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**Information  
Architecture  
for the Web**



**Introduction**



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# Introduction

As information architects, we can address the needs of the age.

**Richard Saul Wurman, *Information Architects*, 1996**

## Objectives:

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**Preview the structure of the workbook**



**Explore our role as users of information**



**Define information architecture**



**i.1** 

## Preview the structure of the workbook

People most often go to the Web because they have a task to do. They want to find information, use it, and get on with their lives.

Into this environment may step the information architect, the individual tasked with crafting a structure that best meets the needs of the users. The actual job responsibilities of an information architect may change from organization to organization, but we believe that all information architects can adopt strategies for structuring information with the user in mind.

That's our goal with this workbook. We hope you will discover reasons and strategies for gathering, evaluating, and crafting information. You will learn why good information architecture depends on process—on both the activity of building a website (or any other communication product) and the outcome of the activity—the ability for your audiences to get their jobs done.

As a reader of this workbook, you should be able to articulate and apply the information it discusses. Specifically, you will be able to:

**Module 1: Build a performance framework**

**Module 2: Create a user-focused foundation**

**Module 3: Structure content**

**Module 4: Enable visual thinking**

**Module 5: Create sites users can navigate**

**Module 6: Write content for the Web**

**Module 7: Conduct usability testing**

**Module 8: Promote effective structures**

**i.2** 

## Explore our role as users of information

The Web is performance-based. As Web users we don't just want to find information; we want to do something with it—compare it, differentiate between its details, act on it. But do we find this easy? What thwarts us?

But are difficulties moving through information unique to electronic documents such as websites? What about print documents—do they always enable you to move through them to get the job done? Or are you thwarted by the *architecture* of the information?



Group Exercise

### Exercise: Evaluate the “Sticks and Bowls” menu

Refer to the “Sticks and Bowls” menu and answer the following questions:

**Where you able to use this information effectively? How?**

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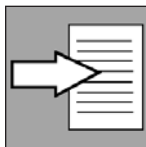
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**What is wrong with the architecture of the information?**

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Module Supplement

For a copy of the “Sticks and Bowls” menu, please see Module Supplement iA on page 11.

### Exercise summary

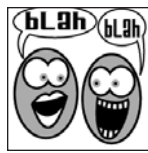
As users of information, we rely on graphic structures—we want important information to stand out, we want patterns that make sense to us. As users of information, we want to get our jobs done. We want to understand how information relates to helping us accomplish our goals. As users of information, we expect information to be interconnected. We want to understand the relationships among the parts. And as users of information we expect to navigate the space efficiently. We expect to know where we are and where we are going.

**i.3** 

## Define information architecture

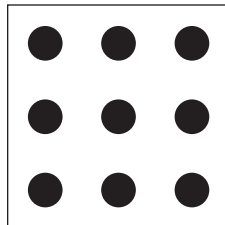
### Explore visual metaphors for information architecture

Metaphors, especially visual metaphors, can be a helpful device in illustrating unfamiliar concepts by associating them with something known to the user. As described by Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville in their book, *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*, “visual metaphors leverage familiar graphic elements such as images, icons, and color to create a connection to the new.”



Group Discussion

#### Discussion: What do these visual metaphors say to you?



**Dots:** Draw four straight lines and connect all the dots—without lifting your pen from the paper. How is this like information architecture?

**Iceberg Theory:** How is an iceberg like information architecture?

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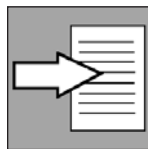
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Module Supplement

For answers, please see Module Supplement iB on page 12.

## Explore definitions of information architecture

Like many fields, information architecture has several different definitions, and while there is confusion due to conflicting labels, some general themes emerge.

### Identify similarities in information architecture definitions

Information architecture is invisible since it concerns the 'structure' of the information and not the way the information is presented.

Jakob Nielsen

**Information architecture** is choosing the right way to present information —helping people navigate through it.

Richard Saul Wurman

**Information architecture** involves the design of organization, labeling, navigation, and searching systems to help people find and manage information more successfully.

Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville

**Information architecture** is structuring (envisioning and rendering) information so people can find it and use it.

Info.Design's "real-life" definition

**Information architecture** is a systematic, question-based process for creating communication products that improve users' performance.

Info.Design's "academic" definition



Question

What do these definitions have in common?

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## Examine components of an “academic” definition for information architecture

### Definition: Information architecture

**Information architecture** is a systematic, question-based process for creating communication products that improve users’ performance.

**Info.Design’s “academic” definition**



Group Exercise

### Exercise: Analyze the “academic” definition of information architecture

In groups of two to four people, answer the following questions. You’ll be asked to report back to the class and to provide examples, if possible.

**What does “systematic” mean to you?**

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**Why is it important that you have a question-based process?**

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**What is a communication product?**

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**Why do users matter?**

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**Why does performance matter?**

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## How does information architecture differ from information design?<sup>1</sup>

Thom Haller, Info.Design

As a teacher of both information architecture and information design, I've had many opportunities to reflect on the differences between these labels (and among the other zillion terms we use to categorize people who structure information).

**As we know, labels matter.** I recall my own label-searching seven years ago. At the time, I was a technical writer and instructional designer with an interest in cognitive science and visual communication. By the early nineties, I'd spent 10 years in professional communication, working as a "research associate," "senior scientist," "corporate communicator," and "documentation specialist."

"Perhaps I'm a data stylist," I recall thinking, about the time I discovered Richard Saul Wurman and reclassified myself as an information architect. I believed, like Wurman, we could learn strategies for making information more understandable. I believed we could re-educate others to see the hidden value in information for improving organizational performance. Did my belief in structure, process, and performance make me an information architect? I intended to find out.

Before too long, I had an opportunity to teach a course in Document and Information Design. Armed with Karen Schriver's *Dynamics in Document Design*, and Donald Norman's *The Design of Everyday Things*, my university students explored ways we could envision the reader as an active participant and major stakeholder in the design and development of documents. Did they care if they were document designers or information designers? Not really. Did they consider themselves budding information architects? Probably not.

Six months later, a colleague and I launched the course, Information Architecture, for adult learners. Although we found the label interesting, it didn't matter as much as the necessity to deal with

the increasing onslaught of online information.

By the time we developed the course structure for a two-day IA class, we were able to use Rosenfeld and Morville's text, *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*, to complement the class. Their perspectives were useful, as my students had shifted once more—from communication and information professionals to website builders.

These students had a job to do. They were captivated by the research only to the extent that it helped them build communication products in which users could find information, use it, and appreciate the experience. As Web builders, they wanted strategies for real-world IA—developing communication products in the context of people, politics, pitfalls, and possibilities.


This remains true today. Not surprisingly, my information design students want this context as well. Few care if they are called information designers. But all want to find ways to present information with the user in mind.

**So do these labels matter?** I offer a resounding "sort of." A new label supported me as I began to differentiate my work from that of a traditional writer. But labels can thwart us as well. For example, I've worked with Web writers who were not willing to think visually (after all, they were writers—they believed they should attend to words only). Will they be able to help their users? Probably not.

The label "information architect" carries with it real-world implications. As information architects we must help users see the untapped potential of information structure. We must strategize, plan, render, manage, build, and measure so we can help organizations improve performance, boost productivity, and increase profitability. Users need results, not labels.

<sup>1</sup> Text first appeared in *Design Matters*, Volume 5, No. 2, April 2001. *Design Matters* is the newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication's Information Design Special Interest Group (SIG).

## Module Supplement iA: Sticks and Bowls Menu



# Sticks & Bowls

1300 Connecticut ave. NW, Washington DC 20036  
 (Next to First Union Bank on Connecticut Ave. & N St.)  
 (202)296-4001 Open 8:30am-8:00pm, Mon. thru Fri.  
 e-mail: skkim@erols.com

**Rice Bowls (I)**

- 211 Rice in black sauce
- 218 Rice in black sauce sharp
- 212 Rice in spicy black sauce
- 213 Ginger-garlic rice
- 214 Broccoli in ginger garlic
- 215 Broccoli in spicy black
- 216 Snow peas in ginger garlic
- 217 Snow peas in spicy black
- 221 Bibim rice
- 222 Peanut rice
- 223 Sichuan rice
- 236 Sichuan rice mild
- 224 Teriyaki rice
- 225 Curry rice
- 225 Red curry rice
- 227 Thai curry rice

*\* All vegetables only*

- 229 \*Egg plant curry
- 219 \*Seven vegis in gnglr garlic
- 220 \*Seven vegis in spicy black

**Toppings:  
for Rice bowls & Noodles**

- Chicken Breast 4.50
- Beef 4.50
- Smoked Sausage 4.50
- 3-meat combo 5.00
- Tofu 4.50
- All Vegetables 4.50
- Mushroom combo 5.00
- Seafood combo 5.00
- Clams & Mussels 5.50
- Shrimp 5.50
- Salmon 5.50

**Rice Bowls (II)**

- 310 Red beans & rice original
- 311 Red beans in black
- 312 Red beans in spicy black
- 313 Red beans in Ginger garlic
- 321 Red beans in bibim
- 322 Red beans in peanut
- 323 Red beans in Sichuan
- 325 Red beans in curry
- 410 Black beans & rice
- 411 Black beans in blk sauce
- 412 Black beans in spicy black
- 413 Blk beans in ginger garlic
- 421 Black beans in bibim
- 422 Black beans in peanut
- 423 Black beans in Sichuan
- 425 Black beans in curry
- 230 Jambalaya
- 231 Kimchi rice

**Options for rice**

*rice (long grain) as regular (default)*  
*brown rice as a choice. add .50*

**Noodle\*\*Soup**

- 530 House noodle soup
- 531 Curry noodle soup
- 532 Thai curry nood soup
- 533 Kimchi noodle soup
- 534 Miso noodle soup
- 535 Gyauze(Gyoza) N. soup

**Side dish**

- Miso soup (12oz).....0.86
- Hot & sour soup.(12oz).....1.27
- Rice, steamed (12oz).....1.54
- Brown rice.....2.00
- Silky tofu soup.....1.54
- Bean cake soup.....1.54
- Gyauze(Gyoza),stmd.(1dz)...4.20
- Green tea (12oz).....1.00
- Roast Seaweed(Nori)...0.50/1.00

**Noodles\*\***

- 511 Noodle in black
- 518 Noodle in black sharp
- 512 Noodle in spcy black
- 513 Ginger garlic noodle
- 522 Peanut noodle
- 523 Sichuan noodle
- 524 Sichuan noodle mild
- 525 Curry noodle
- 526 Red curry noodle
- 527 Thai curry noodle

**Cold Noodles**  
(buckwheat) \*add .50

- 536 Zaru sooa (vegi only)
- 537 \*Sichuan cold noodle
- 538 \*Peanut cold noodle
- 539 \*Bibim cold noodle

**Oriental Breakfast**

- 110 Soy-mung bean pancakes 2.50
- 111 Silky tofu rice soup 2.50
- 112 Silky tofu with broccoli 2.50

**Options for noodles**

*flat noodle as regular (default)*  
*buckwheat ndle add .50*  
*u-dong noodle add .50*

**How do I order  
a rice bowl or noodles?**

*If you like to have  
\* 226 Red curry rice"  
then, choose one of  
the Toppings, "- Beef "  
\*n just say "226 with Beef"  
to the cashier.*

**Side order**

- Green tea (12oz) 1.00
- Miso soup (12 oz) .86
- Hot & sour soup (12oz) 1.27
- Silky tofu with sauce(12oz) 1.54

**PANCAKES (8:30-11:00am)**

- 100 PANCAKES, ONLY 1.82
- 101 PANCAKES, SAUSAGE/BACON 2.35
- 102 P.CAKES, EGG, SAUSAGE/BACON 2.90

The prices are subject to change without a

