

# Information design & navigation

Web Content Design  
for Writers and Editors  
Fall 2004



## Tonight's class

- Review of competitor sites
- Scenarios & personas
- Content inventories
- Grouping content
- Hierarchy

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## What did you learn from other fitness sites?

Goals, audience needs, style, content—what works? Doesn't work? Can be applied to our site?

- [www.24hourfitness.com](http://www.24hourfitness.com)
- [www.goldsgym.com](http://www.goldsgym.com)
- [www.hampshirehills.com](http://www.hampshirehills.com)

Others?

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## Personas

- Fictional "stand-ins" that represent real people who will use website
- They're given names and personal details to make them more realistic
  - Age, photo, family info, work, personal/prof. goals, computer expertise, quotes
- Used to make decisions during the design process

[http://www.steptwo.com.au/papers/kmc\\_personas/](http://www.steptwo.com.au/papers/kmc_personas/)



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Also see:

<http://www.stcsig.org/usability/topics/personas.html>

<http://www.infotoday.com/online/jul03/head.shtml>

## Scenarios

- Short, detailed, fictional story that describes how a typical visitor would accomplish a common task on the website
- Includes each action user takes, each page visited
- Explains why user takes the action she does, what she's thinking



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## Example scenario

“A co-worker tells Maria about the Fitness club website. She’s interested in joining, but only if the club has good weight training facilities. She goes to the Home page of the site and clicks “Take a tour.” On the Tour page, she scrolls down to the photo of the weight room and clicks it, taking her to the Weight Training area...”

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## Web design process

### Planning

- Define site: audience, goals, content, style

### Design

- Organize information: create content categories, select page types, design navigation
- Define functionality and layout

### Building

- Create content: research and write, create illustrations, make text web-ready, create style guide
- Publish and maintain content: proof, archive

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## Information “design”

- “Information design is the art and science of presenting information so that it is understandable and easy to use: effective, efficient, and attractive.” (*Information Design Journal*, 2000)
- “Information design is the intentional process in which information related to a domain is transformed in order to obtain an understandable representation of that domain.” (Peter J. Bogaards, 1994)
- “Information design is the defining, planning and shaping of the content of a message and the environments it is presented in with the intention of achieving particular objectives in relation to the needs of users.” (*ID News*, 1999)

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Why is ID important for Web? Different from book organization—less structured, more dynamic, conventions not established.

## Organizing site information

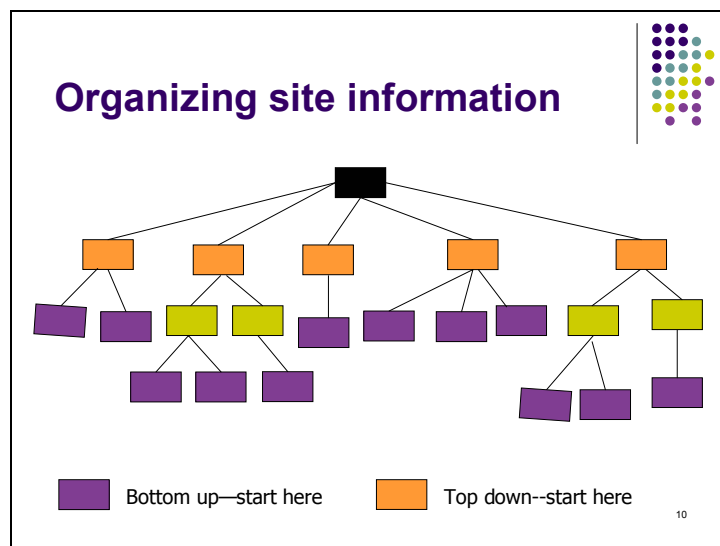


Bottom up	Top down
1. Take inventory of content	1. Establish primary categories based on goals & audience
2. Put content into logical groups	2. Establish hierarchy
3. Establish hierarchy	3. Take inventory of content

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Top down works best when categories are predetermined or obvious: when you're creating a site to fit w/in larger site that already has structure established, or you're creating a site with strong conventions

Bottom up works best when you're not sure about categories, or you have lots of existing content





## Taking inventory

1. Identify existing printed content
2. Create wish list of content to create
3. Combine lists and prioritize

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## Content for fitness website

What content belongs on the Bellevue Mind\*Body Fitness site? What ideas did you get from other fitness sites?

- Graphics
- Audio
- Video
- Tools
- Data
- Downloads
- User-supplied: Chats, bulletin boards

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## Grouping content

Decide what characteristics you'll use to group content items

Group 1

Item 1  
Item 6  
Item 3

Group 2

Item 7  
Item 8

Group 3

Item 2  
Item 4

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## Types of grouping



- Alphabetical, chronological, geographical
- Topical, task-oriented, audience-specific, metaphor-driven
- Combination (audience and task, topical and alphabetical)

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First type are “**exact**” schemes, which means:  
Divides info into well-defined and mutually exclusive sections.  
Users must know exact name of what they’re looking for.

Second is “**ambiguous**”:  
Divides information into categories that defy exact definition; may not be mutually exclusive.  
Users may not know exactly what they’re looking for.  
Ambiguous schemes are more common and more useful. People often don’t know exactly what they’re looking for or what it’s called.

### **Hybrid:**

Easy to confuse users

If multiple schemes presented on same page, distinguish them graphically or spatially.

**Topical schemes**—you’re defining universe of content that users will expect to find.

Hard to be complete, but it’s what users expect.



## Examples

- Alphabetical:  
<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html>
- Chronological:  
<http://www.w3.org/History.html>
- Geographic:  
<http://www.wunderground.com/>

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Alpha: <http://www.thesaurus.com/Roget-Alpha-Index.html>



## Examples (cont.)

- Topical: <http://www.thehistorynet.com/>
- By audience: <http://www.coolmath.com/>
- By task:  
<http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/skill1.htm>

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## Card sort exercise



1. Create list of content items.
2. Write each content item on 3x5 card.
3. Put cards into piles of related items.
4. After cards are sorted, move piles so that related piles are grouped together.
5. Assign a name for each pile and pile "group."

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Piles can contain as many or as few items as sorter wants. Don't have to have equal number.


## How to group this content?



About Us	Northwest gifts	Christmas gifts
Anniversary gifts	Romantic gift baskets	Valentine's gifts
Birthday gift baskets	Sympathy gifts	Coffee & tea gift baskets
Chocolates	Thanksgiving baskets	Cookies
Desserts	Wedding gifts	Flowers
Low-fat gifts	Wines	Easter baskets
Gifts for a new baby	Gifts for a promotion	Salty snack gifts
Privacy info	Microbrews	Payment policy
Gifts for a new job	Shipping info	Indoor plants
Gifts for kids	Our retail store	Corporate gifts
Low-carb gifts	Corporate services	Get well gifts
Gifts for teenagers	Wine policy	Housewarming gifts
		This month's specials
		Contact us

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## Labels for content groups



- Should mirror thinking and language of site users, not its creators
- Should be descriptive and distinct from one another
- Succinct as possible
- Parallelism nice but not necessary
- Be consistent
- Use standard labels (“Contact Us, About Us”)

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Descriptive/distinct: e.g. “international” and “global”

### More guidelines

- ✓ Labels should be used consistently across site
- ✓ Plan for expansion
- ✓ Research labels used in similar sites
- ✓ Ask users/experts what terms they use (card sort test)
- ✓ Length is a major constraint
- ✓ Labels should be created as part of system, not individually
- ✓ Use consistent punctuation, capitalization
- ✓ Strive for grammatical parallelism, but don't insist

Also make sure you've got right users in mind (ex. “oncology” vs. “cancer”)

Grammatical parallelism harder to do on website because of limited space and the fact that labels are repeated on many pages. Clarity and brevity is more important than parallelism.

Example: “Who we are”, “What we do”, “Contact us” (vs. “How to contact us”)

## Evaluate labels



### Cross-media Consulting

Who we are	
Computers	
Web services	
Software	
Clients	
Quotes	
Useful, Regularly Updated Links	
Home	

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## Exercise



Choose a site below and evaluate:

- Whether the content groups make sense
- How well the labels describe each content grouping
  - <http://www.wac.net/>
  - <http://www.syntregyfitness.com/>
  - <http://www.hampshirehills.com/>

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## Exercise



What content groupings will work for our fictional fitness site?

- Bottom up—based on inventory
- Top down—based on goals and audience

What labels should you use?

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## Next step—structure



1. Organize groups, usually into hierarchy
  - Identify subcategories
2. Add links between groups
3. Create page layouts for each level of hierarchy

See textbook pp.75-77

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## Hierarchical structures



- Hierarchy – used by 95% of sites
- Based on categories and subcategories
- General > more specific
- Hierarchies in other domains: biology, genealogy, company orgs, books

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Other structures:

- ✓ Linear
- ✓ Multipath
- ✓ Matrix

Hierarchies are familiar; they're found in many other domains

# Hierarchy

```
graph TD; T[Top level] --- S1[Second level]; T --- S2[Second level]; T --- S3[Second level]; T --- S4[Second level]; S1 --- L1[Third level]; S1 --- L2[Third level]; S3 --- L3[Third level]; S3 --- L4[Third level];
```

•Examples: <http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/>  
[www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com)

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Can also display hierarchy as OUTLINE, see book p. 55

Which level a page is on affects its layout and the navigation it contains.

Prefer BREADTH over DEPTH

# Exercise

Sketch hierarchy (with links) for <http://www.hampshirehills.com/>

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## Reading

Review of tonight's lecture:

- 4 & 7 of *Principles*
- **Site org** page of class Web site ([www.webcontentdesign.com](http://www.webcontentdesign.com))

Next week:

- 8 & 11 of *Principles*
- **Page org** page of class site ([www.webcontentdesign.com](http://www.webcontentdesign.com))
- Hot Text, "Writing like a Human Being" (<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HThumanstyle0.htm>)