Virtual Collaborative Writing
Glossary of Common Terms

Content management-related terminology is also available at: http://www.cmsglossary.com/.

Audience: The audience for a virtual collaborative project includes both the collaborators and the end users. Additional audiences include stakeholders, enforcers of regulations, and other interested parties. The key is to understand that there are multiple audiences and to identify (as much as feasible) who those audiences are and what their needs and desires will be with regard to the project outcomes.

Author: See writer.

Asynchronous: A communication modality in which the message is persistent, and author and recipient are not required to be present simultaneously for communication to take place. The communication is extended over time as well as distance. It includes text-based, audio-visual, and graphical markup tools.

Blog: See weblog.

Business Process Improvement (BPI): A systematic approach to help any organization optimize its underlying processes to achieve more efficient results.

Collaboration: Collaboration is an interactive process in which two or more individuals contribute to creating a deliverable document or information product. It includes three types:

- **Serial**: Occurs when writers work on an information product one after another. Each person works separately on a piece of the writing or the whole document, each performing a distinct function in the creation of the finished work. Each person in the chain to finish before another person can continue working. An example of serial collaboration is a one-writer project, where Writer 1 drafts book A, Editor 1 reviews book A, Engineer 1 reviews book A, and Writer 1 reviews and updates the final copy.

- **Parallel**: Occurs when writers work on different pieces of the same project simultaneously. Each person works on one piece of the whole, usually based on a set of negotiated standards or requirements, and engages in coordinated communication with other collaborators as required from time to time. Parallel collaboration also entails
serial collaboration. An example of parallel collaboration is a project with more than one writer: Writer 1 drafts book A for the project, Writer 2 drafts book B for the project, Writer 3 drafts book C for the project, Engineer 1 provides input for one or more books of the project, and Engineer 2 also provides input for one or more books of the project.

- **Collective**: Occurs when writers contribute concurrently to a project through topic assignments based on a writer’s knowledge of the product or tools (specialty areas) and on activities related to project tracking. Based on this work, specific predefined roles are delineated. All team members provide equally important contributions to the project and have shared ownership of the overall project success. An example of collective collaboration shows how tasks are differentiated by projects with more than one writer: Writer 1 drafts content A, B, C to for three books; Writer 2 drafts content D, E, F to for two books; Writer 3 manages book assembly; Writer 4 updates content in all books; Writer 4 oversees project planning, graphics, and inventory; Engineer 1 provides input for the project; Engineer 2 provides input for the project; and so on.

**Collaborative writing (also termed writing collaboratively)**: An opportunity whereby a writing team has the intention, need, and ability to provide input, offer feedback, and/or receive feedback, as well as to respond to and/or use that feedback while a text is in-process. It involves strategic and generative interactivity among individuals seeking to achieve a common goal like problem solving, knowledge sharing, and advancing discovery. Collaborative writing includes a wide variety of writing strategies, pre- and post-writing activities, team roles, and work modes necessary for collaborating in contemporary colocated and distributed work settings.

**Computer-mediated communication (CMC)**: Any form of information or intrapersonal exchange across two or more networked computers and other digital tools, such as instant messaging (IM), e-mail, wikis, graphical user interfaces, workspaces, Web conferences, and other interactive modalities.

**Container**: An outer layer of an information product, such as a chapter, a book, a training module, a help project, from which content units are dynamically referenced.

**Content**: Information with a scope, structure, and context that can be used for a particular purpose.

**Content model, type**: See Information model, type.

**Content management system (CMS)**: A software package that consolidates, organizes, and manages content efficiently and accurately as a single source in a repository so it can be reused and repurposed in multiple publications and media channels; content management software is best suited for content that is repeatedly revised and published.

**Content unit**: A building block that is structured according to a set of standards, ideally in keeping with a specific information type. Examples of the form content units may take include text, graphics, or other digitally-stored information, such as audio, video, and animation. Content units can be combined with other each other to form standalone topics that address customer issues or questions.

**Customer feedback program (CFP)**: An exercise or series of activities designed to gather information about product usage, impressions, issues and experiences from the customer. The gathered information is analyzed and used to advance various aspects of product development, including documentation.
**Data:** Raw material without a specific context, purpose, or meaning.

**Desktop sharing:** Refers to a relatively synchronous virtual technology that enables individuals to collaborate through software, graphical user interfaces, and the Internet, combining hybrid features, both visual and oral. The software allows individuals to join a Web conference for the purpose of having one or more attendees share desktop activities with other attendees. The technology allows geographically distributed team members to engage in collaborative tasks because individuals can share what they are working on with each other. In virtual collaborative writing environments, while desktop sharing occurs in real time, it does not allow writers to employ collective collaboration entirely because while one writer types, another (or others) watch. However, writers still can use the technology to share ideas and advance content development. Teams also use the technology to carry out tools-related troubleshooting activities.

**Digital rhetoric:** A collection of various ideas and rhetorical schools of thought attempting to organize the impacts of digital media on the process of persuasion. According to many theorists, the main interest of digital rhetoricians lies in the examination of the shift away from persuasion through finite products (texts) to expressions through a range of electronic media.

**Digital technology:** With regard to virtual collaborative writing, any technology that enables communication and/or collaboration through the Internet, Intranet, user interfaces, and telephone technologies.

**Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA):** A topic-based DTD that provides specifications for authoring in XML and for producing a range of information outputs. The base topic types known as concept, task, and reference not only facilitate the production of modular documents but also enable topics to be specialized to accommodate specific domains of knowledge. Designed for the reuse of content, DITA allows users to store source content units in a CMS and to organize them using a DITA map, which defines the topic hierarchy and interrelationships. DITA is an open source technology that can be implemented through the Open Toolkit, which a technical committee oversees.

**Document:** Traditionally a static artifact or work product that consists of an organized unit of information within well-defined boundaries, and it is simply a sequence of text and graphics without any dynamic properties or behavior. Increasingly, documents also include automated properties in collections or webs that are constantly growing, changing, being added to, and being culled. In increasingly technological environments, writing requires collaboration to support the use of the shared content that makes up documents or information products.

**Document Type Definition (DTD):** A formal specification for creating various kinds of XML-based information products, one that defines what markup elements are permitted and the structural rules they must follow.

**Domain:** An overarching subject area that can be used as an organizing structure for categorizing content units.

**Early adopters:** Individuals who implement new technology before others do. Early adopters usually provide feedback regarding their experience, which, in turn, helps developers improve a product, technology, or service before it is made available to a general population of users, both internal and external. External early adopters are also called lighthouse customers.

**Eclipse:** Originally created by IBM, Eclipse is an open-source multi-language software development community now supported by a range of organizations and individuals. Eclipse is organized to maintain the numerous open-source projects that rely on extensible tools for developing and
managing software solutions. Some XML-based authoring environments incorporate Eclipse software into their overall development solution.

**Element:** XML markup tags, which function semantically to describe the meaning of the content contained inside the tags. For example, the tags `<procedure>` `<step>` `<para>` </para> </step> </procedure>` refer to some task a user would have to perform.

**File sharing:** Refers to various ways that individuals can share their work with one another. In virtual environments, rather than handing off files folders literally, individuals share digital files of many types (for example, text-, image-, and video-based files). Writers use numerous CMC technologies to share digital files, including e-mail, Internet workspaces (for example, wikis), virtual conference rooms, and content management systems, to name a few.

**GenCode (generic coding):** Refers to a movement established in the 1960s to establish a system of generic coding to mark up electronic documents. The goal of a project termed “the generic coding project” was to use descriptive coding that would separate form and content. Eventually, the project gave rise to the GenCode Committee, which influenced the development of the SGML standard. See SGML.

**Hybridity:** Functional characteristics of communication that involve the degree to which communication combines elements of spoken and written language. Virtual collaboration tools that are more like face-to-face interactions will involve (1) spoken language (e.g., telephone/video conferences) or (2) written language with a sense of dialogue and open-endedness (e.g., instant messaging or IM). Unless oral conversation or IM is involved in the communication, e-mail messages that send edits back and forth are not considered hybrid. In some cases, greater hybridity might be more useful for developing and completing a writing project.

**Impression management:** The process of taking control of how others will build perspectives and images of oneself.

**Information:** Knowledge about a particular subject, product, or service that is shaped and communicated to a particular audience.

**Information architect:** An individual who develops and manages the structural design of information that is shared in digital environments. They work both with writers and system administrators to ensure that the development, publishing, and delivery of information operate effectively in the context of a content management environment. Single-sourced projects require information architects to design and implement reuse technologies and metadata strategies that enable writers to collaborate and share content in a CMS.

**Information architecture:** Refers to the underlying structure that directs the classification, arrangement, development, flow, and management of information in digital environments. Well-designed information architecture supports the consistent creation of modular content that can be combined, linked, and reused to form various outputs. It is designed to enable users to navigate and find information within information products and across Web sites.

**Information model:** Also known as a content model, an information model refers to an organization’s strategy for developing and managing information products. It often consists of an array of output or information products, the building blocks (such as a procedure, concept, or example) used to create these products. It also refers to metadata or naming conventions assigned to describe and locate the building blocks stored in a database. The aim of developing standard categories of information is to maximize its efficient reuse and to ensure content consistency and usability. Creating an information model requires collaboration among writing teams, who
must agree that the model describes all aspects of organization’s information products.

**Information product:** Refers to artifacts that follow specific standards about what contents various kinds of products should contain and how the contents should be organized. Through information modeling, an organization must determine how many kinds of information products are needed to describe its goods and services. With XML and style sheets, an organization can create a range of dynamic information products, including HTML, online help systems, and electronic files. Finished products can be distributed within software applications, on CDs, on the Web as electronic files, or as printed material for end users.

**Information type:** Also known as a content type, an information type refers to the standards that define the attributes of specific kinds of content, such as a procedure, concept, or glossary item, and the required building blocks that constitute it.

**Infrastructure:** Includes both the material support systems that make virtual work possible (such as computers and computer networks) and the embedded practices of communication that have been established within a particular community of workers.

**Intelligence analysis:** The process of taking known information about situations and entities of strategic, operational, or tactical importance; characterizing the known; and, with appropriate statements of probability, assessing the future actions in those situations and by those entities.

**Interactivity:** Concerns whether participants can cross the interpersonal distance that virtual collaboration creates. It occurs on a spectrum from (1) a dynamic face-to-face setting to (2) a static text or other setting that disallows interaction with others. Both spatial and interpersonal distances must be overcome for virtual collaborative writing. The more interactivity allowed by the technology, the more feedback among participants is enabled and traditionally face-to-face purposes can be accomplished virtually.

**Interdependence:** The reliance of collaborating writers upon each other to develop and share ideas, complete projects, and when necessary to reach consensus in decision making.

**ISO 9000:** Refers to a family of quality management standards—pertaining to quality management and quality assurance—that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) maintains. ISO-certified organizations have been independently audited and to be compliant with a particular set of ISO standards. Certifications are particularly important for organizations that conduct business globally.

**Kairos:** A rhetorical term that expresses the context in which conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action. This context includes both time and location, and an understanding of the most appropriate time and place for an action can also help determine the proper amount of force that is necessary to propel that action.

**Learning spaces design:** The creation of learning spaces (both face-to-face and virtual) that would enable learners and teachers to fulfill the goals and objectives of instruction.

**Localization:** The process of adapting information and software to meet the needs of a specific region or language by adding locale-specific components and translating text.

**Materiality:** The physical and nondiscursive qualities of print texts that serve as a vehicle for transmitting their linguistic content, as well as the physical features that distinguish different kinds of texts from one another. Materiality also includes the physical location of a text, which impacts its rhetorical influence on readers, and serves as a rhetorical act by those who produce and display print texts.
**Metadata:** Naming conventions assigned to document and information types so that writers and users can conduct searches that will help them locate, use, and reuse content. Writing teams must work collaboratively to determine what metadata components and list of values are needed to enable them to categorize, describe, and locate the content stored in a CMS effectively. For example, metadata can include a component called keyword, which may contain a list of terms or values that writers can select to label information.

**Multi-channel publishing:** Publishing the same content to multiple formats, including printed material (books, journals, etc.), electronic files (on CD, for mobile devices, etc.), online help systems, and HTML files.

**Mutual presence:** A construct that attempts to explain the alignment of materiality, practice, and expertise in the production and use of writing. This term is an adaptation of the construct “presence” from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.

**NLP (natural language processing):** A field of computer science related to linguistics, which pertains to the use of computers to process human language. NLP entails the use of meaning-based matching algorithms that allow computers to process and understand languages. This technology facilitates machine translation and is used in tools that can help writers analyze their text in real time to ensure compliance with standard grammar rules style guides.

**OEM (original equipment manufacturer):** Refers to companies that manufacture products without and sell them to other companies that will put their own brand on them and may customize the products in other ways.

**Practice:** The particular profession in which texts are produced and used that corresponds with their materiality. Practice is understood here as a human organized activity comprising a specific set of tools, knowledge, and skills directed toward the accomplishment of particular goals.

**Praxis:** A rhetorical term that represents action that is predicated upon and mediated by reflection. Praxis is also the application of theory to real-world, practical, problems.

**Presence awareness:** Concerns whether participants in a virtual interaction know who is present or available to communicate. Tools may provide the status of participants’ names and activity levels. Presence awareness gives team members a sense of immediacy regarding the relative availability of others with whom they may need to collaborate.

**Process scripts:** Highly structured, documented processes that relate to a set of complex tasks, combining process information that not only sets forth procedures about what individuals should do but also about how they should carry out tasks with others. What makes a process script different from a documented process is that a script adds to the process instructions for interactivity across and throughout time and space and. Scripted processes may include many of the following elements: rules, resources (people and objects), organizational standards, corporate culture, and group norms and experiences. In virtual collaborative settings, writers benefit from knowledge provided in process scripts that can coordinate complex series of tasks and flow of work within and across writing teams.

**Repurpose:** Modifying text developed for use in one context so that it can be used in another context.

**Reuse:** The systematic practice of developing content for use in more than one context to reduce the overall development effort, improve consistency, and facilitate translation into multiple target languages.

**Semantic markup:** Refers to the use of markup to define the type of content rather than its appearance. For example, the markup `<prereq>` identifies certain text within a procedure as a prerequisite...
Glossary

to a task. Style sheets can then be designed to apply specific formatting to all text tagged with `<prereq>` and to vary that format depending on the type of output.

**SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language):** An international standard (ISO 8879 1986/AMD 1988) for defining markup conventions, a metalanguage that describes document components. A markup language must specify what markup is allowed, what markup is required, how markup is to be distinguished from text, and what the markup means. SGML also defines document types along with its components. Documents coded with markup have “intelligence” and thus can be processed automatically for publication. A derivative of SGML, XML is considered by some to be an easier to learn and implement. See XML.

**sim-ship (simultaneous shipment):** A shorthand term for translating products into all designated languages simultaneously to accelerate the introduction of products into a global economy.

**Single sourcing:** The process of applying specific writing standards to the development of information so that information can be stored one time in a content management system and reused in various contexts and across many types of media. The goal of single sourcing is to improve the efficiency of information development and the quality of information products.

**Specialization:** In DITA, adapting basic topic types to create new ones that meet the needs of an organization and remain compatible with the complete toolset. The new topics inherit the structural characteristics of their parent type. Examples of specialized DITA topic types include tutorial, troubleshooting, and user interface help.

**Synchronous:** Communication modality in which the message is delivered in real time, enabling the author and recipient to have a sense of immediate contact and to interact almost as if they were physically present to each other. May include communication that is delivered instantaneously (real-time) as well as communication that is delivered with a brief lag required by instructing the computer to “send” the message (near-real-time). Synchronous communication may or may not be persistent and is extended over distance but not time. It includes text-based, audio-visual, and graphical markup tools.

**Tagging scheme:** A customized use of tags or labels that define the conditions of reusing content. For example, content units that will function in user and installation guides would require the definition of a set of tags such as “user_guide” and “installation_guide” and so on.

**Team:** A group of two or more people who are assembled (with or without explicitly defined roles) with the specific, shared goal of a material outcome. A virtual team may or may not be assembled in a face-to-face setting, but it is coordinated via digital technology. A writing team is a group with the shared goal of producing a written product.

**Team formation:** The process of convening a group of individuals into a purposeful unit.

**Team norming:** The process of establishing shared expectations and common practices among a group of individuals working on a shared product.

**Topic:** Refers to the modular approach to creating information products, hence the term modules. Because topics are intended to address a specific issue or question posed by users, they should function as standalone entities. Writers draw on basic building blocks or content units and information types to form self-contained modules that can be reused. Creating topics effectively requires collaboration among writers.

**Virtual acquaintances:** Online colleagues with whom interactions tend to be direct and formal, with few interpersonal elements.

**Virtual cohorts:** Online colleagues with whom one has frequent contact, some informal
conversations, and few breaches of professionalism.

**Virtual intimates:** Online colleagues with whom one can, while working and interacting, feel comfortable expressing feelings or attitudes beyond what would be considered primarily professional discourse, to include frustrations, personal information, and humor.

**Virtual meeting room:** Refers to a relatively synchronous virtual technology that enables individuals to collaborate through software, graphical user interfaces, and the Internet. This CMC technology facilitates hybrid interactions, using both visuals and oral features to enable geographically distributed individuals to attend meetings, conferences, presentations, seminars, and learning sessions. Virtual writing teams can collaborate using this technology so that teams can participate in meetings and see the same digital files or other writing-related materials.

**Virtual collaborative writing:** Work by a team of writers using means and tools other than face-to-face contact. Virtual writing collaboration can occur over the Internet, over the phone, or over other communication technologies.

**Virtual communication:** Any interaction that decouples time/space attributes even if several dynamics of face-to-face communication are maintained (e.g.; as in videoconferencing). That is, “virtual communication” can be any communicative act that is mediated digitally through Internet, intranet, or telephone technologies.

**Virtual doughnuts:** A relevant piece of information or other contribution that is shared and appreciated among team, often leading to two-way appreciation and goodwill that helps a team maintain as a unit.

**Virtual writing team:** A team of writers whose processes may be distributed across geographic locations, but also within the collocated space of an office or institutional setting. Unlike traditional document sharing and face-to-face or telephone interactions, virtual writing requires participants to communicate using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies.

**Voice of the customer (VOC):** The stated and unstated customer needs or requirements. The voice of the customer can be captured in a variety of ways, such as direct discussion or interviews, surveys, focus groups, customer specifications, observation, warranty data, and field reports.

**Weblog:** An online Web site or journal on which the writer published a regular commentary about various ideas, which can be themed for particular audiences. To “blog” can be used as a verb.

**Webtexts:** Texts that reside on the Web. These texts are distinguished both from hypertext (because their structures may be linear rather than hypertextual) and from print texts that have been placed on the Web (such as PDF copies of journal articles).

**Wiki:** Collaborative Web site that relies one of many types of wiki software. Wiki sites are designed to be easy for technically unsophisticated users to add to and edit, making it a useful venue for multiple authors to develop, revise, and edit collaborative documents.

**Workflow:** A feature within a content management system that allows users to define the flow of a process and automates the assignment of tasks, users, and due dates to ensure a consistent process is implemented by all users.

**Writer:** In a topic-oriented writing environment, the person who researches and writes the topics that an end user accesses to gain understanding or carry out tasks.

**Writing bounce:** The practice of moving between open screens and tasks displayed on one’s monitor.

**Writing project management:** Design and implementation of a series of steps and proce-
Glossary

dures allowing members of a writing project team to complete their work and a final product to be created.

**XML (Extensible Markup Language):** A machine-readable markup language that defines how to create markup tags to create structured documents. XML is made up of elements or tags that describe the function of the text contained within the tags, such as `<title> </title>`. The purpose of semantic tags is to separate content from form so that writers can focus more on writing content and less on how content is displayed.

**XSL (Extensible Style sheet Language):** Refers to a family of style sheet languages used for rendering XML documents.