



Writing for Nerds

Blogging for fun and (not much)
profit







Why write?

- A good remote culture requires a strong written culture. As more of us work remotely, clear written communication becomes ever more important.
- Writing can help build your personal brand.
- It forces you to research and think about areas you may know less about.
- It is stimulating, interesting and hard.

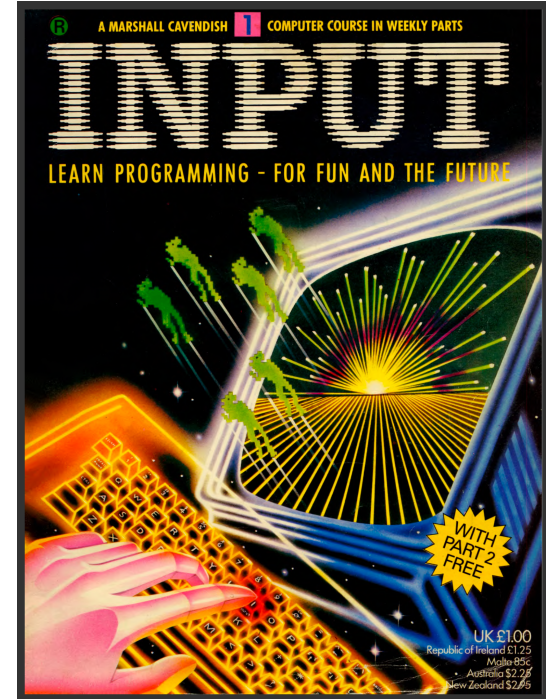


**Always
pass on
what you
have
learned.**

#WTFisCloudNative

Parallels between writing and programming

- You get better with practice.
- You improve through feedback.
- Often learned through imitation.
- Your subconscious mind does a lot more writing than you think.
- Writing also has patterns which you can learn.



Process

Who is this for?

- I like to start by thinking about **who the piece is for**.
- If you are writing for a publication such as The New Stack or InfoQ they should be able to tell you about their intended audience.

Who is this for?

- Knowing who you are writing for helps you identify terms some or all of your target audience may be unfamiliar with.
- If a term is unfamiliar you can either:
 - Link to a good explanation (don't reinvent the wheel).
 - Provide a definition if you can't find a good one.
- If you have a lot of terms like this, providing a [glossary](#) is a good option.

WTF IS CLOUD NATIVE

A Glossary Of Cloud Native Terms



Michelle Gienow

November 4, 2019
9 minutes Read

We need to talk.

No, really—one of the hardest parts of wrapping your head around the complexities of Cloud Native is getting a handle on all the lingo. Containers, [microservices](#), and orchestration, oh my! Sometimes the best place to begin a conversation about new technology is with a quick Cloud Native 101 to make sure we are all talking about the same things in the same way.

So here is rundown on some essential Cloud Native terms and concepts. If you are already familiar with many (or even all) of them, it's still a handy resource to share with those who aren't. After all, a shared vocabulary is helpful when talking with managers, executives, or anyone else in your organisation who needs to understand why it's time to get on board with [Kubernetes](#)—and all that comes with it.

<https://blog.container-solutions.com/a-glossary-of-cloud-native-terms>

What even is this thing?

- The second question is, “What is this thing going to be?” Is it a blog post or article, something shorter like a news post, something longer like a mini-book or full-length book?

Respect your readers' time

Up-front decisions

- In what capacity am I addressing the reader? Am I a reporter? A provider of information? Just an average programmer/EM/etc?
- How much do I want to cover and what **one thing do I want to say?**
- Am I going to write in the third person as an observer, or in the first person as a participant?
- What tense am I going to use?

Where is this going?

- Where are you intending to publish? Own blog? Internal corporate blog? External corporate blog? A publication like The New Stack or InfoQ?
- If you are targeting a publisher you'll likely need to at least write a pitch.

5 things to ask your publisher (you won't believe number 3)

1. Will they pay and, if so, how much?
2. Will they help with things like illustrations?
3. How much help will they give in terms of publicising the content, if any?
4. What is their process?
5. Who is their audience, and what tone do they use?

Drafting

- If my experience as an editor is anything to go by, writers seem to get oddly attached to their first draft—I don't recommend this.
- Think about your first draft as exploring your problem domain by whichever method works for you—like writing test cases first, or drawing diagrams.

QUOTE:

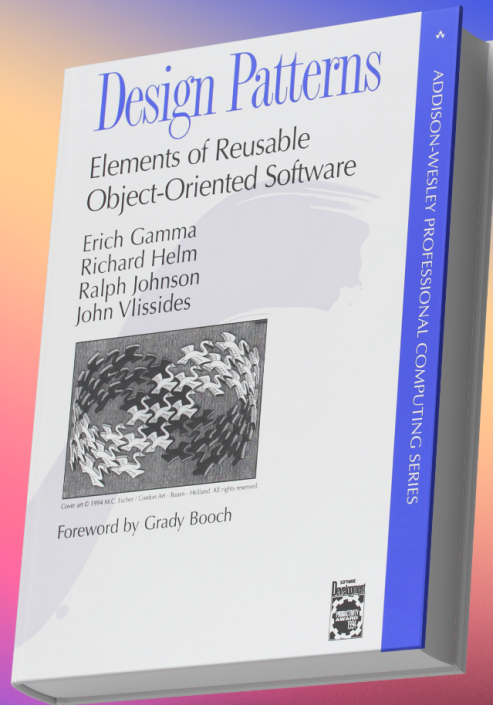
*“The process of doing your second draft is the process of making it look **like you knew what you were doing all along.**”*

(Neil Gaiman, for MasterClass)

Second draft

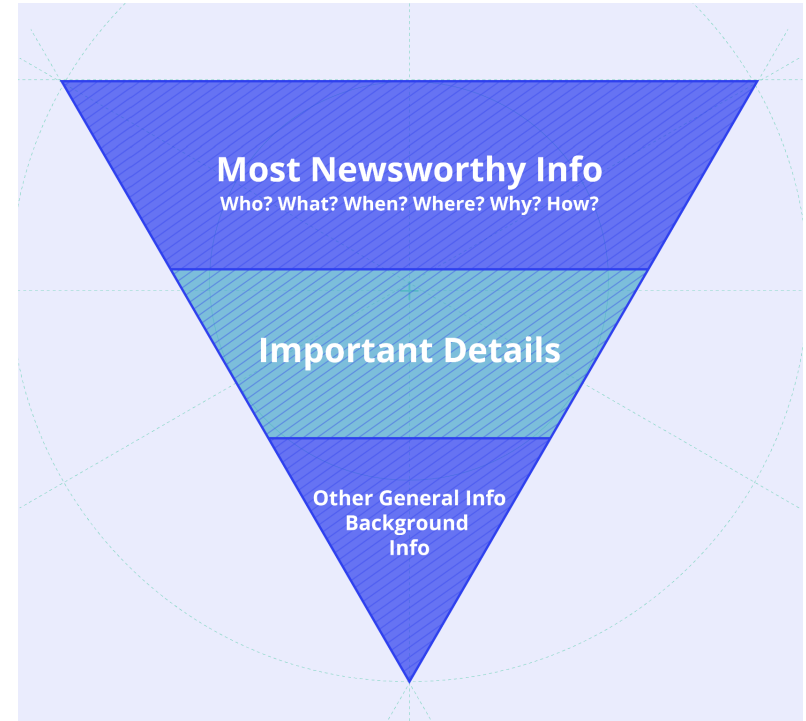
- For me the second draft is where I start to think about the structure for the piece —does it flow logically? Knowing who your reader is really helps here—what would this person want first?
- As you start to write you'll often find that material takes you somewhere you didn't expect it to go.

Patterns and structures



Pattern: The pyramid of news

- The inverted pyramid is commonly used in news, but has wide applicability in other kinds of text including blogs, editorial columns and marketing factsheets.
- It is the main technique InfoQ teaches its news writers (or at least it was when I ran InfoQ).



The lead

- The most important sentence in an article is the first one. If your reader doesn't decide to read on to the second sentence your article is already dead.
- The lead has an equivalent in fiction with the first sentence.

A simple news lead...

“A new fork of SQLite, called libSQL, aims to modernise this massively popular embedded database, with its founder complaining that ‘SQLite is explicitly and unequivocally Open Source, not Open Contribution.’”

Tim Anderson, writing for Dev Class

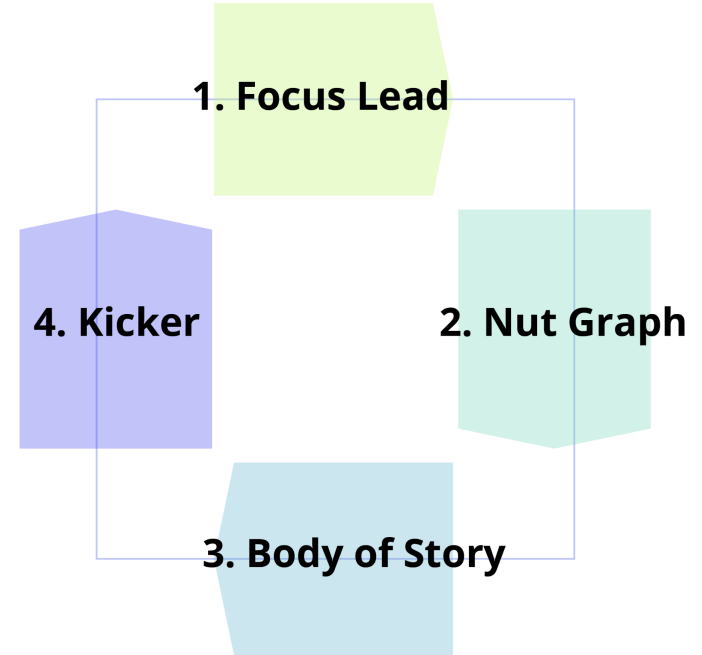
<https://devclass.com/2022/10/05/sqlite-not-open-enough-and-needs-modernization-complains-project-which-forks-it/>

Pattern: the focus style

- The Wall Street Journal has used the focus style for years.

The focus story has four parts:

- **Focus lead:** May be three, four or five paragraphs (unlike with an inverted pyramid where it is more likely to be a single sentence).
- **The nut graph:** Two or three paragraphs stating the central point of the story and how the lead illustrates that point.
- **The body:** Develops the central point in detail.
- **The kicker:** Brings the story to a conclusion.



Focus style variation: narrative lead as hook

A variation on the focus style, common in blogging, is to have a lead which is narrative or anecdotal, and use the nut graph as a turn. We use this style a lot on WTF since the anecdote acts really well as a hook.

Narrative as hook

Jack was delighted when he landed his 'dream job' for a large software company. It enabled him to work flexibly around the demands of his young family, with great colleagues, excellent progression and fantastic salary. Jack was even more thrilled when over two years ago he was asked to lead work on his company's biggest client, a global car manufacturer. He now spent most of his time with this organisation, specifically working with the engineering team responsible for laboratory emission testing.

As part of this new responsibility, Jack worked directly with Noah, one of the senior plant managers. Over time, they became personal friends, often going for a drink after work. They had also started to complete half-marathons together. Noah lived alone and Jack often invited him over for family meals at his house. On one occasion, Noah confided in Jack that he had found out something about his employer that troubled him, but did not say anything more.

In the last month, Jack had not seen Noah in work or at their running club, which was unusual. Every time he called or messaged, Noah just said he was feeling 'burnt out' and would be back soon. After not getting much more information from Noah's manager and HR, Jack decided to go to Noah's apartment to check on him directly. Finally and after much encouragement and reassurance, Noah broke down, uncontrollably sobbing. He swore Jack to absolute secrecy and then confided that, over six months previously, he had discovered something deeply troubling.

Noah suspected that software engineers at the car maker, likely on the orders of their bosses, were intentionally programming turbocharged direct injection (TDI) diesel engines to activate their emission controls only during laboratory emissions testing. This caused the vehicles' NOx output to meet US standards during regulatory testing, while they actually emitted up to 40 times more NOx in real world driving. If Noah was right, this would be catastrophic for the company, and probably Noah himself; not to mention the environmental outcomes worldwide. He cautioned Jack that if a word of this became public knowledge, he would feel like "committing suicide as his life would basically be over".

This particular type of widespread and catastrophic ethical dilemma, although rare, does occur. In fact, according to the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners [Organisations worldwide lose 5 Percent of revenues to fraud](#) - losses amounting to up to \$3.5 trillion. But ethical breaches come in many different forms and can be much

Helen's blog for WTF, "[Mending a Broken Psychological Contract: Understanding Liars and Ethical Dilemmas at Work](https://blog.container-solutions.com/liars-and-ethical-dilemmas-at-work)"

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[A Technical Guide to Burning Down a Troll Farm](https://thenewstack.io/a-technical-guide-to-burning-down-a-troll-farm/), by Jennifer Riggins, writing for The New Stack

Clara “Keffals” Sorrenti, a popular Twitch streamer, answered her door on August 5 to Ontario police pointing guns in her face. She was arrested, questioned, then released, once the police realized that she had been “swatted” — someone impersonated her, emailing that she was going to carry out a mass shooting.

Soon, Sorrenti became a victim of a month-long, cross-continental campaign of doxxing (publicly releasing personal information about an individual) and swatting.

This was all because of her co-organizing of the [#DropKiwiFarms campaign](#). Kiwi Farms is an online message board or forum that organizes trolling, harassment and stalking of mostly transgender people, those with disabilities, and those who are neurodivergent.

The New Stack spoke to [Liz Fong-Jones](#) — [Honeycomb.io](#)'s principal developer advocate, who has been working to bring down the hate site for more than five years — to learn how the volunteer team decided which piece of the Kiwi Farms stack to target, why it eventually came down (and then went up again), and how members of the tech industry can take better responsibility for the infrastructure they use.

Which Layer of the Stack to Target?

If you consider all of the parts of the modern tech stack that make it possible to put content online — client side, cloud and data centers, hosting and network providers, databases, and so on — it would seem like there are many layers to potentially target to take down a troll farm. So the [#DropKiwiFarms](#) campaign applied the process of elimination.

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Knowing when to stop

- At school we're all taught that essays have a beginning, a middle and an end.
- Unfortunately, we're also taught that the ending should restate what we've already said in a more compressed form.
- Instead aim to make it feel like your article just reaches a natural conclusion.

The kicker

“We’re about six years into this, and we’re just now building the actual project we intended to build,” Purdy said. “It’s the longest road to a minimal viable product you’ve ever heard of!”

[All About Ecstasy, a Language Designed for the Cloud](https://thenewstack.io/all-about-ecstasy-a-language-designed-for-the-cloud/), Charles Humble

Making people click

- Unfortunately the only thing most people will read before deciding whether to click and read your article is the headline.
- A good test—without any other context would I click on this?
- Not very good headline: “The regulator will love you!”
- Better headlines:
 - *All About Svelte, the Much-Loved, State-Driven Web Framework*
 - *How TypeScript Won Over Developers and JavaScript Frameworks*
- Most of your traffic will come from Google—so again the headline really matters.

SEO

- With a bit of luck you have a technical team that is focussed on getting and keeping the foundational infrastructure elements right.
- Search engines are really just trying to show the most relevant piece of content for a given query.
- Focus on writing the best content you can, and don't overthink the SEO. Trust that if the content is good, Google will find you.

Writing well

Terminology and acronyms

- Use terms consistently: If you've called something Protocol Buffers don't randomly rename it to protobufs. You can use the shortened form once you've introduced it—Protocol Buffers (or protobufs for short).
- When introducing an unfamiliar acronym for the first time, spell out the full term and then put the acronym in parentheses. Thereafter you can use the acronym.
- An exception is if the readers will definitely know the acronyms in question.

QUOTE:

*“The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence **to its cleanest components.**”*

(William Zinsser, On Writing Well)

Simplicity

- As an industry we have a tendency to make things sound desperately complicated so we can sound frightfully clever and terribly important.
- Clear writing comes from clear thinking.
- Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is not an accident.

Beware of clutter

- Avoid using words to obfuscate meaning.
- Prune your adverbs—they're mostly unnecessary. Likewise adjectives.
- If it is interesting to note make it interesting to read—don't tell me it is interesting, show me.
- Keep your paragraphs short.
- Watch out for overusing little qualifiers.

QUOTE:

*“Good writing is **lean and confident**.”*

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Words are the only tools you've got

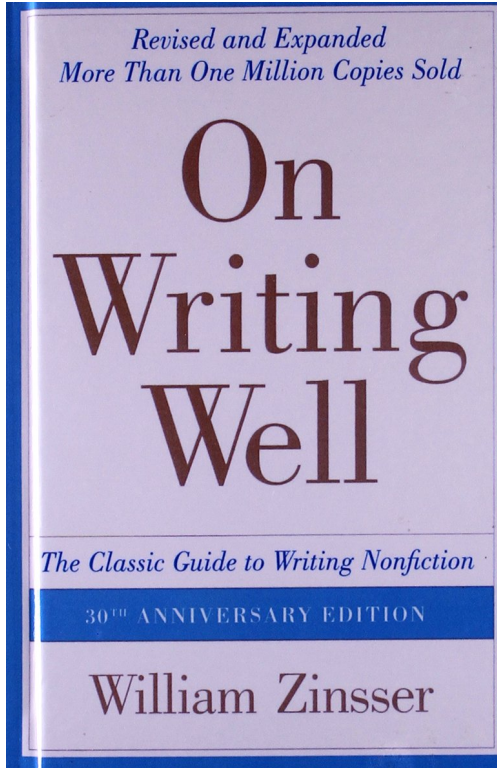
- Get into the habit of using dictionaries. If you have any doubt what a word means, look it up.
- A thesaurus, like a rhyming dictionary for a songwriter, is a useful tool.
- Along with a dictionary and a thesaurus, a book on grammar is a useful tool if you don't know the rules.



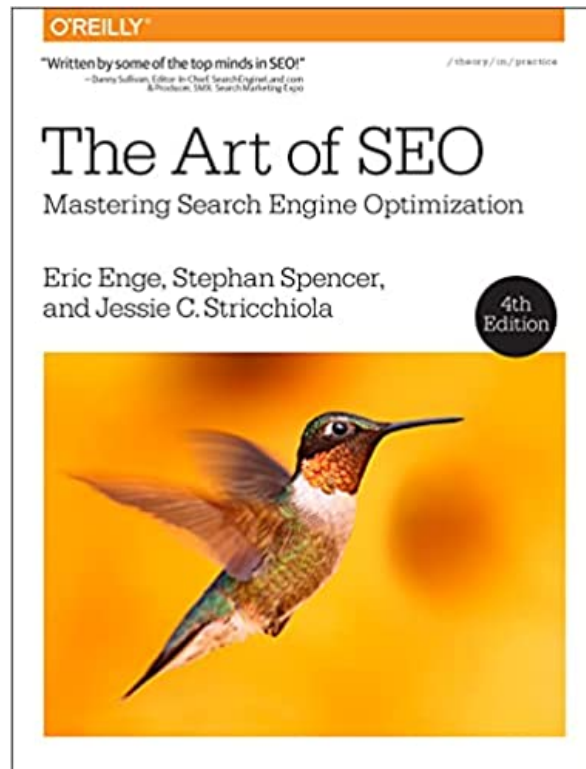
Alright... other tools

- My own toolchain is:
[Apple Pages](#) —> Google Docs —> [Docs to Markdown](#) to extract when needed.
- If I need to edit HTML I tend to use [Adobe Dreamweaver](#); it feels rather heavyweight but I've not found a better tool.
- For editing Markdown I use [Caret](#) but it's unfortunately in beta and hasn't been updated in ages.

References



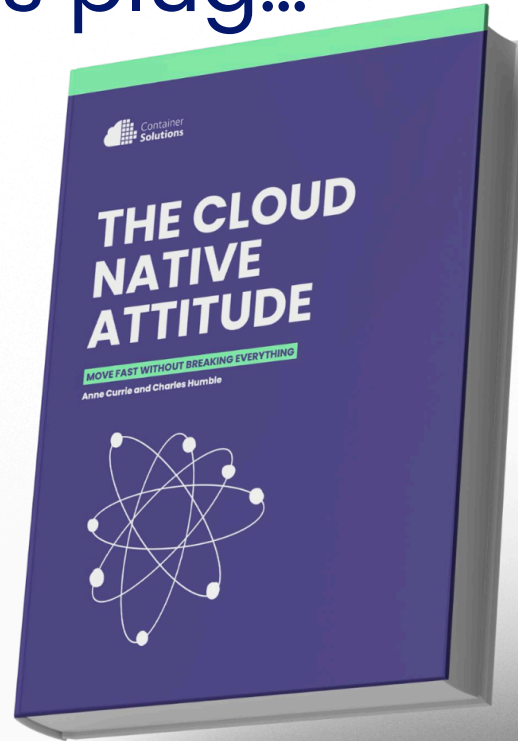
SEO



Gratuitous plug...



Download here



Writing is ultimately problem solving. It might be a problem of where to obtain facts, or how to organise the material, or a problem of tone or style. There are patterns and structures that can help but ultimately, like with programming, **you'll get better by doing more of it.**

Thank you

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Podcast: <https://blog.container-solutions.com/tag/hacking-the-org>

Cloud Native Attitude book: <https://info.container-solutions.com/the-cloud-native-attitude-2nd-edition>

Music: <http://www.twofish-music.com/>