How important are words?
Definitions overlap

**Usability**
The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with **efficiency**, and satisfaction in a specified context of use.

ISO 9241-11

**Document Design**
The field concerned with creating texts (broadly defined) that integrate words and pictures in ways that help people to **achieve** their **specific goals** for using texts at home, school or work.

Karen Schriver, Dynamics in Document Design

Disciplines converging
1. The role of language

How are words used as part of the user interface?
Is this...

User interface?  
Instructions?  
Help?  
Training?

Even simple pages have many words

**Sign up for TypePad**

Follow the steps below to register for TypePad.

**Select your user name and password**

Your user name is the name that you will use to log in to TypePad.

- **Member Name:**
  - Your member name cannot be longer than 35 characters and should not contain any spaces.
  - Your password should be between 6 and 15 characters and should not contain spaces.

- **Password:**
- **Password (again):**

**Password Recovery:**

- What is your mother’s maiden name?

In the event that you lose or forget your password, the system will ask you a recovered password. In an attempt to make the password recovery easy, you will be asked for the answer to the question you specify here.
Words affect usability

Does this mean:
“Take this medication three times a day, with food”
or
“When and why to take this medication”

Many forms are filled with conversation

Introductions
Instructions
Warnings
Questions
Conversation

In the three-layer model of forms...

...conversation is the jam in the middle of the sandwich

Caroline Jarrett: Forms That Work

2. Context of use

“Know thy users (for you are not them)”
### Identifying the participants

**Eligibility questions**
1. Are the applicant, spouse or any of their dependents, regardless if applying for coverage, currently pregnant or in an expectant period? **Yes** / **No**
2. Has the applicant, a co-applicant or any dependent been treated for tuberculosis in the past 2 years? **Yes** / **No**
3. Has the applicant, a co-applicant or any dependent been treated for tuberculosis in the past 2 years? **Yes** / **No**
4. Has the applicant, a co-applicant or any dependent been treated for tuberculosis in the past 2 years? **Yes** / **No**

**Health questions**
1. Are the applicant, spouse or any of their dependents, regardless if applying for coverage, currently pregnant or in an expectant period? **Yes** / **No**
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**What are you asking me??!!**
Jerilynn

- Worked in her office for 20 years
- Age: mid-50s
- Some post-high school education
- Family life very important

Likes
- Helping people
- Knowing how to get things done in the bureaucracy
- A job that doesn’t compete too much with her life

Dislikes
- New computer systems
- Constant change and pressure

Toni

- Age: late-20s
- Married, with husband and two-year old
- Works full time in a local shop

Daily life
- Work and household chores
- Time for family
- Handles family finances and medical appointments, and plans vacations

Frustrations
- Never enough time to get everything done
- Living up to expectations
Dimensions of usability

- Effective
  Users can accomplish their goals...
- Efficient
  ...in a reasonable time...
- Engaging
  ...in a pleasant and satisfying way
- Error Tolerant
  ...in a product that helps them prevent mistakes...
- Easy to Learn
  ...and that is easy to learn to use.

What Does Usability Mean: Looking Beyond ‘Ease of Use’
Whitney Quesenbery, Proceedings of the STC, 2001

Jerilynn & Toni have different requirements
Design based on context of use

Understanding of users and their scenarios for meeting their goals... leads to design that helps them succeed.

ISO 13407

Plan for UCD
Include usability in the project plan

Specify context of use
Who will use the program and under what conditions?

Evaluate designs
Test the design with users, to ensure that it meets business and usability goals

Specify requirements
What are the business and user goals for this program?

Program meets usability and business goals

Produce design solutions
Prototype the design, building from initial concept to complete design specifications

Success!

3. Rules to live by
(And why this is part of a writer’s job)
Usability heuristics*

1. Matches user tasks and mental model
2. Speaks in user’s language
3. Appropriate, minimal visual design
4. Visibility
5. Consistency
6. Support for standards
7. Supports user actions
8. Prevents errors
9. Provides shortcuts
10. Supports learning

* Heuristics
Principles or rules of thumb

Jakob Nielsen (and many others)
Be informative

- Don’t make users guess at what the application will do, and how it will do it
  
  What can I do here? Will this let me accomplish my task?

- Use words that are meaningful to the audience (they may be technical, but only when appropriate)
**Be helpful**

- Provide instructions throughout the process, not just at the beginning
- Answer questions before they even ask

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- **User Name:**
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- **Password (cap/s):**
- **Password Recovery:**

_How many steps? Can I use my usual password? Why do you want to know my mother’s maiden name?_

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**Be helpful**

- Use the web’s “information nature” to make questions easier to answer.

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**Customize Group**

- **Message approval:** Yes
- **Reply to:** Group
- **Group type:** Mail

_They won’t read it anyway, will they?_
Be consistent

Same word = same meaning
Different word = different meaning

Be tolerant

- Don’t make the user do work the computer can do
  - Accept any valid format for codes, card numbers, dates and other data fields

Why can't I enter the rest of my credit card number?
Test the product to design the documentation

- What instruction will help users get started
- What terminology or options need more explanation?
- What tips, hints or reminders will help prevent errors or avoid confusion?

- Where should the help go…
  - Prompt
  - On-screen tips
  - Popup help window
  - Documentation

- And…how can the UI be improved to eliminate the need for some help….
Why is this part of a tech writer’s job?

**Why not?**

- Documentation as the first “usability test”
- Improve the “learnability” of the product
- Start something new

(You might not even need a passport)

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Whitney Quesenbery is a user interface designer and usability specialist with a passion for clear communication. She is an expert in developing new concepts for product designs and has produced award winning multimedia products, web sites, and web & software applications.

Whitney is the President of the Usability Professionals’ Association (UPA) and past-Manager for the STC Usability SIG, where she runs its popular web site. Before she was seduced by a little beige computer into the world of usability, Whitney was a theatrical lighting designer on and off Broadway. The lessons and stories from the theatre stay with her in creating user experiences.