

# Best Practices for Microcontent-based Authoring

*Scott DeLoach, ClickStart, Miami Beach, USA*

Users scan content for quick answers. Microcontent-based authoring makes content easier to scan, and it increases user satisfaction and success. Microcontent can also be reused and accessed by other systems, including embedded user assistance, context-sensitive help, chatbots, and voice-based search. Google calls these microcontent blocks "snippets," and they are a key, highly visible aspect of Google search results.

In this session, we will discuss best practices for designing, writing, and reusing microcontent. We will also explore how microcontent can be reused in other systems and how microcontent blocks can be compared to Google's snippets.

## What is microcontent?

"Microcontent should be an ultra-short abstract of its associated macrocontent."

- Jakob Nielsen, 1998

## Why is microcontent important?

- Targeted
- Focused
- Summarizes/entices
- Reusable and curatable

## How will microcontent impact technical communication?

- Content reuse
- Writing style/architecture
- Microcontent-based vs topic-based

## How microcontent can be reused

- Embedded UA
- Context-sensitive help
- Chatbots
- Voice-based search

## Google Structured Data Types

### FAQ

- A page with question and answers.

- Does not allow users to submit alternative answers.

## Q&A

A page where users can submit answers to a question or multiple questions.

### How to

- Walks users through a set of steps to complete a task.
- Can feature video, images, and text.
- Only available on mobile devices, not desktop.

## How to create microcontent

Search only: authoring tools/search engines

Google integration:

- JSON-LD (recommended)
- Microdata
- RDFa

### How – JSON-LD (recommended)

- JavaScript markup in a <script> tag inside the page head or body
- Can be added dynamically

```
{
  "@context": "https://json-ld.org/contexts/person.jsonld",
  "@id": "http://example.com/Robert_Smith",
  "name": "Robert Smith",
  "born": "1959-04-21",
  "spouse": http://example.com/Mary_Poole
}
```

### How – Microdata

- Open-community HTML specification
- Used to nest structured data within page head or body
- Uses HTML tag attributes

```
<div>
  <div itemtype="http://www.w3.org/2000/01/rdf-schema#Resource"
  itemid="http://example.com/Robert_Smith" itemscope>
    <meta itemprop="http://schema.org/birthDate" content="1959-04-21" />
    <meta itemprop="http://xmlns.com/foaf/0.1/name" content="Robert Smith" />
    <link itemprop="http://schema.org/spouse" href="http://example.com/Mary_Poole" />
  </div>
</div>
```

### How – RDFa

- HTML5 extension that uses HTML tag attributes
- Can be used inside the page head or body

```
<div xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml"
  prefix="
    foaf:http://xmlns.com/foaf/0.1/
    schema: http://schema.org/
    rdf: http://www.w3.org/1999/02/22-rdf-syntax-ns#
    xsd: http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema#
    rdfs: http://www.w3.org/2000/01/rdf-schema#">
  <div typeof="rdfs:Resource" about="http://example.com/Robert_Smith">
    <div rel="schema:spouse" resource="http://example.com/Mary_Poole">
      <div property="foaf:name" content="Robert Smith">
        <div property="schema:birthDate" datatype="xsd:date" content="1959-04-21">
      </div>
    </div>
  </div>
```

## Best practices — design

- Review the structured data types, esp. FAQ, Q&A, and How to
- Use a heading tag (h1-h6) for questions
- Use text, bullets, tables, images, and/or videos as needed for answers

## Best practices — reuse

- Use JSON-LD if possible with Microdata or RDFa as backups
- Write microcontent blocks first and use as building blocks
- Use basic HTML tags and CSS formatting

## Best practices — writing

- Research what people are searching for: Google, Quora, Yahoo Answers, AnswerthePublic
- Use "How to...", "How do/does...", and "What is..." phrases
- Limit answers to 50 words

## About the presenter

Scott DeLoach is the Founder of Click**Start**, where he provides training and consulting for MadCap Flare, embedded user assistance, CSS, HTML5, and the design and development of policies and procedures, online help, and knowledge bases. Scott has been developing browser-based help systems for over 20 years, and he has received four Best in Show awards for his work from STC. He is an STC Fellow.

Scott is a certified Flare instructor, and he is the author of MadCap Flare: The Definitive Guide, CSS to the Point, and HTML5 to the Point. For more information, see [www.clickstart.net](http://www.clickstart.net).

**Contact:**  
[scott@clickstart.net](mailto:scott@clickstart.net)