

Shaun McCance: Discovery Docs Part 1: Discovering Why

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This is Part 1 in a series about the Discovery Docs initiative, which I will present about in my upcoming GUADEC talk.

A long time ago, in the days of bonobos and fishes, GNOME documentation was written as long, monolithic manuals. We split these beasts into digestible pages as best we could (which is to say, poorly) and hoped for the best. Then we had an idea. What if we actually controlled the granularity at which information was presented? What if, instead of writing books, we wrote topics?

And so we did. We weren't the first software project to make this shift, but we were early on the curve, and we did it radically. While many help systems still try to shoehorn topics into a linear structure, our help focuses on creating a navigable web of information.

The question of how big the topics are ? how big the chunks on the web are ? is entirely up to us. For the most part, we have chosen small topics with the least amount of information we could get away with. The reasoning is that users can find quick answers to questions, and if they want to learn more, we have extensive cross linking. Our topics have mostly followed the familiar trichotomy of tasks, concepts, and references. Our documentation is deliberately excruciatingly boring.

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[1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/146>

[2] <https://blogs.gnome.org/shaunm/2021/07/09/discovery-docs-part-1-discovering-why/>