



Introduction

This is a book about getting computers to do what you want them to do. Computers are about as common as screwdrivers today, but they contain a lot more hidden complexity and thus are harder to operate and understand. To many, they remain alien, slightly threatening things.



We've found two effective ways of bridging the communication gap between us, squishy biological organisms with a talent for social and spatial reasoning, and computers, unfeeling manipulators of meaningless data. The first is to appeal to our sense of the physical world and build interfaces that mimic that world and allow us to manipulate shapes on a screen with our fingers. This works very well for casual machine interaction.

But we have not yet found a good way to use the point-and-click approach to communicate things to the computer that the designer of the interface did not anticipate. For open-ended interfaces, such as instructing the computer to perform arbitrary tasks, we've had more luck with an approach that makes use of our talent for language: teaching the machine a language.