



Machine-Ready Language

The terminology one-pager: why your vocabulary is a retrieval problem, and the 30-day way to fix it

Terms are retrieval keys. When one concept lives in your knowledge base under three names, people get partial search results and machines get three weak matches instead of one strong one — and every AI answer built on your content inherits the split. Idiom fails harder: a non-native reader gets nothing from *open the kimono*, and neither does retrieval. Some terms carry a second cost — *tribal knowledge* borrows Indigenous identity as a metaphor for "unmanaged," which is why the knowledge discipline itself has moved off it. You don't need two arguments: **precision fixes both**. Every replacement below is more precise than the term it replaces.

Twelve swaps to make this quarter

Instead of	Say	Why
tribal knowledge	institutional knowledge · tacit knowledge	Two precise terms for the two things it vaguely meant
master/slave	primary/replica · controller/agent	The kernel, 3GPP, and the naming initiative already did
whitelist/blacklist	allowlist/denylist	States the mechanism instead of color-coding trust
grandfathered	legacy status · exempt under prior terms	Names the actual rule
sanity check	validation check · smoke test	Names the check, not a mental state
man-hours	person-hours	Counts everyone
Mexican standoff	standoff · deadlock	The plain word says it better
open the kimono	full transparency	Survives translation
guru · ninja (roles)	expert · specialist	Names the skill
powwow	working session	Borrowed ceremony, returned
dummy value	placeholder · sample value	Precise, and kinder
first-class citizen	fully supported	Says what's actually different

The program, in four moves

1 • Audit — twenty client-facing assets, two reviewers, thirty days. Three numbers out: findings per asset, charged terms on public surfaces, and the *consistency rate* — of concepts appearing in 3+ assets, how many carry one canonical name. That last number is your retrieval health as an editorial statistic. **2 • Standard** — two pages, ratified like policy: canonical terms, deprecated terms, named owner. Contested calls decided once and logged. **3 • Gate** — three line-items in the content review you already run, plus a grep list generated from

the standard: a language linter at zero tooling cost. **4 • Enablement** — coaching, not language police. The standard becomes how people write.

Go deeper

→ **The essay** (machinereadyknowledge.com/terminology) — the full argument: language as the vocabulary layer of machine-ready knowledge. → **Terminology Governance Pack** (contextkeeping.com/toolkit) — the 40-entry inventory, standard template, gate line-items, audit blueprint, and champion deck. \$59, or in the full toolkit. → **Run the audit yourself** — the pack's blueprint walks it end to end: 20 assets, 2 reviewers, findings in 2–3 weeks.

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