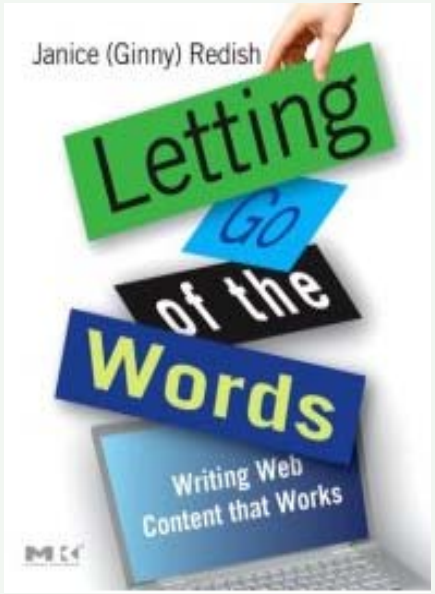
Content as Conversation



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IPCC
Enschede
July 2010

Communication = Conversation

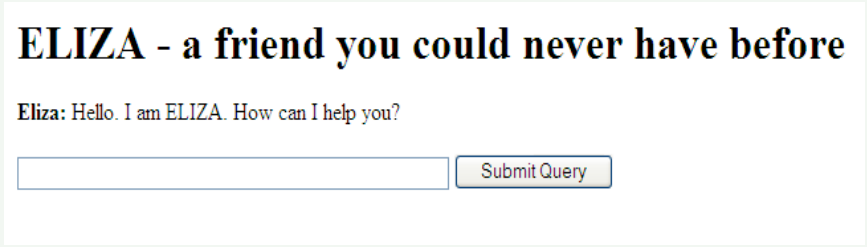
Flickr cc photo by Ed Yourdon

For this talk, I am not including

- Skype and other voice over internet protocol (VOIP) programs

- instant messaging (IM) or chat

- computer talking (building artificial intelligence into computers)



Writing as an asynchronous conversation

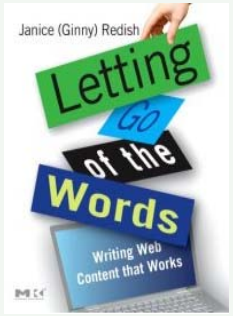
Flickr cc photo by Moonpir

Flickr cc photo by russelljsmith

Every use of every web site is a conversation started by the site visitor

Flickr cc photo by Bradleyolin

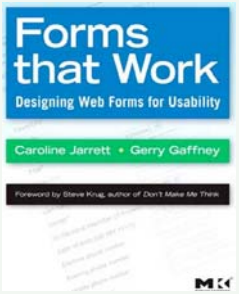
Lost. No problem.
Use the computer!



theme =
content as conversation

Influence 1: Caroline Jarrett's 3-layer model of forms

- Relationship
- Conversation
- Appearance



Jarrett and Gaffney
Forms that Work:
Designing Web Forms for Usability
Elsevier, 2008

http://formsthatwork.com

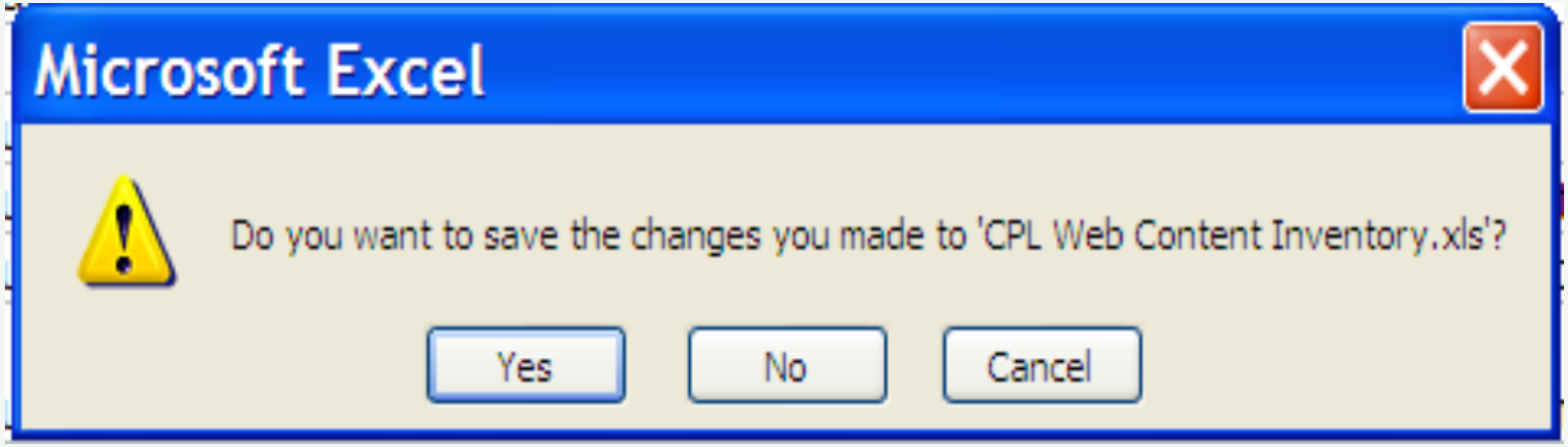
Influence 2: Coney and Steehouder Role playing on the web

Flickr cc photo by hellochris

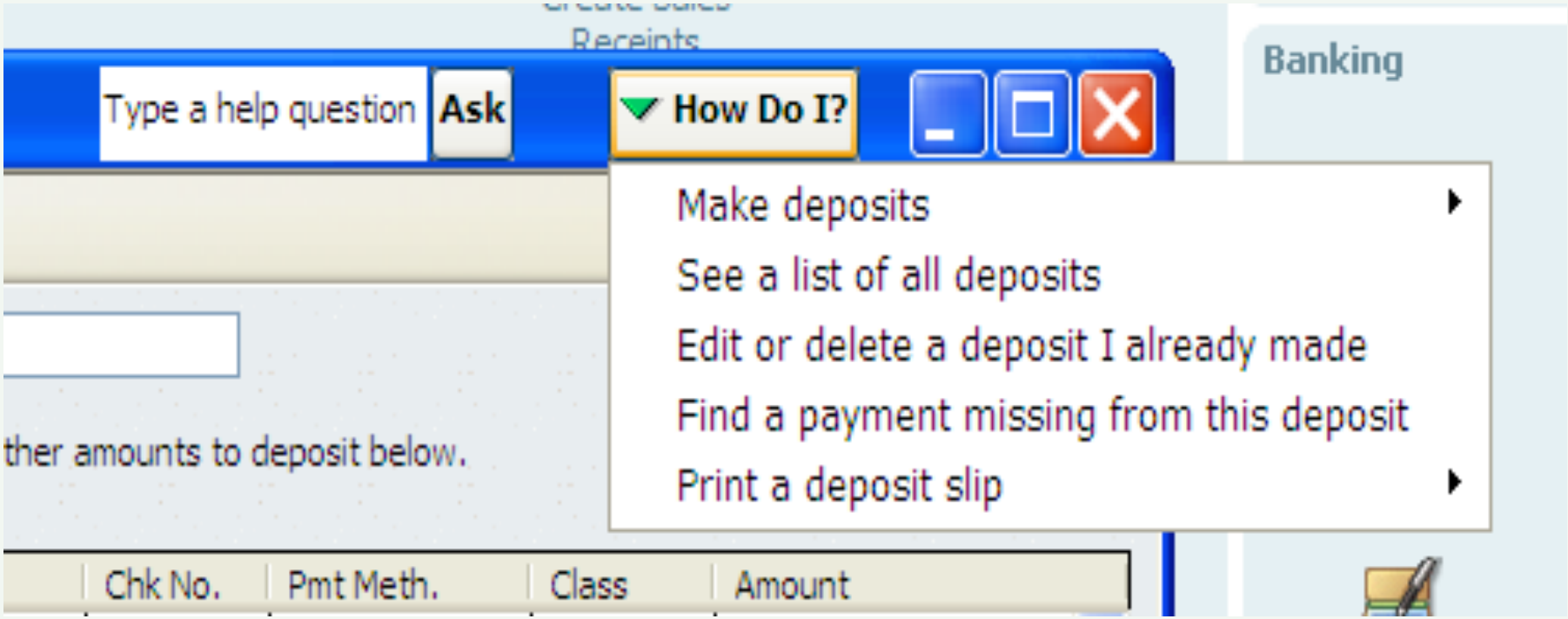
Coney and Steehouder
Role Playing on the Web:
Guidelines for Designing and Evaluating Personas Online
Technical Communication, 47, 3, 2000

Technical communicators have been writing asynchronous conversations for a long time

Sometimes explicitly

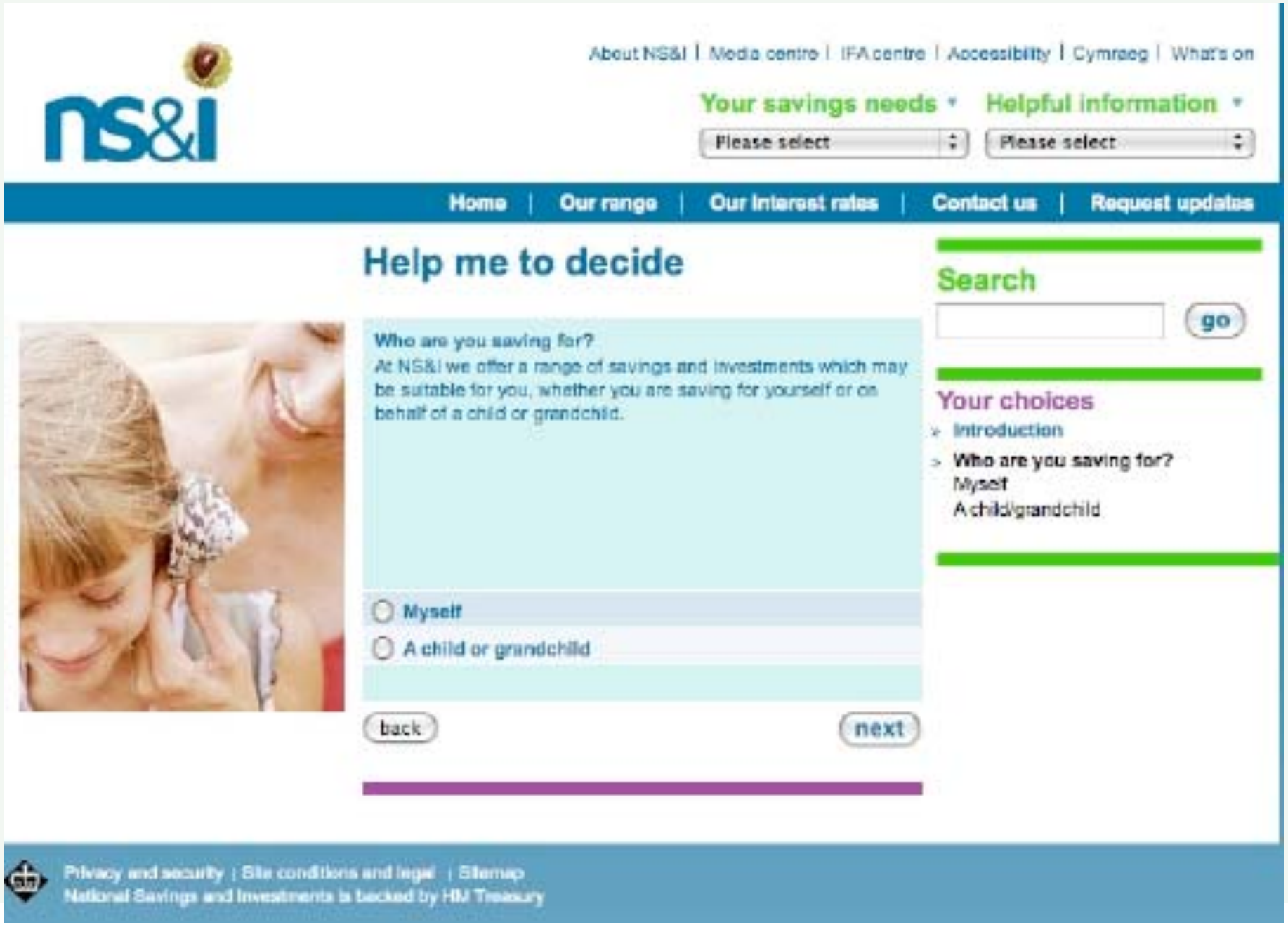


Sometimes explicitly

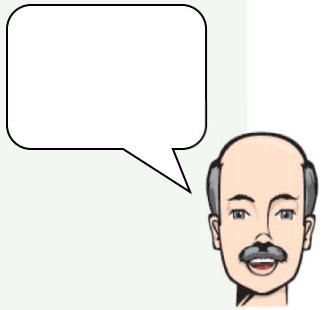


Sometimes explicitly

Sometimes explicitly



Not so explicit, but can you hear the conversation?



What's in the box?

You should have received all the following items in the box:

Hardware

- Treo 680
- AT&T Wireless SIM card (not included with all models; preinstalled in Treo 680 on some models; see Inserting the SIM card and battery for details)

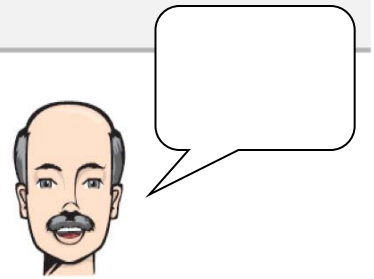
KEY TERM **SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) card** The smartcard that you insert into your Treo 680 and that identifies you to the mobile network. It contains your mobile account information, such as your phone number and the services to which you subscribe. Phone book entries and SMS messages can also be stored on the SIM card.

- Rechargeable battery
- AC charger
- USB sync cable
- Headset
- Screen protector; apply one to eliminate glare and guard against dust and scratches

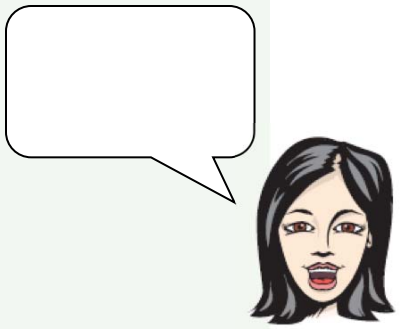
Documentation and software

- *Getting Started Guide*
- *Quickstart Guide*
- Palm Software Installation CD, which includes the following:
  - Palm® Desktop software
  - Bonus software for your Treo 680
  - *Your Palm Treo 680 Smart Device User Guide* (this guide)
- Palm warranty

TIP Missing something? Need help? Contact AT&T Wireless customer service: 1-866-246-4852 or call 611 from your mobile phone.



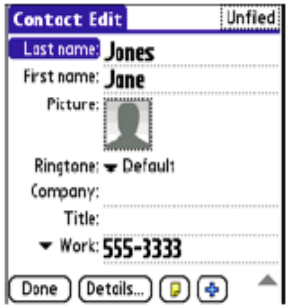
Every task-oriented procedure we write is a conversation.



can also assign a photo and ringtone ID to that contact, so you know when they call you.

Adding a contact

1 Press **Phone** .
2 Select the **Contacts** tab.
3 Press **Menu** .
4 Select **New Contact** from the **Record** menu.
5 Use the **5-way** to move between fields as you enter info.



DID YOU KNOW? If you add a symbol at the beginning of a contact's last name, such as #Smith, the contact appears at the top of your contact list.

6 Do any of the following:

Add a caller ID photo: Select the Picture box. (See Assigning a caller ID photo for more info.)

Add a caller ID ringtone: Select the **Ringtone** pick list. (See Assigning a caller ID ringtone for more info.)

Place the entry in a category or mark it private: Select **Details**. (See Working with private entries for more info.)

Add a note to an entry: Select **Note** .

Display additional fields for this contact: Select **Plus** .

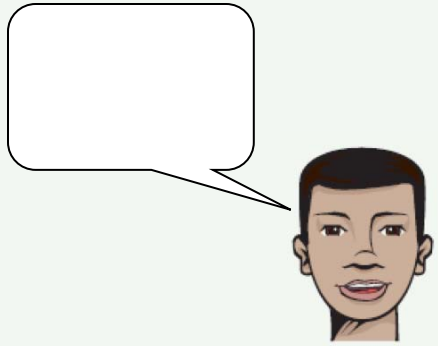
7 After you enter all the information, select **Done**.

TIP Import contacts from your SIM card quickly and easily. In the Contacts list, press **Menu** and then select **Import from SIM** from the Record menu.

Viewing or changing contact information

1 Press **Phone** .
2 Select the **Contacts** tab.

Well-written help
is a conversation.



If you want to…., [do]…..

Microsoft Office PowerPoint Help

Show All

Create a photo album

Microsoft PowerPoint creates a new presentation when you use the photo album feature. Any presentations you currently have open in PowerPoint will not be affected by this task.

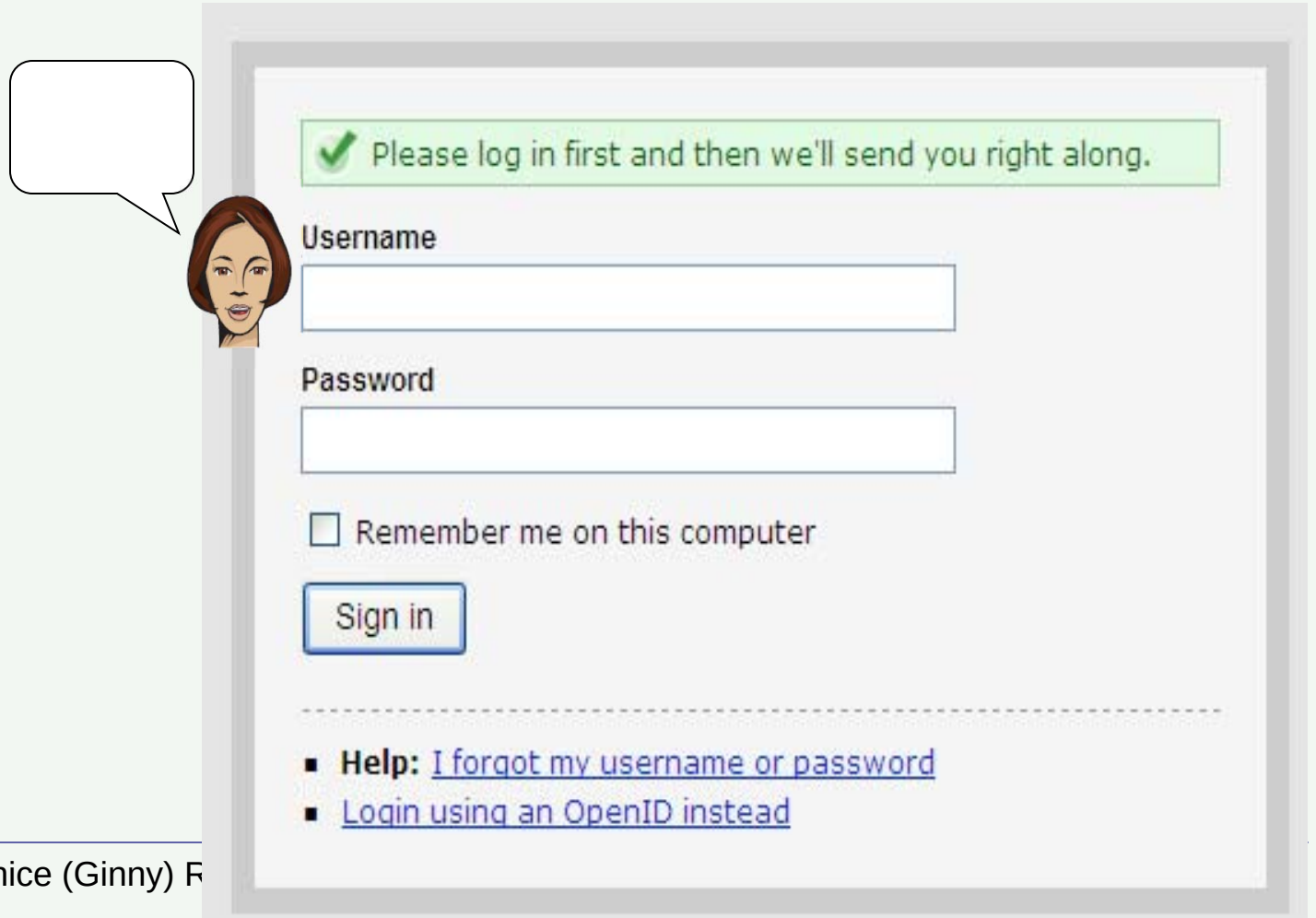
1. On the **Insert** menu, point to **Picture**, and then click **New Photo Album**.
2. In the **Photo Album** dialog box, add the pictures you want to appear in your photo album.
   - Add a picture from a file or disk
   - Add a picture from a scanner or camera
3. Repeat Step 2 for as many pictures as you want to add to your photo album.
4. Under **Album Layout**, do any of the following:
   - If you want to select the layout of your pictures and text boxes on the slides in your photo album, select a layout in the **Picture layout** list. If you select **Fit to slide** as your picture layout, you are unable to add or change frame shapes and design templates.
   - If you want to select the shape of a frame to use with your pictures, select a shape in the **Frame shape** list.
   - If you want to select a design template to use for your photo album, click **Browse**, and then in the **Choose Design Template** dialog box, locate the design template you want to use, and then click **Select**.
5. Click **Create**.

Note Always use the **Format Photo Album** dialog box when making changes or updates to your photo album.

Tip

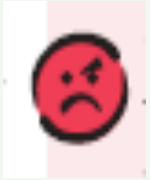
If you want to add a large group of pictures to a new photo album all at once, after clicking **File/Disk** in the **Photo Album** dialog box, select all

Can you hear the conversation in this form even if the form has labels, not questions, by the fields?



© 2010, Janice (Ginny) R

Asynchronous conversation is *the* contribution ^ of professional technical communicators



Issuance of a TOP command results in a line zero condition.

To go to the beginning of your file, type TOP and press Enter.

Influence 3: Going back even further – linguistic research on pragmatics

- Pragmatics = language in use
- Every utterance in natural spoken language has
  - syntax = its structure (grammar)
  - semantics = the meaning (words)
  - pragmatics = the context
- The context may cause the utterance to have a meaning beyond the literal meaning of the words.

Is it cold in here?
open window

- H. P. (Paul) Grice (1913 – 1988)
  - philosopher of language
  - Oxford → Berkeley
  - studied conversation
  - introduced the modern field of pragmatics (1960s)

Grice's maxims are assumptions we have about conversation. They are expectations we all have as speakers and listeners in a face-to-face conversation.

Quality (truth)

- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Quantity (information)

- Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Relevance

- Be relevant.

Manner (clarity)

- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief.
- Be orderly.

Good conversation? (Opening of conversation)

© iStockPhoto

Continue to next slide →

Good conversation? (Response)

© iStockPhoto

Good conversation?

To exit the program, type Quit and press Enter.

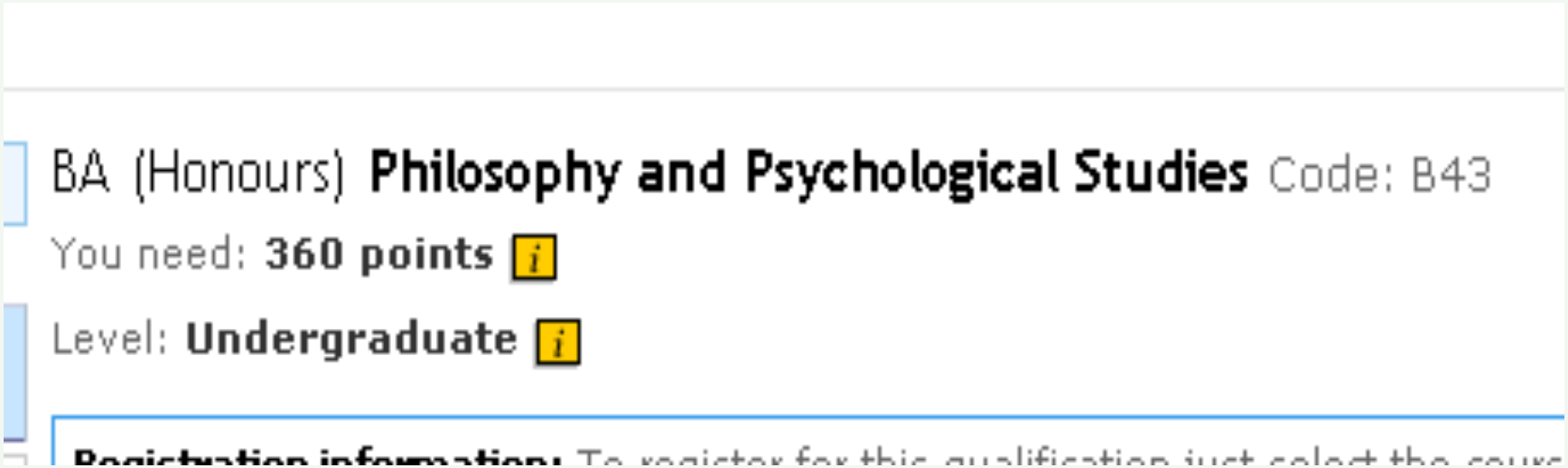
Be sure to save your files before you do that.

Some implications of content as conversation

We must know and focus on our readers.

- Think about how readers will interpret what you write.
- Realize that words trigger associations.
- Write with context first. (Given - New)
- Give and take turns.

Think about how readers will interpret what you write



Example courtesy of Caroline Jarrett
and Whitney Quesenbery

Realize that words trigger associations

Mailing Address Furnished By Licensee

What address must I put on my application?

Write with context first. (Given - New)

Approved fumigation with methyl bromide at normal atmospheric pressure, in accordance with the following procedure, upon arrival at the port of entry, is hereby prescribed as a condition of importation for shipments of yams from foreign countries.

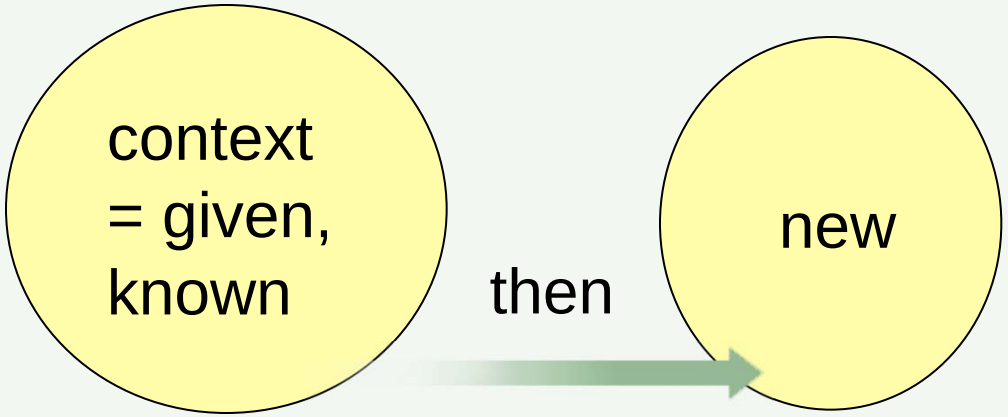
How would you say this information in a conversation?

Try it!

Did you say something like this?

If you are importing yams, [someone] must fumigate them when they arrive at the port of entry.

To fumigate yams, [someone] must use this procedure:



Clark and Haviland, Comprehension and the given-new contract, In R. Freedle (Ed.), *Discourse production and comprehension*, 1975, Erlbaum, 1-40.

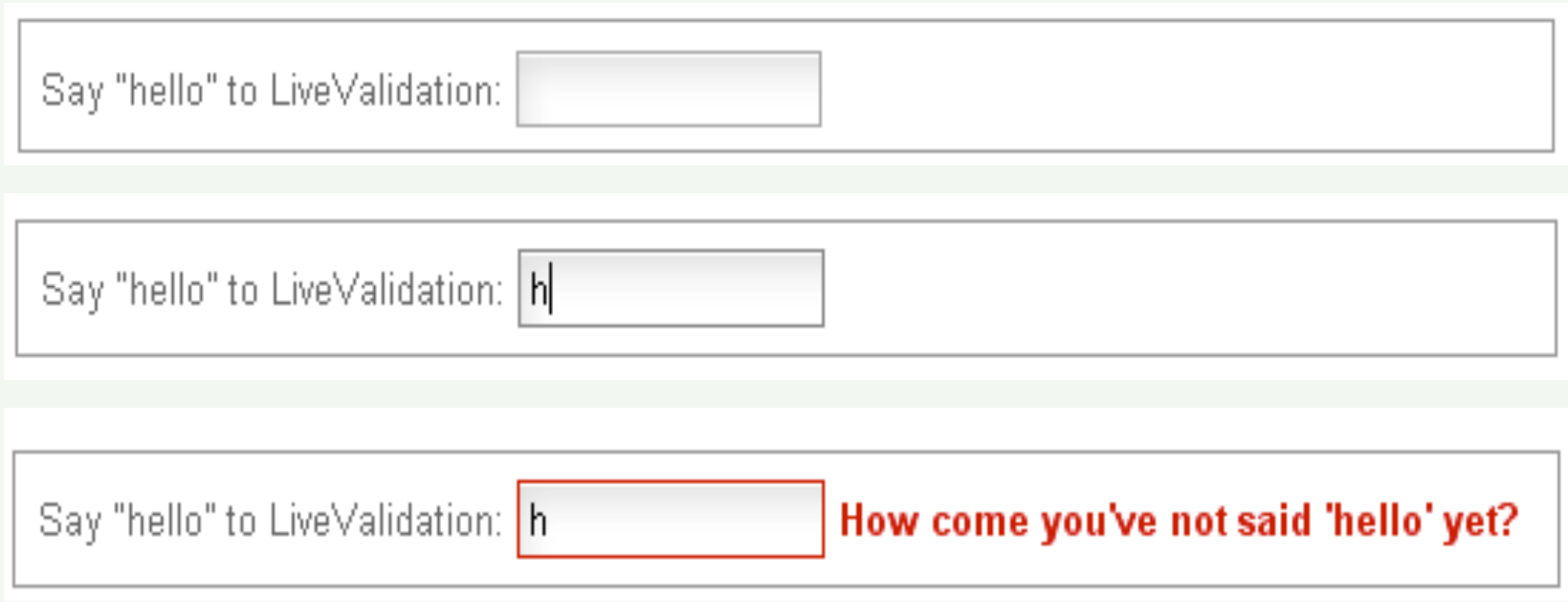
Give and take turns

Flickr cc photo by Polandeze

Dense text =
too long a turn,
"hogging the
conversation"

Clear, meaningful,
useful headings
are the reader's
turns in the
conversation.

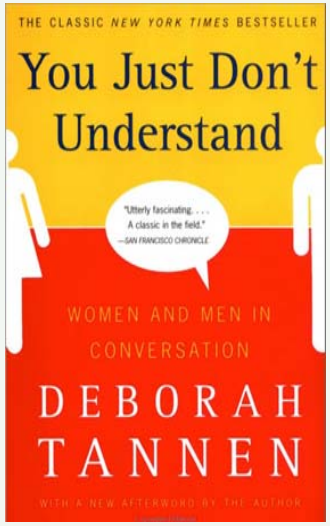
Why is this not a good conversation?

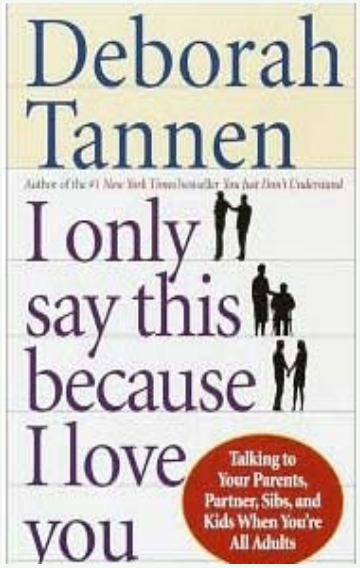


From Jarrett and Gaffney
Forms that Work: Designing Web Forms for Usability
Elsevier, 2008, chapter 6

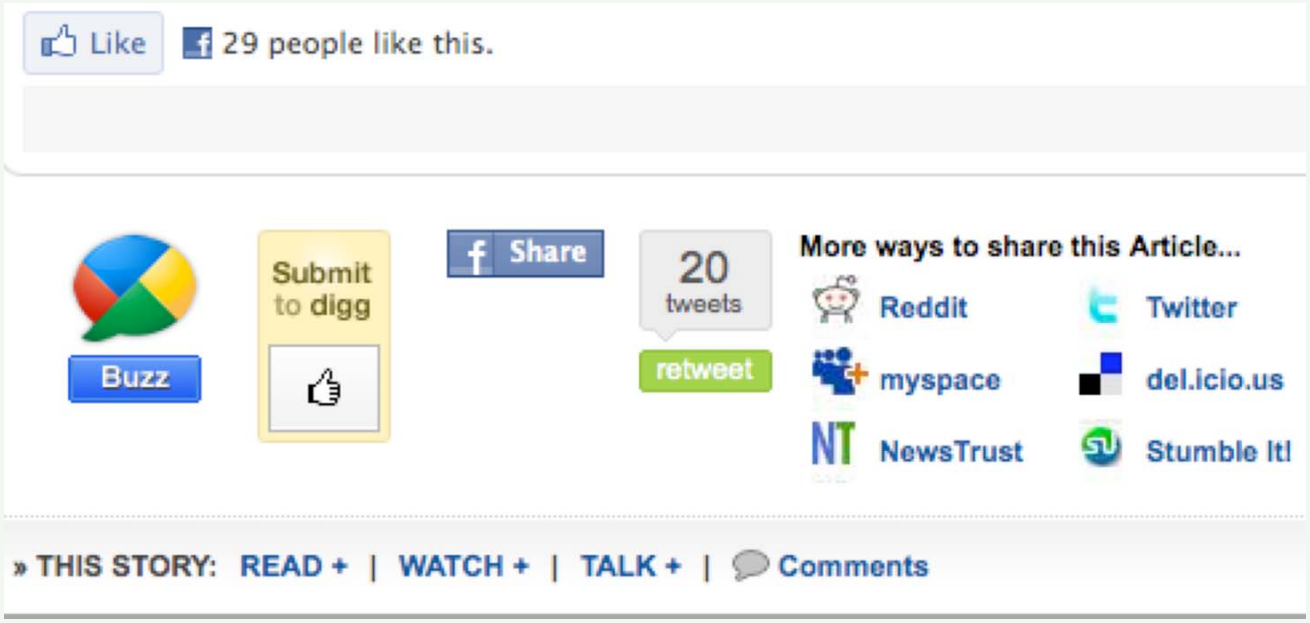
Other areas of linguistics grew out of Grice's pragmatics

- speech act theory
- conversational analysis
- sociolinguistics
- cognitive linguistics





Present – and future?



A blog of articles related to the new book by Janice (Ginny) Redish

Letting Go of the Words

Writing Web Content that Works

Search

Read a chapter from the book

2 Thoughts on "Read a chapter from the book"

From Sam:

I thought this was a great book and was able to apply a few of the principles to our website during a recent update. We added informative link names, broke information into bite-size chunks, made pages friendlier to scanning, not reading.

We're pleased with the result.

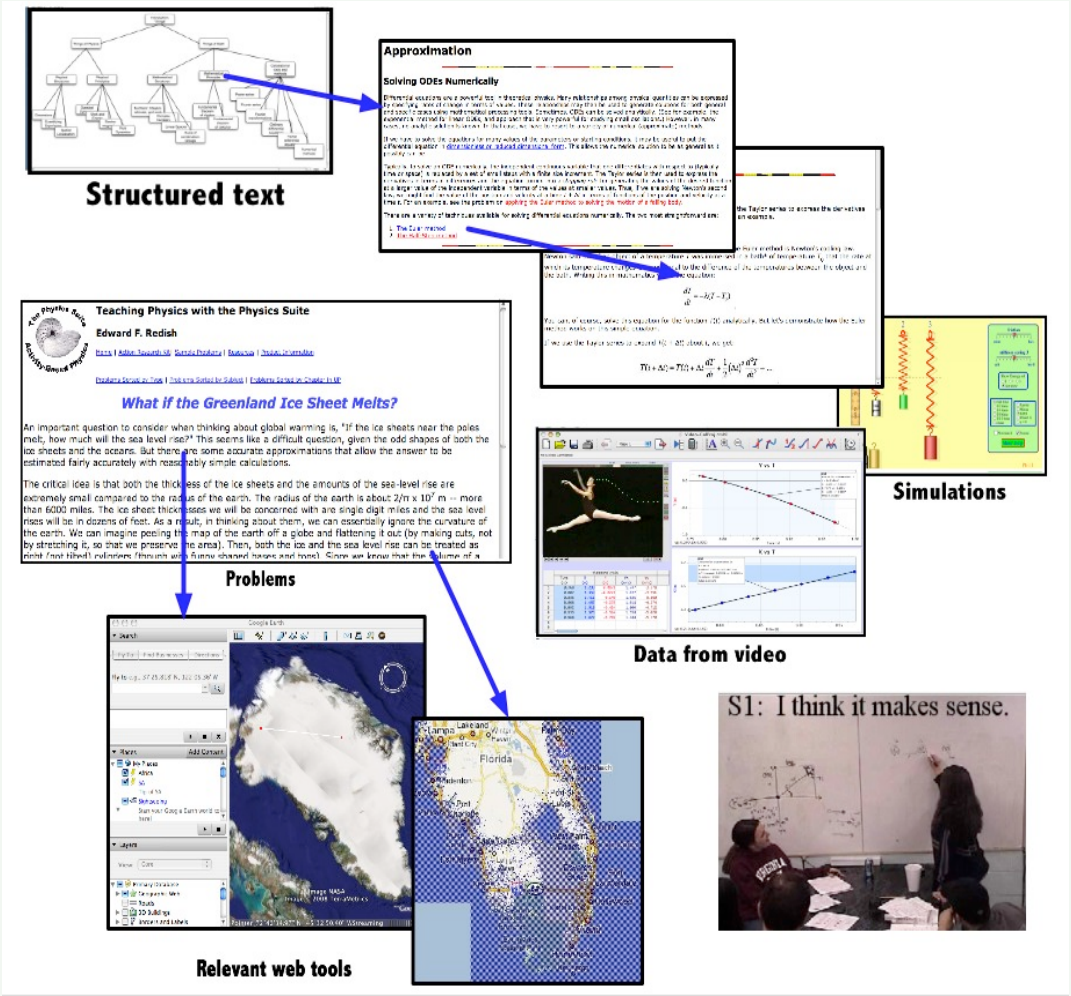
From Leslie:

I am buying your book tonight, Ginny. Seeing the sample chapters convinced me that I must have it.

I have an old-fashioned manual that I have to convert to an up-to-date Help system for a web service. I think your book will provide exactly the kind of guidance I need to plan the rearchitecture and conversion.

The future of information for students

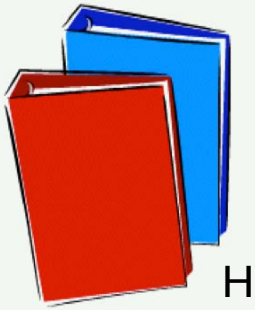
Example of the multi-channel, highly-interactive, non-textbook-based, largely web-based course materials with group work, courtesy of Edward (Joe) Redish, Professor of Physics, University of Maryland, USA.



The future of information for product users

Training manuals

User guides



?

Help topics

Is computer-human interaction (CHI) still what it's all about?

- We don't talk about telephone-human interaction for synchronous conversation.

- Asynchronous conversation is simply human – human interaction through the computer.

Inspired by what Dana Chisnell told me she heard at a panel at ACM CHI 2008.

Think "conversation."
Write conversations.
Facilitate conversations.

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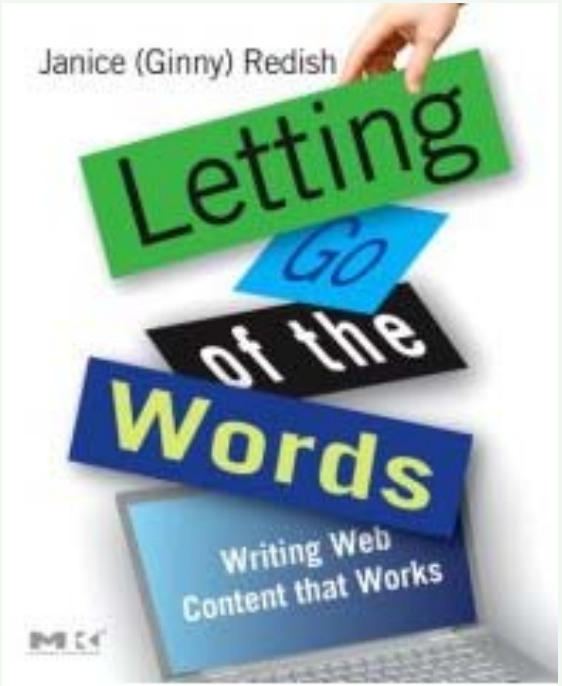
+1 301 229 3039



Morgan Kaufmann / Elsevier, 2007