

# UX Writing

## – A New Role for Technical Communicators?

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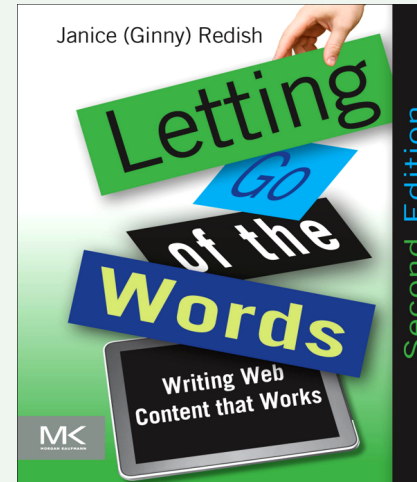
[www.redish.net](http://www.redish.net)



@GinnyRedish



Ginny Redish



Society for Technical Communication  
Washington, DC – Baltimore Chapter  
Virtual workshop  
September 30, 2020


- What is UX writing? Who is a UX writer?
- Is it new? What's new about it?
- How do I do it?
- And time for your questions, comments, and examples

# What is UX writing? Who is a UX writer?







Photo by Wavebreak Media Ltd, from 123RF, licensed to Ginny Redish

# A job title that has become very popular







UX writing


 All  News  Images  Videos


About 83,300,000 results (0.43 seconds)


UX writer

 All  News  Images  Videos

About 32,000,000 results (0.54 seconds)

- 

**User Experience Writer**  
Google  
New York, NY  
via Glassdoor  
8 days ago Full-time
- 

**UX Writer, Spotify for Artists**  
Spotify  
New York, NY  
via Jobsearcher.com  
2 days ago Full-time
- 

**UX Writer**  
Justworks  
New York, NY (+1 other)  
via Greenhouse  
Over 1 month ago Full-time

→ [87 more jobs](#)



# A job title that can mean "write everything"

- Develop content for everything from customer-focused product flows and transactional communications to fully integrated marketing campaigns.
- Write in a clear, conversational style that makes complex financial processes feel clear and approachable.
- Collaborate closely with Design, Product, Marketing, PR, and Customer Success.
- Help apply and maintain consistency within our user experience: Edit, proofread, elevate, and audit all new customer-facing content (press releases, blog posts, transactional emails, phone scripts, etc.).

A company that is looking to hire a "UX writer" explains what they want

# A new name for technical communicator

UX writing is all of the writing that appears along the way of your user or customer's offline and online journey. A letter is UX writing. The script of a service feedback follow up phone call is UX writing. The instruction manual of your lawnmower is UX writing. Even a logo is UX writing, when it comes down to it.

Lizzie Bruce

<https://medium.com/case-study-club/what-is-ux-writing-and-how-is-it-different-from-ux-design-974e8fd982ca>

# But often it means writing the words *in* the product

Lizzie Bruce calls this UI (User Interface) writing

And yes, UI writing can be called UX writing. It falls into the category of UX writing. A quick way to remember it is UI = UX writing, but UX writing  $\neq$  UI writing.

But to many others, UX writing = UI writing

UX writing is the art of crafting the texts that appear throughout the interface of digital products (websites, mobile apps, etc.).

Yuval Keshtcher

<https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/ux-writing-what-does-a-ux-writer-actually-do/>

UX writing is the practice of designing the words people see and hear when they interact with software. It's about designing the conversation between a product and its user.

Lisa Sanchez

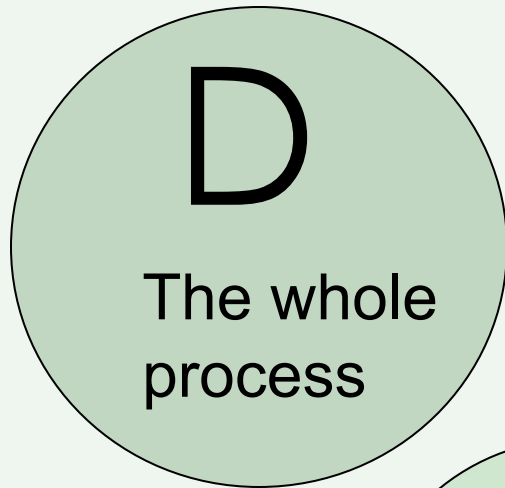
<https://medium.com/@lmsanchez/what-is-ux-writing-1eb71b0f0606>

The UX writer is responsible for all the text the user encounters when navigating their way around a product. Be it a website, a mobile app or a piece of software, copy is crucial in guiding the user and helping them complete their desired actions.

uxplanet.org

<https://uxplanet.org/the-rise-of-the-ux-writer-8beeb836c13f1>

# Many of our words have both broad and narrow meanings



Design Thinking  
User-Centered Design  
Human-Centered Design  
Designing User Experiences  
Iterative Design



information design  
interaction design

Ambiguous phrases  
Document design  
Forms design  
Web design

[https://redish.net/wp-content/uploads/Redish\\_STC\\_Roundtable\\_March\\_2020.pdf](https://redish.net/wp-content/uploads/Redish_STC_Roundtable_March_2020.pdf)

# Big and little apply in other areas, too

## Usability

## Plain Language

## UX Writing

**U**

The whole  
process (UX)

**P L**

The whole  
process

**UX W**

Write  
everything

**u**

specific  
techniques

**p l**

specific  
techniques

**ux w**

write  
in the product

Closest  
to the work

Words in the interface:  
menus, icon names,  
labels in forms, microcopy

Small  
bits

Messages that the system sends

Web content (information, articles)

Context-sensitive help, instructions,  
problem-solving

User guides, manuals (in print or PDF)

Interactive training (in-person or virtual)

Further  
from the work

Large  
pieces

Content Strategy  
Usability Strategy  
(Other) Strategy

Foundation  
Pillars

Design Thinking  
User Centered Design  
UX, CX, Service Design

Adapted from Figure 14.1 in Hackos & Redish, *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design*, 1998



# If your job title is UX Writer, what do **you** write?



Use "chat" to tell us



Photo from iStock.com, licensed to Ginny Redish

# Is it new? What's new about it?



Photo by Marcos Calvo Mesa, from 123RF, licensed to Ginny Redish

# New as a job title

**Table 1. Job titles (Search terms)**

Content Administrator	Social Media Specialist
Content Analyst	Social Media Writer
Content Architect	Technical Editor
Content Coordinator	Technical Writer
Content Designer	UI Designer
Content Developer	UI Developer
Content Editor	UX Analyst
Content Manager	UX Architect
Content Producer	UX Consultant
Content Specialist	UX Designer
Content Strategist	UX Developer
Content Writer	UX Manager
Documentation Consultant	UX Researcher
Documentation Specialist	UX Specialist
Front End Designer	Web Content Administrator
Front End Developer	Web Content Analyst
Grant Writer	Web Content Architect
Information Architect	Web Content Coordinator
Information Designer	Web Content Designer
Information Developer	Web Content Developer
Medical Writer	Web Content Editor
Professional Writer	Web Content Manager
Proposal Writer	Web Content Producer
Publication Specialist	Web Content Specialist
Social Media Consultant	Web Content Strategist
Social Media Coordinator	Web Content Writer
Social Media Developer	Web Writer
Social Media Manager	

## Data from Fall 2013

55 job titles

10 with UI or UX

9 with Writer

No UI Writer or UX Writer

Brumberger, E. and Lauer, C, 2015,  
The Evolution of Technical Communication:  
An Analysis of Industry Job Postings,  
*Technical Communication*, 62 (4),  
November, 224 – 243.

<https://www.stc.org/techcomm/archives/2015>  
(free for STC members)

# Not new if = technical communicator

Information developer

Information designer

Content specialist

Content designer

Do you do traditional  
technical communication  
but have a different job title?



Use "chat" to tell us



# Not new = what we bring to the table

Writing and information design skills –

Content as conversation

Plain language

Research knowledge –

How people read and don't read

How headings help

Research skills –

Interviewing

Observing

People skills –

Collaborating

Communicating

User-centered focus –

Why – purposes

Who – personas

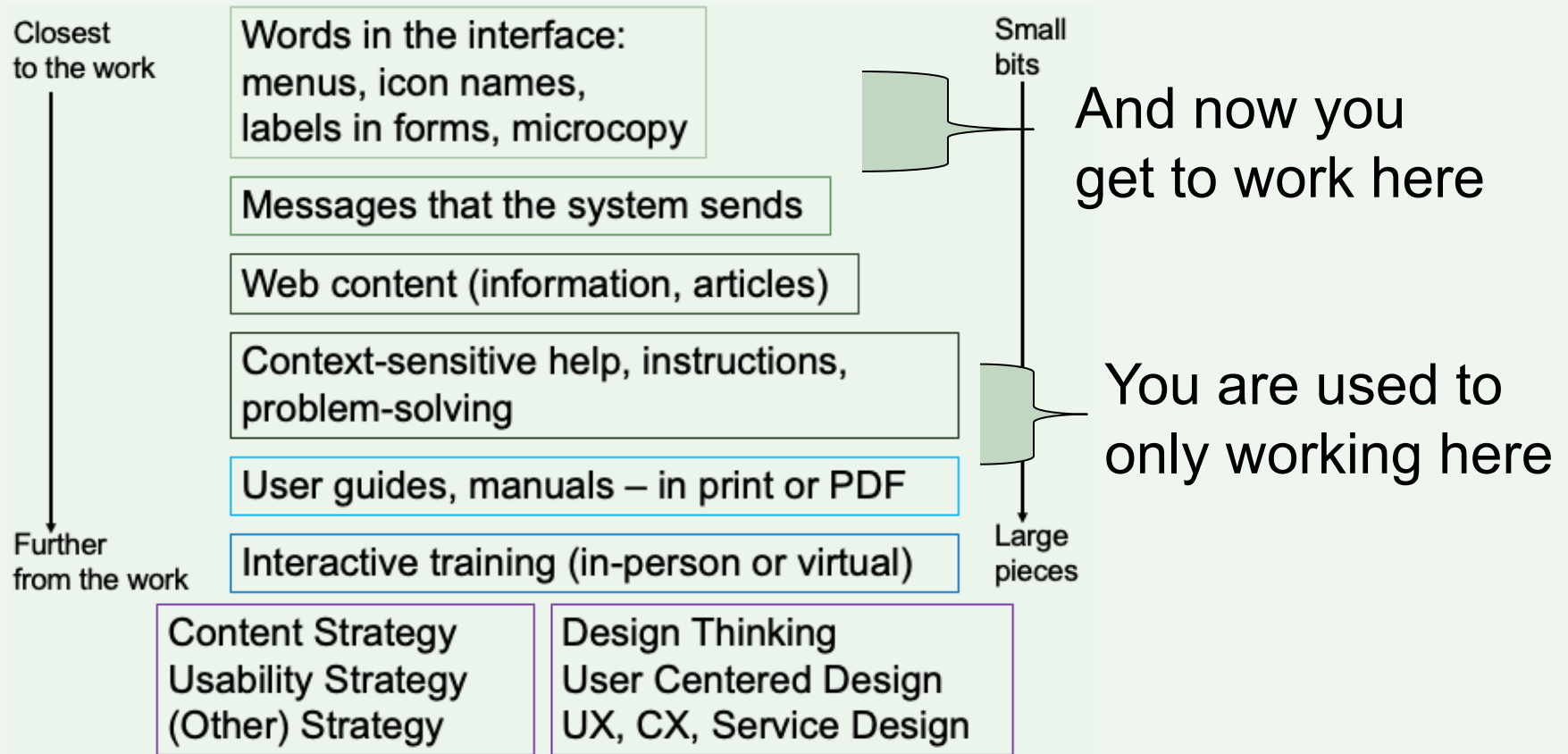
How – contexts

Relevant reading:

Redish, [Technical Communication and Usability: Intertwined Strands and Mutual Influences](#)

Redish and Barnum, [Overlap, Influence, Intertwining: The Interplay of UX and Technical Communication](#)

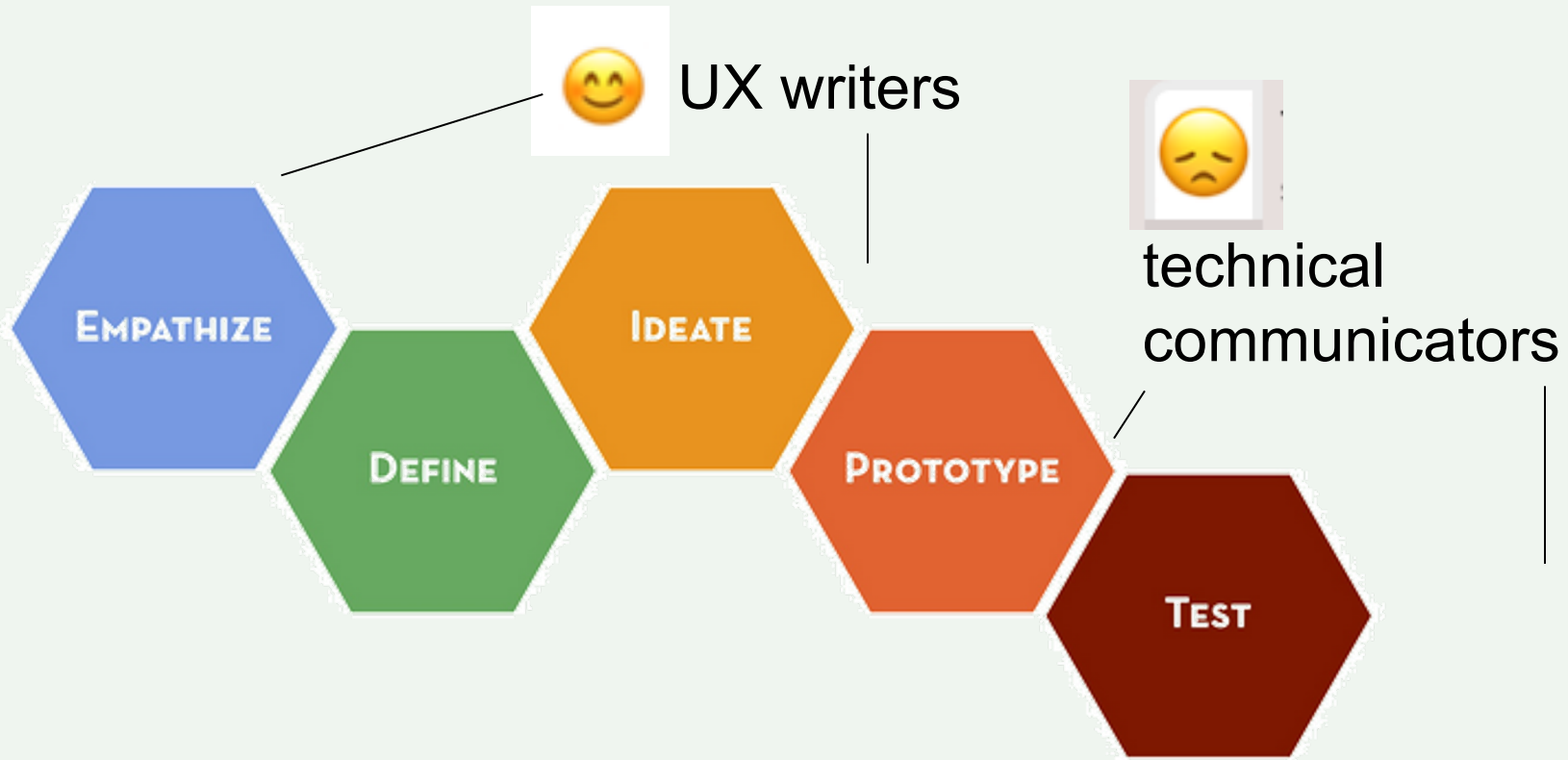
# New if = moving into the product



But not (entirely) new because some of us have done UX (UI) writing for products lots of times over the years.



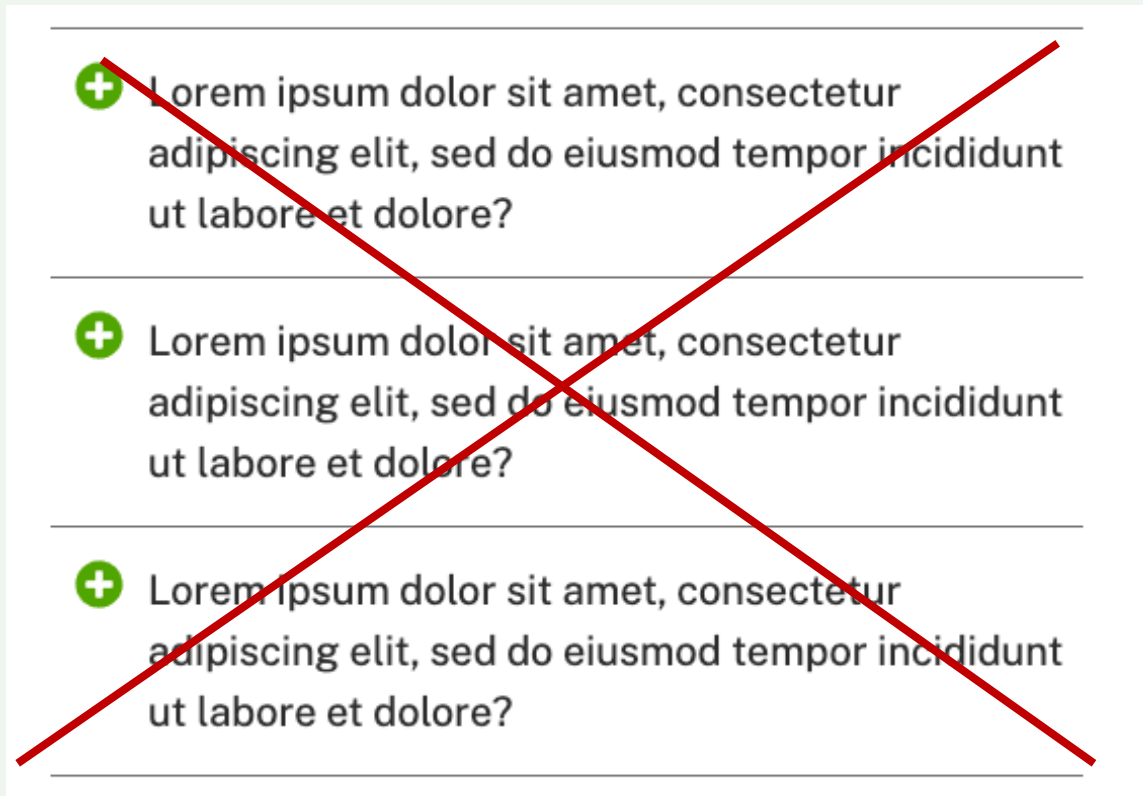
# Changing where we come in



Process for Design Thinking  
Hasso Plattner Institute of Design  
Stanford University  
<https://dschool.stanford.edu>



# Putting in real content from the start



Content = writing = need good writers  
Jobs for UX writers come from companies  
recognizing the importance of content.

# Expanding our role

Model of engagement	Project UX requirements	Scope of UX writing	Roles and responsibilities	Example projects
Own	UX writing and strategy  Existing design components can be used as are	Any	Writer is UX lead  Responsible for writing and strategy and selecting design components  Consults with designer as needed	Content strategy and UI text for alerts framework
Partner	Both UX design and writing	Medium or large	Designer is UX lead  Responsible for design and strategy  Partners with writer, who's responsible for content strategy and strings	New product or feature launch  Complicated error state
Consult	Both UX design and writing	Small  <i>If scope increases, switch to partner</i>	Designer is UX lead  Responsible for design and strategy and selecting writing patterns  Consults with writer as needed	Simple UI title  Simple error string

Writer as lead

Bronwyn Berkery

UX writer at Amazon

<https://uxdesign.cc/how-to-work-with-ux-writers-c5025225feb5>

# If you are not yet a UX writer, how would you feel about these changes?



Use "chat" to tell us



Photo from iStock.com, licensed to Ginny Redish

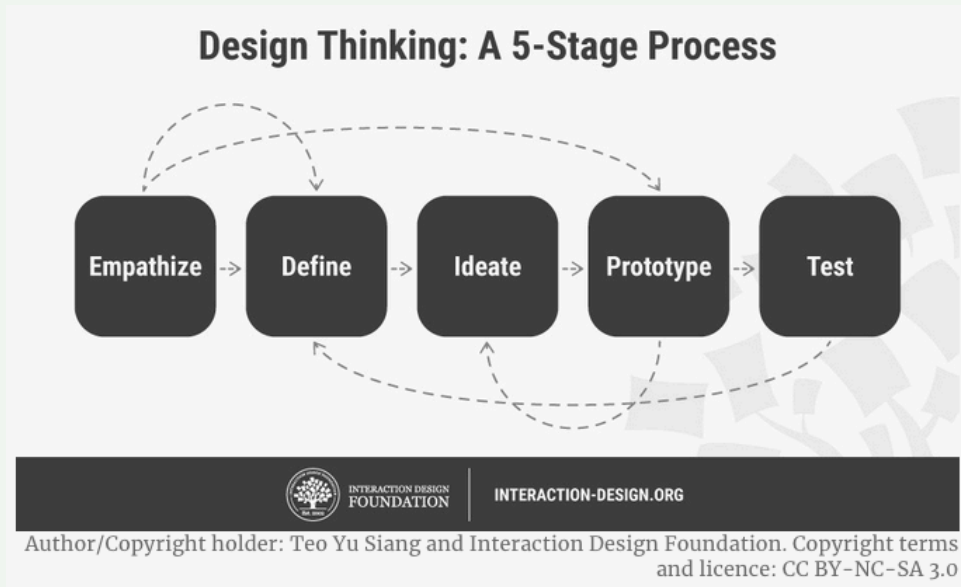
# How do I do it?



Photo by Vadim Gushua, from 123RF, licensed to Ginny Redish

# Understand the organization's processes

## design thinking



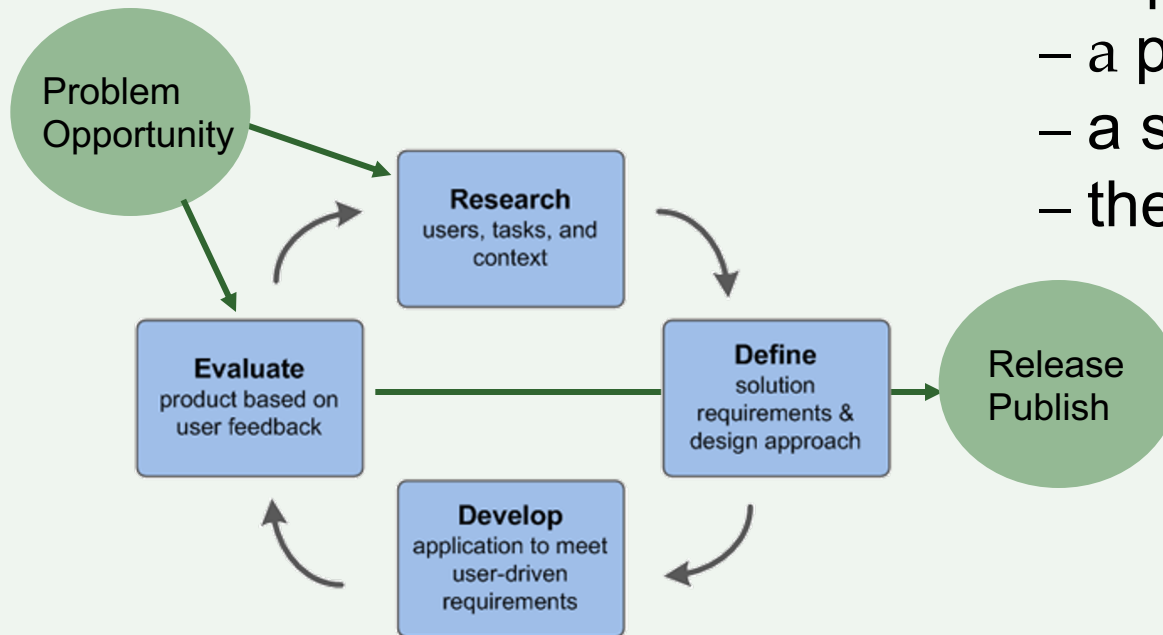
design thinking = both process and philosophy

Tham, Howard, and Verhulsdonck, (in preparation)

Extending design thinking, content strategy, and artificial intelligence into technical communication and user experience design programs:

Further implications

# user-centered design



usability (UCD) =

- a process
- a philosophy
- a set of techniques
- the result

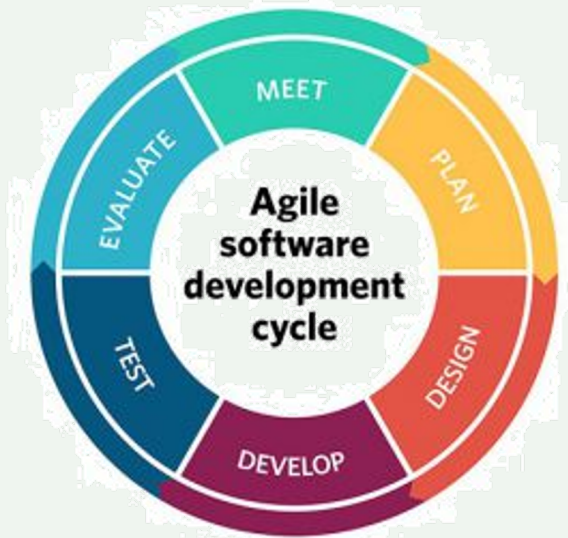
Whitney Quesenbery  
STC conference, 2001

<http://wqusability.com/articles/more-than-ease-of-use.html>

<https://software.intel.com/content/www/us/en/develop/articles/enabling-great-user-experiences-with-user-centered-design.html>

(I added the green parts.)





<https://project-management.com/10-key-principles-of-agile-software-development>



Modular writing  
Content components  
**XML**      **DITA**

## Writing Effective UX Copy for Localisation: Part 1

Four things to consider when writing UX content for localisation



Monty Majeed

Follow

Sep 18, 2019 · 7 min read ★



<https://medium.com/swlh/writing-ux-copy-for-localisation-1-80f480f5afa4>



# Understand the style, voice, and tone

This website stores data such as cookies to enable important site functionality including analytics, targeting, and personalization. By remaining on this web site you indicate your consent.

<https://www.zuko.io> – analyzing how people use your forms

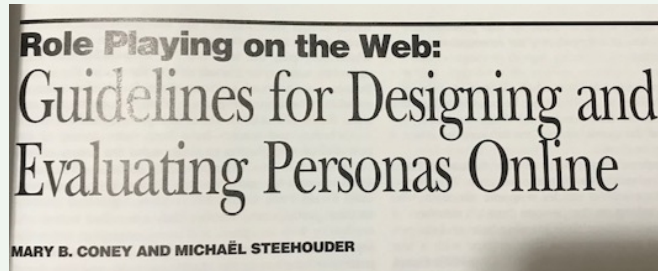
We use [cookies to collect information](#) about how you use GOV.UK. We use this information to make the website work as well as possible and improve government services.

<https://www.gov.uk>

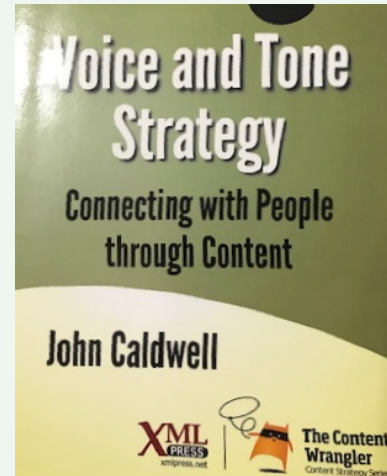
We'll use cookies to improve and customize your experience if you continue to browse. Is it OK if we also use cookies to show you personalized ads?  
[Learn more and manage your cookies](#)

<https://www.paypal.com>

# Perhaps help to set style, voice, tone



Websites have personas, which they show in their style, voice, tone and design.



*Technical Communication*, 47 (3),  
August 2000, 327 – 340.

## Welcome to the Mailchimp Content Style Guide

This style guide was created for Mailchimp employees, but we hope it's helpful for other content and communications teams too.

<https://styleguide.mailchimp.com>



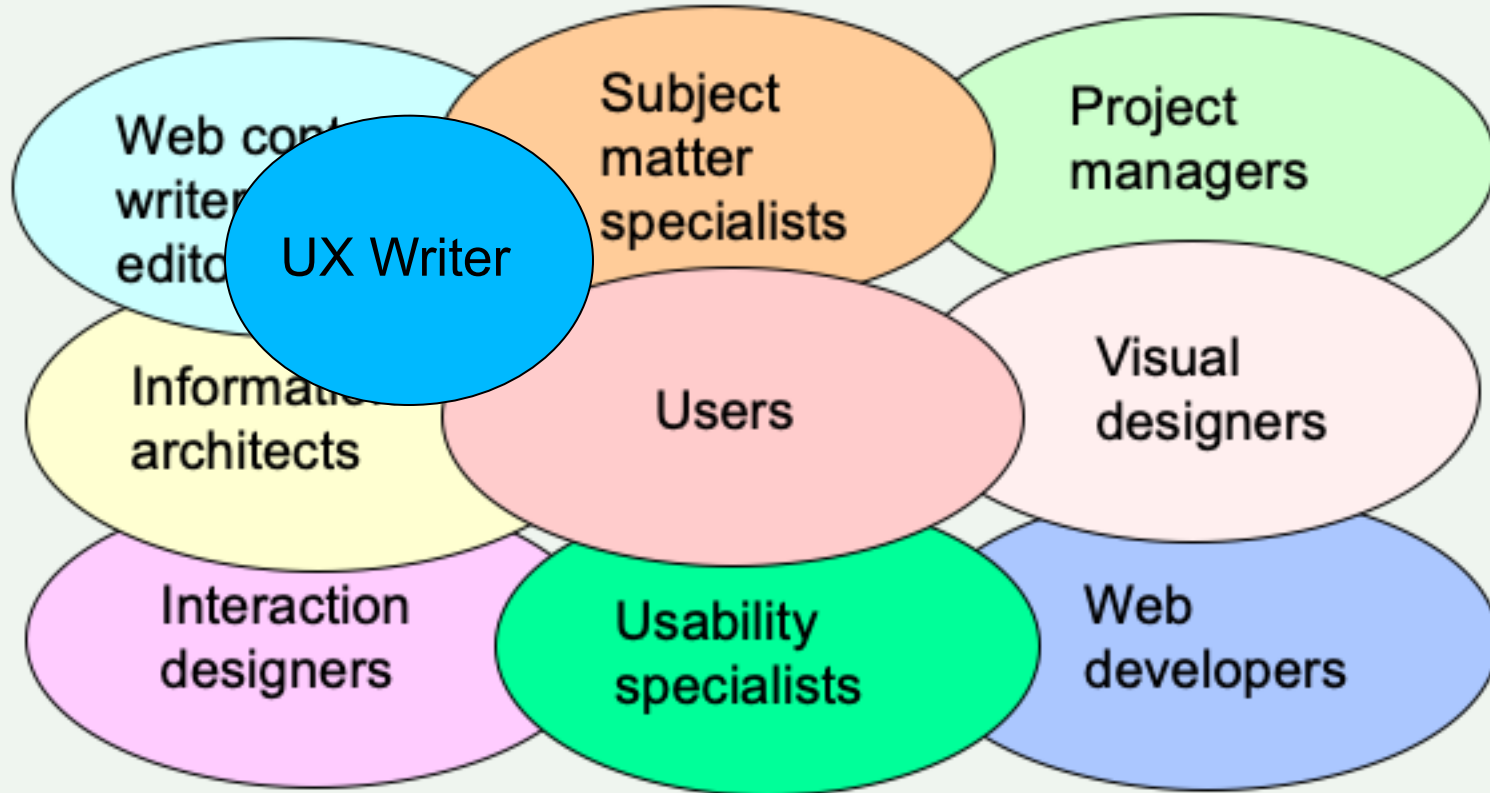
An official website of the United States government

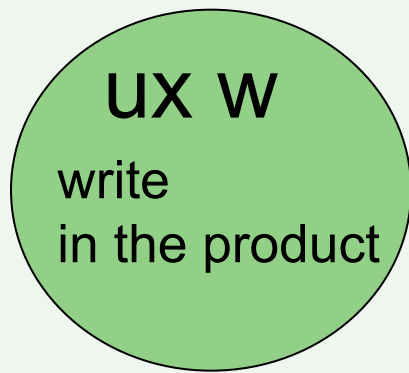


plainlanguage.gov

and the comparable site  
for your country and your language

# See how your skills fit with others'





# What will you write?

Some common instances of UX writing include:

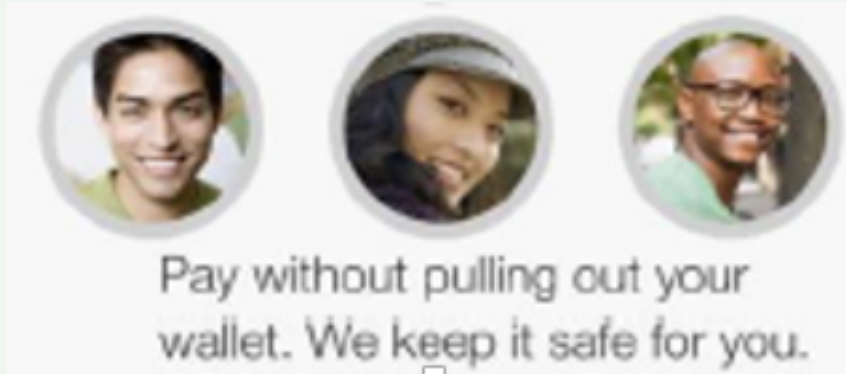
- Call to action buttons
- Navigation menu labels
- Tooltips
- Success and error messages
- Form labels
- Headings
- Fine print
- Instructional copy
- Pop-ups

Rich Staats

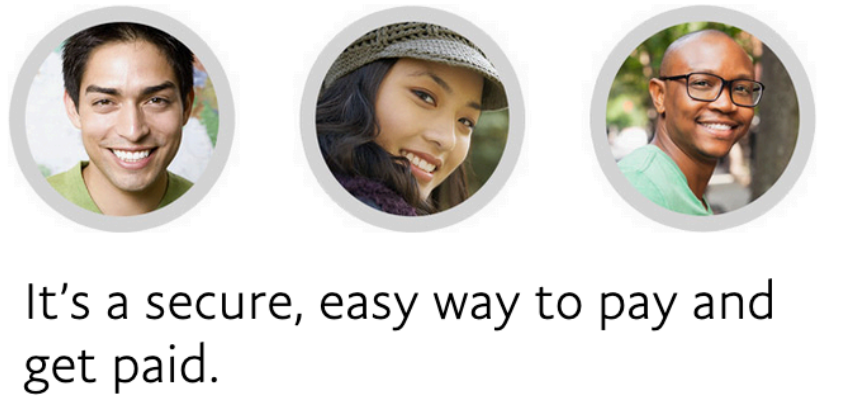
<https://www.secretstache.com/blog/ux-writing>

# Be careful with metaphors

## Think about what's special for your product




PayPal's home page message at one time



PayPal's home page message later

# Write the conversation

## Tell people how much time it will take



✕

**After you are done, help us improve USA.gov!**


Choose "Yes, I'll help" to open a new survey window. When you are ready, go there to give us your feedback.

The survey should take less than four minutes.

Thank you!

**Yes, I'll help**

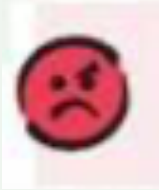
**No Thanks**



[Form Approved OMB#3090-0297 Exp. Date 08/31/2022](#)

But I wish the text was flush left, not centered

# Make messages help people



ERROR

Invalid action  
Error 723

Messages in the 1980s and 1990s were often frustrating and not helpful.

(Better) Can't upload file:

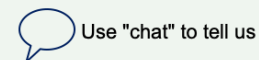


~~Error uploading file: Images must be less than 200 KB.~~

[Go Back](#)

A modern message – short, clear, helpful  
(if you know what 200 KB means)

What would be even  
better than having  
to show this message?



A recent article with good examples: <https://uxplanet.org/how-to-write-good-error-messages-858e4551cd4>



# Think through all the users and scenarios

\*Are you a member of:

- ☐ Clarity International
- ☐ Center for Plain Language
- ☐ PLAIN
- ☐ None of these

\*Are you interested in becoming a member of:

- ☐ Clarity International
- ☐ Center for Plain Language
- ☐ PLAIN
- ☐ Not at this time



Use "chat" to tell us



\*Are you a member of:

- ☒ Clarity International
- ☒ Center for Plain Language
- ☒ PLAIN
- ☐ None of these

\*Are you interested in becoming a member of:

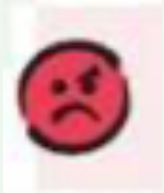
- ☐ Clarity International
- ☐ Center for Plain Language
- ☐ PLAIN
- ☐ Not at this time

This field is required

Who can't answer  
the second question?



# Make forms easy to fill out



Total: **\$1,499.99**

**Continue Shopping**

### Billing Information

### Shipping Information

\*Free Shipping is not available for items being shipped to Alaska or Hawaii

☒ Same Address as Billing Address

<https://www.soletreadmills.com/Checkout>

in Firefox on a Mac

Thanks to Susan Farrell for finding this page.

# Help people with good microcopy



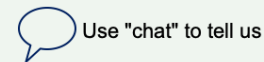
Password

 Show

- One lowercase character
- One uppercase character
- One number
- One special character
- 8 characters minimum

<https://login.mailchimp.com/signup>

Could you rearrange  
and rewrite this list  
to be even clearer?



# An interesting way to do microcopy

Sign up for PayPal

An easy way to pay and get paid



Your email

Mobile number

Legal first name

Legal last name

Create your password

Confirm your password

☐

Stay logged in for faster checkout

We'll reach out to you by email, per our [Privacy St](#)

**Your email**

You can use this email to receive money.

**Mobile number**

+1 |

We'll text you a security code to confirm this number.

**Your email**

ginny@redish.net



It looks like you already signed up. [Log in](#) to your account.

# But then the form didn't give me the same level of help at a crucial field



Create your password

|

Click on the field;  
no microcopy

Create your password

We need a password to create an account for you.

Leave page; come back;  
now there's a message;  
but no help for creating  
the password

Create your password

.....

8 characters or longer.

At least 1 number or symbol (like !@#%^).

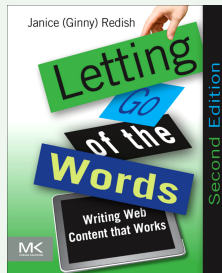
Information shows up  
only after I start to type  
a password

Create your password

.....



Only the  tells me  
I have a problem. No help  
in solving the problem.



Test!  
Test!  
Test!

15

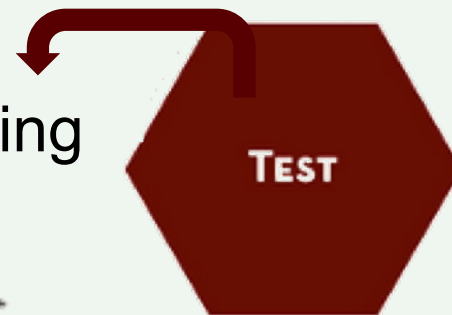
# Test! Test! Test!

## We are not our users!



A usability test session  
Photo courtesy Alexander & Tom  
[www.alextom.com](http://www.alextom.com)

design thinking  
process



user-centered  
design process



Agile  
process

# Thank you!

## Your turn:

Question?

Comment?

Favorite example – good or poor?



Use "chat" to tell us



Slides at [www.redish.net](http://www.redish.net)

Write to me:

[ginny@redish.net](mailto:ginny@redish.net) or  
[ginny.redish@gmail.com](mailto:ginny.redish@gmail.com)

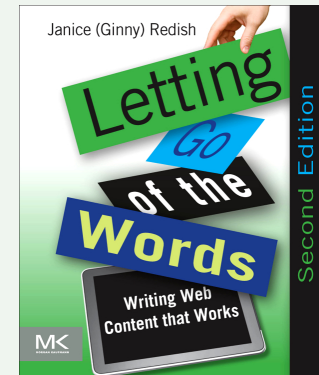
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[2<sup>nd</sup> edition](#)  
[Elsevier, 2012](#)