

Information Architecture for the Web

**Workbook for
structuring
information with
the user in mind**



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1 Introduction

The work world is made up of users of information. Our goal is to structure information so people can find it, use it, and appreciate the experience. In this introduction, you'll look at the challenge users face when they encounter information. You'll discover how the role of an information architect gives us a framework for supporting those who use information.

13 Module 1: Build a Performance Framework

The user's experience matters to business. Research supports this. But how can we structure information to support those who use it? In Module 1, you'll explore the performance environment of the web and discover a strategy for structuring content so it supports those who use the site, in the context in which they use the site's information.

33 Module 2: Create a User-Focused Foundation

Too often sites are built after a bunch of folks sit around the table talking. In Module 2, we'll explore a planning structure you can follow to build user-focused websites. Specifically, we'll explore the questions in a *Scope Definition Document*.

61 Module 3: Structure Content

As developers of web products, we are responsible for gathering, evaluating, and organizing information. In Module 3, we'll look at the questions you must ask as you determine the relevance of information and begin to discover relationships—especially as they relate to your users' context.

91 Module 4: Enable Visual Thinking

As human beings, we depend on classifying and categorizing information to make sense of the world. In Module 4, we'll look at the way human beings classify and structure content. We'll discover how inherent structures and visual patterns support us in making choices and taking action.

109 Module 5: Create Sites Users Can Navigate

As web users, we build decision plans for moving through information to reach our chosen destination. We constantly assess where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. In Module 5, we'll investigate strategies for ensuring our navigation is recognizable, responsive, rhetorical, and routed.

125 Module 6: Write Content for the Web

As developers of web content, we have the opportunity to present our message so users can envision our words and see relationships. Module 6 offers advice on structuring your text to help your users. We'll explore strategies for making text more concise, clear, and cohesive. We'll ensure the text fits users' expectations.

155 Module 7: Conduct Usability Testing

Users face a great deal of frustration. We can minimize this frustration by testing our text, labels, and site structures with users. Module 7 offers tips and strategies for conducting tests that improve the usability of your website.

173 Module 8: Promote Effective Structures

As information architects, are we prepared to explain our value to others in our organization? Module 8 offers advice we can follow for articulating how the structure of information affects how users interact with our websites—and why user performance matters to our businesses.

185 Bibliography

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Preface

Information Architecture for the Web

As developers of communication products for the Web, we are challenged to structure information so people can find it, use it, and appreciate the experience. We have the opportunity to decide how to group content, determining what to call the content groups, and to develop navigational structures so people can accomplish their tasks.

This is the work of an information architect.

Like all labels, the label “information architect” carries with it certain biases and prejudices. Look at advertisements for an IA. You’ll find each job description varies drastically. Some require strong computer skills; others require a library science background. We bring our own biases into this workbook.

We believe the information architect has the opportunity—and the responsibility—to serve as a user advocate. The information architect can help people understand the context in which they’ve found themselves and develop a structure so people can see relationships and respond in a way that serves them best. We look for strategies to build communication products that improve user performance.

This workbook, *Information Architecture for the Web*, introduces you to a user-focused process you can use to build websites that meet both user needs and

business needs. It walks you through a process for gathering, evaluating, and organizing information.

And since the Web is more user-centric than other communication media, this workbook helps you understand how people process and navigate information. It also offers guidance on conducting usability tests—with labels, with prototypes, and with fully developed websites.

As a user of this workbook, you will want to apply these strategies. You may also want to articulate them—tell your bosses, colleagues, and audiences about the importance of user-focused structures. The last module in this workbook offers some thoughts on how you can sell good structure to others.

Will this workbook make you an information architect? We’re of the opinion that we are all information architects. As businesspeople, we are always taking content and refining it in ways so others can use it. Yes, web architects have unique challenges—but our work starts with understanding how to structure information with the user in mind.

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