



black hat[®]
EUROPE 2023

DECEMBER 4-7

EXCEL LONDON / UK



Hacking Your Documentation: Who Should WTFM?

Elliott Grey

Elliott Grey

Technical Writer

- Former red team operator
- Technical Writing HQ certified
- MIT Alum: Course 21E
- Cat lover extraordinaire





Agenda

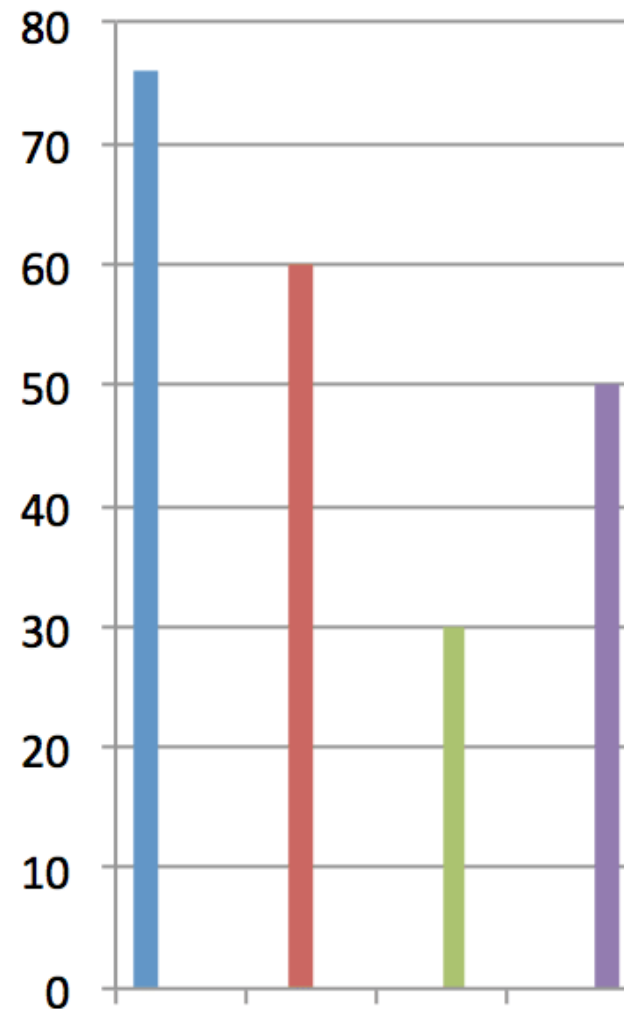
- Framing the Picture
- Understanding Technical Writing
- Who should WTFM?
- Benefits of Technical Writers
- Counter Arguments
- So, You Want to Write?
- Wrap Up



Why Do We Care About Documentation?

“Documentation is any communicable material that is used to describe, explain or instruct...” [1]

The High Cost of Not Finding Information



- 76% of company executives considered information to be “mission critical” and their company’s most important asset.
- 60% felt that time constraints and lack of understanding of how to find information were preventing their employees from finding the information they needed.
- The knowledge worker spends about 2.5 hours per day, or roughly 30% of the workday, searching for information.
- Preliminary research suggests that approximately 35–50% of the information available within an enterprise is not centrally indexed.

Conclusion: An enterprise employing 1,000 knowledge workers wastes \$48,000 per week, or nearly \$2.5 million per year, due to an inability to locate and retrieve information.

Source: International Data Corporation



What Does Technical Writing Look Like?

What Does Technical Writing Look Like?



For developers:

Release notes
How-to guides
References



For security testers:

Assessment reports
Tool READMEs
Blog posts

Who Should WTFM?

Developers?

- Pros:
 - Knows the code base
- Cons:
 - New user experience
 - Inconsistency

Security Testers?

- Pros:
 - Knows the actions taken during assessments
- Cons:
 - Non-security professional viewpoints
 - Inconsistency

Who
Should
WTFM?

Technical Writers!





Benefits of a Dedicated Technical Writing Team

Refocus on core roles

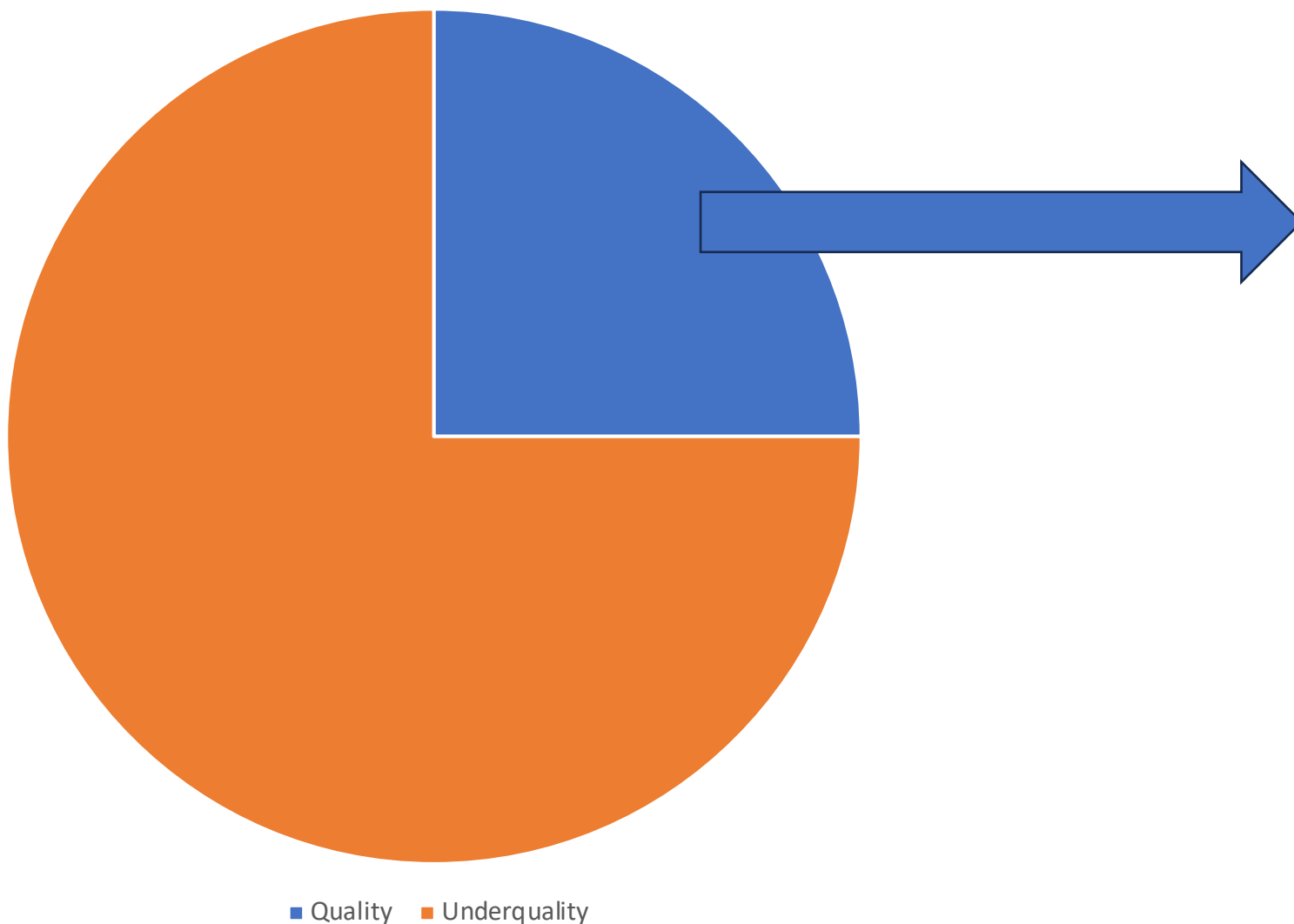
Task quality improves

End user impression improves

Revenue 

Closer Look

Percentage of Good Documentation



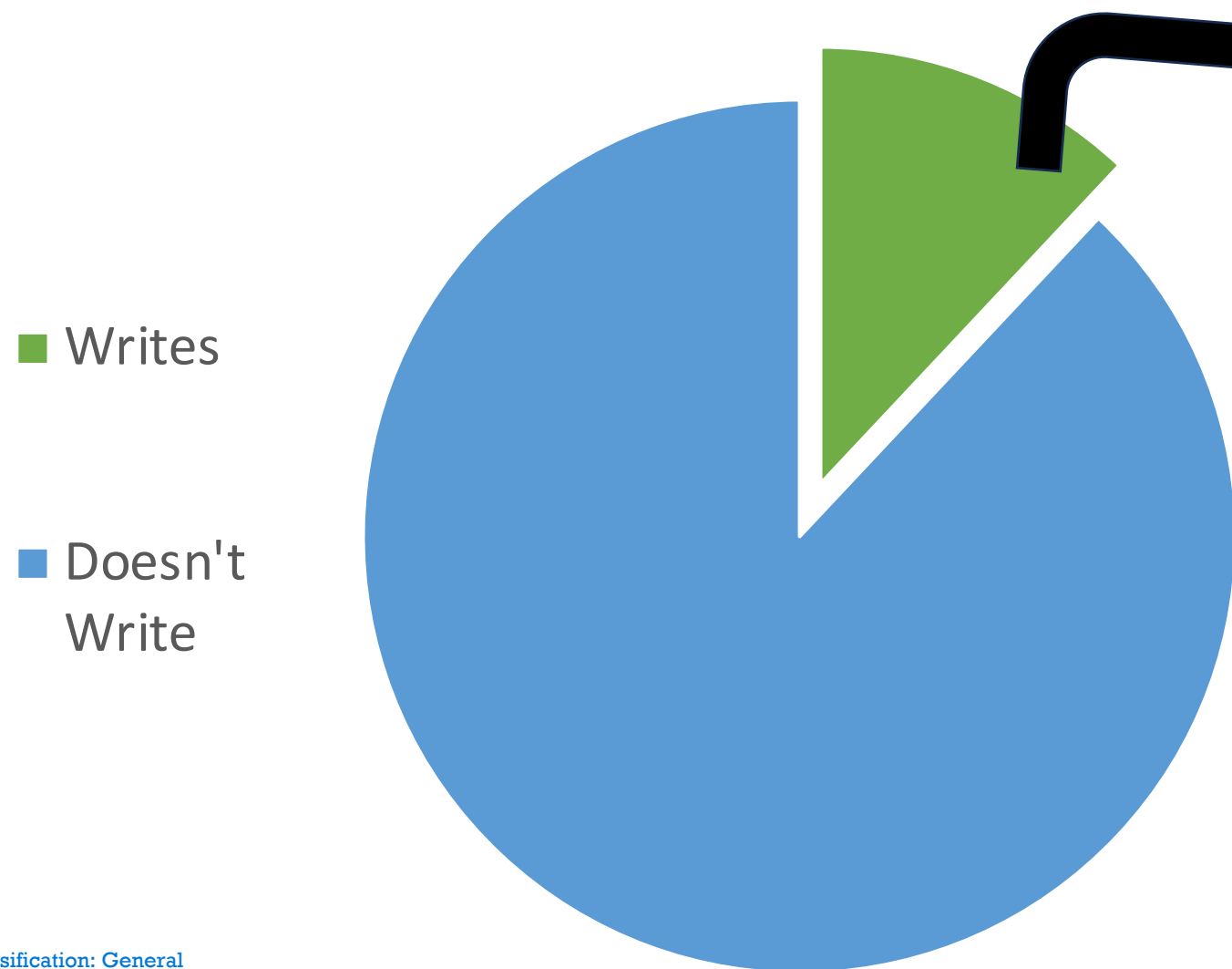
Teams with quality documentation are

3.8x

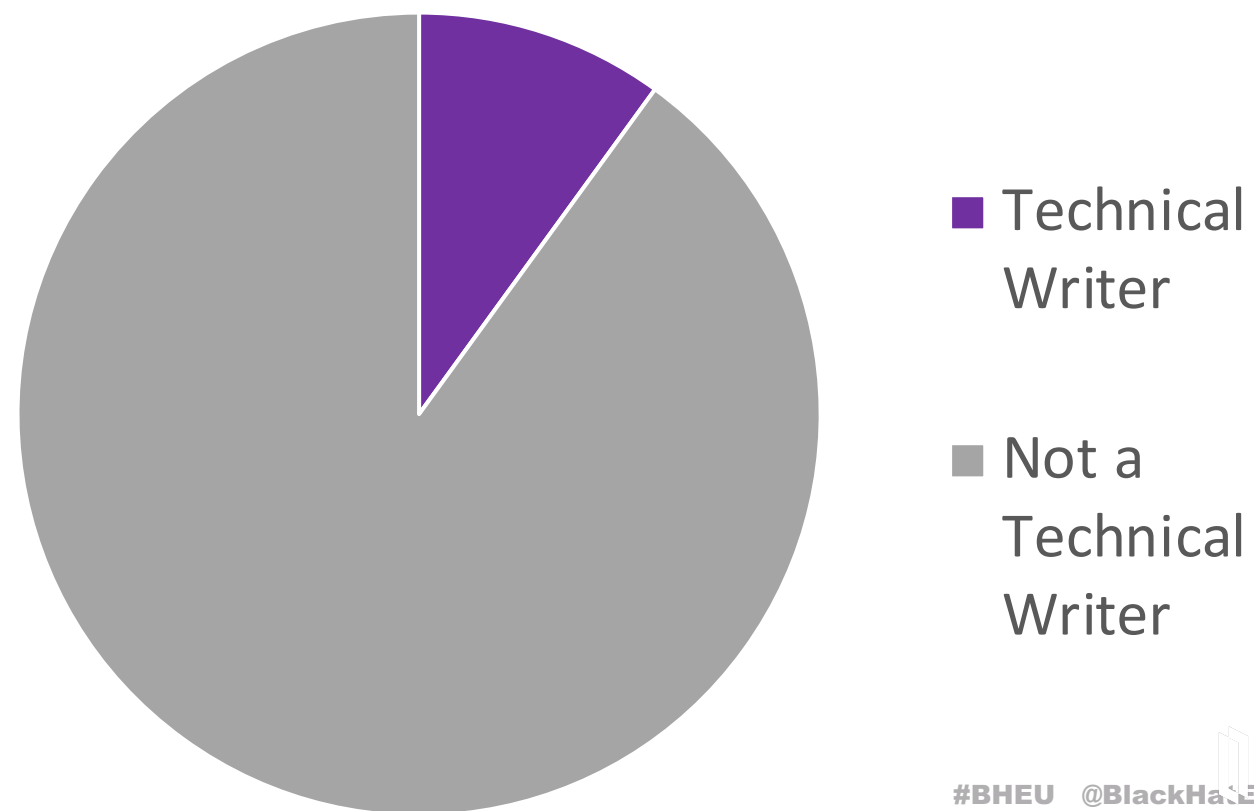
more likely to implement security practices

Closer Look

% of Respondents Who Write Technical Documentation



% of Respondents Who Are Technical Writers





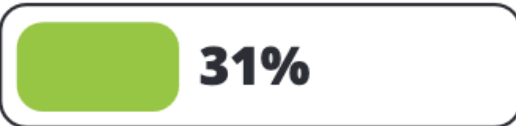
Closer Look

FIGURE 25

Which of the following are issues in your current role that negatively impact your job satisfaction?

(Showing top nine responses)

Too many emails/tasks



I experience overwork due to staff or skill shortages

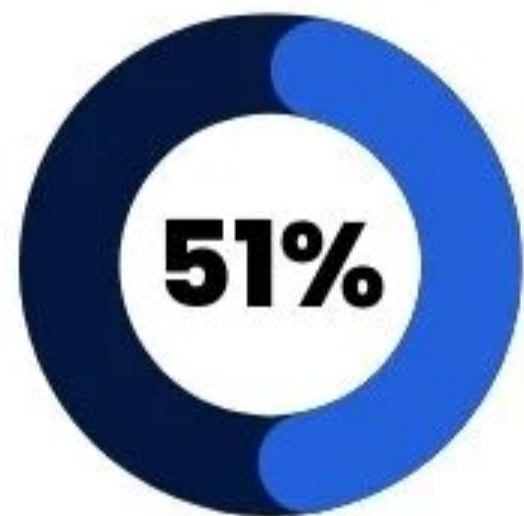


My team has inadequate resources to sufficiently protect the organization

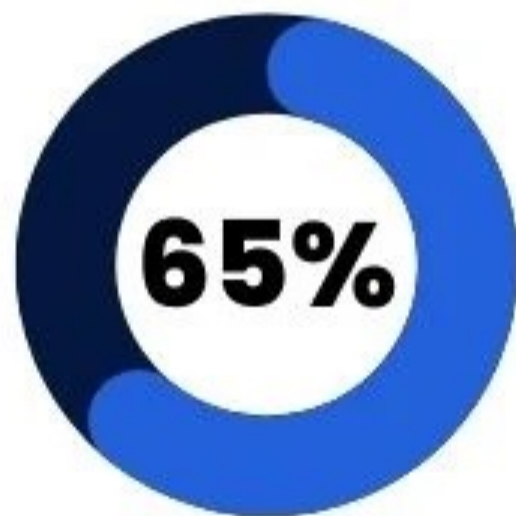


Closer Look

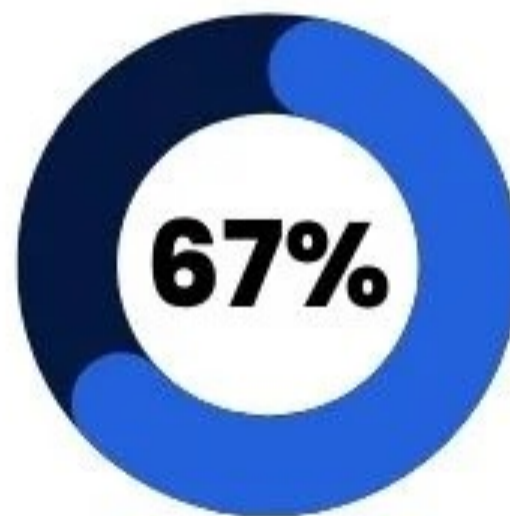
BY THE NUMBERS **BURNOUT IN CYBERSECURITY**



Experienced extreme stress
or burnout in 2021



Considered leaving their job
because of job stress



Wouldn't recommend a
career in the same industry



“Burnout isn't just a people problem; it is a business problem that negatively impacts a company's ability to safeguard its data, reputation, and bottom line.”[5]



Counter Arguments

Pay and
manage

Not every
company can
support this

Not a SME

Devs/Testers
aren't completely
off the hook for
documentation



What Does a Technical Writer Even Do?



Woah, Technical Writing Sounds Cool, Can I Become a Writer?



Yes!



If...



Technical Writer Qualifications



Strong communication skills



Learn technologies quickly



Education: depends



Portfolio



Personal Anecdote

Fast Forward: You're a Technical Writer. Now What?

1

Keep up with your technical knowledge in your topic(s)

- Don't need to be a SME!

2

Be curious!

- Don't blindly copy/paste, try it out yourself

Wrap Up

- Not just for dev/tester burnouts
 - Not just anyone can do it
 - Sounds like paradise? Reach out to me on LinkedIn @egrey37
- Important to security
 - Bad docs → breaches and loss of customer trust
- Ease the burden
 - Reduce burnout & increase productivity

Black Hat Sound Bytes

Good documentation is important

Technical writers should write the documentation

Hire technical writers or become one!

Questions?

Elliott Grey

LinkedIn: @egrey37

X: @elliottgwrites

Medium: @greycatsec

GitHub: @greycatsec

