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USDA: Information Architecture

www.infodn.com/class/ia

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, you will be able to....

- Identify, employ, and validate principles of information architecture
- Arrange and present information according to a specific purpose, specific audience, and specific context
- Learn to ask the right "big questions" for building performance improving "documents" and systems
- Improve clarity and accessibility in documents
 - Structure & organize info so people can find and use it
 - Incorporate thinking and writing strategies for creating documents that meet readers' needs
 - Design effective navigation
- Conduct "guerilla" usability testing for testing WebSites and Internet Sites
- "Sell" information architecture principles to managers, colleagues, and clients.

Course Philosophy:

As user advocates we have the challenge to envision our readers' worlds more vividly and the opportunity to apply systemic, structural, and orderly principles to make documents work.

Instructors' Underlying Philosophy:

- By producing a good design we affect the lives of others. If we design enough things in the spirit of helping users, we create better living and greater satisfaction.
- Man is always a teller of tales/Life is worth living when lived in pursuit of a story.
- Never consider yourself a failure. You can always serve as a bad example.
- Pray for the dead. Fight like hell for the living.



USDA

**Information
Architecture**

Course Audience:

The course is designed for adults who structure and organize information electronically and in print. Students are expected to have some real-world experience creating electronic and print documents, or an interest in doing so.

Course Texts:

Required Text

- *Information Architecture for the Web: Workbook for Structuring Information with the User in Mind*, Info.Design, Inc., 2002

Heartily Recommended Texts:

- *Designing Web Usability*, Jakob Nielsen, 2000.
- *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*, Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville, (O'Reilly and Associates, February 1998).

Additionally Recommended Texts:

- *Back to the USER: Creating User-Focused Web Sites*, Sachs and McClain, 2002
- *Writing for the Web: Structuring Information with the User in Mind*, Info.Design, Inc., 2002. [available at USDA bookstore]
- *Dynamics in Document Design*, Karen Shriver. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1997)
- *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design*, JoAnn Hackos & Janice Redish, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1998)
- *The NonDesigner's Design Book*, Robin Williams (Peachtree Press, 1996)
- *On Writing Well*, William Zinsser, (Harper Collins, 5th Edition, 1995)
- *The Inmates are Running the Assylum*, Alan Cooper, SAMS, 1999)
- *Information Architecture*, Richard Saul Wurman, (Graphis, 1997)
- *Web Navigation: Designing the User Experience*, Jennifer Fleming (O'Reilly and Associates, September 1998).
- *The Design of Everyday Things*, Donald Norman. (Doubleday, 1990)
- *Don't Make Me Think*, Steve Krug. (2000)
- *Homepage Usability*, Jacob Nielsen, Marie Tahir. (New Riders, 2001)



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Purchasing Textbooks:

The workbook is available at USDA Bookstore. Other books are available online.

Class Structure

The classes will be broken into two general components: discussion time and group time. Discussion time will introduce us to new concepts and ideas, group time will be spent planning, organizing and building our final projects.

Groups:

Group topics will depend on the number of students in the class.

- **Class project:** Students have the opportunity to meet with a group that assists a specific organization structuring online content.
Do you know an organization that wants help with their website? Let me know....we will begin groups Week #3. (Send me an email)
- **Research project:** Want to explore a facet of IA and user-centered design -- I encourage a focused, thorough project. Let me know by week 3 if you want to work on research. (Send me an email).
- **Individual work project:** For students who have a work goal, this project gives you the opportunity to follow analysis techniques for own organization.

Calendar/Planning ahead:

To help you plan ahead... (note: This may change some as class needs dictate)

Week 1: What is Information Architecture? (July 1st)

- Define Information Architecture/List 8Ps
- Identify how we can think like a user

Homework:

Reading Assignment:

Information Architecture for the World Wide Web, Ch. 1-2



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**Technical
Writing**

Exploration Assignment:

Interview someone who uses the label “information architect” or discuss this label with someone who is responsible for the structure of content on web sites.

Week 2: Apply Task Focused Thinking (July 8th)

- Identify audience, purpose, and context for your site
- Look at structure of "task-focused" thinking
- Plan for improved user performance (explore strategy for planning web structure).

Homework for Week 3:

Reading Assignment:

Information Architecture for the World Wide Web, Ch. 7

Discovery Assignment:

Use the “triangle tool” to focus on specific audience(s), tasks, and context at your place of work (or site you are revising).

Week 3: Organize Information (July 15)

- Understand principles of organizing information
- Classify and categorize information
- Assess labels
- Complete chunking/grouping exercise

Homework for Week 4:

Reading Assignment-

*Information Architecture for the World Wide Web (optional),
Ch. 3, 5, 8*

Discovery Assignment-

Identify visual structures for sites you like. Why do you think they work effectively?

**Week 4: Use visual design strategies to improve user performance
(July 22)**

- Identify five reasons for structuring information visually



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IA

- Identify five techniques to enable easy information processing
- Relate six types of information to a suggested visual format for each type
- Apply four design criteria that incorporate "gestalt" and "cognitive" cues
- Groupwork: Relate important chunks of information to visual priorities.

Homework for Week 5:

Reading Assignment-

To be determined.

Discovery Assignment-

Find examples of "architectural renderings" -- how do organizations present the visual presentation for sites to clients; what works/what doesn't?

Week 5: Navigation and Rendering (July 29th)

- Discover why navigation matters
- Learn the 4Rs of successful navigation: recognizable, responsive, routed, and rhetorical
- Identify different techniques to render information

Homework for Week 6:

Prepare for "Midterm"

No Class...

Week 6: (August 12) Midterm presentations --

Stories of progress and adventure; opportunities for support.

Week 7: Content: Present web text that users will read and understand (August 19th)

- Explain to content providers how people read on the web vs. how they read in print
- Practice task-based writing
- Structure text so users can find and read the information they need



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Week 8: Usability and Structure: Experiences from the field (August 26th)

- Justify and explain the role of usability testing in web development projects
- Follow process for completing usability testing
- Apply principles for usability testing to your class site.

Week 9: Information Retrieval (September 9)

- Explore the importance of structuring sites for information retrieval
- Identify the importance of taxonomies

Week 10: Final Projects ... and Exploration into how to "sell" Information Architecture to managers, colleagues, and clients (September 16th)

- Overcome the org chart: Keep politics from weakening the user focus of your site
- Dates may have to be rearranged because of Labor Day.

About Class Grades...

1. **Class discussion:** we will use class time to discuss specific challenges we face as we go about structuring information on our "group communication products." 25 points
2. **Midterm Presentation:** Show your stuff. Describe your progress. Include others in the class in your project. You will have to structure information during your midterm presentation so everyone can follow along (we will discuss some strategies for building presentations so others know where we are in the presentation) 25 points
3. **Final Presentation:** Offer class a before and after story.....Show us where you have applied (or are applying) the principles of information architecture to improve performance. Walk us through the process. Explain some of your personal challenges. (Place before and after of success stories on web site too, if possible) 25 points
4. **Class Participation.** Think. Inquire. React. Show your expertise. Have fun. (25 points)