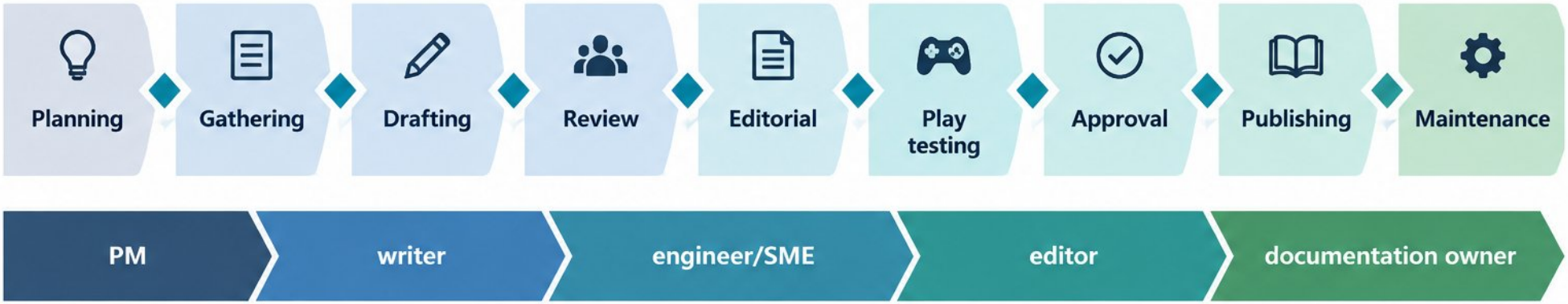
Technical Writing Roles, Responsibilities, and Handoffs

- Role clarity speeds publication, sustains quality, and cuts rework
- Most documentation failures happen between roles, not inside them
- Know the difference: a role, a responsibility, a decision right
- Course roadmap: lifecycle, role map, RACI, handoff contracts, failure modes
- Then docs-as-code, working agreements, scaling, and a 30-day action plan



The Documentation Lifecycle and Its Quality Gates

FROM PLANNING TO LASTING IMPACT



- Nine stages: planning, gathering, drafting, review, editorial, play testing, approval, publishing, maintenance
- Each stage has defined inputs, outputs, and a gate to pass
- Ownership shifts: PM → writer → engineer/SME → editor → documentation owner
- Upstream quality drives downstream results: spec quality and SME availability
- In practice, five review stages: self, technical, editorial, play testing, post-publication feedback

Role Map: Who Does What

Different perspectives.
Better documentation.



Technical writer: audience analysis, content architecture, drafting, and coordinating reviews

Documentation owner: strategy, standards, tooling, prioritization, and overall quality ownership

Engineer or SME: technical accuracy, code samples, API behavior, and technical sign-off

Product manager: scope, positioning, audience priorities, and documentation requirements in issues

Editor: style, clarity, terminology, and the editorial quality gate; peers review structure

Roles overlap by design: fix it with explicit scope boundaries and named owners

RACI and Decision Rights for Documentation

Clear ownership. Confident decisions. Better documentation.

Deliverable	Product Manager	Staff Engineer	Service Owner	Editorial	Others
Release notes	**A**	R	C	C	I
API reference	C	**A**	R	C	I
Runbooks	C	R	**A**	C	I



RACI for docs: Responsible drafts, Accountable signs off, Consulted supplies evidence, Informed stays current

Exactly one Accountable per deliverable; shared accountability is the most common RACI failure

Make decision rights explicit: who can block publication and who approves scope changes

Sample ownership: release notes (PM), API reference (Staff Engineer), runbooks (Service Owner)

Non-transferable rule: editorial review never approves engineering behavior

Handoff Contracts: Artifacts, Criteria, and Deadlines

CLEARER HANDOFFS STRONGER TOGETHER

- A handoff contract states what, in what format, to whom, by when—and what happens if late
- Define ready and done for each handoff stage
- Review requests include intent, audience, scope, and specific questions
- Engineer-to-writer: spec, design doc, API diff, demo access, named SME
- Time-boxes: 24–48h SME review, 24h peer review, 4h lead edit



Handoff Contract

- What (artifact)
- In what format
- To whom
- By when
- What happens if late

Definition of Ready

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

Definition of Done

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

Review Request

Intent | Audience | Scope | Specific questions

Failure Modes at Role Boundaries



- "Throw it over the wall": no context, no named owner on receipt



- Reviewer bottlenecks: one person gates everything, or the queue is invisible



- Rubber-stamp SME review: a 30-second "LGTM" with zero quality gain



- Undefined maintenance ownership after launch; published pages quietly go stale



- Feedback mixing accuracy, style, and personal preference; causes churn and fatigue



- Docs requested at 90% of development with unchanged deadlines; knowledge gaps follow

Docs-as-Code and Modern Collaboration Tooling

BETTER DOCS. STRONGER PRODUCTS. TOGETHER.



- Pull requests, line-level review, CI checks, continuous publishing
- Engineers draft API and reference content; writers become content architects
- Typical path: linting, SME review, editorial review, conflict resolution, sign-off, merge
- Tooling for handoffs: templates, checklists, CODEOWNERS reviewers, rendered previews
- Automation handles linting, links, previews; humans own accuracy, scope, publish
- AI-generated docs must still be reviewed by a technical writer



Working Agreements for Writers, Reviewers, and SMEs

- A lightweight team charter beats relying on memory
- Agree on response times, review depth, and blocking criteria
- Templates and checklists make expectations explicit and repeatable
- Ask busy engineers for small, specific reviews, not open-ended ones
- Escalate repeated review failures: pair-edit after three failed passes



Scaling Roles Across Teams, Regions, and Vendors

Small Teams



Large Teams



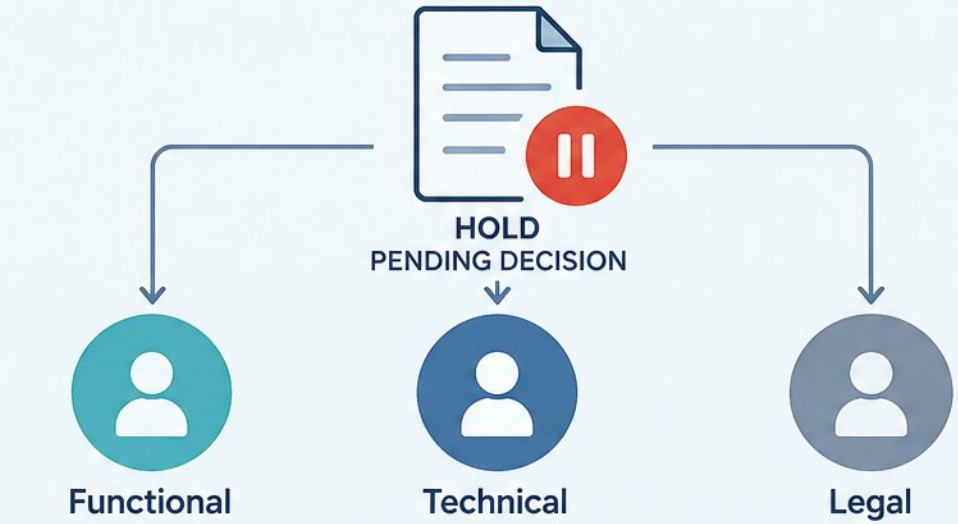
Vendors and Time Zones



- **Small teams:** wear many hats, but name one accountable owner per document type
- **Large teams:** add interface agreements between groups
- **Localization:** string freezes, maintained termbase, context, and editing rules
- **Vendors and time zones:** onboarding, quality gates, written decision logs
- **Encode rules in templates and automation** to avoid process overhead

RACI and Role Clarity in Regulated and High-Risk Content

- Documentation approval confirms only the authority actually delegated to that approver
- Separate functional, technical, and legal roles to expose conflicts of interest
- Name who decides warnings, limits, regulated claims, classifications, and accessibility
- If authority is unclear, hold the claim or release and escalate decisively
- Preserve versions, status, approvals, and publication evidence for auditable accountability



	R	A	C	I
Functional				
Technical		●		
Legal				



Measuring Process Health

- Track review cycle time: draft opened to merged
- Benchmarks: 3–5 days for guides, 1–2 days for reference updates
- Median over 7 days? Investigate SME availability first
- Secondary signals: rework loops, stale pages, publish errors
- Define metric owners and formulas before the pilot



Designing Your Own Role Map and RACI

1. List roles active in your lifecycle; mark overlaps and name the resolver
2. Build a RACI for release notes, API reference, and a user guide
3. Validate: one A per activity, at least one R, no role overloaded
4. Write a one-page map per doc type: draft owner, accuracy owner, publisher, trigger
5. Share the map with the whole team so everyone sees the dependency



RACI Worksheet

	Release Notes	API Reference	User Guide
Product Manager			
Technical Writer			
Developer			
Designer			
Release Manager			

One-Page Map (for a Document Type)

Document Type	
Draft Owner	
Accuracy Owner	
Publisher	
Trigger	

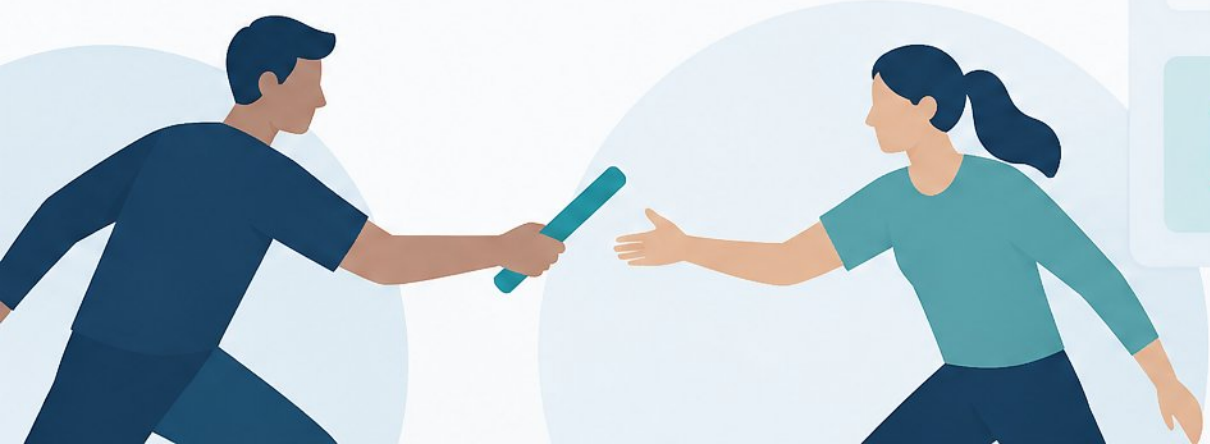
Validation Checklist

- [ ] One A per activity
- [ ] At least one R
- [ ] No role overloaded



Drafting a Handoff Contract for Your Weakest Link

- Pick the handoff where work most often stalls; write one contract for it
- Specify artifact, format, recipient, deadline, and escalation path
- Add a definition of ready and a definition of done
- Require intent, audience, scope, and specific review questions
- Define blocking feedback and committed reviewer response times
- Keep it short enough that people will actually read and use it



Handoff Contract (Template)

- Artifact
- Format
- Recipient
- Deadline
- Escalation path

Definition of ready

Definition of done

Keep it short enough that people will actually read and use it.

Action Plan: Run a 30-Day Pilot and Adjust

Week 1



One-page role map

RACI for top three deliverables

One handoff contract

30-Day Pilot



Run a 30-day pilot with named owners, review SLAs, and a simple cycle-time tracker



Compare against baseline: review cycles, rework loops, time to publish

Pitfalls: too many consultants, missing owners, unenforceable decision rights

Start small, pair the first publish, update agreements as teams and tools change



PEOPLE PROCESSES PROGRESS

PersonWise.

PersonWise • AI digital-human course platform

Scan the code or click anywhere to watch this course live, with voice Q&A

personwise.ai/t/bf9cd71e/public