

Mistakes were made

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**This goes out to all the
sysadmins.**

**You can never think
about failure too much.**



Some goals around
pessimism.

Plan for the worst.

Minimize risk.

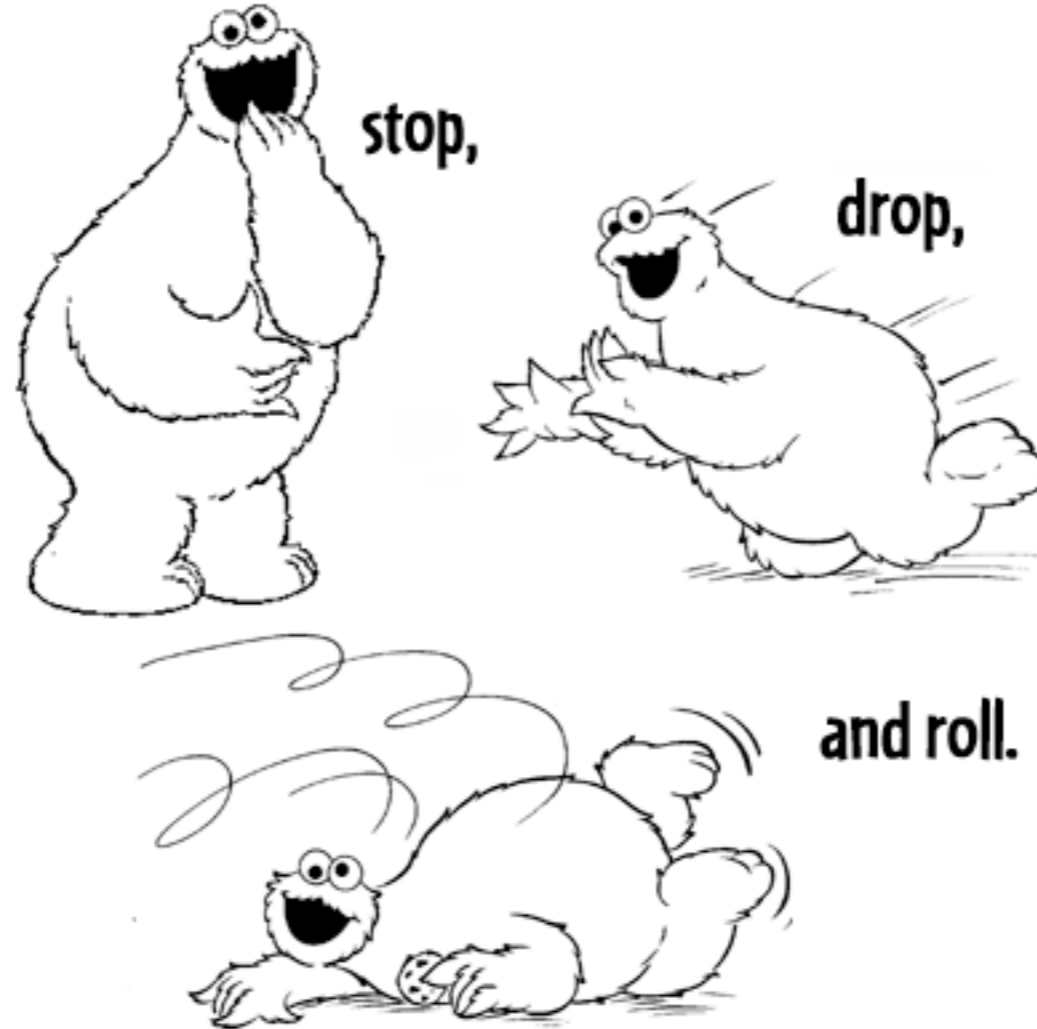
Recover, gracefully.

**Plan for the worst.
Minimize risk.
Recover, gracefully.**

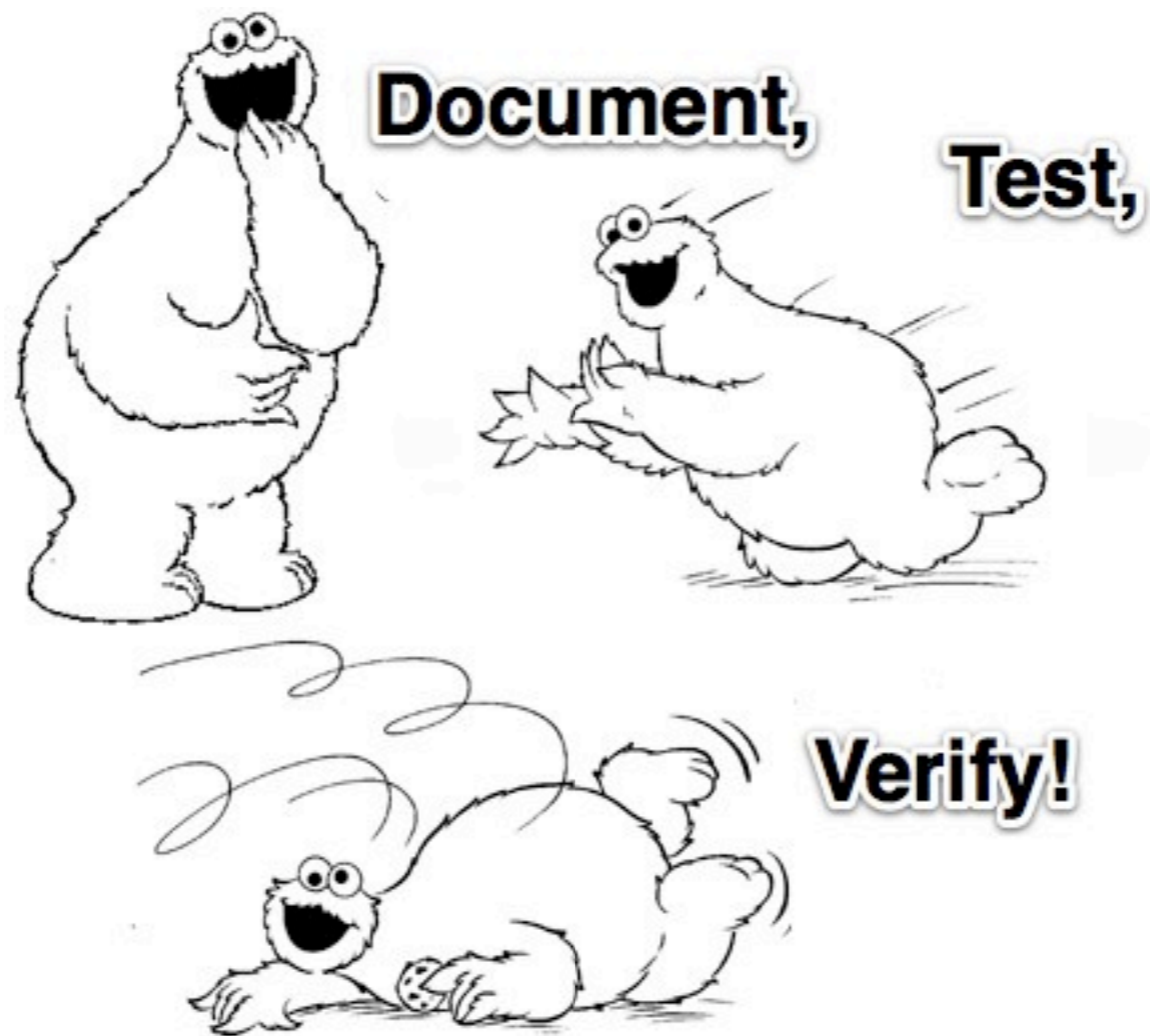
Stop, drop, *and* roll



if your clothes catch on fire



Practice stop, drop, and roll with Cookie Monster.



**Operational success
with Cookie Monster.**

Tales of failure to...

Document

Test

Verify

Imagine

Implement



Failure to document.



Moving Day



Thanks, David Prior!



Prevent documentation failures.

- Write documentation.
- Update documentation.
- Make documenting a step in your written process.
- Assign a fixed amount of time to that step.



Documentation tools

- Graphic designers. (Pretty wikis. Pretty docs. (Sphinx?) Diagrams.)
- Timelines.
- Bug tracking.
- Ordered todo lists.



Failure to test.



“My first day posing as a sysadmin (~1990, no previous training...) I deleted all zero length files on a Sun workstation.”



Prevent testing failures.

- Verify success criteria.
- Write tests.
- Test with a buddy.
- Have a plan.



Testing tools

- Your favorite test framework
- Repeatable shell scripts
- Staging environments



Failure to verify.



“What does ‘-d’ actually do?”



Prevent verification failures.

- Have a plan for things going wrong.
- Have a staging environment.
- Test your rollback plan, not just your implementation plan.



Verification tools

- Staging environments
- Your buddy



Failure to imagine.



For my group the
bottom line was
"don't trust anyone".

Thanks, Maggie!



Recover from failures to imagine.

- Share your stories of failure.
- Talk with people who are different from you.
- Act out implementation scenarios.

Failure to implement.

Re-implement.

- Learn from mistakes.

Reflection. (or, the Post-Mortem)

Before

- Document the plan with numbered steps and a timeline.
- Test the plan and the rollback plan.
- Identify a “point of no return”.

During

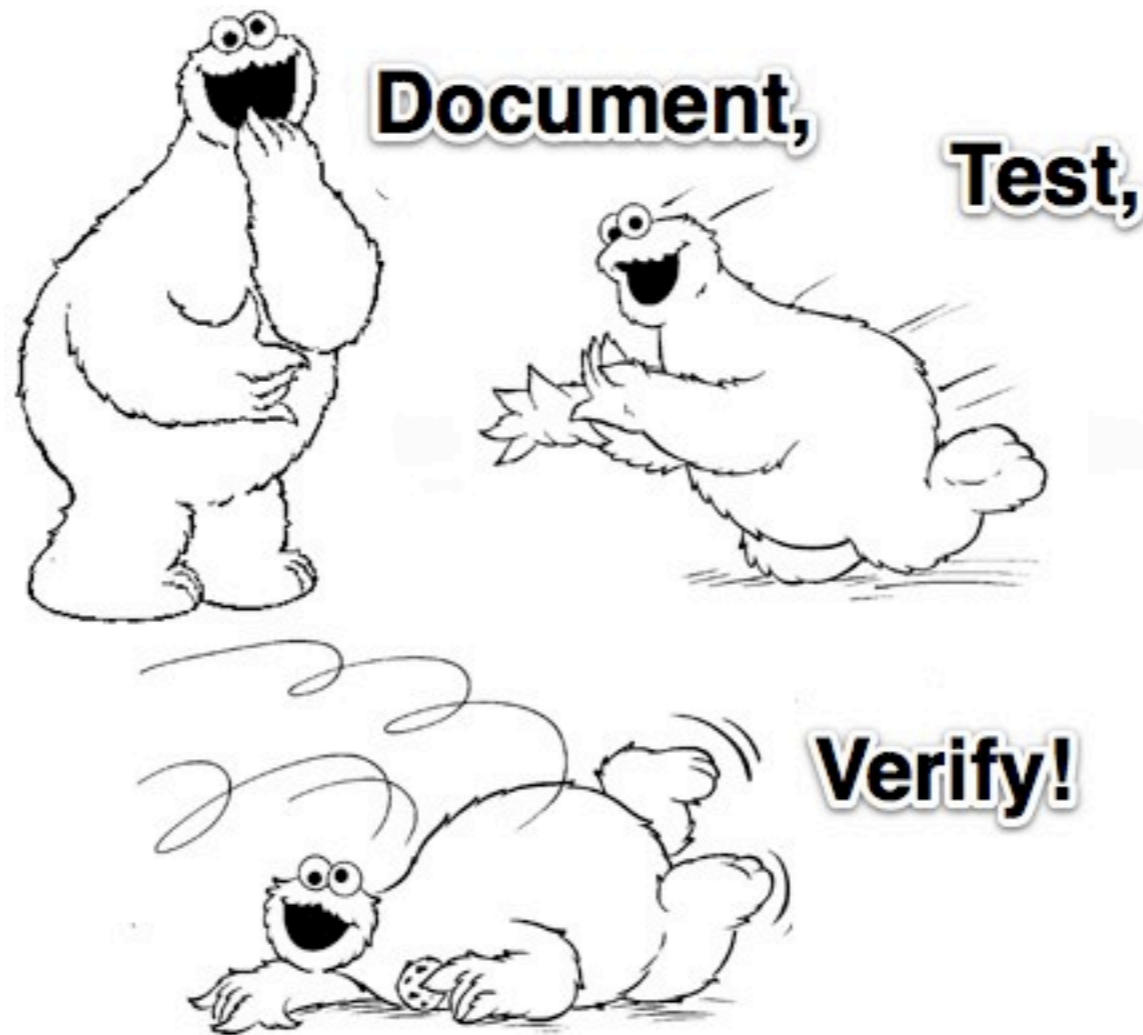
- Screen sharing: UNIX screen, VNC, etc.
- Chatroom: AIM, Campfire (scrollback!)
- Voice: Campfire, Skype, VOIP, POTS call line
- Headsets!
- Designated time-keeper.

After

- Documentation updates
- Post-mortems to identify areas of success and areas for improvement.
- Limit improvements to 1-2 things.

Plan for the worst.
Minimize risk.
Recover, gracefully.

Thanks!



**Operational success
with Cookie Monster.**

Photo credits

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