



Simon Fraser University

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Top Canadian University Uses MadCap Flare to Teach Online Documentation Best Practices

INDUSTRY

- Education



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Sue Andrews | **Simon Fraser University**

Goals:

- Provide hands-on experience with authoring software
- Apply best practices for modern online documentation

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare native XML content authoring software

Benefits:

- Single-sourcing addressed students' real-world career needs to publish to desktop, Web and mobile formats
- Students were able to apply concepts such as CSS, topic-based authoring, and search in one week of using Flare
- Intuitive, user friendly interface helped students get up and running quickly

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Simon Fraser University (SFU) has been recognized as one of Canada's top three universities for more than 20 years. One key to the university's success is its commitment to offering courses that combine robust academics with real-world best practices that students will require in their professional careers.

In the SFU Technical Communications Certificate, "TCOM260: Fundamentals of Creating Online Documents" course, this commitment means giving students hands-on experience in applying the latest online documentation best practices. Today, SFU's authoring tool of choice is MadCap Flare.

"It's important for our students to experience authoring with a single-source tool," says Sue Andrews, an instructor in the SFU Writing and Communications program. "With its single-source publishing of online content on the desktop, Web, and mobile devices, Flare is a natural fit."

Flare was introduced to the TCOM260 course in conjunction with a major revamp of the course to support recent changes in online publishing practices. The updated course using Flare was rolled out in Spring 2011.

"We were very pleased with how quickly students could begin using Flare to take what we were teaching and put it into practice," Sue said. "The interface is fairly easy to master."

More important is the patented structure bar technology at the side of the WYSIWYG editor built into Flare, notes Sue, "It demonstrates the underlying code, and this transparency makes it easier to learn concepts such as cascading style sheets and XHTML."

Sue added, "As we anticipated, Flare's single-sourcing to multiple outputs, including mobile, has given our students first-hand experience in publishing to the different online formats that companies require. In fact, one student went on to buy a copy of Flare for her company this year."

The topic-based authoring in Flare is also very important, observes Sue: "Many students are not familiar with the whole idea of chunking down content into topics, and Flare provides an intuitive way of putting content into this structure.

Additionally, Flare gave students valuable experience in linking different topics and setting up a search, and a table of contents, Sue said. She also noted that MadCap's Help system provided students with a best-practices example of dynamic online Help.

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Sue noted. "Our next course will build on that success, giving students four weeks to apply best practices using Flare."