

## Put the user first

Just one simple idea can transform your content: put the user first.

What is a user? You might call them audience, visitors or something else. They are the people using your web pages.

Our goal is to create web pages that our visitors can use easily so they can get the information they are looking for.

### How to put the user first

#### Who are you talking to?

First, define your user. Make use of the department's existing [user personas](#) or develop your own.

#### What do they need to know?

Identify your user needs and create an [information architecture](#) that supports those needs.

#### Can your user understand your content?

Is your content [accessible](#)?

Have you followed our [content guidelines](#)?

### Global Experience Language (GEL)

Putting the user first is the top priority of the [Global Experience Language](#).

Quality content is part of the department's move towards providing a better user experience across all of our channels.

Category:

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## Information architecture

Create an information architecture (IA) for your web presence by following these guidelines.

Your IA should be developed after conducting research and workshops. We recommend you:

- [conduct user research](#)
- participate in an IA workshop.

Most important to the process of developing your IA is to put the user first.

You must seek support from digital services during this stage of your website transformation project.

Make sure your project plan allows enough time for user testing and business negotiation on the IA. It will take time to reach an agreed approach. This can be a few days on a small website to many weeks for larger projects.

### What is information architecture?

Information architecture is a form of content design that helps people understand your website, find information and complete tasks.

IA involves designing navigation for your content as well as labelling and categorising your pages. We'll cover navigation here. For labelling, go to [how to write page titles and navigation labels](#).

### What it isn't

One of the most common problems with IAs is that they mimic or reflect the organisational structure of a company. This may make sense to the employees building the system, but it is not how your users think about and interact with your information.

Don't build an IA that reflects your organisational structure.

#### Creating your information architecture

- Contact [Digital Services](#) for help with advice and workshops.
- Explore the [IA page templates for education.nsw.gov.au](#).
- Read [creating your information architecture](#).
- Read [rules and tips for creating an IA](#).
- Use the [IA and content plan \(XLSX 31.35KB\)](#) to plan your IA.

Category:

- [Communication and engagement](#)

Topics:

- [Governance](#)

Business Unit:

- Communication and Engagement

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## Creating an information architecture

Usable IA is developed through understanding your users (people), the content they want and the context in which that content.

### Making sense to your audience

A usable IA is about creating groups or categories that make sense to the end users of the site/system - this is how we've structured the education [level 2 hubs IA](#).

Different audience groups may think about or interact with information in different ways and they are likely to have diverse levels of knowledge, skills and expertise in any given area.

Because of this it becomes crucial to have (or develop) knowledge of these 3 key areas:

#### People

- Who will be using your site? (frequent and infrequent user groups)
- What will they need to do with it?
- How much do they know about the area?
- How do they think and speak about the topics/content?

#### Content

- What do you currently have?
- What do you actually need to service your users?
- What form should it be in?
- What don't you need?
- Is it for the general public or department staff only?

#### Context

- The business or unit goals for the site
- What constraints do you have (timelines, content resources, technology)
- Where should you sit in the [global education IA](#)?

In addition to having an understanding of your users and content, the development of effective labels is integral to how easily your users can move around your site and find the information they need.

The labels you implement must speak to your users in their own language, clearly signpost key content and enable quick and efficient movement through your site. This can be difficult to achieve and may involve several rounds of iterations and testing to get right.

To help this process there are some [established rules and tips](#) which you can follow and use as checkpoints while you develop your labels. They are based on heuristics which have been established within the usability, user research community through many years of research and testing and are a useful resource.

Use the [IA and content plan \(XLSX 31.35KB\)](#) to plan your IA and track the content as you develop it.

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## Rules and tips

We have created these rules and tips for you to reference when developing your IA on [education.nsw.gov.au](https://education.nsw.gov.au)

This should be used in conjunction with the label confidence ratings. Many content owners are working on IA's that make up education.nsw. By using the same method to test and rate the quality of labels and categories we are more likely to achieve a consistent and usable IA for all content on education.nsw.

1. Create and audit labels using desirable label attributes and your primary audience profiles
  - a. **Specific** - The label accurately describes the material it leads to, avoiding vague or generic words.
  - b. **Concise** - Streamlined. Contains just enough words and no more.
  - c. **Comprehensive** - Adequately describes all of the section's content.
  - d. **Familiar** - Describes content with terms that are meaningful to the target audience.
  - e. **Front-loaded** - Most information-carrying word(s) come first.
2. Avoid use of acronyms
3. Spell out ampersands
4. Labels should be topic or task focused. Avoid long sentences such as:
  - a. Overview of enterprise risk management
  - b. Integrating risk management into strategic and business planning
  - c. Re-imagining professional learning resources
5. Avoid generic labels such as:
  - a. Further information
  - b. Resources
  - c. Downloads
6. Labels should not nest the same label within a site structure. For example:
  - a. English > English > English key stage 4 and 5

### Examples of desirable label attributes

Review all labels against these useful attributes.

Attributes	Description	Bad	Good
Specific	The label accurately describes the material it leads to, avoiding vague or generic words.	Downloads	Leave form downloads
Concise	Streamlined. Contains just enough words and no more.	Employee leave entitlements	Employee leave
Comprehensive	Adequately describes all of the section's content.	Benefits	Benefits and incentives
Familiar	Describes content with terms that are meaningful (based on the anticipated domain knowledge of the target audience.)	People and services	Human resources
Front-loaded	Most information-carrying word(s) come first.	The Jill Sherlock Memorial Learning Assistance Library	Learning Assistance Library

## Some additional labeling tips

**Use fresh eyes:** Look at your labels with fresh eyes, would they make sense to someone with limited knowledge of the area or someone who may be new to their Department of Education role?

If you can't change names think about how you might deal with this in the interface: If there is large discrepancy between document names and the terms your audience use (and you are unable to change the name), you will need to consider this when creating your metadata and when creating page content.

**Jargon free space:** Don't use jargon, acronyms or inward/internal facing business terms.

**Be consistent:** ensure that your language and terminology is always the same throughout your labelling and content.

**Look at search logs:** If you have access to metrics, look for common search queries to help you understand how your audience phrases things and the terms they use.

**Avoid repetition:** Avoid duplication e.g. a navigation label of 'Procedures and guidelines' which has 2 sub-pages in it, one called 'Procedures' and one called 'Guidelines'.

Category:

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## Assessing usability

We have developed a confidence rating which helps content owners and reviewers strive for an information architecture (IA) that is right for the people who will use it most.

All IA's need to be assessed to know how usable they are because we all think about information differently. We have developed a confidence rating that helps content owners and reviewers strive for an IA that is right for the people who will use it most.

We are all using our best efforts to reach the 'excellence' rating for high priority content. This removes barriers to content and ensures our information is easy to find.

### Excellent rating

'Excellent' rating means you have reviewed your IA and it passes all rules AND has had positive results in user validation activities.

Techniques to improve: 6 to 12 monthly review to ensure labels remain excellent.

### Satisfactory rating

'Satisfactory' rating means, the IA passes all IA rules.

Techniques to improve: Conduct user validation activity: usability testing or tree testing to achieve excellent status

### Undesirable rating

'Undesirable' rating, means the IA fails all or some of the IA rules. It is strongly recommended to take steps to improve your confidence rating as soon as possible.

Techniques to improve:

1. Review according to your target audience and desirable label attributes
2. Conduct appropriate user validation activity, such as usability testing, tree testing, card sorting

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NSW Department of Education

## User experience guidelines

We are bringing a consistent and coherent user experience to all our online services, to better serve the residents of NSW and DoE staff. Our [user-centered design](#) (UCD) approach puts user needs first.

The current perception of DoE websites is not positive. Externally our users are saying:

- there are too many websites
- duplicated content in multiple locations
- difficult to know which website to use
- visually and functionally disconnected
- poor content quality
- minimal brand integrity
- usability and user experience issues.

Internally our users are saying:

- there are long lead times for new elements
- different platforms
- non-targeted content
- confusing structure.

We have an opportunity to listen to what our users say and turn negative comments into positive experiences. Good user experiences lead to a greater trust in content and enable audiences to self-serve online. They also reduce the cost to DoE of maintaining websites.

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## What is user experience?

We talk about great user experiences and bad ones - but what does this really mean for our websites? User experience (UX) involves a person's thoughts, emotions and attitudes towards using a website.

When considering if a website has a positive or negative UX we typically seek answers to these types of questions.

- Can you achieve your goals?
- How does it compare to other websites like this?
- Is the website pleasant to use?
- Does it look visually appealing to you?
- Is it easy to use?
- How does the website perform?

Everyone has a unique experience of a website because we each bring our own sets of ideas, goals and beliefs to everything we do. It's these individual human qualities that drive and influence a user's experience.

Human qualities of user experience

1. Motivations - the reasons they came to your website and what they hope to achieve
2. Expectations - their preconceptions about how your website should work
3. Perceptions - the way in which your website affects their senses (touch, see, hear, smell, taste)
4. Abilities - how they are able to cognitively and physically use your website
5. Flow - how they use your website over time
6. Culture - their own cultural beliefs and value system within which the person lives their life

When someone describes a good user experience with your website, it means your website has positively addressed these qualities.

## References

Subject to change, book by David Verba and Todd Wilkens.

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