

Pamela P. Cote

Task Oriented Communication

January 30, 2003

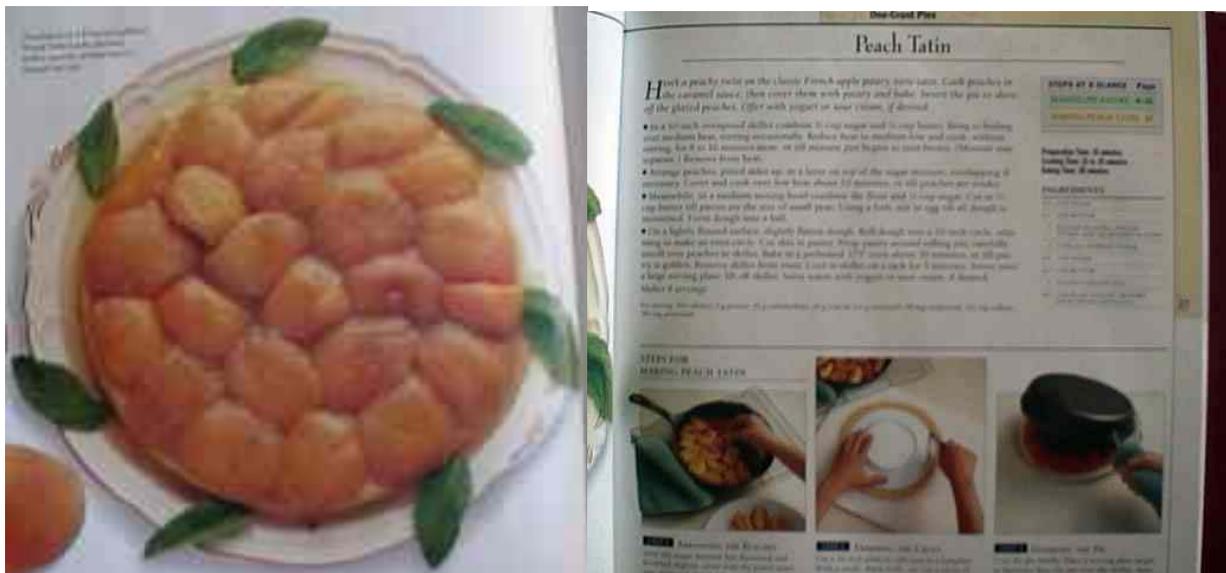
The Peach Tatin

Example of good task oriented communications

Overview

This is a recipe for a peach dessert in a cookbook called "Cooking at a Glance, Pies & Pastries". It is published by Fog City Press with ISBN: 1-892374-49-8.

It is an unusual dessert, really, an upside down pie. It is started in a skillet with some top of stove cooking and then put into the oven. It is turned out or flipped onto a plate for presentation.



Analysis

Principals of Minimalism

1. Action-oriented approach

The recipe is action oriented with a main section that directs a step-by-step process while describing the tools and activity.

2. Anchor in the task domain

This is assumed to be a recipe since it is found in a recipe book. You would use this book if you plan to cook or bake, and you expect to see what it delivers.

3. Support error recognition and recovery

There are some cautions, and pictures to show you what various steps should look like and you can compare them to what you have done.

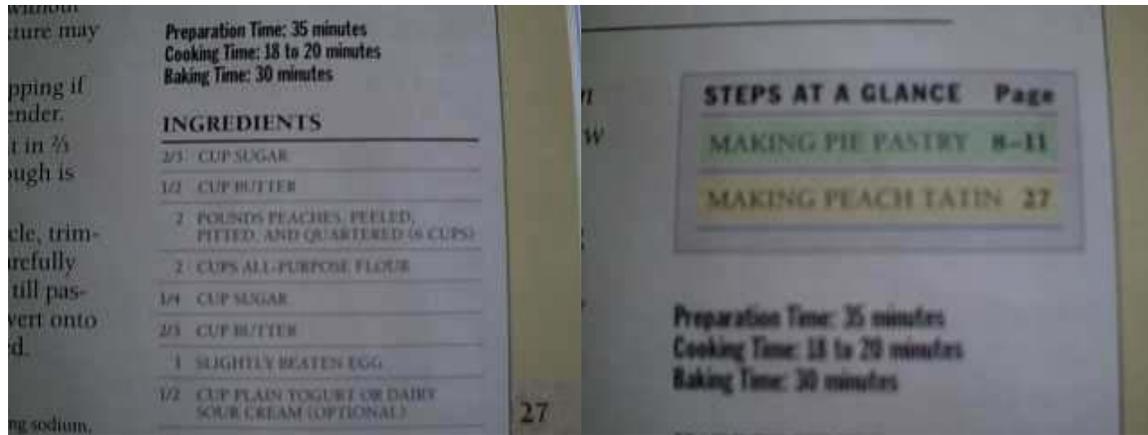
4. Minimal reading for doing, study, and locating

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There is a concise list of ingredients, a declaration of time needed for each step, pointers for more information, and pictures for description.



Principals of Task Orientation

1. The performer

According to the book's introduction, the performer is expected to be a baker who wants to produce this desert, whether professional or beginner. In my opinion, all the helpful hints and pictures are very suited for the beginner to intermediate. The method of organization, makes it easy for the experienced baker to find exactly what is needed to proceed quickly.

2. The starting point

This recipe begins at the beginning, and that is not always true of recipes. Sometimes they have sections at the end that tell you how to make the glaze, the crust, the sauce, etc. that are called for in the basic recipe. In those cases, you need to do those steps first, or read the recipe thoroughly before starting, and make your own timetable and project plan to be sure all the needed ingredients are at hand when required.

3. The action

The action is straight-forward and procedural. There are bullet points for major sections. There are pictures with related information. For instance, you don't have to re-read the procedural part about placing the peaches in the skillet. You can look at the picture to see what this step should be accomplished. It even describes alternatives such as laying the peaches on their sides if it isn't possible to lay them pitted side up. Maybe the shape of the peach and the softness after pitting and quartering will determine whether the pieces will lie correctly.

It presumes that you have read the ingredients list to know that the peaches are pitted and quartered, and the egg is slightly beaten.

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You would be able to complete the recipe with only the ingredients list and the instructions, which is the normal method of following a recipe. You would not be able to complete it with only the ingredients and the pictures or only the instructions and the pictures.

4. The ending point

The ending point is illustrated with a full page picture and accompanying suggestions “Presented on a Provencal platter...”, and also described in the instructions, “Serve warm...”.

The RPI Library pin example of bad task oriented communications

Overview

In one of my RPI classes, I am required to use the library databases for source material. I’ve found that many databases, including the suggested ones are restricted to people who have a Library Pin.

Since I am a distance student, I sent this email to my PDE contact:

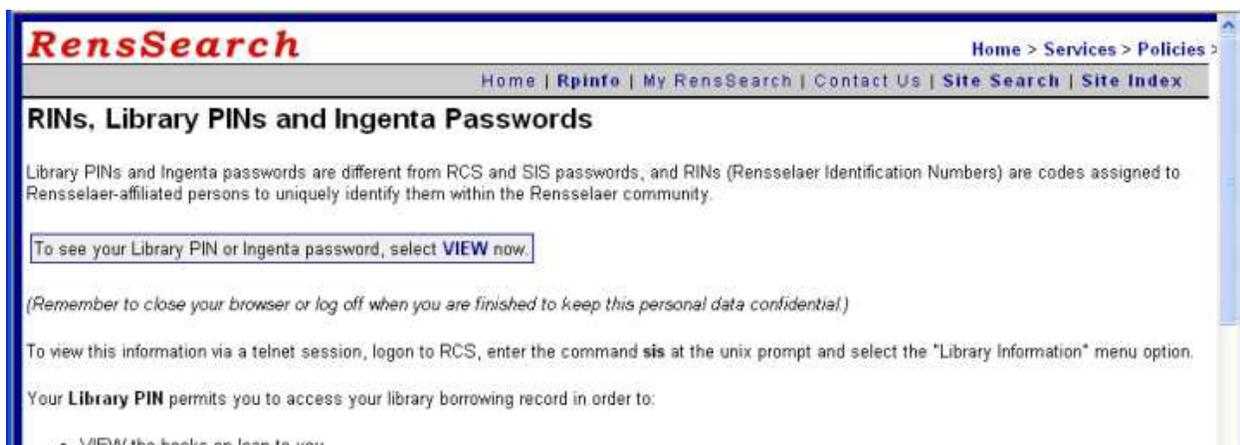
*I can't seem to find any information about my library pin. My search online says every registered student is assigned one. I need to be able to access the library for my HCI studio class and need help in obtaining or reissuing.
Who do I contact?*

This is the response:

Pam

Please use this web site to access your library pin. <http://www.lib.rpi.edu/services/policies/pins.html>

When I went to the link, I found this information:



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the RensSearch website. The page title is "RINs, Library PINs and Ingenta Passwords". The header includes the RensSearch logo and navigation links: Home > Services > Policies >, Home | Rpinfo | My RensSearch | Contact Us | Site Search | Site Index. The main content area explains that Library PINs and Ingenta passwords are different from RCS and SIS passwords, and RINs (Rensselaer Identification Numbers) are codes assigned to Rensselaer-affiliated persons to uniquely identify them within the Rensselaer community. A button labeled "VIEW now" is visible. A note in parentheses says "(Remember to close your browser or log off when you are finished to keep this personal data confidential.)". Below that, it says "To view this information via a telnet session, logon to RCS, enter the command `sis` at the unix prompt and select the "Library Information" menu option." The page concludes with "Your **Library PIN** permits you to access your library borrowing record in order to:" followed by a bullet point: "• VIEW the books on loan to you".

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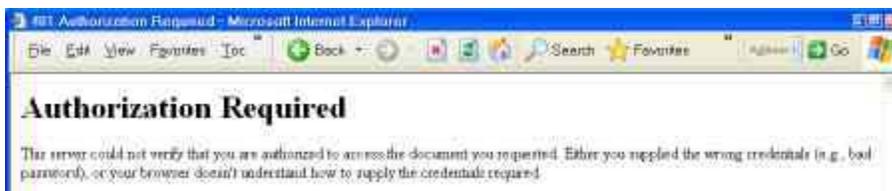
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It told me, “To see your Library PIN or Ingenta password, select **VIEW** now.” Since there isn’t a View on the navigation, I clicked on the word VIEW, which took me to the password screen after warning me that I will be displaying confidential information if I continue. This was definitely what I wanted.



This seemed like a very straight-forward task with simple instructions, and appeared to be a “piece of cake” to solve this problem. However, I quickly learned that I had embarked on a rather circuitous route to try to find out how to access, acquire, or change a library pin online, or find a contact related to such a transaction. I tried all my known RPI logins and passwords, but none worked as evidenced by this “Authorization Required” message.



I went back to the original screen, and decided that of all the options, maybe “My RensSearch” would help me find what I need.

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After reading the information on the page, it looked like I might be able to use the library resources using a login and password that I could create immediately.



My RensSearch

Home | Rinfo | My RensSearch | Contact Us | Site Search | Site Index

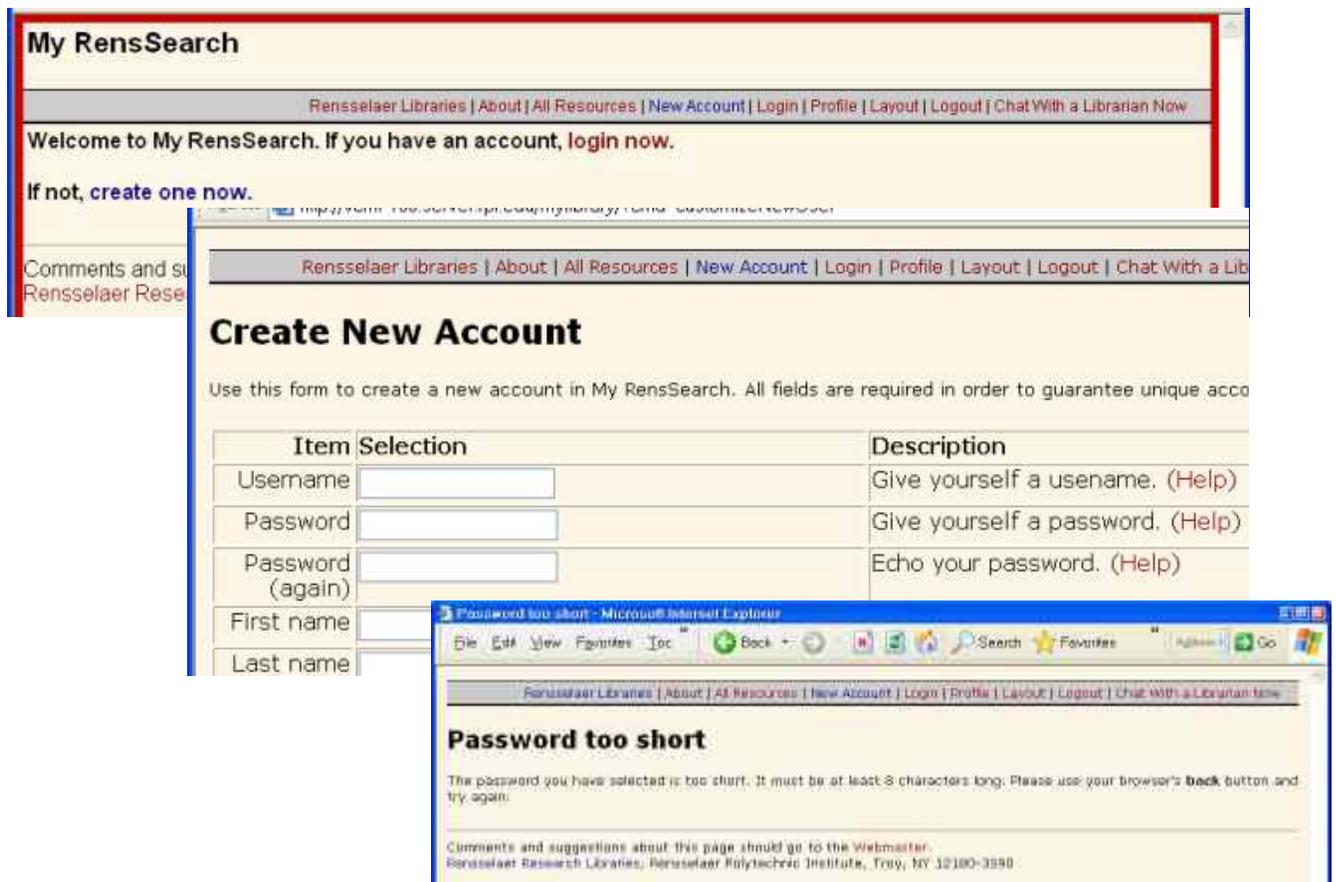
Rensselaer Research Libraries are now beta testing a new user-driven, customizable information service. By telling us a bit about yourself, My RensSearch will allow you to create a portable web page listing information resources available from the Libraries. After you've read the information below, [login here](#) and begin receiving a new level of online library service.

What is My RensSearch?

My RensSearch is a dynamic Web page allowing you to define what is displayed. It is:

Content rich - The database supporting My RensSearch contains links to information-rich content. It represents the sort of content necessary to do real research in an academic environment. Types of information include full-text databases, data sets,

When I used my normal online password, I got an error message. They do offer password help if you click on (Help), but who needs help in creating a password? They should have put the caution, that the minimum is 8 characters, in plain sight. Suffice it to say that I eventually created a record with an acceptable password.



My RensSearch

Rensselaer Libraries | About | All Resources | New Account | Login | Profile | Layout | Logout | Chat With a Librarian Now

Welcome to My RensSearch. If you have an account, [login now](#).

If not, [create one now](#).

Comments and suggestions about this page should go to the Webmaster.
Rensselaer Research Libraries, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY 12180-3550

Create New Account

Use this form to create a new account in My RensSearch. All fields are required in order to guarantee unique accounts.

Item Selection	Description
Username <input type="text"/>	Give yourself a username. (Help)
Password <input type="text"/>	Give yourself a password. (Help)
Password (again) <input type="text"/>	Echo your password. (Help)
First name <input type="text"/>	
Last name <input type="text"/>	

Password too short

The password you have selected is too short. It must be at least 8 characters long. Please use your browser's **back** button and try again.

Comments and suggestions about this page should go to the Webmaster.
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Then I tried to use it to get to the database. I found the database listing that was suggested by the professor, ProQuest. It was marked: “symbol  follows those databases restricted to Rensselaer users”. Well, that’s why I needed the password. I clicked on ProQuest, and got this message which was entirely meaningless to me.



Much later, I realized that it meant to use “ipauto” as the user name, and “welcome” as the password. But at this point, I thought it was asking for yet another password into the ipauto system. Of course, I was pretty confused, getting frustrated, and not thinking straight. With my current knowledge, it seems ludicrously simple that the message is a reminder that I should use ipauto as the login and welcome as the password. But of course I tried the one I had just created in My RensSearch, and after wading through a few other screens, was informed that it didn’t work.



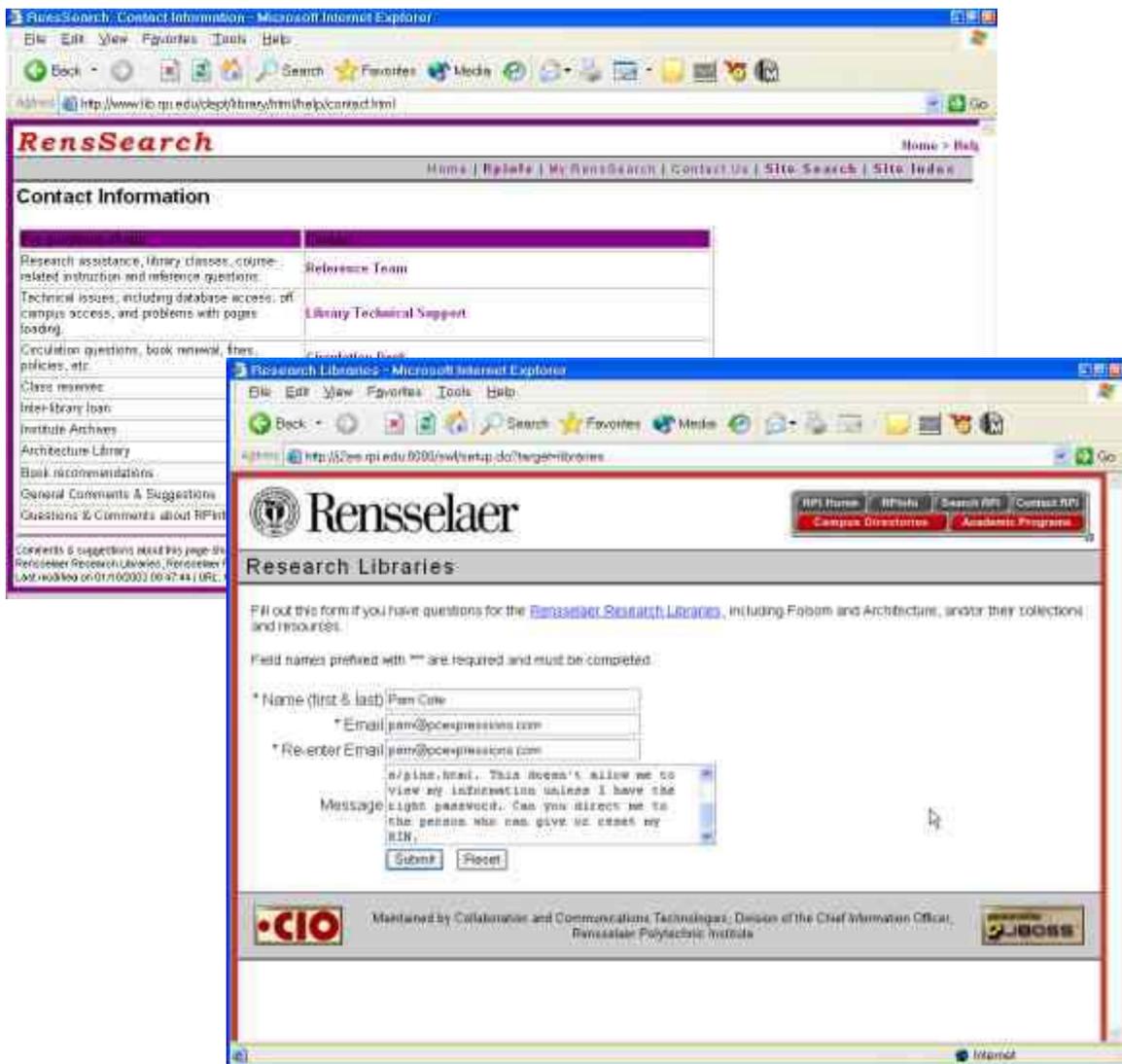
At this point I resorted to trial and error, because there didn’t seem to be any clear cut path to achieve my goal. I took a quick foray into the SIS system because of a note saying I could change all my passwords there. I tried site search and site map and looked up how to use the proxy service.

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At one point, I even found this information, which says I have to do this in person:

If you forget your PIN, library staff can assign you a new temporary PIN, but you must contact the Folsom or Architecture Library Circulation Desks in person to do this.

Note: When you change your Library PIN, the original code in sis is not changed and will no longer work.



When I had exhausted all obvious paths through trial and error, I tried to contact library support via chat, but I was too early in the day. When I looked at the contact information, I decided to try Library Technical Support.

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My email to Library Technical Support:

I have been trying to find my RIN. I am a distance graduate student, and was directed to <http://www.lib.rpi.edu/services/policies/pins.html>. This doesn't allow me to view my information unless I have the right password. Can you direct me to the person who can give or reset my RIN.

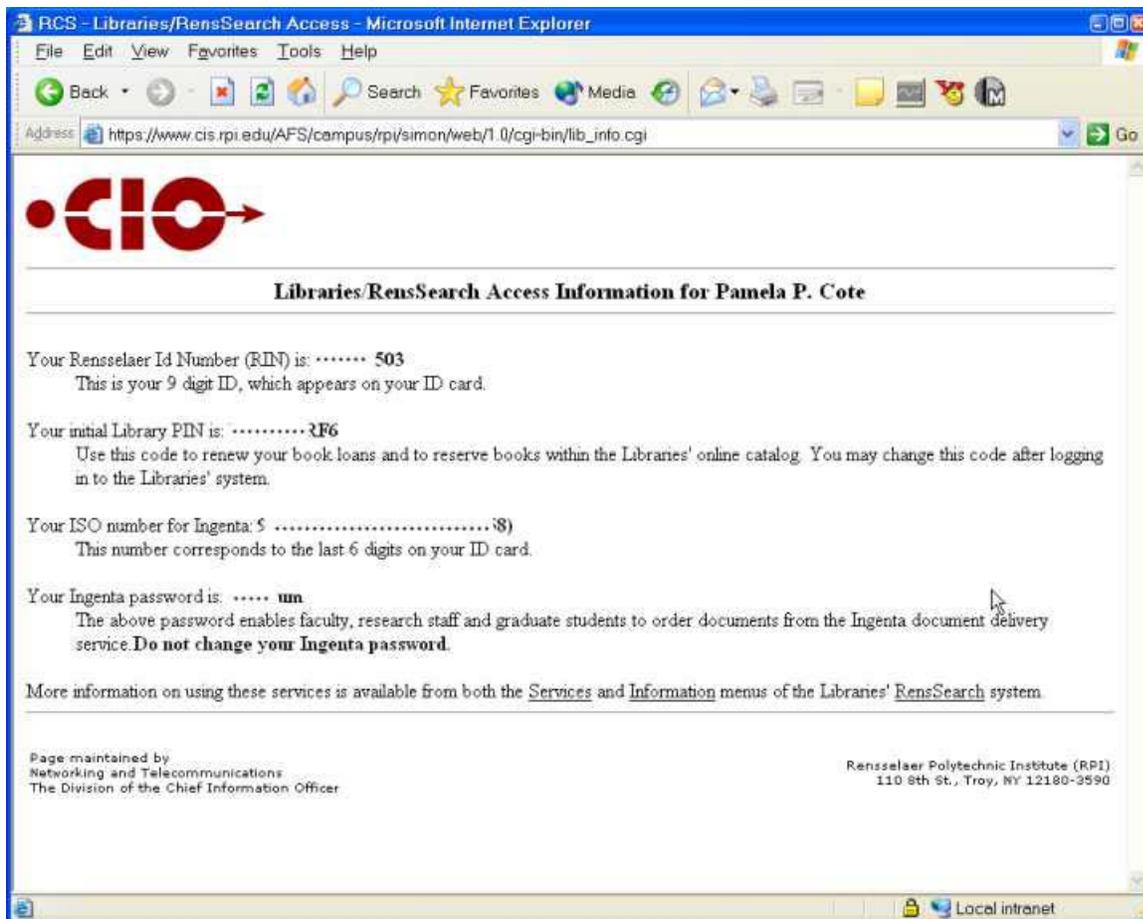
Response from library staff:

Hello Pam,

In order to get to the RIN web page, you must enter your RCS ID and password. I have searched the RPI directory, and you are not listed, so I can't help you any further. However, I am copying this message to Irv Stephens, head of library Public Services, who will be able to determine your status and get you the proper access, if appropriate.

Mary Anne Waltz

I received a thoughtful reply from Irv Stephens that triggered a memory of yet another login and password I had used in the past for RPI email. That is how I finally solved the problem, and when I got to this screen, finally felt that my mission was accomplished.



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Analysis

Principals of Minimalism

1. Action-oriented approach
I couldn't find the action I needed listed in navigation, site search, or other clues.
2. Anchor in the task domain
I should have been able to find my solutions within the library system. But there wasn't a help section or FAQ that addressed my problem or a name to contact. I was even directed to links outside this system on occasion.
3. Support error recognition and recovery
The password problem when creating a My RensSearch identity shows error recovery, because I was able to redo the password without redoing the entire screen of data entry. But it should have given me the information I needed to do the job correctly in the first place and done it in an obvious way.
4. Minimal reading for doing, study, and locating
This principal was applied in some sections, but overall this principal was not followed in the RenSearch system.

Principals of Task Orientation

1. The performer
They assume the performer is a member of the RPI community and take great pains to make sure you can't get where you want to go unless you have the right passwords. I am a distance student and am not able to go to the help desk and talk to a real person when I need help. I think the system may work well if you are on campus, but it didn't work well for me. I am technically adept and if there was an answer available, I believe I would have found it.
2. The starting point
I had a very definite goal, and the link I was given seemed like the right place to start.
3. The action
When I tried to access the confidential information and was denied, there was no remedy suggested. It actually suggested that the problem might be my browser or settings, if not a bad login or password. If I had a bad login or password, it didn't tell me how to fix it.
4. The ending point
The ending point should have been reached quickly had I understood that I actually have 4 different logins and passwords as an RPI student. My ending point was only reached after corresponding via email with four different people. I was not able to resolve the problem through the library online system, except that I got a "shot-in-the-dark" library contact name from it. I achieved success through perseverance and only because it was a requirement for the class. I was finally able to see my login and pin numbers. I may never have completed this mission, except that I decided to recreate the problem for this assignment. The first time I tried, I quit after going through the whole process without sending the email. I'm still confused as to why the

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system is now called •CIO (not RensSearch, SIS, CIS, or WebCT). On the other hand, I really don't care. I printed the page and filed it for future reference.