What is information architecture?

- The last lecture examined some ways of presenting individual documents so as to enhance user needs.
- Today’s lecture looks at some ways of grouping together documents so as to enhance user needs.

Information architecture and the WWW

The explosive growth of documents available online — above all thanks to widespread use of the World Wide Web — has given a powerful impetus to the field of information architecture.

Information architecture: designing web sites

Websites commonly draw upon certain distinctive attributes of the electronic medium — starting with hypertext — as a means to organise the documents they make available.

Information architecture asks: what is the most appropriate way to organise documents online, so that users can locate the information that they need?
Information architecture: designing web sites

‘it’s exactly because users don’t care about the structure of a website that it is so important to get the information architecture right in the design’

(Nielsen 2002)

Information architecture in the past

Books draw upon a number of tools to help users find the information they require

The Internet isn’t like that …

‘The net is like a huge vandalized library. Someone has destroyed the catalog and removed the front matter, indexes, etc., from hundreds and thousands of books and torn and scattered what remains …’

(Michael Gorman, cited in Morrogh 2003: 99)

The Internet isn’t like that …

‘The net is even worse than a vandalized library because thousands of unorganized fragments are added daily by the myriad cranks, sages, and persons with time on their hands who launch their unfiltered messages into cyberspace.’

Managing individual sites

• None of that is really surprising, given the complex social make up of the Internet

• On the other hand, does that mean that individual web sites should be poorly organised?

Defining information architecture

• ‘the design of organization, indexing, labelling and navigation systems to support browsing and searching throughout the web site’

(Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 20)

• ‘the art and science of structuring and organizing information environments to help people effectively fulfil their information needs’

(Toub 2000: 2)
Why architecture?

- The word architecture has a number of connotations.
- For our purposes, we are talking about architecture as ‘the manner of construction of something and the disposition of its parts’ (Morrogh 2003: 144)

Navigation

- One issue that information architecture seeks to address is how pages are arranged in a web site
- To accomplish this, we first need to think about the relationship within the site between the various kinds of information that is provided

Organising information: hierarchies

‘The foundation of almost all good information architectures is a well-designed hierarchy’ (Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 37)

Organising information: depth

‘If users are forced to click through more than four and five levels, they may simply give up and leave your web site.’ (Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 38)

Organising information: breadth

‘Web sites with more than ten options on the main menu can overwhelm users’ (Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 38)

Labels

- The labels used to organise and link information can make a crucial difference to users’ efforts to search within a web site
- Consistency and clarity of purpose are fundamental
Labels

- can be textual or iconic
- can link to information on other pages
  and/or
- provide headings within a web page

(Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 76)

Exercises for Lab 8

- Examine some application help routines to see how well they address users' needs
- Examine some web sites to explore the information architecture they utilise

Exercises for Tute 8

- Examine some paper-based documents to see how well they address users' needs
- Discuss Nielsen's views on usability

Excellent web site on information architecture

http://deyalexander.com/resources/information-architecture.html

Further reading