

Info Design (cont.) & Writing for the Web I: Page organization


Web Content Design
for Writers and Editors
Fall 2004



Review—grouping content


Evaluate these alternative groupings for the top level of the Fitness Center site. What are the pros and cons of each?


By age:	By activity:	By need:
Children	Aquatics	Lose weight
Teens	Aerobics	Build muscle
Young adults	Basketball	Improve cardiac health
35-45	Racquet sports	Age gracefully
45-60	Karate/Tae Kwan do	Meet others
Seniors	Spa	Learn to relax
	Yoga/Pilates	



Tonight's class

- Hierarchies and links
- Home page and navigation
- How people read on the Web
- How to write for the Web






Creating site 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

4



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

5

Other structures:

Linear

Multipath

Matrix

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

Hierarchy

Top level

Second level

Third level

- Examples: <http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/>
www.marthastewart.com

6

Sketching a hierarchy

What does your hierarchy look like for www.hampshirehills.com?

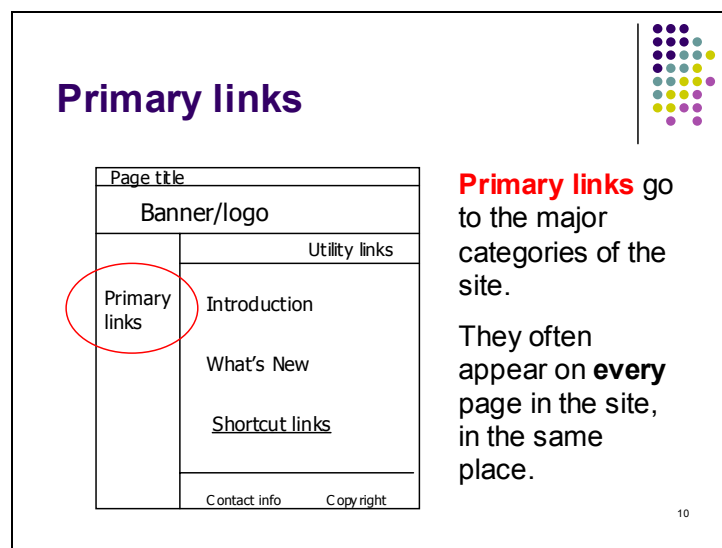
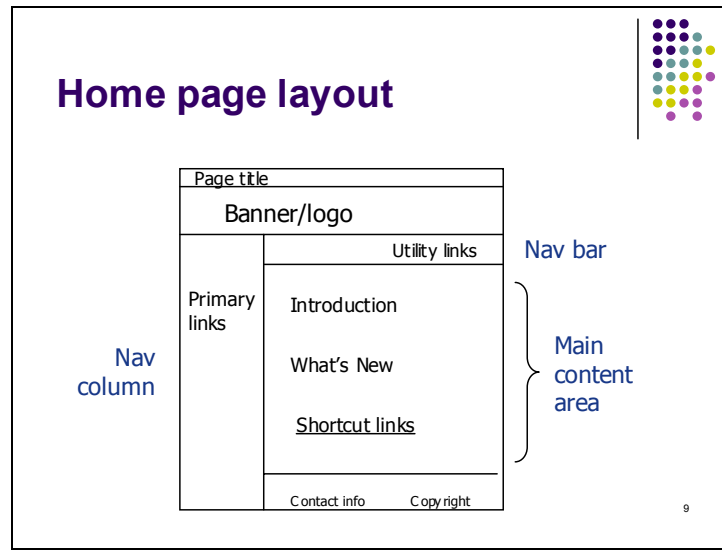
7

Top level—Home page

- Introduces site and encourages users to enter
- Provides top-level navigation, reveal site structure
- Spotlights new or featured content
- Contains key words for Search engine optimization

<http://www.marthastewart.com/>
<http://www.lifetimefitness.com/>

8




Primary links answer:
 What does site contain?
 How is it organized?

Every site must have primary links; otherwise, users can't get to most important areas.

Guideline: On home page, the primary links should be prominent, and clearly distinguished from other links.

Displaying primary links



- Navigation bar
 - <http://www.fool.com/>
- Navigation column
 - www.oprah.com
- Tabs
 - www.amazon.com

Links are usually ordered from most to least important or popular. (p. 164-5)

11


Also compare figs. 8.1-8.5 on http://www.uwtc.washington.edu/pwd/ChResources/ChR_8.html

Also mention importance of considering ORDER of links. See example on p. 165 (cities)

Krug likes tabs because:

- They're self-evident >> people understand how to use them
- They're hard to miss >> At the top of page
- Visually “slick” but not large
- They suggest physical space (one of few physical metaphors to work on Web)

Special-purpose links



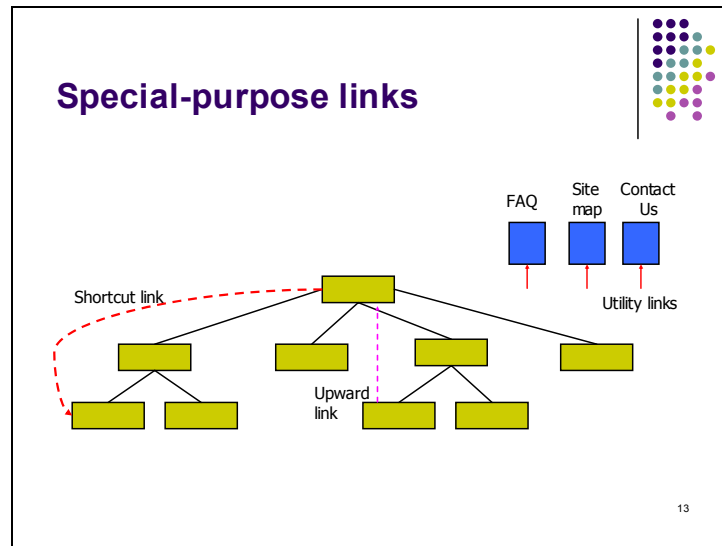
Page title	
Banner/logo	
Primary links	Utility links
	Introduction
	What's New
	Shortcut links
Contact info Copyright	

Shortcut links provide quick access from the home page to pages deeper in hierarchy.

Utility links provide access to pages that help people use the site.

12

See Table 7.1 defining different types links (p.162)



Shortcut links provide quick access from the home page to important pages deeper in hierarchy.

Utility links provide access to pages that help people use the site. Available “globally” (from every page in site).

Upward links – link to page on higher level. Ex: link to home page (usually logo in upper left)

See Table 7.1 defining different types links (p.162)

Lower level pages

- May have same layout as home page or different.
www.webcontentdesign.com vs. www.tradeprintery.com
- May be for navigation or provide actual content.
www.marthastewart.com: “Cooking Class” vs. “Grilling Fish”
- Challenge = show lower levels of organization without disorienting user
See Fig. 8.11-8.16 in textbook

14

Class project—page prototypes



Sketch layouts for two pages on site:

- Home page
- 2nd or 3rd level page

15

Web development process



Planning

- Define site: audience, goals, content

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

16

How people read on the Web



Nielsen's studies:

- Rewritten paragraph:
www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html
- Complete study:
<http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html>

17

How people read on the Web



Web writing must support nonsequential, incomplete reading. Users:

- Search for information, don't usually read for pleasure.
- Scan--not read word for word.
- Are suspicious of "marketese."

18

Why scanning works



- Concise text = less info to process
- Scannable text = calls attention to most important info
- Objective text = doesn't distract readers; promotional text needs to be evaluated


19

Why people scan



- Computer screens make reading harder and slower.
- Users need to move around and "click on things" to feel productive.
- With millions of pages on Web, there's probably something more valuable.
- Information "overload"


20



Skimmers vs. readers

- **Skimmers** are looking for a specific piece of information and want to find it as quickly as possible.
- **Readers** are motivated enough to read through an entire page or multi-page article from start to finish.

21



What gets read vs. skimmed?


“Read” content

- Analyses, opinion pieces, essays
- Narratives
- Humor

“Skimmed” content

- Facts and data
- News
- Catalogs and compilations
- Portals and navigation pages

22



Examples

For reading:
President Bush's forest plan is half right
<http://slate.msn.com/?id=2070027>

For skimming:
Improving Web Site Usability and Appeal
<http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/default.asp?url=/library/en-us/dnsiteplan/html/IMPROVINGSITEUSA.asp>

23

What “readers” need



- Short line length short (40-60 characters) with plenty of white space
- Font designed for the screen (e.g. Verdana).
- Don't embed links in the body text; list in margin or at end.
- For very long articles, provide a printer-friendly version for offline reading.

24

What “skimmers” need



- **Chunk** the information into logical sections and place on separate pages.
- **Summarize** the most important points or conclusion at the beginning of the page.
- Make the text **easy to scan**.

25

Chunking example



http://www.wac.net/catering/catering_frameset.html

26

Chunking: one page or several?



- Depends on audience, purpose, content, page size/speed
- Several, short pages help readers find and absorb **details**
- One long page can provide better **overview** of topic
- Will audience be interested in everything?
- Is the order important? Are there dependencies?
- How many graphics?
- The more pages, the harder it is to maintain content

27

Chunking guidelines



- Split content into logical chunks, not just arbitrary lengths.
- Don't let readers get lost—provide links to other chunks on every page.
- Provide single printer-friendly page.
- Consider using in-page anchors instead.
- Try editing chunks in random order.

28

Exercise



Your company's having its annual meeting at a conference center downtown and you're in charge of adding directions to the internal web site. Employees will travel by bus, car, ferry, bike and foot.

Do you put all the information on **one** Web page or on **separate** pages? What are the **pros/cons** of each organization?

29

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30

Inverted pyramid

Specific

beginning

Most important


General

end

Least important

31

How Nielsen describes this: “start the article by telling the reader the conclusion...follow by the most important supporting information, and end by giving the background.”



Inverted pyramid

Goals:

- Give readers what they're looking for right away
- Help readers decide whether to continue by previewing content

Pay extra attention to what goes "above the fold."

32

Journalistic model. Not the one commonly used for literature, narratives or even technical writing.

Can take the form of:


Summary paragraph (msnbc)

Table

Bullet list (Alertbox)

Should tell readers what article will contain, succinctly

Goal is NOT to tease; giving most important info up front make site more useful to readers: rewards them for clicking through (but doesn't penalize them).



Example—traditional pyramid

Beards -- Why are they such a turnoff?
 The chattering classes have gone gaga over Al Gore's beard, which he has grown during a trip to Europe. Political consultants usually advise candidates to shave, and given the reaction to Gore's whiskers, it's not hard to see why: Gore "look[s] more like an accountant on the lam from the IRS than a White House-compatible action figure" (*Time*); it's "scrawny and grey-patched" (the *New York Post*); it "might cover up some of the added chin heft" of his rumored post-election weight gain (the *Boston Herald*)...What is it about a beard that turns people off?

<http://slate.msn.com/default.aspx?id=113390>

33

Example—inverted pyramid



Error message guidelines

Summary:

Established wisdom holds that good error messages are polite, precise, and constructive. The Web brings a few new guidelines: Make error messages clearly visible, reduce the work required to fix the problem, and educate users along the way.

<http://useit.com/alertbox/20010624.html>

34

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35

How to make text scannable




1. Identify main sections and add headings.
2. Create link list for headings
3. Check for 1 idea/paragraph.
4. In each section, add tables and lists.
5. Tighten text.
6. Highlight most important concepts.

36

Goals

- Support nonsequential, incomplete reading
- Get users to desired content as quickly as possible
- Convey main points directly and succinctly
- Use visual cues to reveal content structure

Identify main sections and add headings



- More headings than in print
- Summarize main point
- Be clear, not cute
- 2 levels or less

Compare:

- "Beards..." <http://slate.msn.com/default.aspx?id=113390>


Vs.

- "Improving Web site usability"
<http://msdn.microsoft.com/workshop/management/planning/improvingsiteusa.asp>

37

To summarize, you'll typically use a phrase or complete clause

Create link list for headings



- At beginning of article
- Can be list, table, or sidebar
- "Back to top" link at end of each section

Example:

- <http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/default.asp?url=/library/en-us/dnsiteplan/html/improvingsiteusa.asp>

38

Break up paragraphs



- 1 idea/paragraph
- Short sentences: 3-4 sentences
- Formatting: separate with line of white space, not indent
- Start each paragraph with main point

Example:

http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/fitfacts_display.cfm?itemid=21

39

Restructure text into lists & tables



- White space helps readers scan
- Use bullets and/or bold text

Examples:

- http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/fitfacts_display.cfm?itemid=19
- <http://homeadvisor.msn.com/improve/easydecorating.asp>
- <http://www.contentious.com/articles/010622-1.htm>

40

Tighten text



- (Re)move unnecessary details
- Eliminate redundancies
 - “In order to...” > “To”
 - “The reason is because” > “Because”
- Consider deleting transitions
 - “Furthermore...” “In contrast to...”

Tips: <http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>

41

If rewriting printed piece, should be HALF the word count

Unnecessary details > Nielsen example. Need to ask writer. Can also move into a SIDEBAR. Consider removing:

- Basic background
- Laborious history
- Abstract theoretical discussions
- Info that only a small part of audience cares about
- Advanced arguments (see above)

Redundancies: but be careful not to make it so telegraphic that its hard to read

But leave “that” and “which” to introduce clauses.

Highlight significant concepts

- Use bold font
- Italic font – not readable
- Don't rely on color


Example:

- <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20031027.html>

42

Don't use underline > reserve for links

Be careful if bold font is used for another meaning (e.g reserved words, menu commands)
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20010610.html>



Exercise


Rewrite an article to work on the Web:

- Revise the opening paragraph
- Make the text easy to scan

Inverted pyramid.doc

On the class website, click **Exercises** under **Class Materials**
(<http://www.webcontentdesign.com/wcd/materials/bcc/students/exercises.asp>)

43



Reading

Review of tonight's lecture:

- Page org section of class Web site
(www.webcontentdesign.com)
- Hot Text, Ideas 2 & 4
(<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HThumanstyle0.htm>)

Optional

- Chapter 10 of *Principles*
- [Editing online documents](http://www.contentious.com/articles/V2/2-4/feature2-4a.html)
(<http://www.contentious.com/articles/V2/2-4/feature2-4a.html>)

44



Reading – next week

- “Writing style” on class Web site
(www.webcontentdesign.com)
- *Hot Text*, Ideas 1, 3 & 5
(<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HThumanstyle0.htm>)

45

