Quality Is Not an Accident

Dawn Stevens and Kathy Madison

COMTech   CIDM

- Dawn Stevens – Comtech
  - President/Owner of Comtech
  - Director of CIDM
  - 32 years in information development

- Kathy Madison – Comtech
  - CIDM Member Liaison & Consultant
  - 30 years years of experience
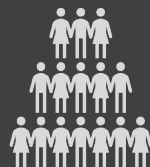 - 5 years in information development

CIDM's 2020 member survey

How do you define and enforce quality standards in technical publications?
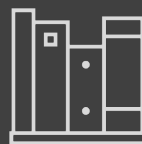

ONLINE SURVEY

41 Companies

43% have 50+ people

80% have 500+ Publications

90% software related

60% hardware related

Definition of quality

Accuracy matters.

80% ranked accuracy as the #1 factor in defining quality

Poll: Definition of Quality

Besides accuracy, which of the following is most important in defining quality?

❑ Clarity

❑ Relevance

❑ Usability

❑ Consistency

❑ Proper grammar/spelling

❑ Conciseness

❑ Level of detail

❑ Language (voice, tone, terminology)

❑ Look and feel

Factor	Importance	How we're doing
Accuracy	1	1
Clarity	2	3
Relevance	3	7
Usability	4	10
Consistency	5	8
Proper grammar, spelling	6	2
Conciseness	7	9
Level of detail	8	4
Language (voice/tone, word choice)	9	6
Look and feel	10	5

Performance against it

Quality standards

Quality standards

Editors and writers monitor our style guide daily, and we update it frequently. It's a living document that adapts based on industry norms, product development, and new trends in documentation.

95%
Have corporate quality standards

42%
Use Microsoft's Manual of Style

25%
Use more than one style guide

Offensive versus inclusive terms: **55%** are addressing the issue

🚫	✅
master	main, primary, parent, controller, leader
slave	secondary, child, follower
blacklist	exclude-list, deny-list, block-list
whitelist	inclusion-list, allow-list, safe-list,
man-hour	person-hour
he, she, him, her, man, women	person, user
abort	stop

Training of standards

- **Training during the onboarding process (84%)**

- Handing writers the style-guides (84%)

- Mentoring by editors or senior writers (76%)

- Learning through the review process (42%)
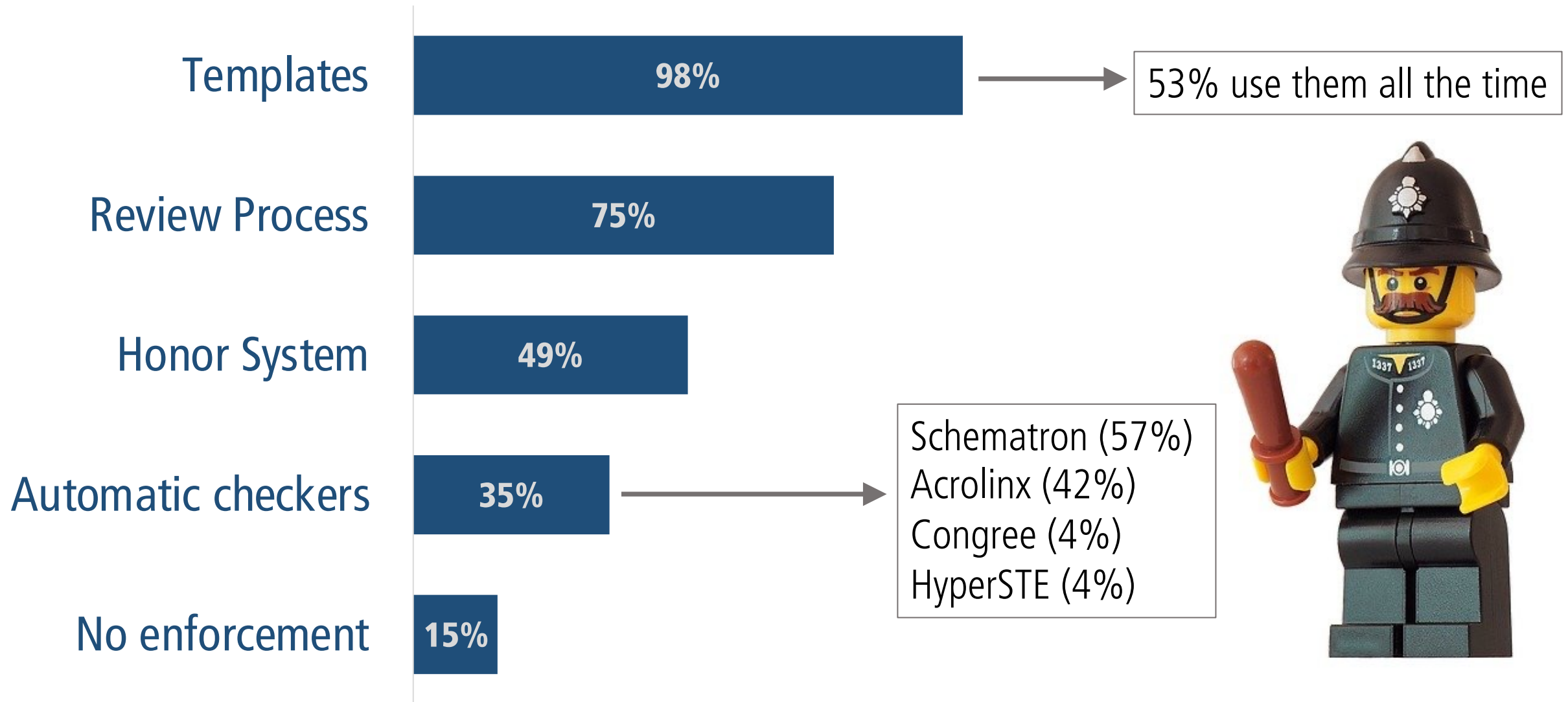
Enforcement

Who is writing

- 26% have professional writers responsible for 100% of the content
- 34% have SMEs writing up to 10% of the content
- 10% have SMEs writing 90% of the content
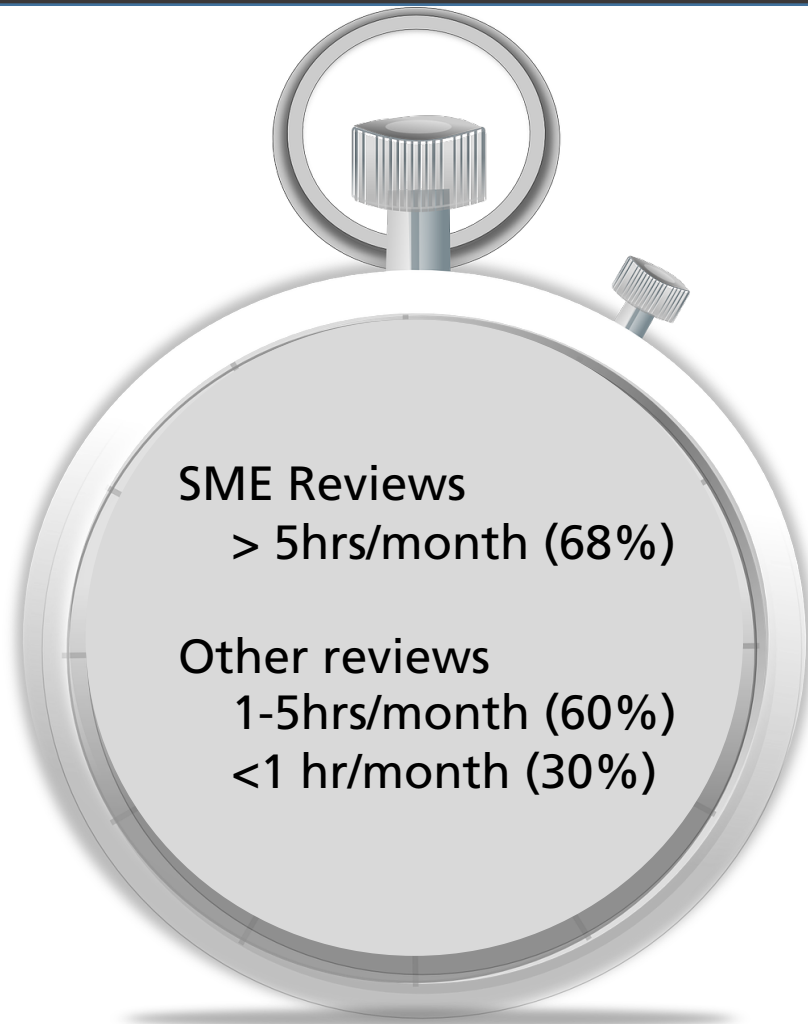
Poll: Standards enforcement

How do you enforce your standards? (Select all that apply)

❑ Templates

❑ Review process

❑ Honor system

❑ Automatic checkers

❑ No enforcement

Enforcement of standards

Templates — 98%

Review Process — 75%

Honor System — 49%

Automatic checkers — 35%

No enforcement — 15%

53% use them all the time

Schematron (57%)
Acrolinx (42%)
Congree (4%)
HyperSTE (4%)

Types and frequency of reviews

SME Reviews
> 5hrs/month (68%)

Other reviews
1-5hrs/month (60%)
<1 hr/month (30%)

Reviews that always occur	
SME review	92%
Self-review	63%
Final copyedit	37%
Editorial review	24%
Peer review	21%
Architectural review	5%

Poll: Editors
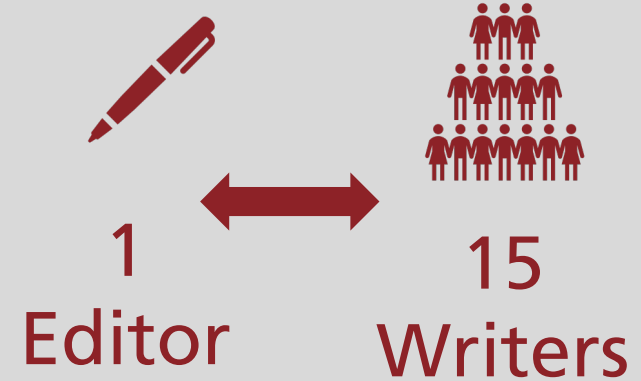
Do you have full-time, professional editors?

❑ Yes

❑ No

❑ We used to, but don't anymore

Use of editors

☹ **65%**
Do not have editors

1
Editor ⟷ 15
Writers

80% consider writers and editors peers

Addressing infractions

Remind authors (65%)

Adjust style guide (12%)

Mentor or train (30%)

Adjust goals for performance review (6%)

Add or adjust Schematron rules and templates

Use scorecard (2%)

Team and individual quality KPIs

Only a THIRD have…

★★☆ Content quality KPIs

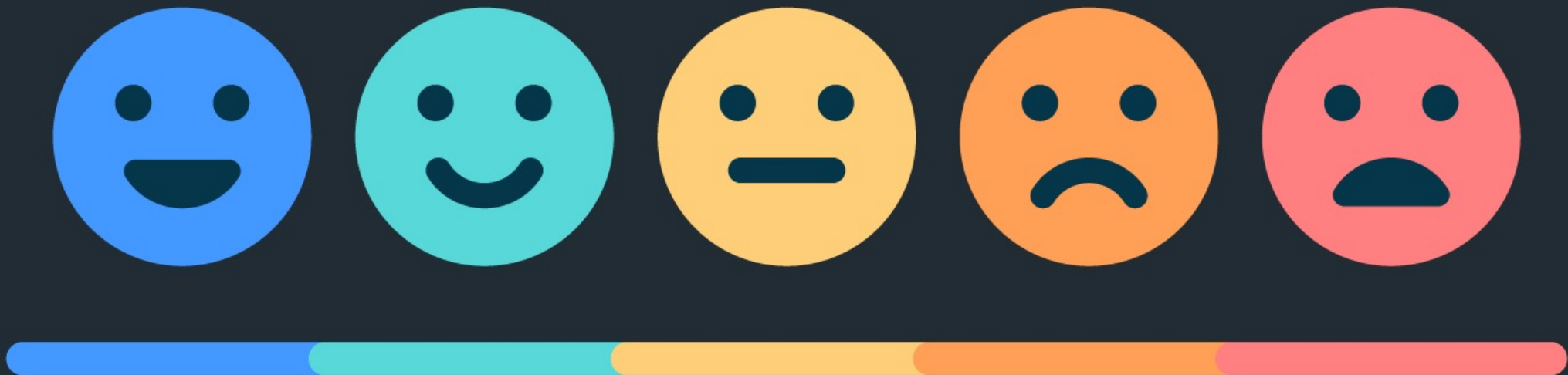Quality standards significant in appraisals

Most focus on…

Delivery time

Customer satisfaction

User feedback

Poll: User feedback

What type of quality feedback do you gather from your users (select all that apply)?

- ❑ Accuracy
- ❑ Clarity
- ❑ Relevance
- ❑ Usability
- ❑ Other (put in slack channel)
- ❑ None

Bottom line

High Quality

But.. Room to improve

Poll: Satisfaction

On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how satisfied are you with your overall documentation quality?
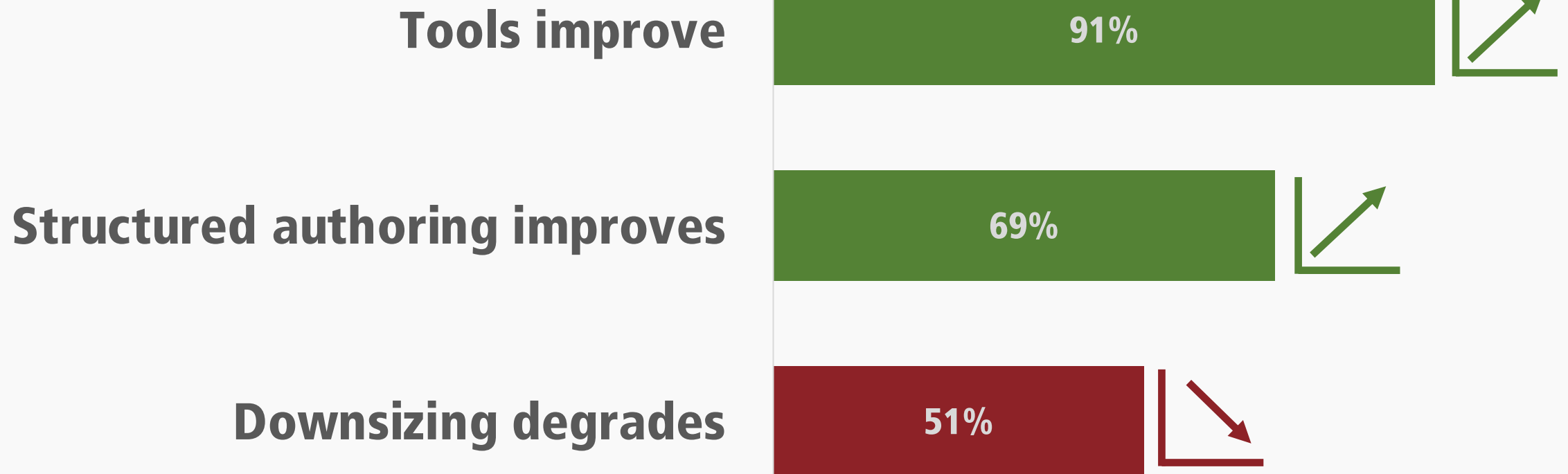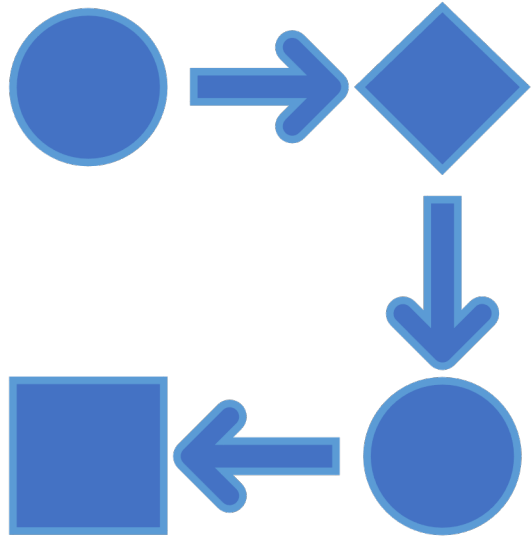
- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5

How Are We Doing?

3.4/5

Quality is an on-going process

Other factors impact performance

Tools improve	91%
Structured authoring improves	69%
Downsizing degrades	51%

"When something can be read
without effort, great effort has gone
into its writing."

~Enrique Jardiel Poncela

Questions?

Dawn.Stevens@Comtech-serv.com

Kathy.Madison@Comtech-serv.com