[REVIEW OF] LETTING GO OF THE WORDS: WRITING WEB CONTENT THAT WORKS. Redish, Janice (Ginny). Amsterdam: Morgan Kaufmann, 2007. ISB 987-0-12-369486-7.

Janice (Ginny) Redish is an independent website-usability consultant, and her experience shines in this book. She has written a number of articles on information design, particularly relating to low-vision users, and has also co-authored two books related to website usability, User and Task Analysis for Interface Design (1998), and A Practical Guide to Usability Testing (1999). Her latest book, Letting Go of the Words, takes a more specific focus on writing for websites, and encompasses everything from composing link titles to translating long print documents to a web-friendly format.

Redish writes in a conversational style, employing the very concepts that this book advocates. She organizes her points into the bulleted lists and provides colorful, relevant screenshots. This not only makes the book pleasant and simple to read, but prepares you to think and write in a similar style. As Redish explains in the introduction, this book can be read in any order that is useful to the reader, including the traditional linear method (which I employed). Its organization into concretely-themed chapters makes it a handy book for your library or your personal reference shelf. I will certainly refer back to various chapters the next time I'm writing for a website.

The book's key message is that people are busy, and they come to websites looking for specific information. Your job, Redish explains, is to provide that information to them as clearly and simply as possible, and to make it easy to find. Redish shows that you can more effectively center your content around user needs by creating personas, sample users with pictures and backstories. She stresses breaking information into "usable chunks" and using action verbs for headings and links. One of the most useful features of the book is the use of visual examples. In each chapter, Redish presents screenshots of websites that are difficult to read or use, and then shows how those websites have been (or perhaps should be) edited.

Letting Go of the Words is different from any other book I've seen on web content. There are a number of books about writing for interactive content like games, which focus on narratives. Then there are those like Web Production for Writers and Journalists (Whittaker, 2002) that contain a short section about writing, but primarily focus on website design. Then there are web usability guides such as Don't Make Me Think (2000) by Steve Krug, who also wrote the introduction to this book. Krug's book uses the same colorful screenshots as Redish, but his book focuses on the overall usability of the site. He mentions concepts such as organizing information into small, useable bits, but his purpose is not to focus on the writing. As Krug himself states in the introduction, Redish's book explains "how writing for the web is *really* different, and why, and exactly what to do about it."

Letting Go of the Words isn't a HTML manual, or a grammar handbook, or a web usability guide, but it borrows concepts from each and blends them into a unique, indispensable tool. This is a valuable resource for those writing or organizing web content, but the concepts can just as easily apply to technical writers or those documenting projects. It is particularly relevant to web-savvy librarians, since it focuses on making information accessible to the public. And really, isn't that what being a librarian is all about?

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