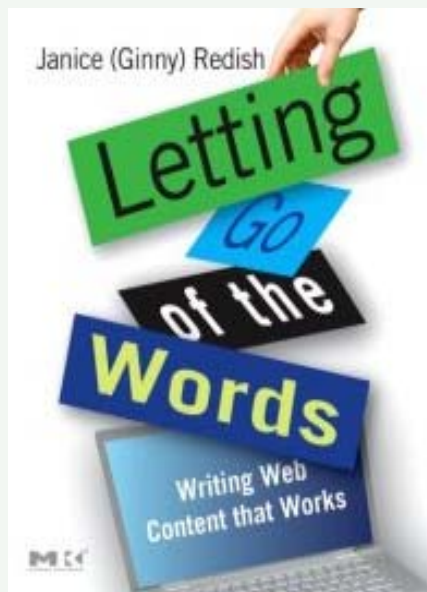


# Content as Conversation



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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)

## **ELIZA - a friend you could never have before**

Eliza: Hello. I am ELIZA. How can I help you?

# Writing as <sup>an asynchronous</sup> conversation



Flickr cc photo by Moonpir



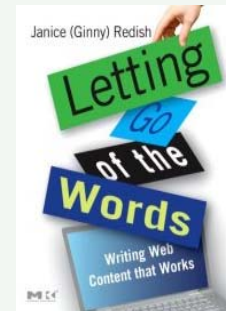
Flickr cc photo by russellsmith

# 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



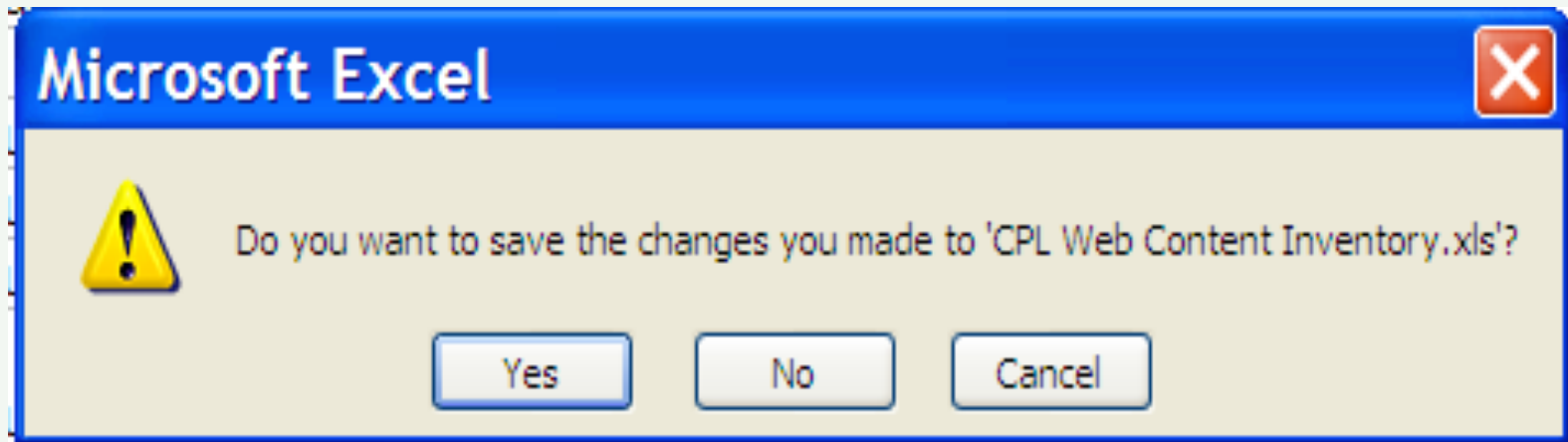
Flickr cc photo by hellochris

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



Technical communicators have been  
**asynchronous**  
writing **conversations** for a long time  
^

Sometimes explicitly





# Sometimes explicitly

The screenshot shows a software window titled "Receipts" with a "Banking" tab. The window has a blue header bar with a search box containing "Type a help question" and an "Ask" button. To the right of the search box is a "How Do I?" dropdown menu, which is currently open, displaying a list of help topics: "Make deposits", "See a list of all deposits", "Edit or delete a deposit I already made", "Find a payment missing from this deposit", and "Print a deposit slip". Below the header bar is a table with columns labeled "Chk No.", "Pmt Meth.", "Class", and "Amount". The table is currently empty. In the bottom right corner of the window, there is a small icon of a notepad and pen.

Sometimes explicitly

The image shows a screenshot of the Amazon.com website's sign-in page. At the top left is the Amazon logo. To its right, a message says "Hello. Sign in to get personalized recommendations:". Below this is a navigation bar with "Your Amazon.com", "Today's Deals" (with a gift icon), and "Gift" (partially visible). A search bar contains "Amazon.com". A button labeled "Shop All Departments" is on the left. The main content area is titled "Sign In" and asks "What is your e-mail address?". Below this is a text input field. The next question is "Do you have an Amazon.com password?". There are two radio button options: "No, I am a new customer." and "Yes, I have a password:". The second option is selected. Below the radio buttons is a text input field for the password. At the bottom, there is a yellow button that says "Sign in using our secure server" with a right-pointing arrow. Below the button are two links: "Forgot your password? Click here" and "Has your e-mail address changed since your last order?".

amazon.com Hello. Sign in to get [personalized recommendations](#):

Your Amazon.com Today's Deals Gift

Shop All Departments Search Amazon.com

### Sign In

**What is your e-mail address?**

My e-mail address is

**Do you have an Amazon.com password?**

No, I am a new customer.

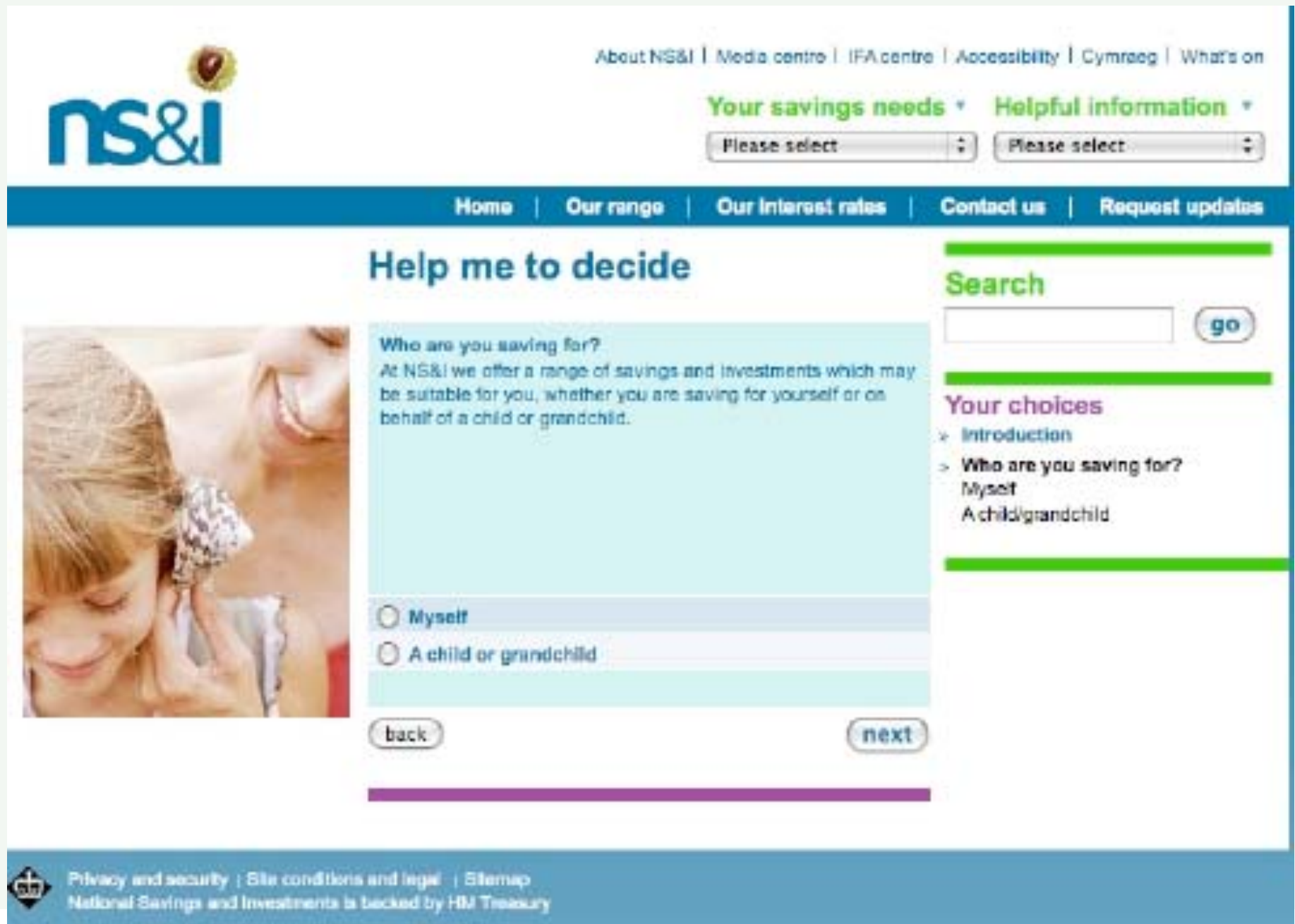
Yes, I have a password:

[Sign in using our secure server](#)

[Forgot your password? Click here](#)

[Has your e-mail address changed since your last order?](#)

# Sometimes explicitly



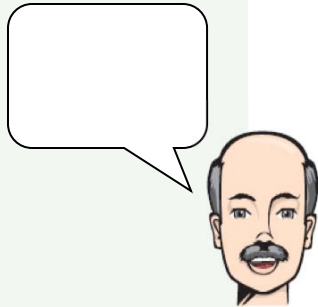
The screenshot shows the NS&I website interface. At the top left is the NS&I logo. To the right, there are navigation links: "About NS&I", "Media centre", "IFA centre", "Accessibility", "Cymraeg", and "What's on". Below these are two dropdown menus: "Your savings needs" and "Helpful information", both currently set to "Please select". A blue navigation bar contains links for "Home", "Our range", "Our Interest rates", "Contact us", and "Request updates".

The main content area is titled "Help me to decide". On the left is a photograph of a woman smiling and holding a young child. To the right of the photo is a text box with the heading "Who are you saving for?" and the text: "At NS&I we offer a range of savings and investments which may be suitable for you, whether you are saving for yourself or on behalf of a child or grandchild." Below this text are two radio button options: "Myself" and "A child or grandchild". At the bottom of this section are "back" and "next" buttons.

On the right side of the page, there is a "Search" section with a text input field and a "go" button. Below that is a "Your choices" section with a list of links: "Introduction" and "Who are you saving for?". Under "Who are you saving for?", there are two sub-links: "Myself" and "A child or grandchild".

The footer contains a logo for HM Treasury and the text: "Privacy and security | Site conditions and legal | Sitemap National Savings and Investments is backed by HM Treasury".

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.

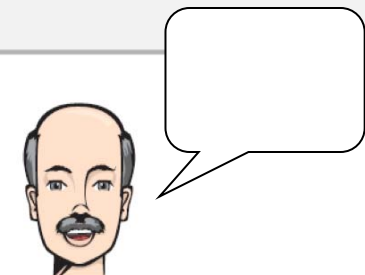
- Rechargeable battery
- AC charger
- USB sync cable
- Headset

- Screen protector; apply one to eliminate glare and guard against dust and scratches

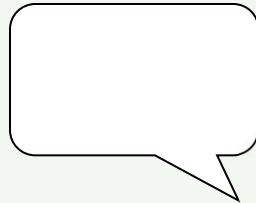
### Documentation and software

- *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.







3

YOUR PHONE

CHAPTER

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** .

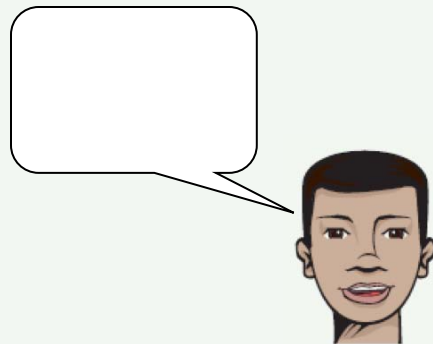
- 7 After you enter all the information, select **Done**.

**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

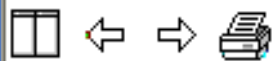
- 1 Press **Phone** .
- 2 Select the **Contacts**  tab.

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.

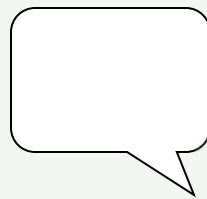
1. On the **Insert** menu, point to **Picture**, and then click **New Photo Album**.
2. In the **Photo Album** dialog box, add the pictures you want to appear in your photo album.
  - ▶ Add a picture from a file or disk
  - ▶ Add a picture from a scanner or camera
3. Repeat Step 2 for as many pictures 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?



✓ Please log in first and then we'll send you right along.

Username

Password

Remember me on this computer

---

- **Help:** [I forgot my username or password](#)
- [Login using an OpenID instead](#)



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



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

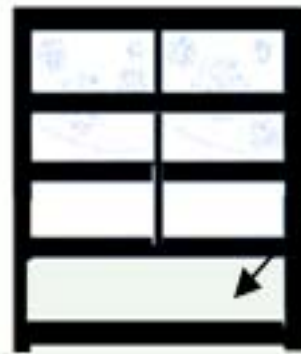


To go to the beginning of your file, type TOP and press Enter.

## **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)



The car is almost out of petrol.

© iStockPhoto

Continue to next slide →

## Good conversation? (Response)

There's a petrol  
station around  
the corner.



© 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

BA (Honours) **Philosophy and Psychological Studies** Code: B43

You need: **360 points** 

Level: **Undergraduate** 

**Registration information:** To register for this qualification just select the course

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.



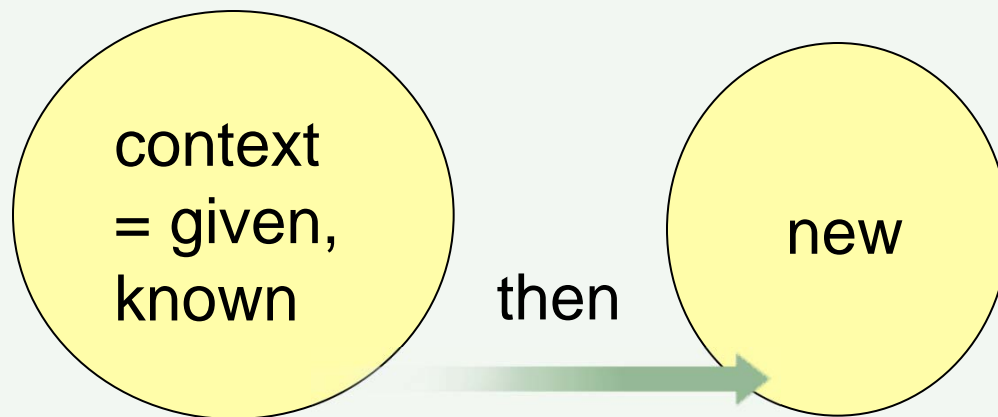
How would you say this information in a conversation?

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?

Say "hello" to LiveValidation:

Say "hello" to LiveValidation: h|

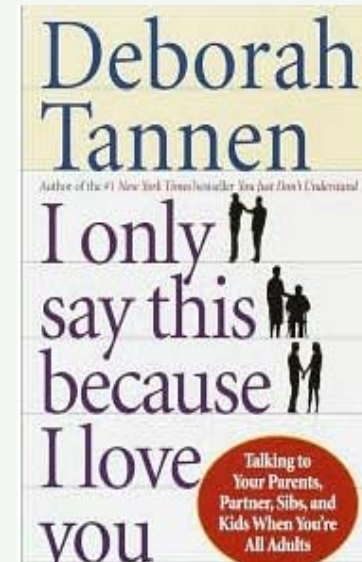
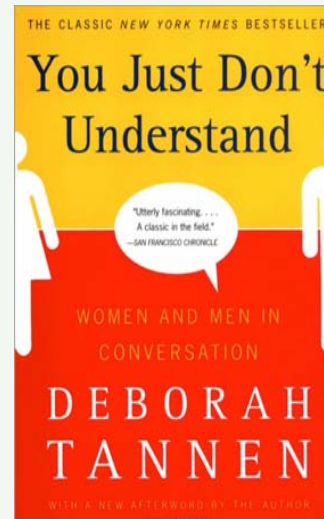
Say "hello" to LiveValidation: h

**How come you've not said 'hello' yet?**

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?

Like 29 people like this.

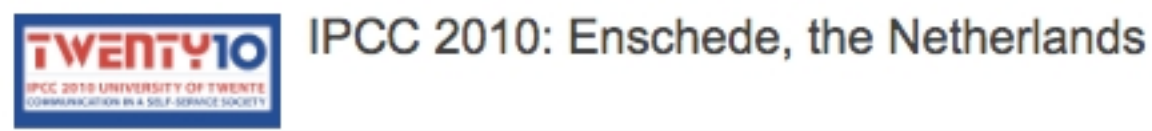


More ways to share this Article...

- Reddit
- Twitter
- myspace
- del.icio.us
- NewsTrust
- Stumble It!



» THIS STORY: [READ +](#) | [WATCH +](#) | [TALK +](#) | Comments





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

# Letting Go of the Words

Writing Web Content that Works

[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.

**Structured text**

**Approximation**  
Solving ODEs Numerically

**Problems**  
Teaching Physics with the Physics Suite  
Edward F. Redish  
*What if the Greenland Ice Sheet Melts?*

**Relevant web tools**

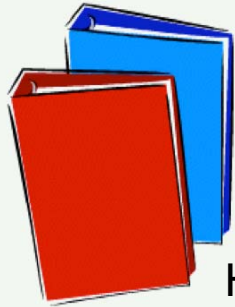
**Data from video**

**Simulations**

**S1: I think it makes sense.**

# 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.

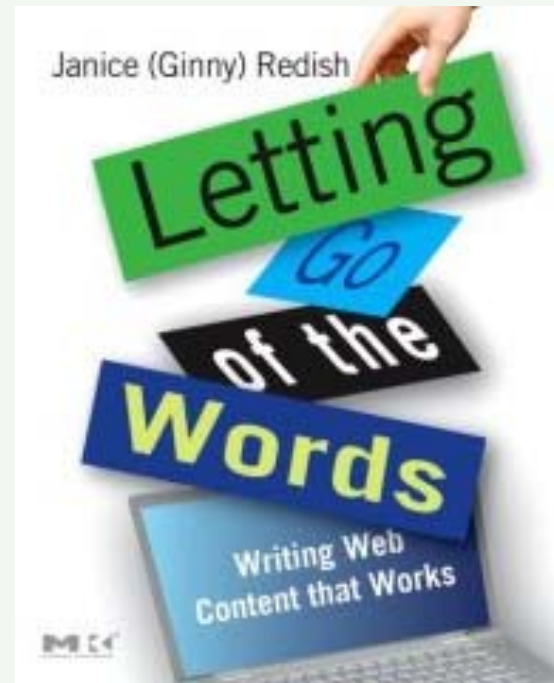


**Think "conversation."  
Write conversations.  
Facilitate conversations.**

Ginny Redish

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+1 301 229 3039



Morgan Kaufmann / Elsevier, 2007