ENGL 380 RECIPE EXERCISE:
cookies, SMEs, and the curse of knowledge

The scenario: You’ve been hired as a publishing intern, and your first assignment is to help edit a cookbook. Many of the recipes that have been submitted to the cookbook editors—including the recipe on the card below—need to be edited and in some cases substantially rewritten before they can be sent out to be tested by volunteers.

The volunteer testers are home cooks with varying degrees of baking and cooking experience (ranging from novice to expert), so an important part of your revising task will be to ensure that the instructions are complete and clear enough that all of the testers can easily follow them.

Your task is to:

1. **Identify missing information or problems for the recipe card below.**

   Read through the entire recipe, making note of any questions you might have that the recipe doesn’t answer. Try to imagine questions that a novice cook might have. Jot down observations and ideas for improving organization and clarity. Are there places where terminology or lack of information could cause problems or confusion?

2. **Revise the recipe to make it clearer and easier to follow.**

   Create a new document. Rewrite the recipe to remedy the problems you’ve identified. Use the principles discussed in the assigned reading for Monday to guide your revision (Ch. 10: Instructions, Procedures …).

   As you revise: consult someone who has more or less baking expertise than you do. Use cookbooks or the as additional resources.

3. **Describe what you did.**

   Include a paragraph at the bottom of the page labeled “reflection.” Briefly describe research/revision process: What did you end up changing? What resources did you consult (human or otherwise), and how did they affect your revision?

Learning objectives

- understand the technical writer’s role in uncovering *tacit knowledge* and the importance of working with SMEs
- practice identifying missing information and translating *specialized terminology*
- become familiar with the guidelines for technical writing discussed in the reading, particularly “Organization” and “Details and Language” (#1-8)
Due: Complete this exercise and bring a printed copy for our next class meeting. This exercise isn’t graded, but I’ll collect your printed draft at the end of class and you’ll get homework points for completing it.

Pumpkin Cookies (drop)

1 c. shortening       1 c. sugar
1 egg                 1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp vanilla         1 cup pumpkin
2 cups flour          1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt           1 tsp. cinnamon

Cream sugar/shortening; mix as usual. Bake at 350, 10 min or so
Makes 4 doz. Icing: 3 T butter, 4 T milk, ½ c br. sugar, 1 t vanilla,
1 cup p. sugar