LDP WikiText Editing HOWTO

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Added QandASet section, had to tweak the grammar for filename markup.		
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Initial release.		

This HOWTO explains how to use the LDP WikiText editing format to create DocBook documents for the LDP.

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1. Legalities

2. Introduction

The LDP uses *DocBook* format for our new documents, and we are trying to get our older documents also converted into DocBook. Unfortunately, DocBook is a very large and complex DTD, so it can be difficult for people to use. We are always looking for ways to make it easier, so more people can help the LDP.

The solution we came upon was inspired by the WikiWikiWeb, thanks to a great suggestion from LDP author Martin Wheeler. I call it WikiText, because it isn't a true Wiki, but it has some of the best features of a true Wiki.

3. What Is a Wiki?

A Wiki is a kind of a website, where anyone who is reading the site can also edit it. While the LDP isn't going to implement that kind of permissive editing, we do really like the way the Wiki editing works. Instead of having to learn html tags, you enter your information in plain text. The Wiki software takes that plain text, and converts it into html to display it.

In our case, we convert not into html, but into DocBook. Then that DocBook gets fed into our regular publication systems just as if you had written it in DocBook originally.

If you've never used a WikiWikiWeb, see *http://www.wikipedia.com* for a good example of a thriving Wiki.

Common functions like creating a link, a bulleted list, a numbered list, and section headings are made quick and easy. We wanted to provide that same level of ease for LDP authors, so I wrote a utility that would take a text format similar to the one used in Wikis (we call it WikiText), and combine it with the meta−data in the *LDP Database* to generate DocBook.

4. Why Would I Want to Use One?

Here are some reasons:

1. It's quick and easy. No fancy tags to learn, only a few simple text "hints".
2. It's powerful. While you can edit WikiText without using any DocBook at all, you can also use any DocBook tag inside it.
3. It versions. A complete version history of your edits is maintained in the database. You can revert to a prior version if you didn't like something you did. You can do this also with cvs, but it is much easier in the online system.
4. It shares documents. Authors who work on documents with other authors can collaborate through the WikiText. Yes, cvs also does this, but again WikiText is simpler.
5. It's accessible. All you need is any web browser and an LDP Database account.
6. It's WYSIWYG. There's a "Preview" feature, so you can click the "Preview" button and see how your document will look on the LDP site. There are no utilities to run, nothing to learn, no DTDs to install or catalog files to munge with. If you've ever tried to get a working DocBook system on your machine, you will appreciate this! :−)

5. How Does It Work?

We tried to use the same text hints that are used on the Wikipedia, which came from UseModWiki. There are some differences between different Wiki systems, but most of them are quite similar to this one, and it has proved itself through use.

A blank line separates paragraphs, and there are other hints for making sections, bulleted lists, links, filenames, etc.

5.1. Sections

```
=Introduction|intro=
```

creates a new top level section. See the pipe character followed by "intro"? Many hints provide for an "id", and this is how you supply it. For sections, the id will become the output filename (intro.html, in the first example), or the html "tag" used for intradocument linking.

```
==How Does It Work?|how-does-it-work==
```

creates a second–level section, and

```
===Why Would I Use It?|why?===
```

creates a third level section.

5.2. Lists

5.2.1. Numbered Lists

```
#one

#two

#three

/#
```

The "#" prefix says to make a numbered list. The numbered list continues until the end of the current section, or until it hits a line with only "/#", which closes the list. After opening another "#" list, the numbering will begin over again at "1".

Here is how the above block will appear in the final document:

1. one
2. two
3. three

5.2.2. Bulleted Lists

Bulleted lists work almost the same, except you use the "*" hint, and you don't have to worry about renumbering issues:

```
*one

*two

*three

/*
```

Here's how the above block will appear in the final document:

- one
- two
- three

5.3. Links

Use the square brackets to identify links, like this:

```
[[http://www.linuxdoc.org|Linux Documentation Project]]
```

In this case, the text after the pipe character isn't an id, but the "title" of the link.

There are two special namespaces that you can use besides the standard "http:" and "mailto:" namespaces that you are probably famliar with. The first is the "ldp:" namespace. Look at the following link:

```
[[ldp:Distributions-HOWTO]]
```

When you use the "ldp:" namespace, WikiText will look up the document that you named in the LDP database, and generate a link to it.

Note: we're still working on entering the correct "name" in all of our database records, so only a few are working. But don't worry. Just let us know if you need to use a link that isn't correct yet and we'll fix it right away.

The second special namespace is the "wiki:" namespace. It will generate a link to the article on the Wikipedia, an open source encyclopedia project. We hope to mirror some of the most appropriate articles from the Wikipedia right on the LDP. Wikipedia has many great articles on computer related topics that aren't the kind of information we do at the LDP, but which would complement our documents very well. For instance, there are articles on virtual memory, operating systems, and so on. For now, your link will go to the live Wikipedia site. Eventually, it will go to a mirror on our site, but with a link to the "real" site.

The following links go to articles called "Operating system" and "Linux kernel" on the Wikipedia:

```
[[wiki:Operating system]]

[[wiki:Linux kernel]]
```

Wikipedia is a great resource for all Netizens. Both the software they use and their content are open source.

5.4. Filenames

You can indicate filenames by wrapping them with double brackets, just like http and other links. Or, you can specify the "file" namespace:

```
[[/etc/apache/httpd.conf]]

[[file:/etc/apache/httpd.conf]]
```

Either way, it will render as `/etc/apache/httpd.conf`.

5.5. Emphasis

You can make certain words emphasized by wrapping them with three (3) single–quotes, like this:

```
'''Wow!'''
```

That will render like: *Wow!*

5.6. QandASets

You can create question and answer sets if you're writing a FAQ, or if you have a FAQ section in your document. Just make "Q:" and "A:" the first characters on a new line, and the QandASet tags will automatically be created.

```
Q: What if you want to do DocBook that isn't supported by WikiText?
```

```
A: Mu.
```

And this is how the example renders. Notice that a list of questions appears right before the first question. This looks a bit silly in this example, since there is only one question and it just gets repeated twice. If you're working on the *Linux−FAQ*, though, it's really nice.

Q: What if you want to do DocBook that isn't supported by WikiText?

Q: What if you want to do DocBook that isn't supported by WikiText?

A: Mu. See the next section.

5.7. Fancy Stuff

There is no DocBook structure that is not supported by WikiText. Why? Because if there is no WikiText for it, you can just put the tags you need directly into the document, and they will work.

There are a few "special" tags that are not inline DocBook, but section structures, among them the "programlisting" and "screen" tags. You should keep in mind that none of the WikiText functions will work inside these tags. You don't want commented lines in your code sample converted into numbered lists, do you?

```
# this is a comment

# it is NOT a numbered list!
```

6. But What About the Meta−Data?

You do not need to enter any articleheader or articleinfo information into your document. That information is pulled directly from the database itself. Go to your document's edit page, and enter the appropriate information there.

7. Where Is It? Can I Get Access?

Any LDP author is welcome to use the WikiText. It is on the LDP database, *http://db.linuxdoc.org*. You will need to have an account on the database. If you don't have one yet, you can request one from me by email. Send me your full name (as it appears on your documents), username and password, and I will set it up for you, probably the same day.

Once you're logged onto the database, click "My Documents". If you don't see a list of your own documents (only), I messed up. :−)

Click the document you want to edit. You will see a page that shows the meta−data we have for the document. Also on that page is a link to WikiEdit. Click it, and you're on your way.

Click "Preview" to see how your document will appear on the LDP (except that it will be rendered in a single page).

Click "DocBook" to see the raw DocBook that WikiText generated from your text.

Click "Save" to save your changes to the database. You can also add a "comment" to it, for future reference.

Click "Version History" to see a record of all the changes you've made to the document.

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8. Conclusion

We hope that you will find the WikiText helps make your life as an author easier, so you can concentrate on writing the best documentation possible and spend less time fudging with your tools and learning arcane syntax.

I would very much appreciate any feedback or suggestions from you, whether positive or negative (as long as it's constructive, of course). You can write me at *david@lupercalia.net*.