Introduction
This document is designed to be a tool for determining the future of Zen technical publications.

First we define standard quality levels and metrics. Next, we examine the stages of the Content Life Cycle\(^1\). Then we discuss the current status of Zen documentation using these concepts.

How to Evaluate a Technical Publications Department
Some ways to measure the return on your investment in technical writing are through the benefits of standardized processes and lower overhead in support calls.

Quality Levels
Zen technical publications are in the zone of Level 1 Quality as outlined in the following definitions:

- **Level 1 Quality**\(^2\) – Meets minimal standards: No index, no examples, was spellchecked.
- **Level 2 Quality** – A good job: Verified against software, indexed, spellchecked, copyedited.
- **Level 3 Quality** – The best that we can do with technical editor and graphic artists on the team.

Metrics
The metrics in Table 1 make it possible to project the work effort necessary to create a Level 2 or Level 3 Quality documentation set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>Level 3 Quality</th>
<th>Level 2 Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple rewrite</td>
<td>8 /pages/day</td>
<td>10 – 12 /pages/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep rewrite</td>
<td>4 pages/day</td>
<td>6 – 7 pages/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New document</td>
<td>2 pages/day</td>
<td>3 – 4 pages/day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the generic formula for scoping a project based on page count. In reality, the entire company experience level and product stability are factors in calculating the time cost of your technical publications.

\(^{1}\) A. Rockley, *Managing Enterprise Content.*

\(^{2}\) J. Hackos, *Managing Your Documentation Projects.*
Figure 1 shows the factors involved in a more highly determined estimate. It has an example for a fictitious User Guide, *Fateful User Guide*.

![Dependency calculator](image1)

**Figure 1: Dependency calculator (J. Hackos, 1994)**

**Content Life Cycle**

Figure 2 shows how content moves through the following phases of development: Creation, Review, Management, and Delivery.

![Content life cycle](image2)

**Figure 2: Content life cycle (A. Rockley, 2003)**
Table 2 describes each phase of the Documentation Content Life Cycle. The documentation delivered in December, 2011 is in the Creation stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>This phase can include planning, design, authoring and revision. The current set of documents is in the Documentation Content Creation phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Documentation is usually reviewed before it is delivered to users. The review process can involve one or many reviewers. In addition to multiple reviews, the documentation content is refined before final approval. Approval happens when the content is considered accurate, complete, and ready for delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>This is the version control aspect of content development through the creation, review and revision cycles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Publication and Delivery | Delivery options include:  
  - Hardcopy  
  - Online PDF  
  - Online hyperlinked HTML  
  - CD |

**Zen Documentation Roadmap**

Prioritizing the documentation tasks should reflect which processes are the most mission critical to the company.

In creating the current documentation set, we bypassed the design, authoring and revision steps of the Creation phase. To achieve full Level 1 Quality, further development must finish the Creation phase.

Consistent terminology must be a company-wide goal to maximize operational efficiency of everyone in your organization who creates, works with, and reads content.

**Next Document Set**

Goals for the next documentation effort should include the following:

- **Design** – This includes prioritizing subjects, and creating standard document templates.
- **Review** – Subject matter experts read for accuracy and completeness.
- **Revision** – Writers revise for accuracy and conciseness.

The revision includes the following:

- consistent voice across documents
- standardized phrasing, terminology, and graphics
- procedures tested
- indexing
Projections
A standard set of technical documents includes the following document types:

- Administration Guide
- Install Guide
- User Guide
- Reference Manual
- Operation Manual