Linux Documentation Project Reviewer HOWTO

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Revision History

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Corrected spelling mistakes.		
Revision 1.4.1	2004−04−19	Revised by: EJH
Minor updates to the language and markup, emphasizing the reporting procedures for reviews. Also changed the order of the reviews to reflect actual procedure (technical, language and finally metadata).		
Revision 1.4	2004−04−18	Revised by: EJH
Updated the language review: clarified use of capitals, and added a new requirement that Latin abbreviations always use their English counterpart instead.		
Revision 1.3	2004−01−31	Revised by: EJH
Added the metadata and markup review information.		
Revision 1.2	2003−11−09	Revised by: TMM
Updated content, URLs, mailing lists, converted to XML.		
Revision 1.1	2001−05−12	Revised by: DCM
Minor bugfixes.		
Revision 1.0	2001−05−01	Revised by: jy
Initial release.		

This document will help you review LDP documentation. It includes procedures and techniques for the review process of all new, and existing, LDP documents.

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1. Introduction

The LDP Review Project is a "working group" of the *Linux Documentation Project*, whose goal is to improve the quality of the LDP's documentation. We are approaching that goal from two different angles: a review of newly submitted documentation, and a review of existing documentation. We are open to your suggestions for improvement.

We have a mailing list established for editors; instructions to subscribe are at *http://www.tldp.org/mailinfo.html#maillists*.

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Send feedback to `<discuss@en.tldp.org>`. Please reference the title of this document in your email.

1.2. Acknowledgements

The original version of this document was written in 2001 by Joy Yokley and David C. Merrill, Ph.D.. Tabatha Marshall updated the content and converted the document to DocBook XML in November 2003. Emma Jane Hogbin added the section on Metadata and Markup Reviews in January 2004 and is the current maintainer of the document.

2. Reviewing Newly Submitted Documentation

This review project will continue throughout the life of the LDP. The process will act as a front−end quality assurance review for new documentation which is submitted to the LDP. Ideally documents will be reviewed within one week of their submission to the LDP.

Coordinators of this effort will announce to the list or notify individual review members of new document submissions. The coordinators will try to funnel documents to reviewers who have knowledge in the same technical area as the documentation. If the reviewer is not a technical expert in that particular area and needs technical questions answered, there will be a technical expert designated who will be able to address any technical issues or questions.

Once reviewers have agreed to work on a document, they will have one week to complete the review. If they are not able to complete the review within that time frame, they will need to let the coordinator know of their difficulties so that the author can be notified of the problem. Because these reviews need to be conducted quickly, there will be times when reviewers will be more able to accept review work.

When reviewing newly submitted documents, refer to the Section 5 and Section 6 portions of this guide for the types of information to verify and correct. As a reviewer, you will need to check the documents out of the CVS [1] and make any necessary changes. If changes are extensive or if the document has glaringly and fundamentally fatal errors, contact a coordinator and let them know what the problems are. Once changes are made, the reviewer will update the minor version number, add a new entry to the revision history, and include their name as an "editor" of the document. These changes will then be submitted to the CVS, and an original copy will be sent to the author of the document if the author does not have CVS access.

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3. Reviewing Existing Documentation

This project will focus on reviewing documentation that already exists at the LDP. Our goal is to implement a quality management program that makes sure we are supplying up−to−date, accurate, easily read documentation. This process will be ongoing throughout the life of the LDP. Initially, we will try to review all documents currently on the LDP. Once we have made our way through existing documents, we will schedule dates for follow−up reviews. By continually reviewing the documents throughout their life at the LDP, we help make sure readers have the best possible experience with Linux documentation.

In addition to the primary goal of improving the quality of the documentation itself, we will also be gathering data about the collection for storage in some sort of database to facilitate the ongoing management of the collection. However, this stage of the review is still being defined; details about the specifics and how this data will be measured will be added in the future.

Below are some general guidelines that you should follow before you begin reviewing existing documentation for the LDP. Please try to have document reviews completed within two weeks of the time you sign up to review a document.

3.1. Choosing a Document

There are many documents that need review. The most important thing is that you coordinate your work with the other reviewers. To coordinate the effort, we have set up a mailing list for reviewers.

Notify the editor list (instructions for subscribing are at *http://www.tldp.org/mailinfo.html#maillists*) before you begin to review a document. We want to make sure your work is directed where it is most needed and where it will be most useful. Of course, you may have a particular area of expertise and that will dictate your choice to some extent. You can ask on the list for an assignment, or you can select one for yourself and just let the mailing list know what you're doing.

3.2. License Issues

Make sure you have the legal right to work on the document. If it is licensed under a free license that specifically grants such rights, you are fine. If not, you need to contact the author and get permission.

If you do not plan to actually change any of the content, but simply report on the document's status, then you don't need permission, regardless of license. Of course, it is still polite, and advisable, to write the author anyway.

If a document is missing a copyright and/or license, it's recommended you advise the author to choose and apply one. More information on licensing is available in Section 7

3.3. Working With the Latest Version

Make sure the copy you are reviewing is the most current.

If your document includes a URL to an official homepage, visit that page and see if it displays the same version number. If you find the same version number, you are fine. If you find a newer version number, write to the author and ask him or her to please submit the newer version to you.

3.4. Picking a Review to Conduct

There are many different ways a document can be reviewed, and you may have the skills to do only one or two types of reviews. It is sometimes useful (and easier) to do each review as a separate pass through the document; Your Mileage May Vary.

The following sections explain the various types of reviews we are conducting. Use these sections as a guide to help you choose the type of review to conduct and to help you conduct the review itself. Again, when you post your review choice to the review list, please specify the type of review you would like to be responsible for.

4. Peer Review

When an author submits a new document to the LDP, someone monitoring the submission email list will advise the author to post his draft to the discussion list for an initial peer review, prior to publication. Besides determining whether the document thoroughly covers the subject matter, peers may also point out similar work already in the document collection, in which case the new author might want to contact the maintainer of the existing work.

As a member of the review team, you will recognize a peer review document as one the author has submitted to the discussion list, specifically requesting feedback for inclusion of their HOWTO in the collection. This review can be performed by anyone subscribed to the discussion list (www.tldp.org/mailinfo.html#maillists).

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5. Technical Accuracy Review

Make sure the facts as stated in the document are correct, helpful, and on topic.

To do a technical accuracy review, you really need to know your subject matter, probably as well or better than the original author. Use whatever other documentation is available for your subject, including man pages, program documentation, other printed books, etc. You might also use mailing lists on the topic, asking for third parties to verify certain facts of which you are in doubt.

When doing this type of review, consider if the information is only valid for certain types of hardware or software. If this is the case, make sure to note the limitations of the document within the document, either within the abstract or as a note at the beginning of the document. For example, if the solutions in the document only are relevant for one type or brand of hardware, make sure that that limitation is defined. This will keep readers from trying to apply a certain type of technology to an application or situation where it will not work.

The same should apply for the prerequisite knowledge of the reader. If prior knowledge of a subject is assumed or required, the author should say so somewhere at the beginning of the document, and it's helpful to ask that authors provide a Resource section for further reading, to bring readers that much closer to the required information.

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6. Language Review

Because writers come from all types of backgrounds, there may be problems within the documentation that need to be fixed. Writers may be very knowledgeable in their subject areas but not great writers, or they may be excellent writers but not completely fluent in the language of the document. The language review addresses these types of problems by focusing on language issues that make the document easier for the user to read and understand. Some of the problems that may occur within the document are poor sentence structure, grammar, organization, clarity, and spelling.

If you are doing a language review, you should be fluent in the language and the structure of the language. You want to consider both the logic and grammar of the document. Your primary goal in a language review is to identify and correct areas that could lead to confusion for the reader/user of the document. To this end, you can most certainly use language and grammar references such as dictionaries and handbooks when in doubt.

Although this review does address the structure and delivery of the language, you should not attempt to purge the document of individuality and personality in an attempt to make it "sound better" or more technical. Stilted, humorless language and structures are not the goals here. Again, your goal should be to make the document clear, unambiguous, and correct in spelling and grammar.

Items to evaluate:

- **Spelling.** Spelling should conform to a standardized English spelling of terms. For words that are new to the language and not yet standardized (for example technical Linux terminology that is generally accepted in the community), follow the most common spelling for the term.

  Note

  Because there are two generally accepted forms of English, this review should not privilege American English spellings over British English spellings, or vice−versa. For example, if the author is writes British English and uses the word "realise" you should not change the spelling of the word to "realize" just because you speak/write American English.
- **Grammar.** For the purposes of this review, grammar should address issues such as standards of subject/verb agreement, pronoun/antecedent agreement, etc. One of the common and confusing mistakes made in HOWTOs is unclear pronoun antecedents.

  For example, to say, "You will need to set several parameters in the config file to make it compile correctly. The ones you choose to set make a big difference." In this example it sounds like the config file is what is compiling and it takes a re−reading of the phrase for it to be clear that "The ones" refers to the parameters.

  Along these same lines, many authors writing for the LDP use smiley faces and exclamation points where they would never be accepted in formal documentation or grammar handbooks. The general rule to follow at this time is to leave the smiley faces and gratuitous punctuation marks in place unless they interfere with the reader's understanding of the concepts being explained. The rationale behind this is to protect the more conversational tone of the LDP documentation.
- **Use of capital letters.** The word "HOWTO" should always be in full caps with no hyphen. The document's title and section headings may follow one of two conventions, but must be consistent throughout. Titles may either capitalize only the first word, or may capitalize each word. In the second case the only words not capitalized in a title are prepositions, articles, and proper nouns which would not be capitalized otherwise (for example: insmod). Other capitalization should follow rules of

standard English.

- **Clarity.** Judgements on clarity are sometimes difficult to make. One successful strategy in evaluating clarity is asking the question "If I did not already know this information, would the explanation be clear from this document." If it is confusing to you and you already generally understand what the author is trying to say, then there is a good chance that the explanation is really confusing for someone reading the document for the first time. If you run across this situation, and you don't really know how to correct the technical explanation, or you are afraid your changes might affect the meaning of the document, ask for help from a technical expert. If no technical expert is available or no one responds to your requests, note the needed changes in the review and mark that these concerns need to be addressed in the technical review.
- **Organization.** In some cases the document would really benefit from a different structure. You should address these issues when they interfere with the understanding of the information within the document. If a document gives background information after a procedure has been performed, this may well be too late for the reader to fully consider the information he or she needs before performing the task. Look for document organization that might confuse or mislead the reader. These will be the types of issues you want to address. Once these are identified, it may be worthwhile to let the author know your rationale and discuss major changes with him or her.
- **Sentence Structure.** To some extent, sentence structure issues are discussed in the grammar section; however, there are some additional issues that are not grammatically incorrect but do interfere with the readers comprehension of the material. One of the most noticeable of these is stacked prepositional phrases. Stacked prepositional phrases become a problem when the document's readability suffers because it becomes less and less clear what the subject and action of the sentence are. In some cases more precise descriptors are needed or sentences need to be changed from one long sentence that is hard to comprehend, to two or three more easily read sentences.
- **Readability.** This area is somewhat subjective. What passes for fairly readable material to one person might be confusing to someone else. Because this is a value judgement you should be cautious when marking up an author's work for readability. Realize when basing a judgement on readability that you might be dealing with preferences of style. At this point in time within the LDP, there is no set style or stylistic rules that authors need to follow. In evaluating readability you must consider whether or not the way the document is written truly interferes with the readers understanding of the information. If the answer you come up with is "No, but it doesn't sound like I think it should." then you should probably not re−write the text to make it sound better to you.
- **Title.** The title should be in proper title case. The general principle for this is that all words are capitalized in a title except prepositions and articles (an article will be capitalized if it is the first word in the title). The word HOWTO should be in all capital letters. There should be no hyphens within the word HOWTO. The version should not be included in the title.
- **Date Formats.** Dates should be in standard ISO format, which is YYYY−MM−DD.
- **Uniform Use of Terms.** Because the HOWTO you are reviewing is probably filled with new information for the reader, it is important that the terms discussed throughout the document be uniform. For example, referring to a part or parameter in one section of the document by one name and then calling it by another name (or an abbreviation that has not be explained) in another part of the document is confusing for the reader. Making sure that terms are the same throughout the document goes a long way in helping the reader understand the documentation.
- **Definitions of Acronyms or Slang.** Terminology and language within the realm of computer technology changes rapidly. In reviewing documents you may find that many of the terms that are being discussed are not valid words in any dictionary or technical reference that you are familiar with. In this case you will need to search on terms and find if they are, in fact, terminology that is accepted in the general Linux community. Terms that are less familiar should be defined immediately following the first instance of the term. Slang should be replaced with more common terminology if the slang will causes the reader to be confused by the connotation or denotation of the term. Remember that readers using the document may not come to English as a primary language and,

therefore, you should do your best to make sure that the document is as easy to understand as possible.

- **Latin abbreviations.** Avoid using abbreviations. e.g. (for example), et al. (and others), etc (and so on) and i.e. (that is) should always use the English equivalent.

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7. Metadata and Markup Review

The LDP uses a series of scripts to transform documents into their published format. In order for these scripts to work, documents must use valid markup and include specific metadata. Metadata is information about the document and includes author information, copyright, license and a revision history of the document.

At this time Metadata and Markup Reviews will be conducted by one of the Review Coordinators and will be the final of the three reviews for new documents. Upon successful completion of a Metadata and Markup Review, the Review Coordinator will update the document's version number to 1.0 and submit the document for publication in the collection.

7.1. Required Markup

Documents submitted to TLDP document repository must validate as one of the following:

- DocBook XML version 4.2 (preferred), 4.1.2
- DocBook SGML version 4.2, 4.1 or 3.x
- LinuxDoc SGML

Authors are not required to submit documents in DocBook

Authors are not required to submit their initial document in one of the required markup languages. A volunteer will be assigned to convert any document which is not submitted in valid markup. Authors must maintain their documents in one of the required formats. Help, of course, is available to authors. The main goal of The Linux Documentation Project is to provide quality documents, not to force authors to learn markup languages.

7.2. Required Metadata

The following elements are all required:

- **`articleinfo` or `bookinfo`.** If you are writing a shorter HOWTO (this will be most documents) you will need to use an `articleinfo`, if you are writing a longer guide you will need to use `bookinfo`.
- **`title`.** Every document must contain a short, descriptive title. It should be reasonably unique; check other documents in the collection to make sure your document's title is distinctive from all other documents. Although it is not required, most "HOWTO" documents contain the word "HOWTO" in the title.
- **`abstract`.** A short description of your document must be included in the `abstract`. This description is typically one or two sentences in length.
- **`author`.** Every document must have an author. If there are multiple authors, you may use `authorgroup`. If the document was prepared by an organization with no individual author, please use `authorcorp` instead.
- **`editor`.** Every new document must go through the review process and have a technical, language and metadata/markup review editor listed. In some cases two of the reviews may have been conducted by the same person. The name of the editor and the version their review was conducted on should be included. For more information about this markup, please read the notes in the *Author Guide*'s Markup for Metadata.

- **`pubdate`.** The date of publication for the document. The date should be in the ISO standard of YYYY−MM−DD.
- **copyright.** Authors will always retain the copyright to any documents they submit to the LDP. Although it is not required, a copyright notice may be included. A license, however, is always required.
- **Revision history (`revhistory`).** A summary of revisions should be included in the document. For more information about their markup, please read the notes in the *Author Guide*'s Markup for Metadata.

  The initial release of a document should be marked up as Version 1.0. Subsequent updates should increment the version number appropriately. The preferred format is Major.Minor.Bugfix, where each section is an integer. Some authors use Alan Cox style versions (for example 1.4pre−3) and some include additional information (for example 1.3beta). This is acceptable but not encouraged. The most important thing is that we *have* a version number so we know which version we are dealing with! Once a document goes through review it should advance in minor or bugfix version number, depending on the amount of change introduced.
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8. Reporting Your Results

Once you have completed your review of a document, you should send the updated file and your results back to the Review Coordinator [2] , and advise the working group you've completed the review. A summary of your findings should be included in the body of the email. If the reviewer has access to the CVS, and permission of the author to submit the changes directly, the reviewer may email the Review Coordinator with only a summary of findings and a note that the document was updated in the CVS.

If you have made any modifications to the document, also send your updates to the author or maintainer, as well as the LDP *submission list*, which is at *submit@en.tldp.org*. The subject line should be the title of the document. In the body of your email, please include a note which says something to the effect of, "I am a reviewer for the LDP and am submitting an updated copy of this document on behalf of the author."

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