

# Getting started with **Documenting APIs and SDKs**

## About This Workshop

This workshop focuses on how to organize and produce SDK documentation, no matter what language the API is written in.

You'll learn:

- **Why companies bother with SDKs**
- **How to structure the documentation for an SDK**
- **What programmers really want**
- **Why sample programs are so important**
- **What to put into each document**
- **Useful strategies for producing an SDK**

The purpose of this booklet is to help you get the most from this DVD, whether you are a department manager, a lone technical writer, or an independent consultant.

By the end of this workshop, you or your team members will be able to work with developers to create useful documentation for a Software Development Kit.

## About Gordon & Gordon

Gordon & Gordon is a partnership of two award-winning technical and marketing writers, Manuel Gordon and Gordon Graham. Our clients hire us to explain complex products and to persuade demanding customers. And we share our many years of experience through practical, cost-effective consulting, training and products.

What participants say about this workshop:

"Solid, basic API concepts made concrete through examples. Great presentation manner and sense of humor, depth of knowledge and experience."

"Explanations based on experience, not theory."

"Excellent introduction to the raison d'être of APIs and SDKs. The course builds a writer's confidence that they are on the right track to developing acceptable SDK documentation."

"Very thorough. I highly recommend it."

For more information on other useful products and services from Gordon & Gordon, visit [www.gordonandgordon.com](http://www.gordonandgordon.com)

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TECHNICAL WRITING  
FOR THE REAL WORLD



Getting started with

# Documenting **APIs and SDKs**

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## Welcome

The purpose of this booklet is to help you get the most from this DVD, whether you are a department manager, a technical writer or an independent consultant.

By the end of this workshop, you (and your team members) will be able to work with software developers to create useful documentation for a Software Development Kit.

## Main Sections of this Workshop

Here is a list of all the main sections in this workshop.

### Preview

#### Why Bother with SDKs?

#### The Structure of SDK Documentation

#### What Programmers Really Want:

##### Code, Code, Code and More Code

#### Outlining the Developer's Guide

#### Generating the Reference Manual

# Detailed Contents of these DVDs

Here is a list of all the video clips in this workshop. These clips run anywhere from a few seconds to 10 minutes in length. The number before each clip shows the accompanying slide in your workbook.

## **1. & 2. Intro (Disc 1)**

3. Welcome...
4. Introductions...
5. Manuel Gordon
6. Gordon Graham
7. Workshop Preview
8. Learning Goal
9. Discussion: Who documents APIs and SDKs in your company?  
How do they do it?

## **10. Why Bother with SDKs? (Disc 1)**

11. What is an API?
12. Where APIs Fit in
13. Who Uses APIs?
14. Building New Applications
15. Integrating into Applications
16. API Users Are Special
17. Not a Graphical User Interface
18. Not a Command Line Interface
19. An Application Programmer Interface!
20. What is an SDK?
21. An SDK Includes...
22. What Use is an SDK?
23. What Use is an SDK?...2
24. What Use is an SDK?...3
25. What Use is an SDK?...4
26. Discussion: Why does your company sell SDKs?  
Why do your customers buy SDKs?
27. The Audience for SDK Docs
28. Who Programs What?
29. API Developer View
30. Application Developer View
31. Writers Must USE Information (Understand, Simplify and Explain)
32. How to Use USE

- 33. USE for SDK Writers
- 34. Why USE-ing APIs is So Hard
- 35. Look for Other Sources
- 36. Use Cases Can Help Writers
- 37. SDKs Need Use Cases

## **38. The Structure of SDK Documentation (Disc 1)**

- 39. What SDK Docs Look Like
- 40. Don't Lump Them All Together
- 41. The *Reference Manual*
- 42. Organizing Reference Manuals
- 43. At Each Level of Hierarchy
- 44. The *Developer's Guide*
- 45. Online Help
- 46. A Reasonable Doc Set
- 47. Other Items
- 48. Intelligent IDEs
- 49. Microsoft Intellisense™
- 50. Discussion: What formats does your company use to distribute SDK documentation?

## **51. What Programmers Really Want: Code, Code, Code and More Code (Disc 1)**

- 52. Preview
- 53. A Real-World Needs Analysis
- 54. Programmers Want Code
- 55. Programmers Learn by Doing
- 56. Types of Sample Programs
- 57. Demo Programs
- 58. Model Programs
- 59. Tutorial Programs
- 60. Code Snippets: *Reference Manual*
- 61. Code Snippets: *Developer's Guide*

## **62. Outlining the Developer's Guide (Disc 2)**

- 63. The Universal Tasks
- 64. *Developer's Guide* Outline
- 65. *Developer's Guide* Outline...2
- 66. Instead of Big Theory Chapter
- 67. *Developer's Guide* Outline...3

- 68. *Developer's Guide Outline*...4
- 69. *Developer's Guide Outline*...5
- 70. Appendices?
- 71. MathEngine Dynamic Toolkits
- 72. More Detail on One Chapter

### **73. Generating the Reference Manual (Disc 2)**

- 74. Generating Reference Docs
- 75. Doc Generation Programs (DGPs)
- 76. More on DGPs
- 77. Tools to Generate Docs

### **78. Documentation Strategies (Disc 2)**

- 79. Preview
- 80. User Manual as Spec
- 81. User Manual as Spec...2
- 82. USE-ing the Specification
- 83. USE-ing the Specification...2
- 84. Build a Documentation Team
- 85. Build a Documentation Team...2
- 86. Learn as You Plan
- 87. SDK Documentation Plans
- 88. The Nifty SDK Project
- 89. The Nifty SDK Doc Set
- 90. Documentation Standards
- 91. More on Standards
- 92. Hire a Consultant!
- 93. Get Full Access to...
- 94. Two Languages to Learn
- 95. System-Design-ese
- 96. Business-Problem-ese
- 97. Learning More: When & How

## **Who Can Benefit from this Workshop**

- Technical writers with a capital T
- Writers with previous exposure to any programming language
- Writers or programmers being asked to document SDKs
- In-house writers or consultants who want to break into the field of writing SDKs.

# Training Suggestions for Managers

You can use this cost-effective workshop on DVD as:

- **an orientation course** for new hires to work on APIs and SDKs
- **professional development** for any or all of your team
- **a refresher course** or “**reality check**” for yourself.

## **Orientation Course**

Any new hire on your team can use these DVDs for an initial orientation. They can view this workshop at home on any TV with a DVD player or at work on any suitably equipped PC or Macintosh. They should follow along in their workbook and make notes as they go. Make sure to point out the additional material at the back of the workbook. Since the workshop is 3 hours long, allow a couple of afternoons or evenings for any team member to go through the material at their own pace.

## **Professional Development**

Any member of your team can view these DVDs for their individual professional development.

Or you can hold a team meeting for your whole group to view it together. Allocate 3 hours to view this workshop, plus 1 or 2 additional hours for discussion. The two discs make it easy to divide the workshop into two sessions of 90 to 120 minutes each.

Each team member should follow along in their workbooks and make notes as they go. Make sure to point out the additional material at the back of the workbook.

## **Refresher Course or “Reality Check”**

You can review these DVDs as a refresher course to round out your own background knowledge, or as a “reality check” to make sure that your team’s work is up to industry standards.

Watch the workshop by yourself and follow along in your workbook. Make notes as you go, and make sure to check out the additional reference material at the back of the workbook.

Since the workshop is 3 hours long, allow yourself a couple of afternoons or evenings to go through this material at your own pace.

# Learning Suggestions for Technical Writers or Consultants

You can use this cost-effective workshop on DVD as:

- **an orientation course** or for **professional development**  
if you plan to start working on APIs and SDKs
- **a refresher course** or **“reality check”**  
if you already work on APIs and SDKs.

## **Orientation Course or Professional Development**

If you've never worked on an API or written an SDK, we recommend viewing the entire workshop.

Follow along in your workbook and make notes as you go. And make sure to check out the additional material at the back of the workbook.

Think about how the discussion topics apply to your own company or clients. For best results, allow yourself a couple of afternoons or evenings to go through this material at your own pace.

## **Refresher Course or “Reality Check”**

If you've already begun to document APIs or write SDKs, you can use these DVDs as a “refresher course” to round out your background knowledge or as a “reality check” to make sure that your work is up to industry standards.

Follow along in your workbook and make notes as you go. And make sure to check out the additional material at the back of the workbook.

## **Ordering More Workbooks**

To get the most from this workshop, we recommend that everyone viewing these DVDs uses their own workbook. Additional workbooks are available at a special discount to purchasers of this workshop.

To order more workbooks, email [products@gordonandgordon.com](mailto:products@gordonandgordon.com).

## System Requirements

- **Any PC** with a DVD player and either headphones or a sound card and speakers
- **Any Macintosh** with a DVD player
- **Any TV** with a standard DVD player and remote.

## DVD Running Times

- Disc 1 approximate running time: 83 minutes
- Disc 2 approximate running time: 95 minutes

## Using these DVDs

1. Put the DVD in the player.
2. If the title screen doesn't appear, start your DVD software and press **Play**.
3. To start a continuous presentation, select **Play Entire Disc**. The DVD will play through the workshop until you choose to stop.
4. To jump to a particular clip, use the mouse or remote to move through the menus and select any section and then any clip. The DVD will start from that point and play through the workshop until you choose to stop.

**TIP:** You can also use any navigation controls available with your remote or DVD software, such as **Fast Forward**, **Skip**, **Next**, **Rewind**, **Pause** or **Stop**. These controls can help you quickly access any clip or part of a clip.

## Getting Help

If you have any problems using these DVD or have any further questions, please email [products@gordonandgordon.com](mailto:products@gordonandgordon.com).



## Credits

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Special thanks to all the participants.

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