

# Stephen King's Practical Advice for Tech Writers

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Rikki Endsley  
rikki@opensource.com  
Twitter: @rikkiends



[opensource.com/stephen-king](https://opensource.com/stephen-king)

# What, Why, Who, How

- What are you writing about?
- Why are you writing about it?
- Who is your reader?
- Will you re-use your content?
- Research
- Create an outline
- Write
- Revise

## Example Whats and Whys

- let your **community** know about a bug fix or security update
- provide a project status update to a **manager**
- tell **developers** about a new process for submitting patches
- or to inform the **press** about the latest software release

## 3 categories of readers

- Lay audience
- Managerial
- Experts

Writing@CSU Guide:  
<http://bit.ly/1X2deIE>

# + The Press

## The Care and Feeding of the Press

<http://netpress.org/care-feeding-press/>

Compiled by Esther Schindler,  
with members of the Internet Press Guild

# RTFM? How to write a manual worth reading



[opensource.com/write-better-docs](https://opensource.com/write-better-docs)

Ready to write? Cool your jets.

*On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*  
by Stephen King



# 1. Good writing requires reading

If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut.

~ *Stephen King*

- Be clear on expectations
- Read examples
  - See articles on the company blog or publication site
  - HowTo articles
    - e.g., How To: Writing an Excellent Post-Event Wrap Up Report by Leslie Hawthorn: [opensource.com/write-event-recap](https://opensource.com/write-event-recap)

# Consider how your content might be re-used

**Stephen King's practical advice for tech writers**

**\*\*UNPUBLISHED\*\***

Posted 04 Oct 2015 by [Rikki Endsley](#) (Red Hat)  Rating: ★★★★★ (1 vote)



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Even if you don't enjoy writing and have no intentions of becoming a professional tech writer, chances are you'll have to draft reports, mailing list updates, or technical articles at some point in your career. With a few practical tips in mind—along with solid writing advice from Stephen King—you can improve your writing *before you start writing*. And, with proper planning, you can easily repurpose your content for multiple audiences.


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# Example: Writing for expert audience (developers)

Greg DeKoenigsberg, VP Community at Ansible: ansible-devel mailing list

Ansible Development >  
New process for acceptance of new modules in Extras  
5 posts by 4 authors ▾

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 **Greg DeKoenigsberg**

★ **Other recipients:** ansible...@googlegroups.com

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The backlog of New Modules in Extras is here:  
[https://github.com/ansible/ansible-modules-extras/labels/new\\_plugin](https://github.com/ansible/ansible-modules-extras/labels/new_plugin)

The original intention of the Extras module split was to allow us to be more generous with acceptance criteria of new modules, to help grow our functionality and community more quickly. I don't think we're making as much progress as we could be making in merging these modules, and I believe it's because our current process is too restrictive.

Here are the baseline criteria for acceptance of modules into Extras, as I see them:

# Example: Writing for lay audience (community)

Robyn Bergeron, Community Architect at Ansible: blog post

## ANSIBLE EXTRAS MODULES + YOU: HOW YOU CAN HELP. (IT'S EASIER NOW!)

If you are a caring user of [Ansible](#), and you meet any of the following criteria, this post is for you — because you can help to improve the quantity and quality of modules in [Ansible Extras](#).

- You are a user of, or contributor to, Ansible Extras modules
- There is a pull request for an Extras module that you have been anxiously waiting to see merged (yours, or someone else's!)
- You've been looking for a way to contribute to the Ansible community
- You are looking for fun and constructive ways to procrastinate doing other things you should be doing

**In short:** Our improved "new extras modules" review process is now in place, and any new Extras module can be reviewed for inclusion by *any* user of Ansible who cares to see that module be included.

Want to see a few of the modules that need love? Scroll down to the end!

## 2. Invite the reader in

An opening line should invite the reader to begin the story. It should say: Listen. Come in here. You want to know about this.

~ *Stephen King*

### 3. Tell a story

When you write a story, you're telling yourself the story. When you rewrite, your main job is taking out all the things that are not the story.

~ *Stephen King*

## 4. Leave out the boring parts

This suggests cutting to speed the pace, and that's what most of us end up having to do (kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings.)

~ *Stephen King*



- **Example 1:** ansible-devel mailing list post omits details about developing modules. Instead, he provides a link to module guidelines.

- **Example 2:** community blog post includes background explanation of the problem

Folks who keep an eye on the various Ansible repositories have probably noticed that your friendly neighborhood Ansible community team (that's myself and [Greg DeKoenigsberg](#)) have been digging through a pretty sizable backlog of issues and pull requests, primarily in the Extras and Core modules repos. We've been doing this with a few things in mind; obviously, getting caught up as best as possible, but more importantly, making sure that the contributions of community members are being acknowledged and acted on. We value Ansible's community members tremendously, and the last thing we want is for their hard work to be unused — or worse, for those people to feel demoralized and not contribute in the future.

# After stating the problem, she explains the solution:

And thus: A new process has been born. I encourage you to read the details, particularly if you are interested in helping with reviews, or are already [contributing to Ansible](#), which were outlined by Greg on Friday on the [ansible-project](#) and [ansible-devel](#) mailing lists. That said, here are the important highlights:

1. **Any caring Ansible user can review new Extras modules.**
2. **2 +1 votes, and no -1 votes, will result in the new module being merged into Extras. More specifically, a +1 vote to the module working as expected (meaning: you have tested the module in good faith) — and a +1 vote verifying that the module follows the Ansible [module guidelines](#).**

She links to the boring parts  
(i.e., Greg's post)

## Sample outline: news or community announcement

- Introduction (invite the reader in)
- Provide a brief background (state the problem)
- Share the news (explain the solution)
- Conclude (include important dates or action items)

## Sample outline: technical article, tutorial, or whitepaper

- Introduction (invite the reader in)
- Provide a brief background (state the problem)
- Share the news (explain the solution)
- Get technical (HowTo steps, FAQ)
  - Include subheads for longer articles
- Conclude (include important dates or action items)

## Facts to include

- What the product is
- When it was first released
- What platforms it runs on
- What the configuration requirements are
- How much it costs
- Contact people for the press
- URLs and other contact information for the general public

From *The Care and Feeding of the Press*

## 5. To edit is divine

To write is human, to edit is divine.  
~ *Stephen King*

You've decided what to write.  
You know who you're writing for.  
You've done your research.  
You've sketched an outline.  
You know how best to edit whatever you write.

What's next?



## 6. Start writing

The scariest moment is always just before you start. After that, things can only get better.

~ *Stephen King*

Write for [Opensource.com](https://opensource.com)

[opensource.com/story](https://opensource.com/story)

[open@opensource.com](mailto:open@opensource.com)

Freenode IRC:

[#opensource.com](https://freenode.net)

Twitter: [@opensourceway](https://twitter.com/opensourceway)

[rikki@opensource.com](mailto:rikki@opensource.com)

Twitter: [@rikkiends](https://twitter.com/rikkiends)