

SSR, LLC

Documentation Brownbag

Commenting on Docs for Review
2.18.2014

First Things First

Let's start with the basics

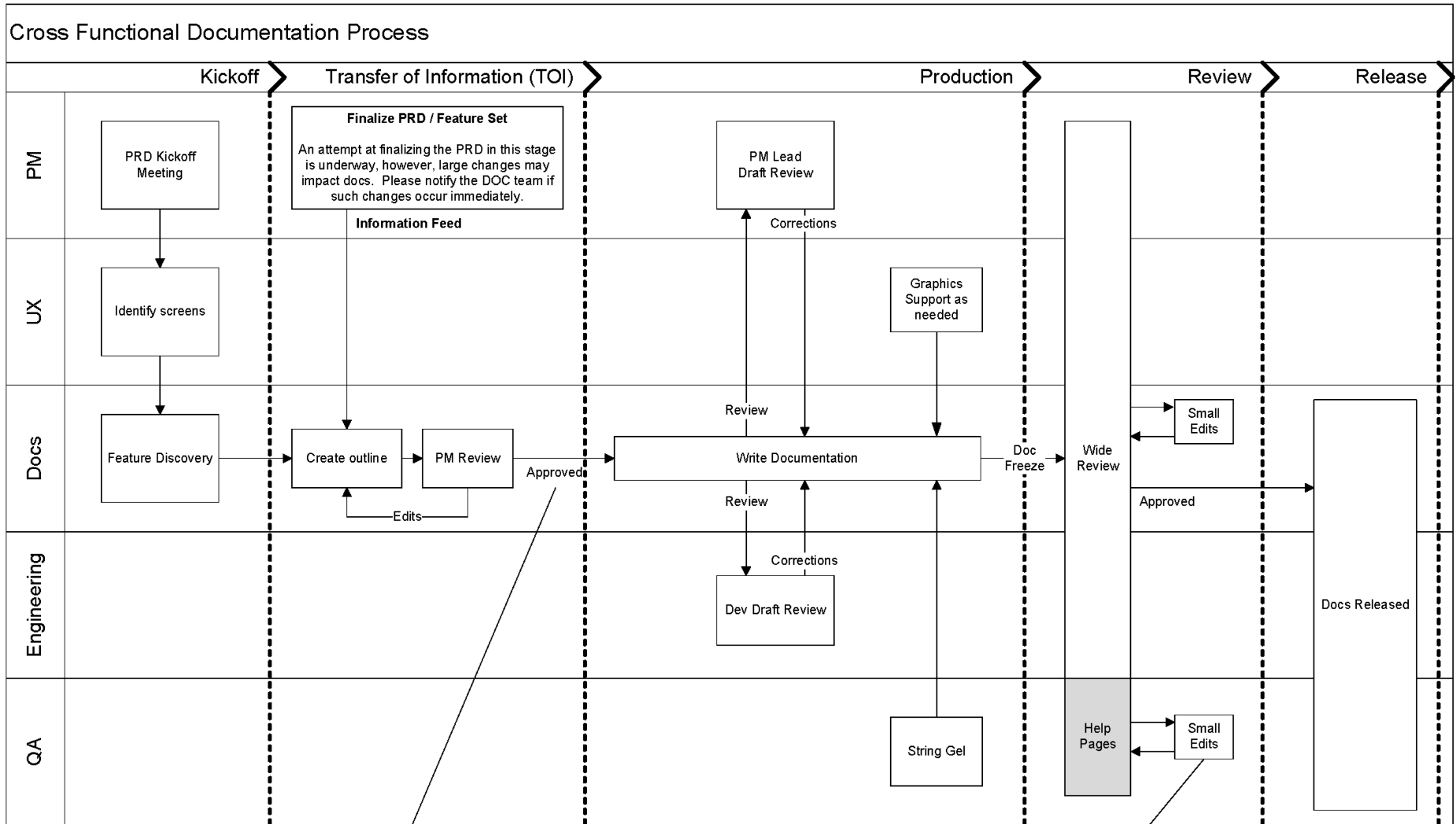
- Why do docs matter?
- How do they get written?
- What do you have to review?
- What do we mean by “reviewing,” anyway?

Well, since you ask so nicely...

Why Docs Matter

- “Docs” includes:
 - Long guides on the Support website
 - QuickSheets emailed to customers
 - Online Help in the application itself
- Our docs are used by everyone from the low-level end user to admins to internal employees!
- There are hundreds of pages of documentation.
- There’s a fairly steady trickle of feedback from customers about the docs on the website. People notice when things are wrong or confusing.

How Docs Get Written



At this stage, no new content should be added in order to minimize doc rewrites. Approving the outline means that PM agrees to the scope of the doc. Any changes after this point will adversely affect the release schedule of the doc and/or its dependencies. **Exceptions can be made.**

At this stage, Doc edits are reserved for minor corrections such as wording, type errors, style, or minor clarification. It is essential for all stakeholders to get their first round edits in on time. Delaying the review process will affect quality and timeliness of delivery.

What to Review

- **Highest priority:** docs or parts of docs where you're the expert
 - Do you work directly on the feature being documented?
 - Were you part of the design process for the feature?
...if so, we need you!
- **Secondary:** docs or parts of docs you know a little about
 - Do you know just enough about the feature to spot systemic doc errors?
 - Do you know zip about the feature but want to help?
...if so, you are awesome!

What Reviewing Is Not

- The same as grading a paper.
- Unnecessary.
- Doing the writer's work for them.

What Reviewing IS

- A chance for you to help users directly.
- A crucial part of the documentation process.
- Working in partnership with the writer to create a better doc.

What makes a comment useful?

Saving Time

Most comments boil down to “this is wrong and should be fixed.”

This is useful information! But...

If the writer doesn't know what the right thing to write is, they will have to email you back with questions, or hunt down the right person to ask and ask them.

Save time with comments like:

- “This is incorrect, the correct information is ...”
- “This is wrong, and so-and-so can tell you the what's correct.”
- “This reads oddly to me, I'd say it...”
- “You left out...”

Reviewing Thoroughly

- A quick look through a doc followed by “this all looks fine” is actually *worse* than unclear or unhelpful review comments.
- Writers can’t fix what they don’t know is wrong!
 - The most important thing reviewers do is provide a different set of eyes to look at the doc.
 - Reviewers catch things writers miss.
- If you don’t have time to review a doc completely:
 - Pick the section you know the most about.
 - Review it thoroughly.
 - Let the writer know you only had time for that one section.

Remember...

- We're all working toward the same goal: a top notch experience for users. We are on the same team.
- Save time by providing information.
Pointing out things that are incorrect is super-important... but if you don't tell the writer what the correct thing is, they have to go hunting for the information.
- Be thorough.
If you haven't reviewed it thoroughly, don't say it looks fine. Review as much as you have time for and let the writer know how much you were able to do.

Sample Comments

Helpful:

“Step 3 doesn't apply here. It only applies to the Define Elimination section. Also, Step 2 should be "select the level at which elimination entries will be generated".”

Less helpful:

“Steps 2 and 3 are wrong.”

Helpful:

“We need to include what happens when the Actuals version is selected. i.e. the Actuals Version box appears. The Root actuals defaults as the "Source actuals" value and cannot be changed. This is because ...”

Less helpful:

**“Missing “Suppress on sheets”
setting.”**

Nice to have:

“This section is perfect. :-)”

Let's Sum Up

- As a reviewer, you are a partner in the documentation process!
- We all want the customers to get the best experience.
- Save time by sharing information.
- Be as thorough as you can.