responsiveness](#)

[Migrating from 2.x to 3.0](#)

[Browser and device support](#)

[Third party support](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[License FAQs](#)

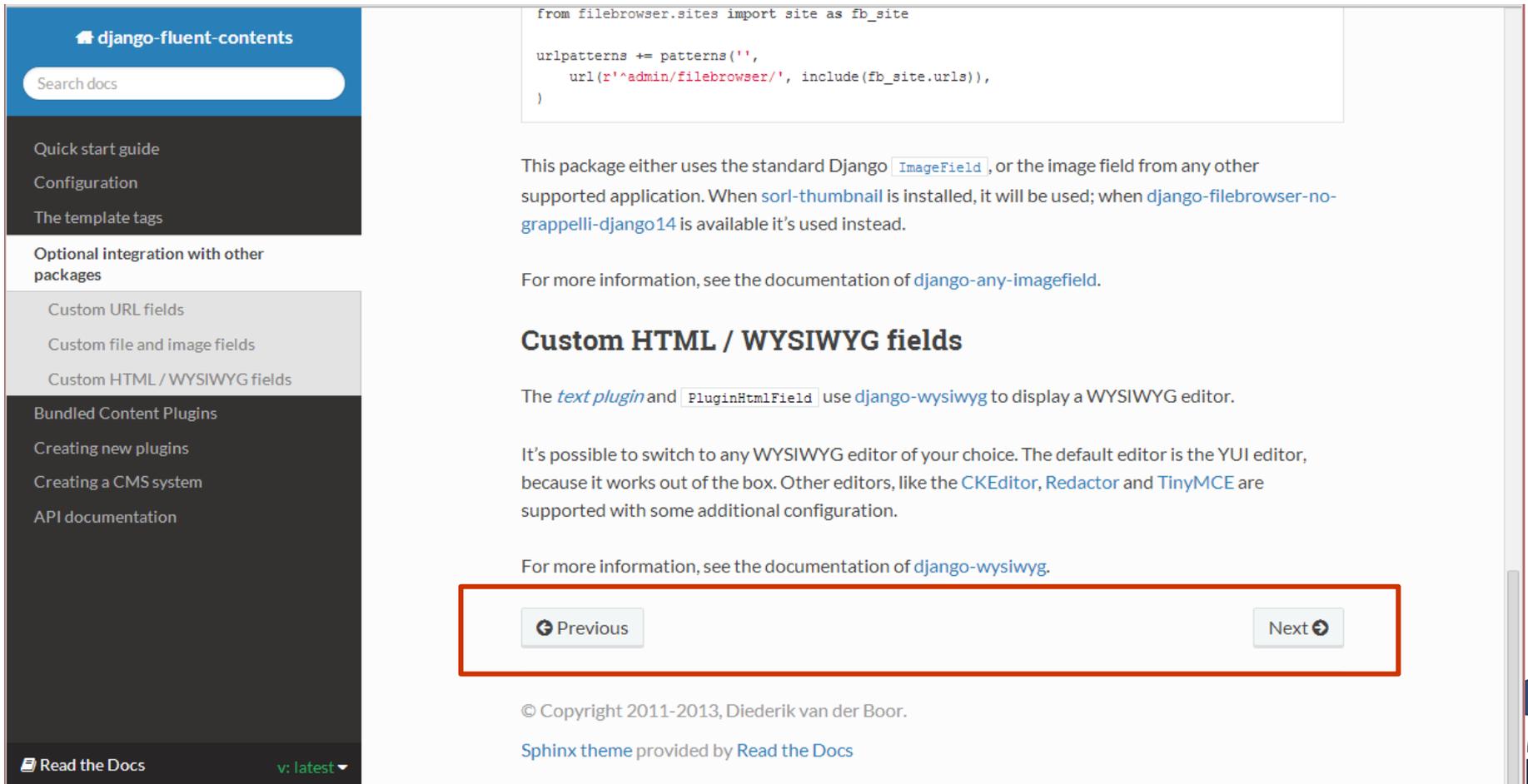
[Customizing Bootstrap](#)

[Translations](#)

[Back to top](#)

Signposting and navigation within topics

- Use affordances within a topic to indicate flow between topics



The screenshot displays a documentation page for 'django-fluent-contents'. On the left is a dark sidebar with a search bar and a list of navigation items: 'Quick start guide', 'Configuration', 'The template tags', 'Optional integration with other packages' (with sub-items 'Custom URL fields', 'Custom file and image fields', 'Custom HTML / WYSIWYG fields'), 'Bundled Content Plugins', 'Creating new plugins', 'Creating a CMS system', and 'API documentation'. The main content area features a code block with Python code for URL patterns, followed by explanatory text about package dependencies and integration. A section titled 'Custom HTML / WYSIWYG fields' discusses editor options. At the bottom, a red-bordered box highlights 'Previous' and 'Next' navigation buttons. The footer includes copyright information and the Sphinx theme used.

```
from filebrowser.sites import site as fb_site

urlpatterns += patterns('',
    url(r'^admin/filebrowser/', include(fb_site.urls)),
)
```

This package either uses the standard Django `ImageField`, or the image field from any other supported application. When `sorl-thumbnail` is installed, it will be used; when `django-filebrowser-no-grappelli-django14` is available it's used instead.

For more information, see the documentation of [django-any-imagefield](#).

Custom HTML / WYSIWYG fields

The *text plugin* and `PluginHtmlField` use [django-wysiwyg](#) to display a WYSIWYG editor.

It's possible to switch to any WYSIWYG editor of your choice. The default editor is the YUI editor, because it works out of the box. Other editors, like the [CKEditor](#), [Redactor](#) and [TinyMCE](#) are supported with some additional configuration.

For more information, see the documentation of [django-wysiwyg](#).

◀ Previous

Next ▶

© Copyright 2011-2013, Diederik van der Boor.
Sphinx theme provided by [Read the Docs](#)

Read the Docs v: latest



Signposting and navigation within topics

- But only if there is genuine flow



experience across all of our platforms that is as similar as possible, but we encourage you also to spend time reading the articles below to better understand how Voice Messaging works on your smartphone

Next →

I'm using my phone in Uzbekistan, why can't I download and/or send media files properly?

FAQ Home



Summary

- A topic is as long or as short as it needs to be
- A topic consists of pieces of information that depend on each other
- 300+ words is good for SEO
- Shorter topics enable greater re-use
- Enable users to see the full topic scope

References

- Minimalism and Documentation (Mary Ann Eiler)
<http://kairos.technorhetic.net/3.1/reviews/eiler/minimal.html>
- The Secrets of Blog Post Length (Susan Gunelius)
<http://weblogs.about.com/od/writingablog/qt/The-Secrets-Of-Blog-Post-Length.htm>
- How to Calculate the Ideal Blog Post Length (Kyle Chowning)
<http://kylechowning.com/how-to-calculate-the-ideal-blog-post-length/>
- Wikipedia: Article size
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article_size
- What is a topic? What does standalone mean? (Mark Baker)
<http://everypageispageone.com/2011/06/08/what-is-a-topic-what-does-standalone-mean/>

References

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- Do Short Topics Make Information More Findable? (Tom Johnson) <http://idratherbewriting.com/2013/05/05/do-short-topics-make-information-more-findable/>
- Why Long Topics Are Better for the User (Tom Johnson) <http://idratherbewriting.com/2013/05/06/why-long-topics-are-better-for-the-user/>
- Single-page Docs: Stop the click insanity (Brandon Philips) <http://lanyrd.com/2013/writethedocs/scfpdh/> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXcdTYuxwys>

References

- Content Re-use and Narrative Flow (Rahel Anne Bailie) <http://intentionaldesign.ca/2013/01/06/content-re-use-and-narrative-flow/>
- Topic size: Finding the narrative minim (Mark Baker) <http://everypageispageone.com/2012/09/11/topic-size-finding-the-narrative-minim/>
- Content Reuse and The Problem of Narrative Flow (Deane Barker) <http://gadgetopia.com/post/8356>

Samples

- Windows Help 8 topic:
<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-gb/windows-8/personalize-pc-tutorial>
- Example 1:
<http://helpx.adobe.com/captivate/using/edit-audio.html>
- Example 2:
<http://helpx.adobe.com/photoshop/using/levels-adjustment.html>
- Example 3:
http://webhelp.madcapsoftware.com/flare9/Content/Multimedia/Adding_Multimedia_Files_to_Projects.htm
- Word Help: Create a bulleted or numbered list
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/create-a-bulleted-or-numbered-list-HA102840173.aspx>

Samples

- Word Help: Use Word mail merge for email
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-gb/word-help/use-word-mail-merge-for-email-HA102809788.aspx>
- Twitter Bootstrap documentation (single page with signposting that enables users to see full scope of topic)
<http://getbootstrap.com/getting-started/>
- django-fluent-contents' documentation (multiple pages with Next and Previous buttons)
<https://django-fluent-contents.readthedocs.org/en/latest/index.html>
- WhatsApp FAQs: What is Voice Messaging?
<http://www.whatsapp.com/faq/en/general/25118341>

Questions?

matthew@uaeurope.com

