

Software documentation commonly reports only the operation of systems. How can we write documentation that attends to the ethical and social nature of software use?

The Ethical Importance of Documentation

Procedure is more than formality. Procedure is, indeed, the great mainstay of substantive rights.... Without procedural safeguards--liberty would rest on precarious ground and substantive rights would be imperiled.

William O. Douglas (qtd in Sturgis)

The history of liberty has largely been the history of observance of procedural safeguards.

Felix Frankfurter (qtd in Sturgis)

Approaches to Documentation

Robert's Rules of Order, 10th Ed.	The Standard Code
<p>The application of parliamentary law is the best method yet devised to enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member's opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of questions of varying complexity in a minimum amount of time and under all kinds of internal climate ranging from total harmony to hardened or impassioned vision of opinion.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Robert, XLVIII)</p>	<p>Both our freedom and our rights can exist only if they are safeguarded by sound procedures, rigidly enforced. [...]</p> <p>Parliamentary law provides the procedures that give reality to these democratic concepts.</p> <p>Parliamentary procedure is... the guardian of the freedom to band together, to discuss, to decide, and to act...the code of rules and ethics for working together in groups.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Sturgis, 2)</p>
<p>Granting the Permission to Speak</p>	
<p>If the member is entitled to the floor at the time, the chair recognizes him--normally by announcing, as applicable, the person's name or title, or the place or unit he represents.</p> <p>[...] presiding officers often use the formal wording, "The chair recognizes Mr. Smith."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Robert, 28.24-29.10)</p> <p>Customs of formality that are followed by the presiding officer and members under parliamentary procedure serve to maintain the chair's necessary position of impartiality and help to preserve an objective and impersonal approach, especially when serious divisions of opinion arise.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Robert, 21.30-35)</p> <p>(for more complete explanations of the general forms observed by the presiding officer and members in an assembly, see 42 and 43)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Robert, 24.5-7)</p>	<p>The presiding officer may recognize a member by calling the member's name. [...]It is traditional...for members to address each other by last names, even though they may ordinarily be on an first-name basis. In a large group, especially, this adds a note of formality, which keeps the discussion on a higher plane.</p> <p>[...] Under no circumstances, however, should the chair call some members by their first names and others by their last, as this creates the feeling of an "in-group," composed of those friends of the presiding officer, and an "out-group" of comparative strangers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Sturgis, 12)</p>

Ethically Re-Imagining Explanations

“Hoppers and Gargoyles” by John Kinsella (1995)

A screw drives the lupins towards the chute, lupins spill into the hopper, an auger drags them upwards towards the spout, lupins spill into the silo. These are the facts, or facts as they seem to the farmer who follows the tried-and-true procedure, believes what his eyes tell him, and is satisfied with the end result. These are the facts as his father has told him, neighbours confirm.

Another view, another set of facts: the gargoyle masquerading as a spout draws all into its mouth and spits it back, the hopper -- its belly -- endlessly fuelled by the reaper who, disguised as a farmer, cannot be content with endless death, but rather gains its pleasure from the neighbours who believe what they tell the farmer, who stare at the spout and see no more than lupins filling his coffers.

[quotations by kinsella]

Bibliography & Suggested Reading

(suggested reading marked with a ★)

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