

information architecture (IA)

An IA is the plan and structure of content and pages within a Web site. This might seem like a low priority. However, visitors need to be able to find the information they're looking for, and quickly. Otherwise, they may get frustrated and abandon your site. Creating an intuitive information architecture is therefore one of the most important aspects of ensuring a site is user-friendly.

"The most effective sites at directing people to the right place are those that match user expectations. People expect sites to organize information in a way that makes sense to them." (Jakob Nielsen, 2006)

We encourage you to abandon your organizational structure as the structure for the Web site and find out what visitors are looking for and how they find that information.

How-To. If you can generate a Microsoft Word outline, you can create the structure of your IA. Here are tips on creating your outline:

- Each Web page should appear as a separate item
- Use Titles and descriptions of Web pages to create the structure
- As you move further along in the process, begin filling content in to the outline
- Once you've created your outline, re-structure your Web site to follow this IA
- We do not recommend creating navigation more than one level deep for the audience navigation. i.e. we don't recommend creating pages underneath "current students"

Example of a site's information architecture:

Left Navigation

1. College Home Page – news, features, announcements
2. Academics – list of all departments within the college and short description
 - a. Student Work – Web portfolio of student work. Current semester.
 - i. Spring 2007 – Web portfolio of student work. Spring 07
 - ii. Fall 2007 – Web portfolio of student work. Fall 07
3. News – archive of news articles and press releases
 - a. Alumni News –articles from Alumni magazine
4. Contact Us – college and advisors' contact info
5. About Us - short bio of department and department head.

Audience Navigation

1. Faculty / Staff - events, deadlines, news
2. Current Students - events, deadlines, news
3. Prospective Students – contact advisor, link to go2.ou.edu