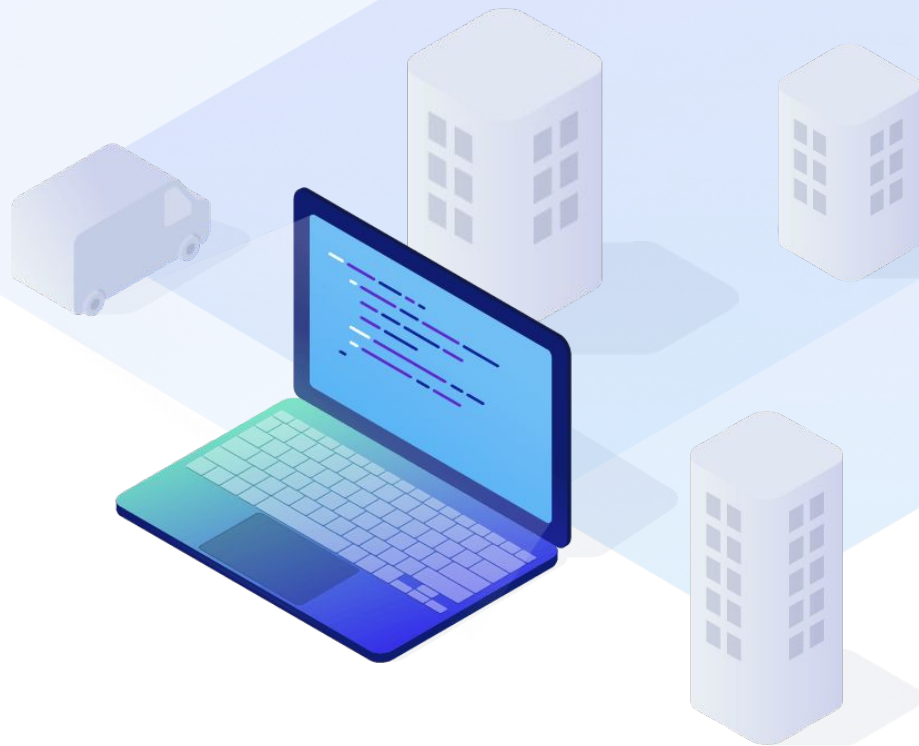




Documenting APIs

from 406 Not Acceptable
to 200 OK





James Messinger
Product Director



JamesMessinger



@James_Messinger

{ } SHIPENGINE

Any carrier

FedEx



DHL

**AUSTRALIA
POST**

CANADA POSTES
POST CANADA

Royal Mail

Any marketplace

amazon

ebay

Walmart 


Etsy

**GROUPON
Goods**

shopify



Documenting APIs | Agenda

- Types of documentation
 - Developer experience
 - Discoverability
 - Build or Buy?
- 

Documenting APIs

Types of Documentation

Types of Documentation

Tutorial

- is **learning oriented**
- is a lesson
- allows newcomers to get started

How-To Guide

- is **goal oriented**
- is a series of steps
- shows how to solve a problem

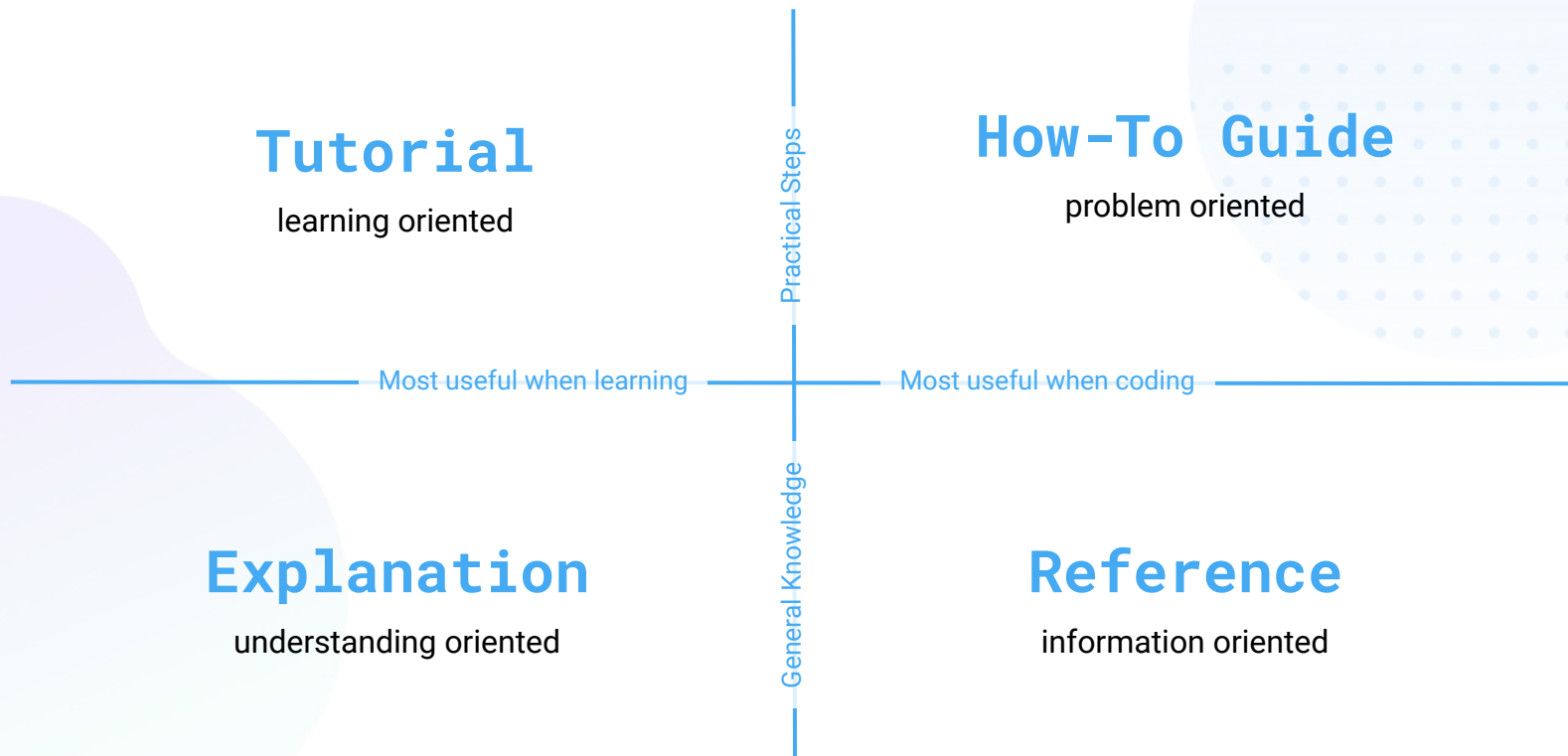
Explanation

- is **understanding oriented**
- explains
- provides background and context

Reference

- is **information oriented**
- Is accurate and complete
- describes the machinery

Types of Documentation | Spectrum



Types of Documentation | Priority

1

Reference

- Table stakes
- Auto-generatable
- Sufficient for internal APIs

2

How-To Guide

- Solutions for common use cases
- Reduces onboarding time
- Hand-written

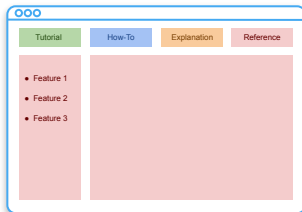
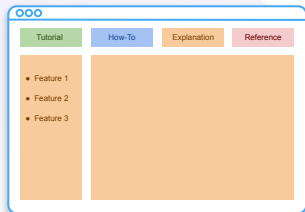
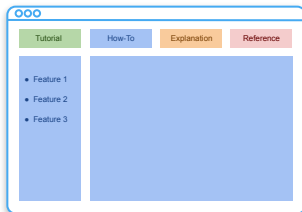
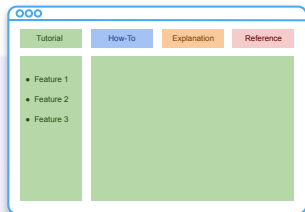
3

Tutorial & Explanation

- Makes your API more approachable
- Long-form
- Hand-written

Types of Documentation | Organization

Organize your docs by feature or use case, not by type.
Give users one place to go, not four.



Documenting APIs

Developer Experience

Developer Experience | Beyond Documentation

Integrate with the tools developers are already using



Postman Collection



OpenAPI Definition



JSON Schemas

▶ Run in Postman

Run in Postman Button

Developer Experience | Native SDKs



- Familiar
- Beginner friendly
- Reduced onboarding time
- Improved productivity
- Keep focus on functionality, not implementation
- Promotes community
- Not just an API client
- Ensure best practices
- The **primary method** of using your API

Developer Experience | Native SDKs

The primary method of using your API



Provide first-class SDK docs



Code samples should use SDKs



Separate docs for each language



Classes & methods
not endpoints & verbs



Complete code samples



Installation instructions



IDE & editor screenshots



Project templates

Documenting APIs

Discoverability



Discoverability

Your documentation is part of your content strategy

Search engine optimization



Increased product awareness

Shareability



Organic growth

Analytics



Spot popular topics, trends, flows

Discoverability | Metadata



Customize search engine results

enrich search results with context



JSON-LD

WebAPI & APIReference



oEmbed

requires a server



Shareable

embed cards, content preview



Twitter cards

used by more than just Twitter



OpenGraph

used by more than just Facebook

Discoverability | Page Per Topic



Search engine optimization

separate index entries for each topic



Shareable

separate embed cards for each topic



Bookmarkable

bookmark individual topics



Analytics

popular topics, related topics, flow



Faster load times

better user experience + seo



Mobile optimized

smaller pages, less memory

Discoverability | Progressive Enhancement



Don't rely on JavaScript
for loading content or navigation



Search engine optimization
crawlers don't always run JS



Unfurl friendly
previews only includes static content



Content still loads
even if JavaScript fails or errors



Faster load times
pages should be usable while JS loads



Mobile optimized
progressive features are optional

Documentation Discoverability

optimized for
Search Engines

easy to share on
Social Media

Local Search
within your docs

Analytics
to surface relevant docs

Discoverability | Search Engine Optimization



One page per topic
with separate metadata



Cross-link between topics
especially on different domains



Progressive enhancement
don't rely on JavaScript



Page load speed
static site or server rendered



Optimize for mobile
responsive design / AMP



JSON-LD
WebAPI & APIReference

Discoverability | Social Media



One page per topic
with separate metadata



One URL per topic
bookmarkable & shareable



Allow deep linking
anchor links on all headings



Twitter cards
used by more than just Twitter



OpenGraph
used by more than just Facebook



oEmbed
requires a server

Discoverability | Local Search



One page per topic
with separate metadata



Keep users on your site
increased stickiness, decreased bounce rate



More specialized
tailored to your API



More contextual
easier to find overloaded terms



Discoverability | Analytics



One page per topic

track separate analytics per topic



Spot your most popular topics

overall and by segment



Analyze behavior flow

uncover hidden relationships between topics



Surface relevant docs

based on segmentation & flow



Improve your docs

based on hit & bounce metrics



Make data-driven decisions

more information = better product

Documenting APIs

Build or Buy?



Build or Buy? | Reasons to Buy

The API ecosystem is rich with documentation builders
and end-to-end API lifecycle tooling



Build or Buy? | Reasons to Buy



Faster time to market



Focus on core product offering



Reduce initial costs



No competitive advantage gained



Limited budget



Already proven solutions



Feature complete



Integrations



Internal API



Lack of expertise

Build or Buy? | Reasons to Build

It's never been easier to build your own API docs



Build or Buy? | Reasons to Build



Flexibility and control



Product differentiator



Competitive advantage



Specialized requirements



No vendor lock-in



Personalization



Search engine optimization



Increased productivity



Workflow integration



Nonstandard API

Build or Buy?

Build

- API as product
- Product differentiator
- Dedicated DX team

Buy

- API as feature
- Internal APIs
- Early stage product

Documenting APIs

Questions?





Documenting APIs

from 406 Not Acceptable
to 200 OK

