Summary: Activity Design

This chapter has introduced activity design and discussed some of the fundamental tradeoffs in introducing computer technology into existing situations. The virtual science fair was used to illustrate how to transform problem scenarios into activity design scenarios, using metaphor and technology exploration as a source of new ideas. Central points to remember are:

- Designing activities first helps to simplify and modularize design, and at the same time reinforces the centrality of users' needs and goals in the design of interactive systems.
- The scope of activity design is the entire situation, including the physical and social characteristics of the environment.
- Metaphors help users understand new technology, but often limit people's grasp of new ideas. At the same time, the ways in which metaphors mismatch a situation can suggest new ways of thinking.
- Reducing tedium and the physical steps of a task can increase user satisfaction, but designers must take care to respect and enhance (not remove) the aspects of work that are personally rewarding.
- Envisionment of activity scenarios is tightly interleaved with the analysis of tradeoffs implied by the new design features under consideration.
- Taking a computational perspective on scenario objects may improve communication and cross-fertilization between usability and software engineers.

From: Rosson and Carroll. Usability Engineering. Academic press 2002.