

# EPUB introductory checklist for MDN

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This document answers the questions in MDN's [checklist for web-related technologies](#).

## **The technology, its core purpose/use cases, and target developer audience.**

EPUB (see [excellent explainer for the W3C Technical Architecture Group](#)) is the dominant format (everyone except Amazon Kindle) for ebooks. Amazon uses EPUB indirectly; publishers send them EPUBs and then they convert to a proprietary format.

The developer audience is all ebook developers, but many do not think of themselves as developers; a relatively small number work for book publishers directly — typically with titles like "digital publishing specialist" or "cross-media assistant" — and more work for conversion houses in India etc to which publishers outsource conversion.

## **What kind of industry/community buzz there is around the technology.**

To be honest, *buzz* is low. In a recent W3C call, someone called EPUB "deeply unsexy from a branding perspective." But as the explainer above makes clear, EPUB has been tremendously successful where competing formats have not. EPUB is behind well over \$1B / year in ebook sales; it is the *necessary* technology for ebooks, yet it has no canonical documentation after 14 years.

Creating good documentation, alongside achieving W3C recommendation status, are the next steps in improving EPUB's professional posture.

## **How the technology relates to core web technology and web browsers.**

EPUB is a specialized zip format that packages XML, XHTML, CSS, SVG, and standard web image/audio formats. Modern EPUB reading systems are all built on top of browser cores and may allow online access and JS, although these features are rarely used.

Edge supported EPUB in browser before it switched to the Blink engine; as far as I know, no major browsers natively support EPUB today, but it's on the community's long-term wishlist.

**What documentation/resources there are available already that cover the technology.**

Nothing canonical. The best documentation is [DAISY's Accessible Publishing Knowledge Base](#), but it's accessibility-focused, non-exhaustive, and not where new users would expect to find documentation. Besides that, there's [the spec](#) and a few scattered [blogs](#) etc.

The reason that EPUB has managed without good docs for so long is that 90%+ of professional EPUBs are exported from Adobe InDesign, which does the hard work of setting up the scaffolding for a file, but things like EPUB-specific metadata are still not well understood by the community.

**How much documentation would need to be added to MDN:**

**List the expected number of guides, tutorials, reference pages for elements/methods/attributes, etc.**

I haven't thought much about guides and tutorials — planning to focus on reference, at least to start — but for the MVP (covering only basic reflowable EPUBs, not advanced features) I'm thinking either ~10 long reference pages or ~50 short ones (depending on, e.g., whether we put all package metadata elements on a single page vs one page per metadata element).

**Provide a high level table of contents.**

See [this outline](#) from the 2019 attempt at documentation, which isn't exactly how I would structure things (and goes beyond the MVP), but close enough.

**Mention the kind of "advanced" features you think you might need for this resource, beyond basic documentation pages. Are you expecting to include embedded videos, interactive code samples, etc.?**

Nothing at this time.

**Details on who will be writing the documentation. Who are these people, and why are they suited to the job?**

I've volunteered to lead the project. I ([Dan Lazin](#)) am an experienced technical writer at Google and the editor-in-chief of [developers.google.com](#). I'm new to EPUB — about 8 months on the W3C's EPUB Working Group — but the technology is fairly straightforward aside from the hidden historical rationales behind it. I'm mentoring two would-be tech writers, [Sumi Clements](#) (currently a non-technical writer / accomplished choreographer) and [Michelle Mark](#) (a journalist at Business Insider) who will contribute about 5 pages total of the above docs to build their portfolios.

We are working from [an initial draft of EPUB docs](#) created for MDN about 2 years ago by EPUB professionals like [Tzviya Siegman](#) (Wiley), [Rachel Comerford](#) (Macmillan) and others.

The docs will be reviewed by the experts on the EPUB standards committee, notably [Wendy Reid](#) (Rakuten Kobo), [Brady Duga](#) (Google), [Dave Cramer](#) (Hachette), [Matt Garrish](#) (DAISY), and [Ivan Herman](#) (W3C).