

Creating breathing room

Continuous improvement strategies with limited resources

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About UT Dallas

- **The university**

- R1 research university enrolling 30,139 students (fall 2025)
- Large international population from 105+ countries
- 76% undergraduate, 24% graduate

- **Office of Institutional Success and Decision Support**

- Combines IR, assessment, policy, accreditation, data warehouse, and web applications and technology
- Reports to VP Strategy and Chief of Staff
- Reorganized into this structure in fall 2022 – lots of growth and change



THE FUTURE
DEMANDS
DIFFERENT
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS



staffing

ACTS

**technical
debt**

Who is this presentation for

- Feels overwhelmed by workload
- “There must be a better way”
- Wants to update old processes to something more effective
- “There’s not enough time”

Our journey

Before



After



Our journey

Before

- 2 hours to run each report
- Limited effective dating
- Multiple scripts per report
- Difficult to update
- Disengaged stakeholders

After

- 10 min to run each report
- Strong effective dating
- 1 script per report
- Macros to make updates easier, fewer errors
- Engaged stakeholders
- Strong version control

Learning outcomes



Use effective communication strategies to foster collaboration and innovation within teams



Apply practical approaches to documentation and process improvement in their own IR work



Leverage unique perspectives and experiences to enhance team innovation and problem-solving



Assess and prioritize tasks within their functional area to maximize impact

How to create breathing room

Prioritize (what)



Identify where to start

Tool (how)



Continuous improvement through iterative processes

Areas (where)



People



Documentation



Technology

Identify where to start

- Unique to you, your department, and your institution
- Communicate it to leadership, team, stakeholders
- Create your own rubric – keep it simple

Questions to ask

- What are the risks?
 - To funding?
 - To accreditation?
 - To institutional reputation?
- Does it relate to a presidential priority or strategic initiative?
- Will this improve data integrity?
- Will this improve efficiency?
- Will this improve stakeholder relationships and data literacy?
- How does this intersect with other projects?
- Is this a building block?



Continuous improvement through iteration



- **Why it matters**

- Iteration creates better products
- Quicker, smaller progress
- Puts resources where they're needed

- **How to do it**

- Make it a little better each time
- Let go of perfection - learn from missteps
- Shared expectations and trust
- Prioritize building blocks

We don't have time to rush

People

Why

- People are at the core of everything we do.
- Collaborative partnerships improve data integrity, add guard rails
- Problem solving benefits from multiple perspectives

How

- Connect on a human level
- Reach out proactively
- Actively solicit feedback
- Recognize their expertise





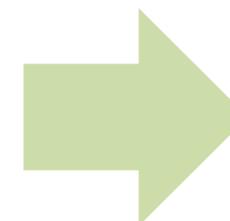
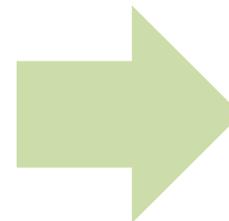
Documentation – why it matters

Why

- Communicating to collaborators, future self, and future team
- Preserves institutional knowledge – business continuity, reproducibility
- Saves time – clear procedure, fewer questions
- Data integrity – reduces risks and human error

How

- Living document
- Version control, change log
- Crosslink pages
- Save somewhere you can access even if campus is closed, internet is out





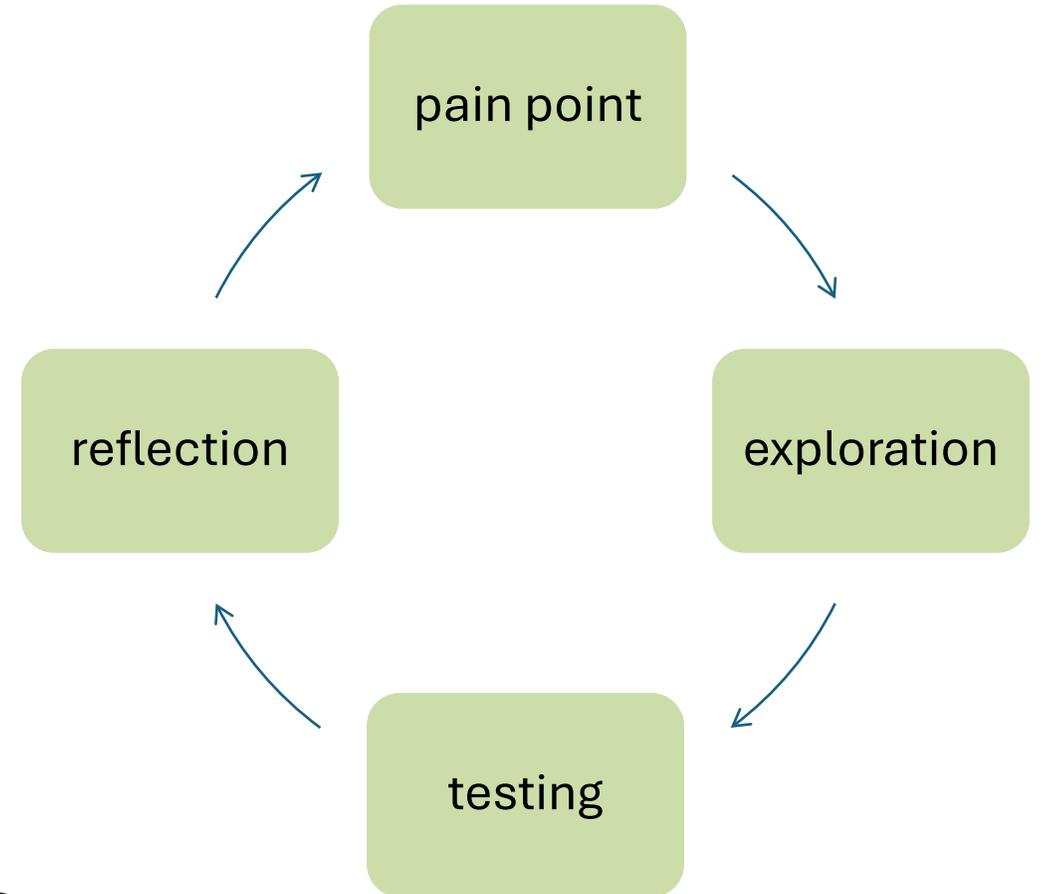
Technology

Why

- Let computers do what they're good at!
- Reduce human error
- Increase efficiency and reproducibility

How

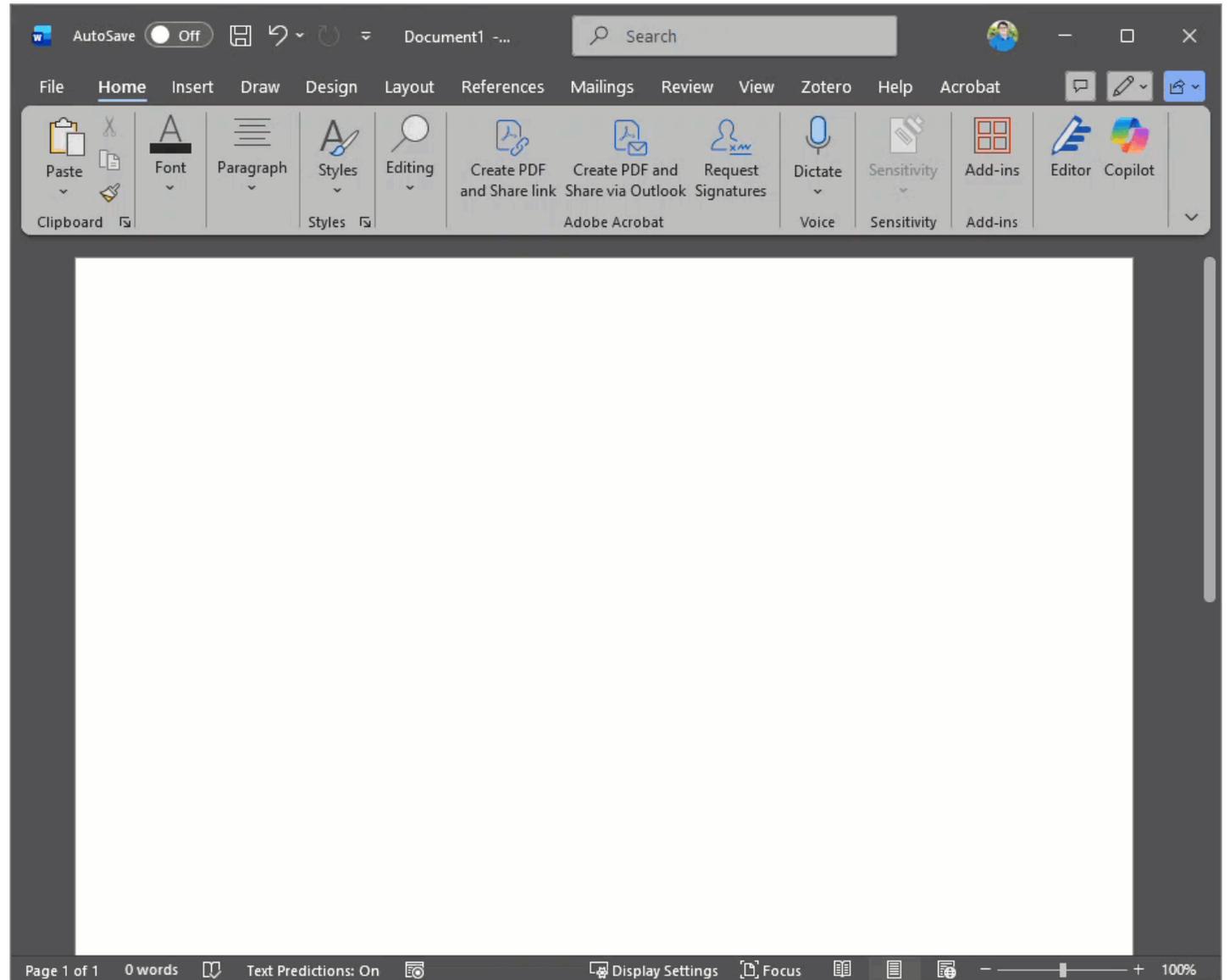
- Listen for “there has to be a better way”
- Start where you're at, then 1-2 steps outside comfort zone
- Actively applying bite sized learning
- Building blocks, expanding toolbox
- Human readable AND computer executable



Technology

AutoHotKey

- Safer manual entry
- Hotkeys to insert text anywhere
- Functions to insert formatted dates
- And much more!





Technology

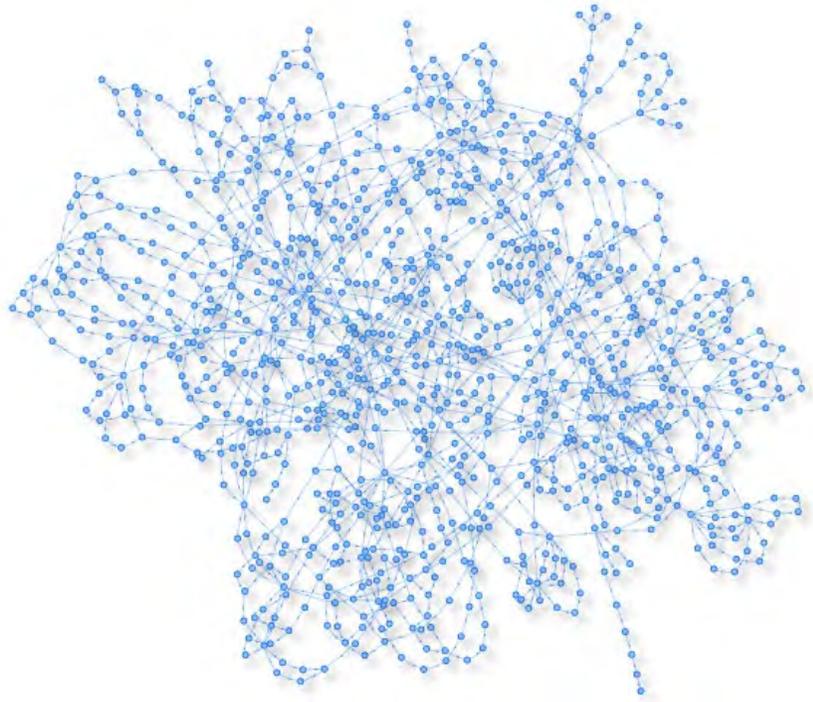
Regular Expressions

- Find and replace for patterns
- Helpful for MoveIt Edit Reports

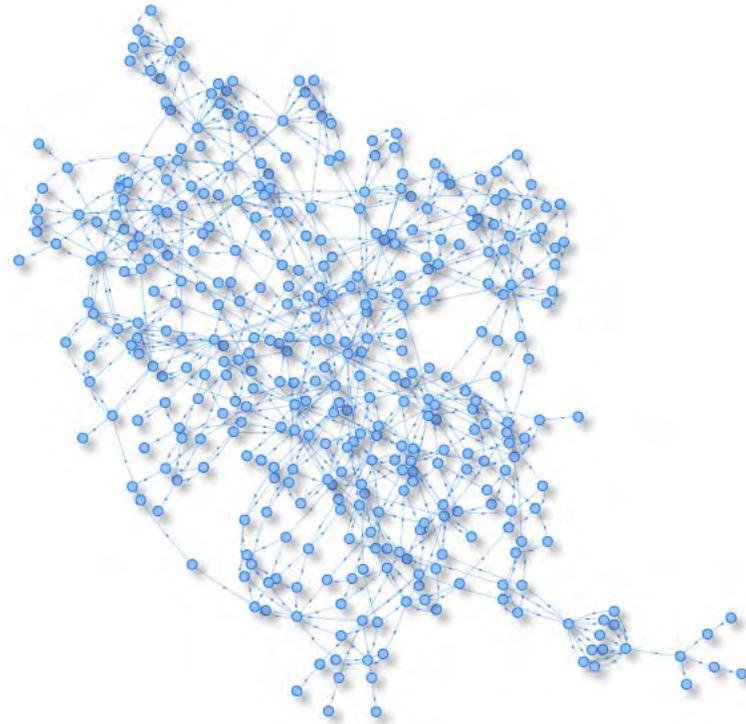
```
C:\Users\sns072000\Desktop\format-id-numbers - Sublime Text (UNREGISTERED)
File Edit Selection Find View Goto Tools Project Preferences Help
format-id-numbers
1 stu id - 1111111111 - error REF123!
2 stu id - 2222222222
3 stu id - 3333333333
4 stu id - 4444444444
5 stu id - 5555555555 - questionable REF456
6 stu id - 6666666666
7 stu id - 7777777777
8 stu id - 8888888888 - error REF789
9 stu id - 9999999999
.* Aa "" "" ☰ ☷
Find:
Replace:
Find Replace
Find All Replace All
34 characters selected Tab Size: 4 Plain Text
```


People - Documentation - Technology

Before



After



Thank you for coming!

Presenters

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Resources

utd.link/tair-2026-breathing-room



Scan the QR code to
complete the
session survey.

