

The techaddicted guide to

Documentation

Images: XKCD.com



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So you run a software company

So you run a software company



You have a
developer

So you run a software company



You have a
developer



then you hire
another

So you run a software company



You have a
developer



then you hire
another



and another

And they talk to each other



which is fine



Until...



You hire more



And the new guys?



Don't have a clue...



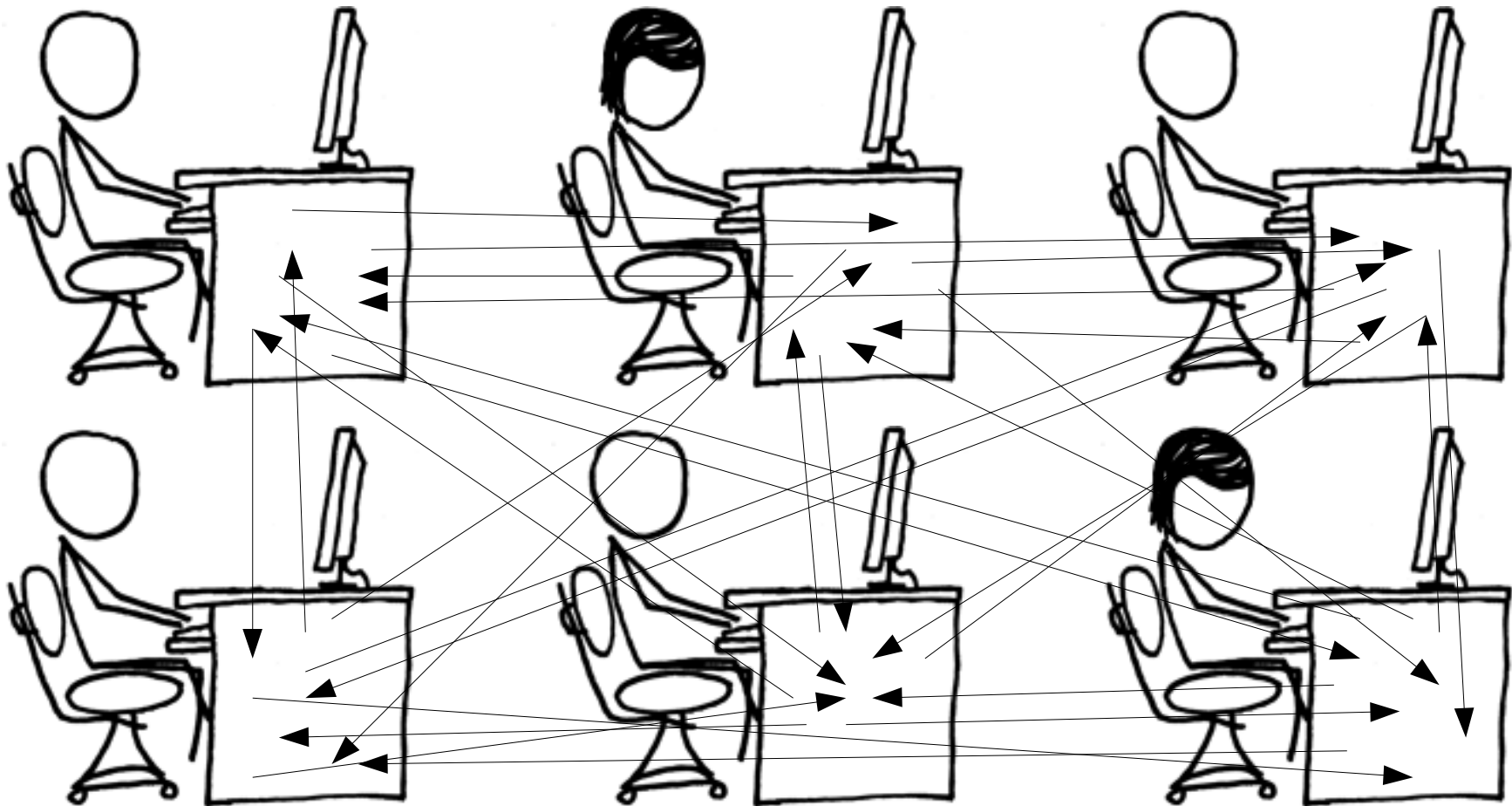
But there's a work to do



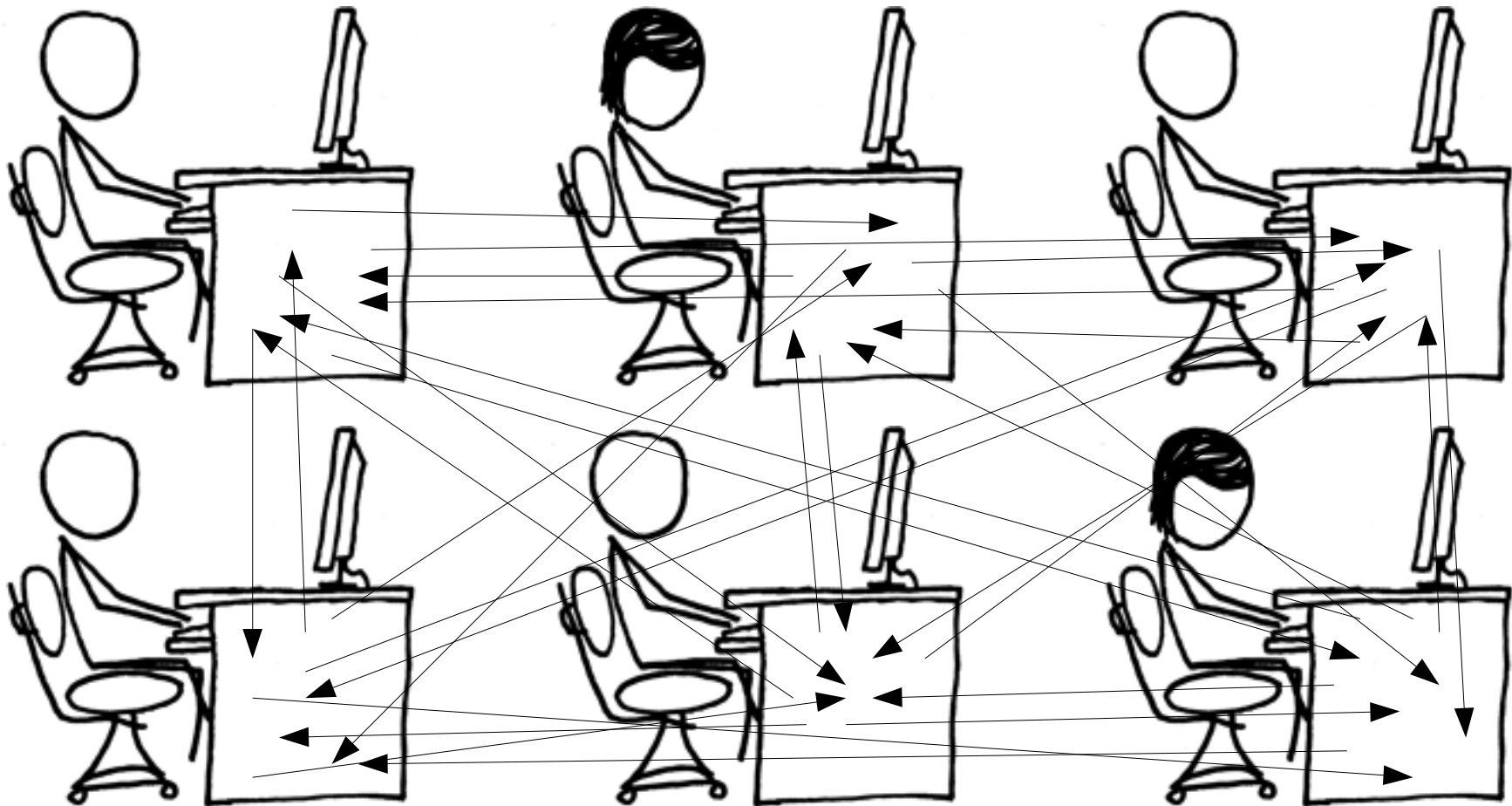
And you need all of them productive



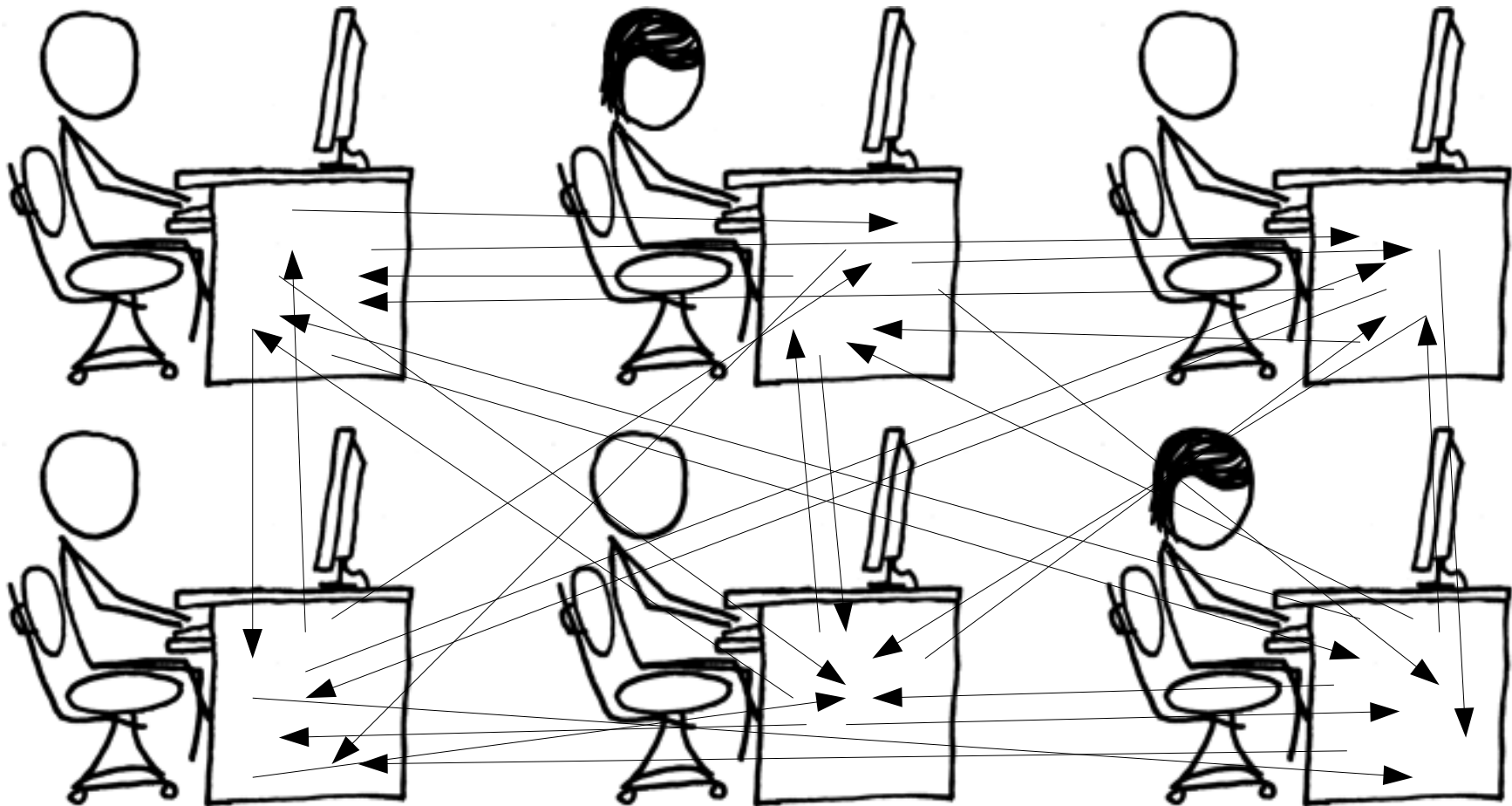
So they all talk



Which wastes a lot of time



But it's what they need to do



Then customers ring with questions



But only one guy knows the answer



This isn't an efficient system...

So what do you do about it?

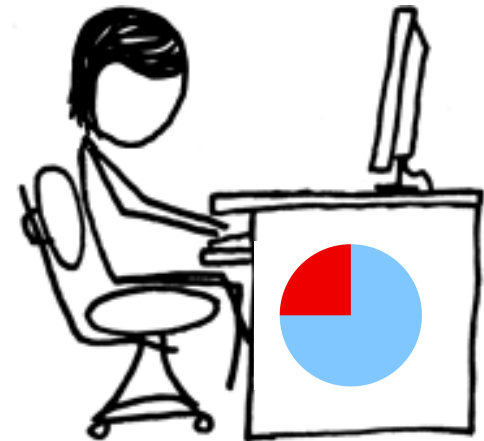
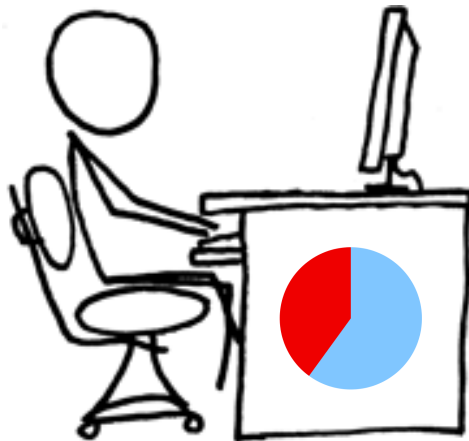
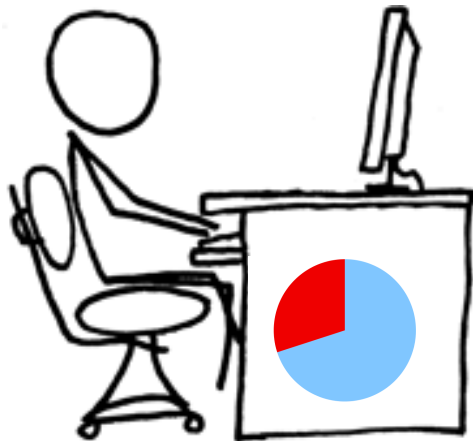
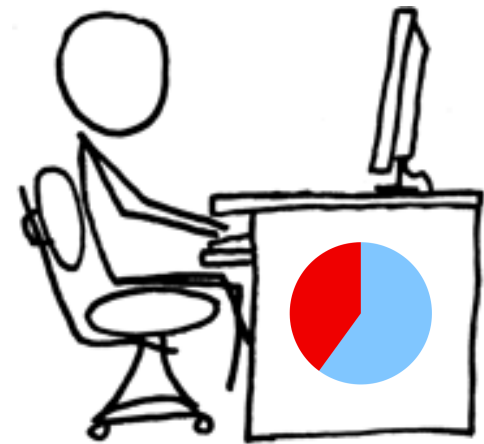
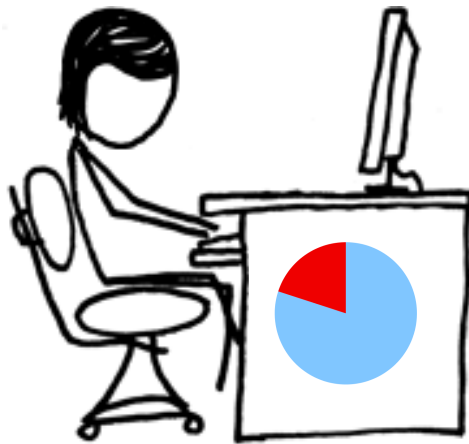
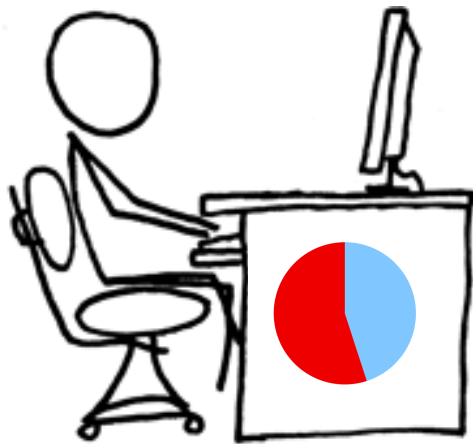
Make your developers write docs!



Except you didn't hire them to write



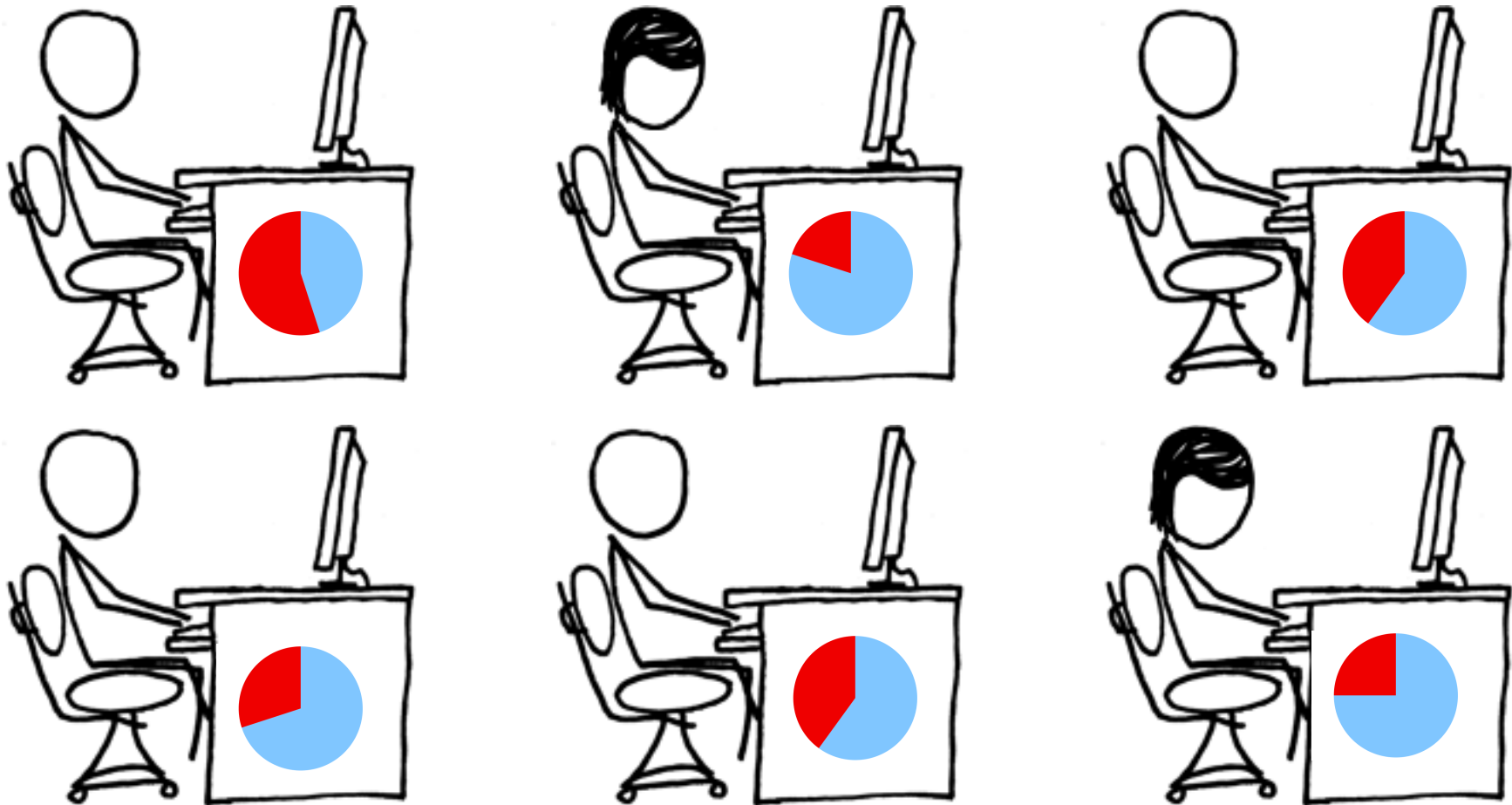
So they take awhile



Programming

Documentation

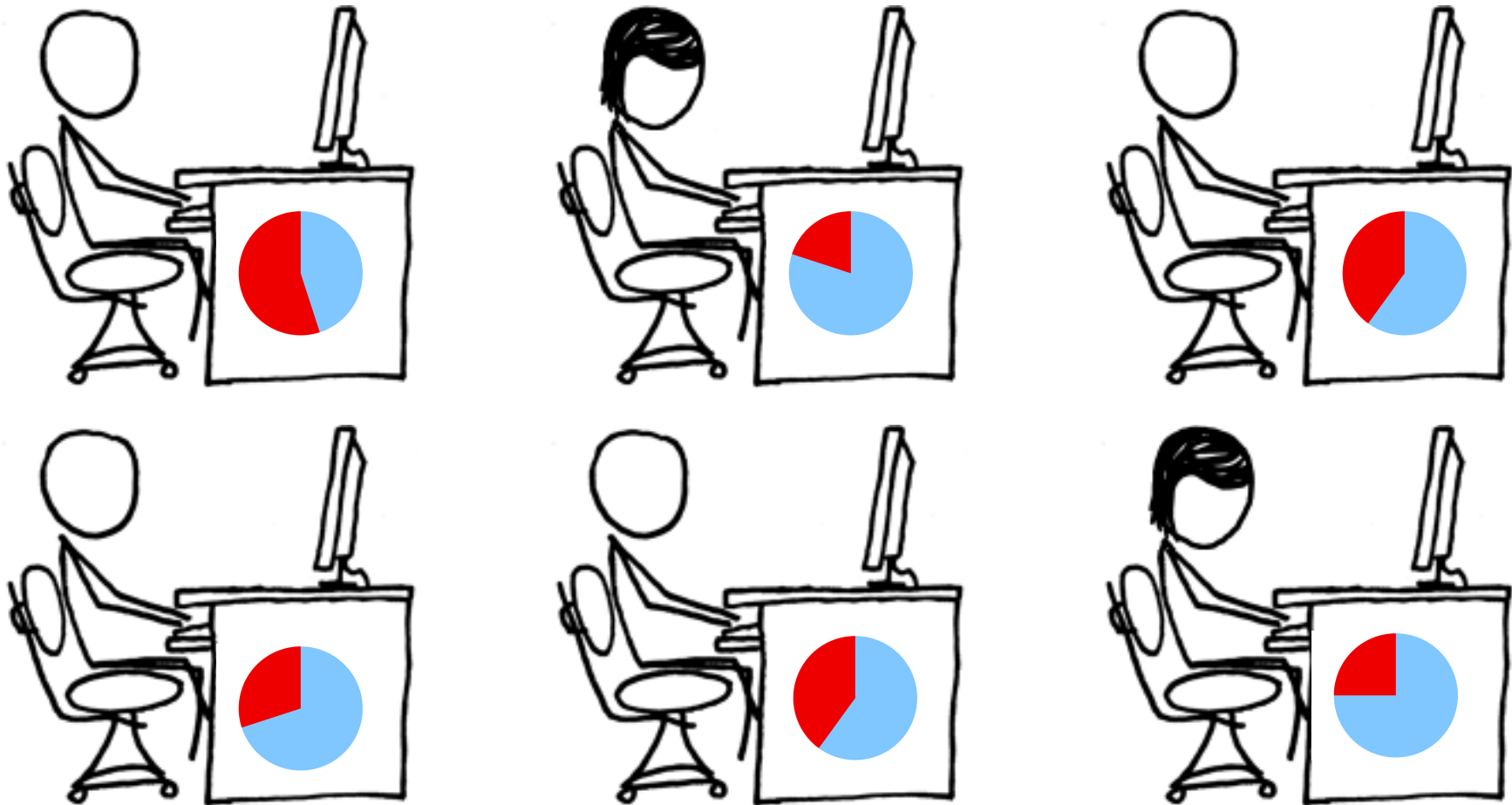
Because they're not sure how



Programming

Documentation

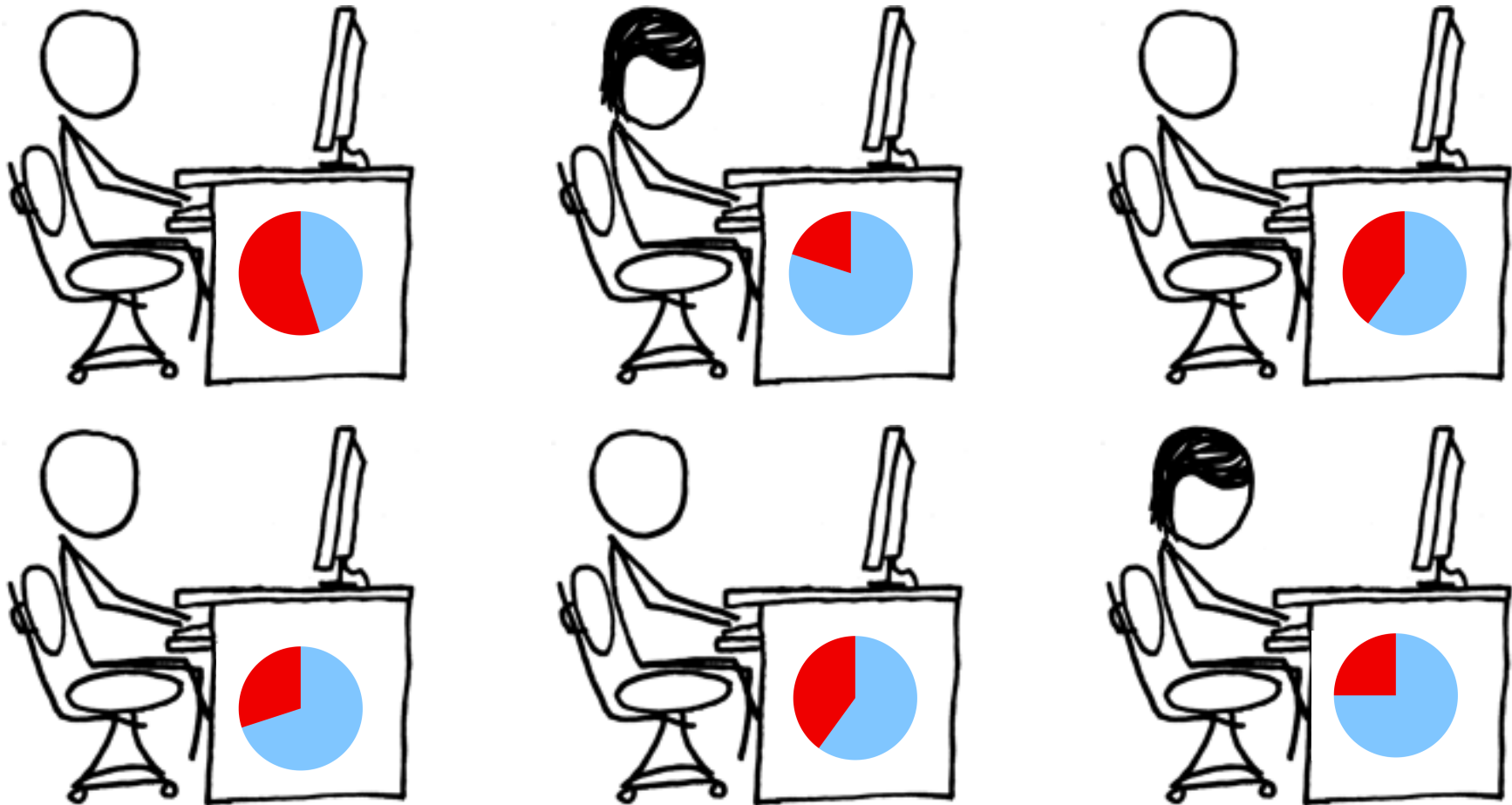
And now you have deadlines



Programming

Documentation

And more work than resources



Programming

Documentation

You need to free up your devs

So you have 2 options:

So you have 2 options:

1. Teach your developers to write

So you have 2 options:

1. Teach your developers to write
2. Hire a technical writer

1. Teach your developers to write

How to write

Lesson One

How to write

Lesson One

Audience

How to Write: Audience

Who will read the documentation?

How to Write: Audience

Who will read the documentation?

- Internal developers

How to Write: Audience

Who will read the documentation?

- Internal developers
- External developers

How to Write: Audience

Who will read the documentation?

- Internal developers
- External developers
- Non-technical customers

How to Write: Audience

Who will read the documentation?

- Internal developers
- External developers
- Non-technical customers
- Your mum

How to Write: Audience

Different audiences have different needs:

How to Write: Audience

Different audiences have different needs:

- Internal developers
- External developers
- Non-technical customers
- Your mum

How to Write: Audience

Different audiences have different needs:

- Internal developers
 - Wiki pages, code comments
- External developers
- Non-technical customers
- Your mum

How to Write: Audience

Different audiences have different needs:

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How to Write: Audience

Different audiences have different needs:

- Internal developers
 - Wiki pages, code comments
- External developers
 - API descriptions, architecture diagrams
- Non-technical customers
 - UI descriptions, step-by-steps
- Your mum

How to Write: Audience

Different audiences have different needs:

- Internal developers
 - Wiki pages, code comments
- External developers
 - API descriptions, architecture diagrams
- Non-technical customers
 - UI descriptions, step-by-steps
- Your mum
 - A short, high-level explanation (and love)

How to Write: Audience

So:

- Figure out who your audience is

How to Write: Audience

So:

- Figure out who your audience is
- Know which different types of information your audience needs to know

How to write

Lesson Two

How to write

Lesson Two

Topics

How to Write: Topics

Imagine you're only writing internal docs

How to Write: Topics

Imagine you're only writing internal docs

Audience: Those new guys you hired

How to Write: Topics

Imagine you're only writing internal docs

Audience: Those new guys you hired

Goal: So they can answer the customers' questions on the phone

How to Write: Topics

They'll need to know:

How to Write: Topics

They'll need to know:

- What is your software for?

How to Write: Topics

They'll need to know:

- What is your software for?
- What things (tasks) do users need to do?

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- What is each individual step in each task?

How to Write: Topics

They'll need to know:

- What is your software for?
- What things (tasks) do users need to do?
- What stuff does the user need to know to do those tasks?
- What is each individual step in each task?
- What problems do customers have?

How to Write: Topics

Put different information in different sections

How to Write: Topics

Put different information in different sections:

1. Some conceptual information

How to Write: Topics

Put different information in different sections:

1. Some conceptual information
 1. Some more specific information

How to Write: Topics

Put different information in different sections:

1. Some conceptual information
 1. Some more specific information
 2. A task you can perform

How to Write: Topics

For example

How to Write: Topics

For example

1. Peanut Butter and Jelly Basics

1. Types of Peanut Butter

1. Homemade Peanut Butter
2. Store-bought Peanut Butter

2. Jelly, Jam and Preserves

1. Selecting a Jelly, Jam or Preserve

3. Bread

1. Choosing a Type of Bread
2. Slicing Bread

How to Write: Topics

NOTE:

Knowing how to structure comes with practice

How to Write: Topics

NOTE:

Knowing how to structure comes with practice

HINT:

If you need to write many similar documents,
then create a template

How to Write

Lesson Three

How to Write

Lesson Three

Templates

How to Write: Templates

A fixed document structure means:

How to Write: Templates

A fixed document structure means:

- All guides of the same type are similar so readers know where to look

How to Write: Templates

A fixed document structure means:

- All guides of the same type are similar so readers know where to look
- A writer can use the outline as a fill-in-the-blank for the basics which saves time

How to Write: Templates

For each document type, create a structure:

I. Introduction

II. Concepts

III. Tasks

IV. References

V. Glossary

How to Write: Templates

For each document type, create a structure:

I. Introduction

II. Concepts

III. Tasks

IV. References

V. Glossary

And use it every time.

How to Write

Lesson Four

How to Write

Lesson Four

Style

How to Write: Style

Two rules:

1. Be consistent
2. Be clear

How to Write: Style

Be consistent, pick one

How to Write: Style

Be consistent, pick one:

- Email
- E-mail
- email
- e-Mail
- eMail

How to Write: Style

Be consistent, pick one:

- Version 3.3 and later
- Version 3.3 or later
- Version 3.3 and higher
- Version 3.3 or higher
- Version 3.3 upwards

How to Write: Style

Be consistent, pick one:

- Enter text in the text field.
- Type text in the field.
- Write text in the box.
- Fill in the text box.

How to Write: Style

Be consistent, pick one:

- Select the radio button
- Choose your option
- Pick your selection
- Fill in the bubble

How to Write: Style

Be clear, avoid ambiguous words

How to Write: Style

Be clear, avoid ambiguous words:

Bad:

Once you have clicked the button once, something happens.

How to Write: Style

Be clear, avoid ambiguous words:

Bad:

Once you have clicked the button once, something happens.

Good:

After you click the button once, something happens.

How to Write: Style

Be clear, avoid ambiguous words:

Bad:

You need to enter your login details since the service requires authentication

How to Write: Style

Be clear, avoid ambiguous words:

Bad:

You need to enter your login details since the service requires authentication

Good:

You need to enter your login details because the service requires authentication.

How to Write: Style

Be clear, avoid ambiguous words

There are more, I've got a list.....

How to Write

Lesson Five

How to Write

Lesson Five

Graphics

How to Write: Graphics

Only use graphics when absolutely necessary

How to Write: Graphics

Only use graphics when absolutely necessary

Bad:

Screenshots

Good:

Diagrams

denise@Sam: ~

MAN(1) Manual pager utils MAN(1)

NAME


man - an interface to the on-line reference manuals

SYNOPSIS

man [-C file] [-d] [-D] [--warnings[=warnings]] [-R encoding] [-L
locale] [-m system[,...]] [-M path] [-S list] [-e extension] [-i|-I
[process] [-d[device]] [-H[browser]] [-X[dpi]] [-Z] file ...
man -w|-W [-C file] [-d] [-D] page ...
man -c [-C file] [-d] [-D] page ...
man [-hV]

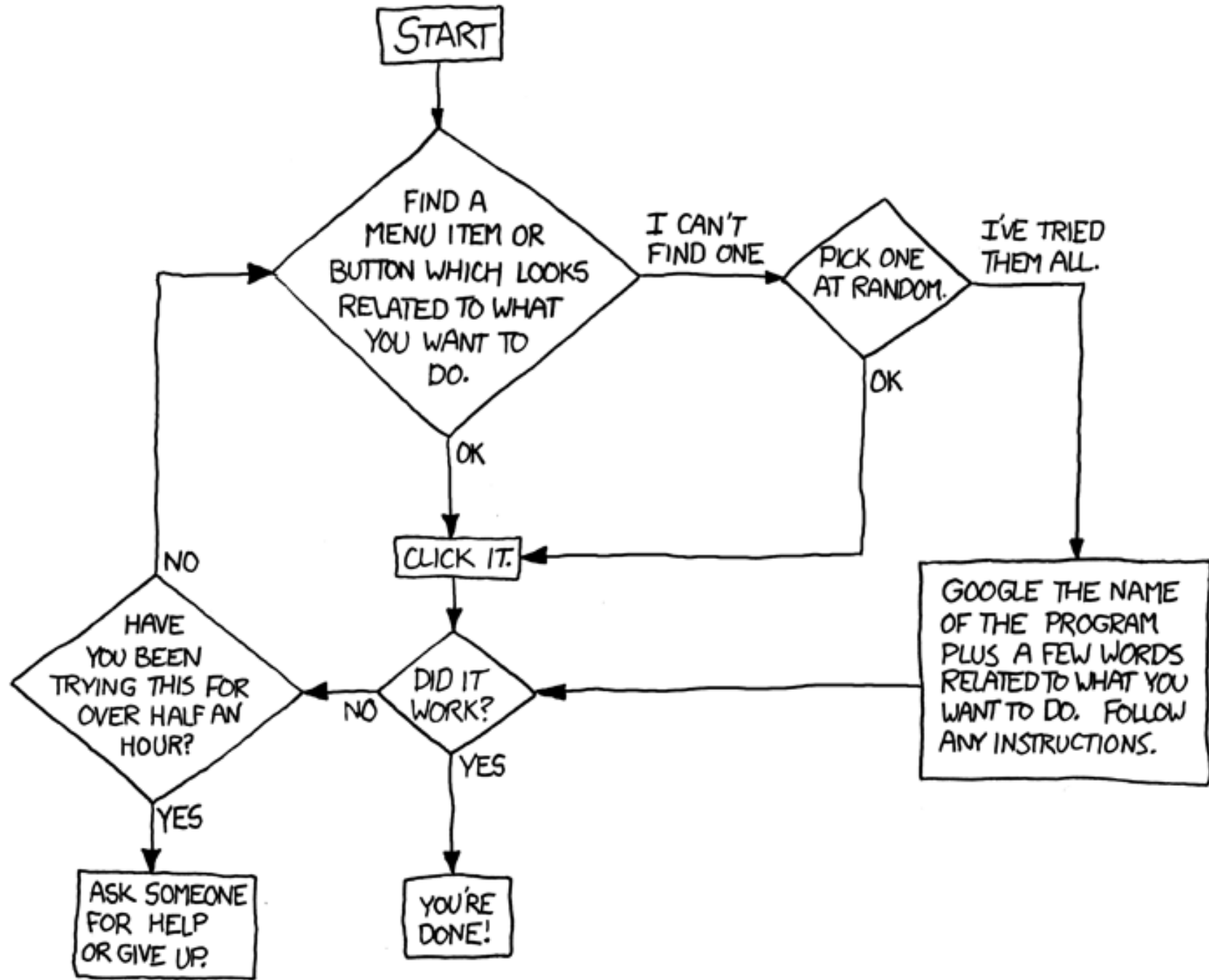
DESCRIPTION

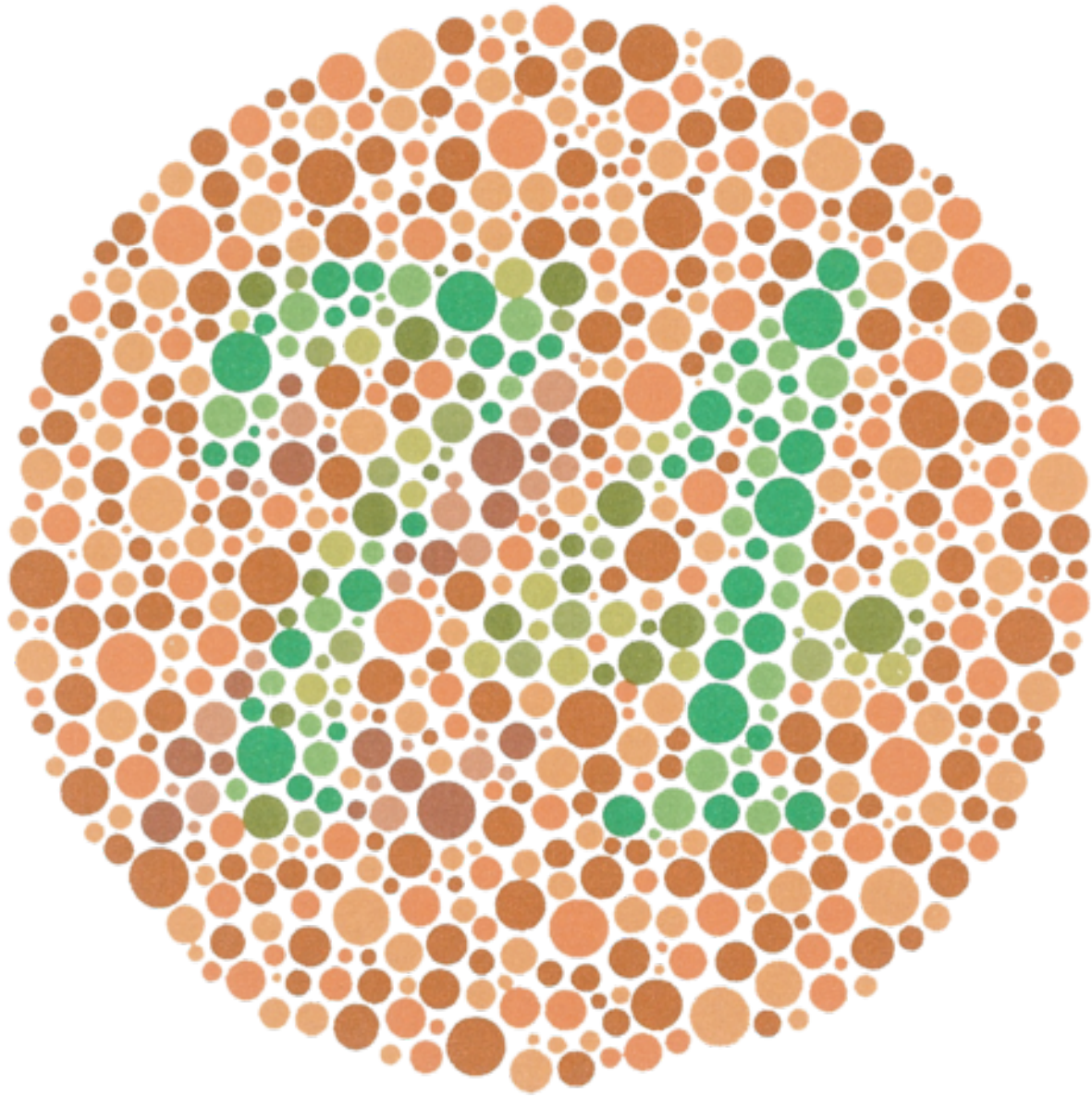
ESC

 **Close this terminal?**

There is still a process running in this terminal. Closing the terminal will kill it.

Cancel **Close Terminal**





Remember your developers?



Think they'd want to learn all this?



They'd rather be coding



(ask them sometime)



2. Hire a technical writer

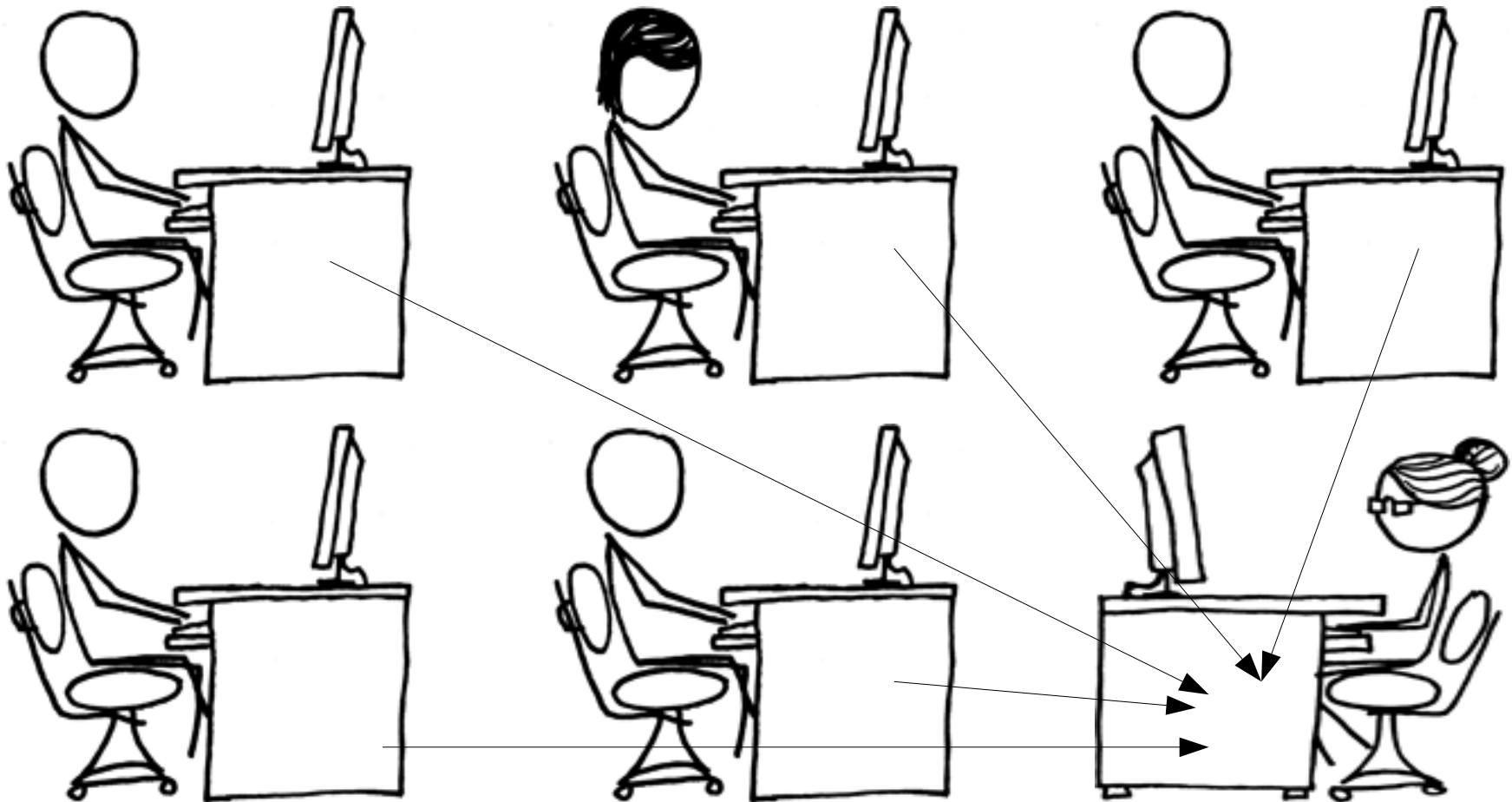
Next time you have an opening...



Consider hiring a technical writer



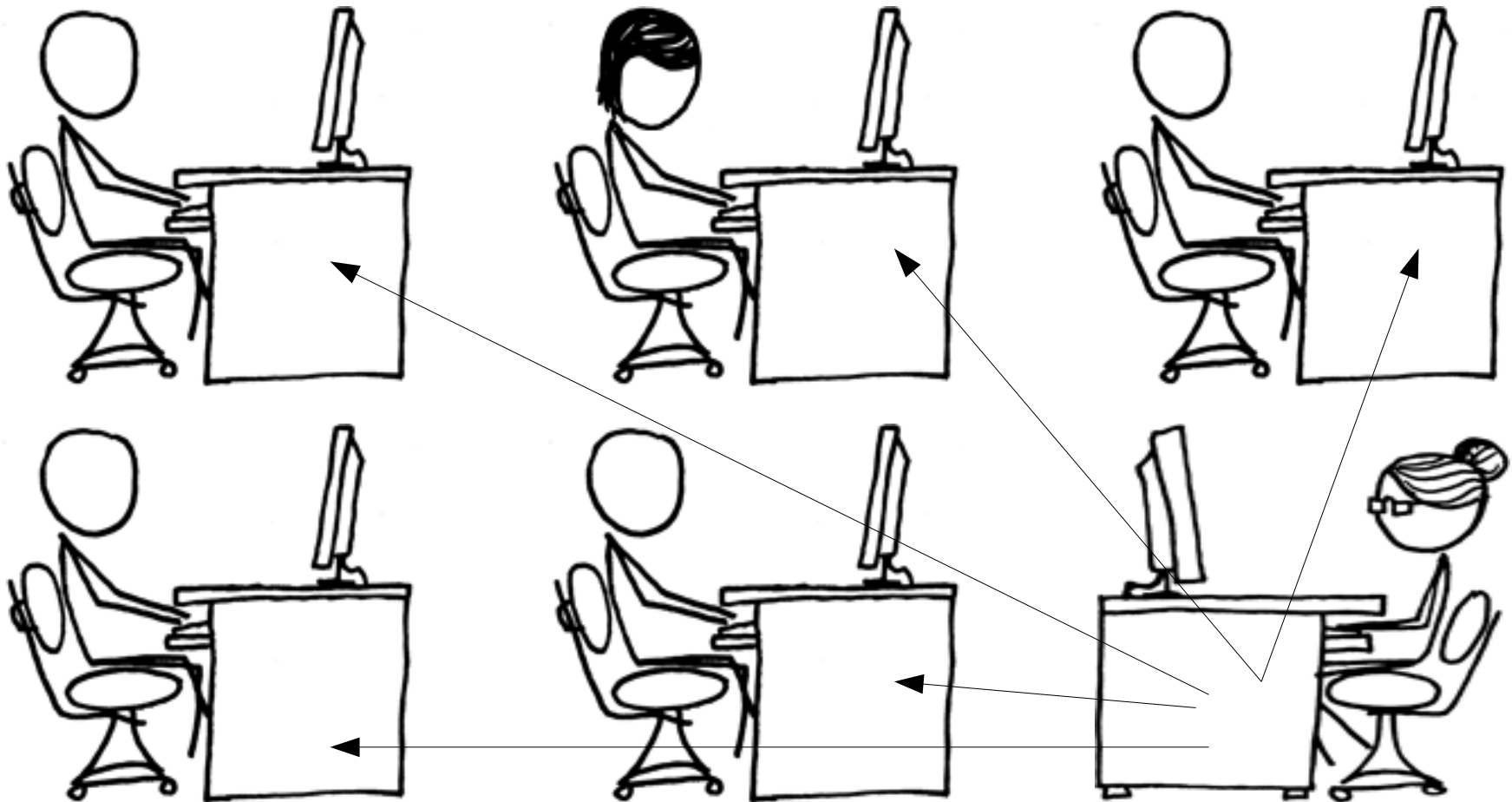
Everyone can talk to the writer



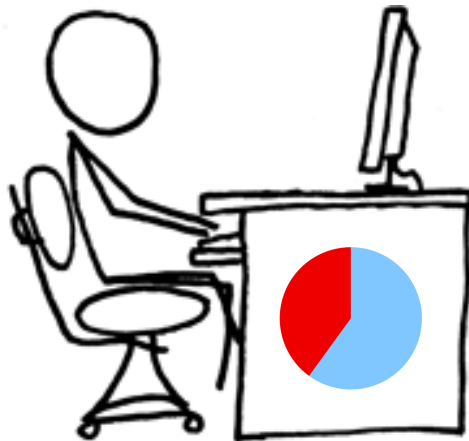
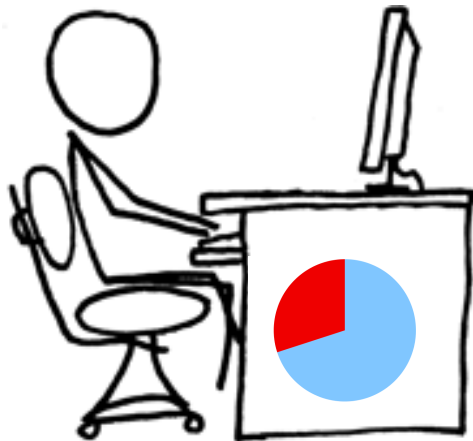
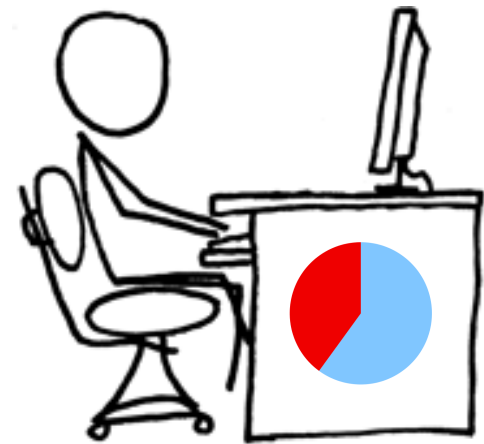
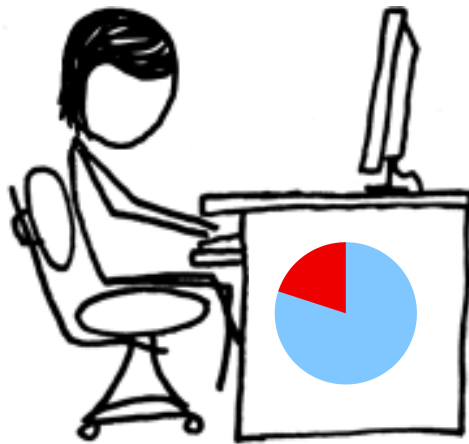
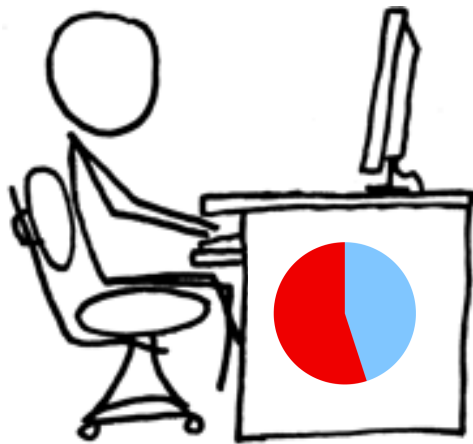
Who'll write it all down



And only ask for reviews



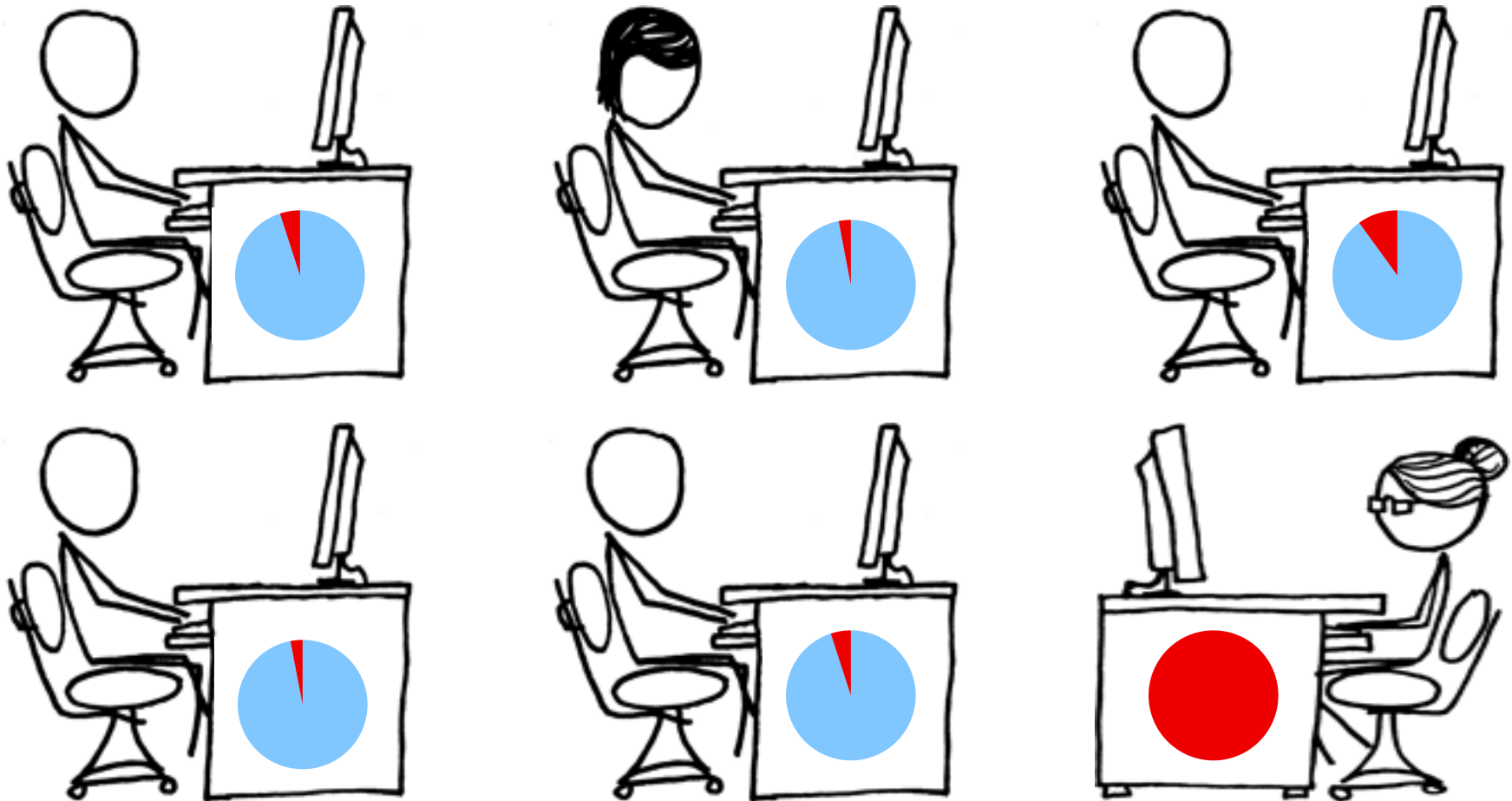
And your overwhelmed developers



Programming

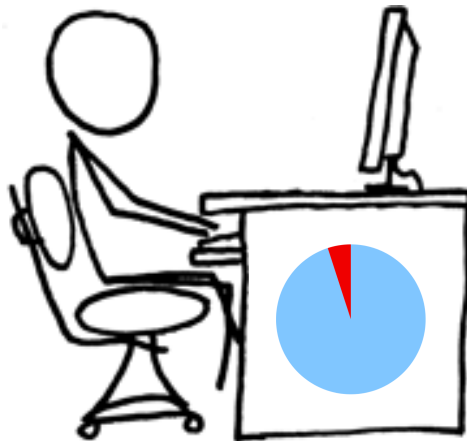
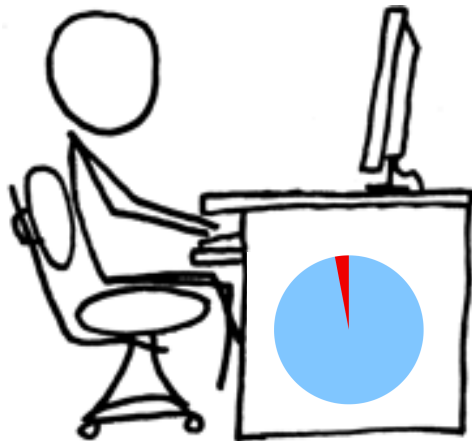
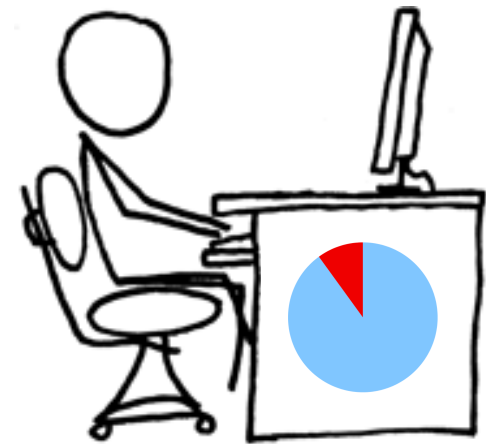
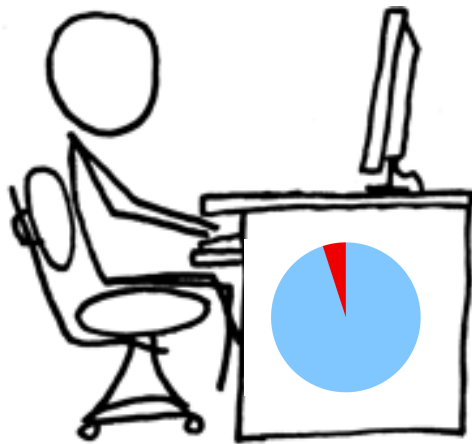
Documentation

Have more time to spend coding



Programming **Documentation**

Which is what they like doing



Programming

Documentation

And the documentation



Will be much better for it



Because someone enjoys writing it



And knows what they're doing



Questions?

To learn more about documentation:

- 1) Ask a question now
- 2) Ask another question later by using one of the following contact methods:

Item	Value
Email	hello@techaddiction.co.uk
Twitter	@dnwood
Skype	Edinburgher10

Result: Your question will be answered