

Develop Website Information Architecture

Web Development Team

Session 2 – Plan Content Structure

Information Hierarchy

By this stage of the design process you should have identified and categorised the information within the organisation and divided it up into usable discrete segments appropriate for the website. It is important now to consider how to structure this content.

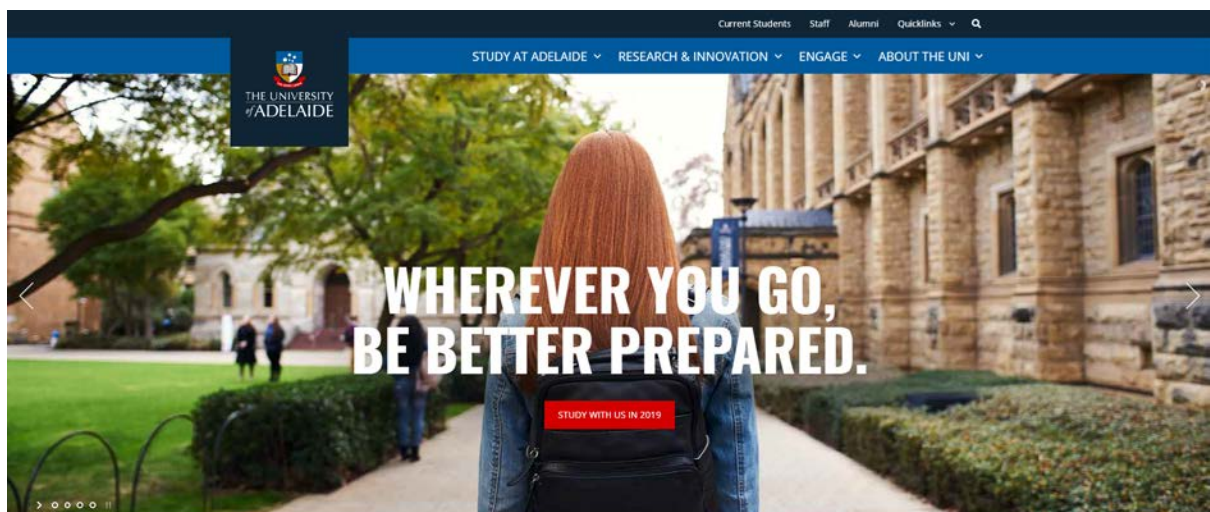
Website content is often structured according to some kind of metaphor. According to John Shiple in a tutorial entitled [_Information Architecture](#) there are three types of metaphor:

- Organisational metaphor
- Functional metaphor
- Visual metaphor

The organisational and functional metaphors are commonly used to structure content; these are discussed below. The visual metaphor is more relevant to a discussion on navigation and is discussed in the resource **Develop Navigation Systems**.

Organisational metaphor

An organisational metaphor groups and presents information according to the organisational structure. For example, consider an academic site which organises the website by department. The graphic below shows the Adelaide University website <http://www.adelaide.edu.au>



This website provides a good example of how the organisational structure can be used to provide a basis for the navigational structure. For example, we have pages for:

Develop Website Information Architecture

Web Development Team

- The University
- Programs and courses
- Faculties and departments
- Campuses and maps

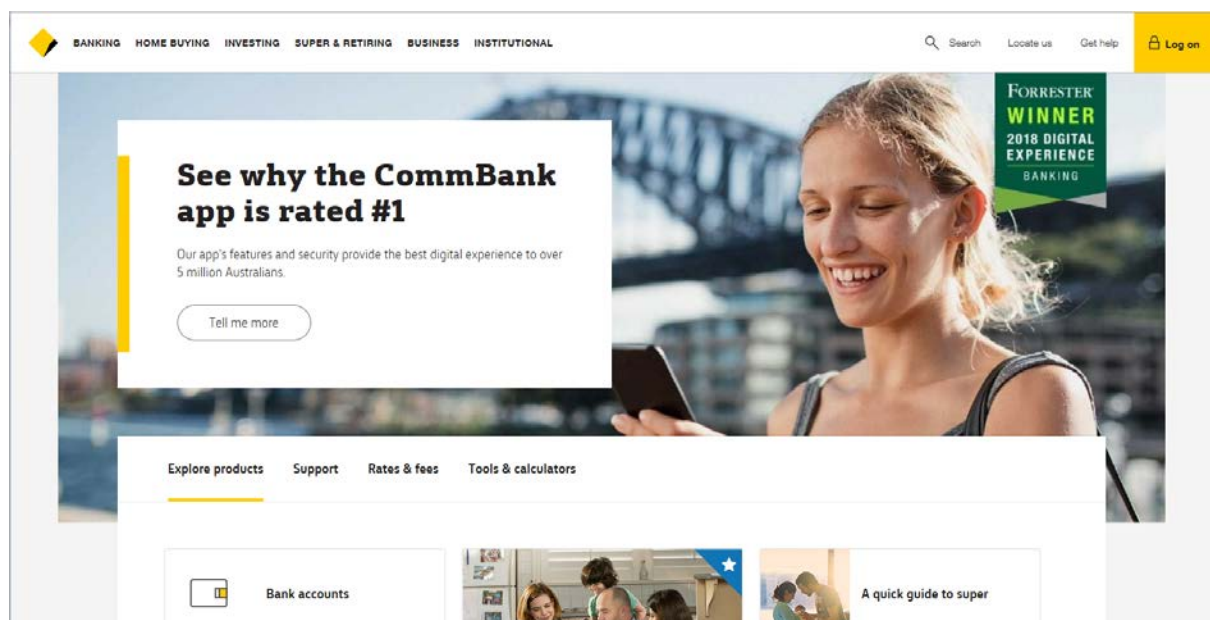
Many users visiting this site already have some idea of how a university is organised and so this structure helps them locate the information they require. The metaphor contributes to the usability of the site.

The University website also provides navigation based on target audience. For example there are links labelled:

- Future students
- International students
- New students

Functional Metaphor

The functional metaphor presents information and navigation according to the function of the site. This type of organisation might be appropriate where the main purpose of the website is to perform specific tasks. The graphic below shows the Commonwealth Bank of Australia website - commbank.com.au/. This website is predominantly designed with user tasks in mind.



Notice how many of the navigational areas reflect the functions or tasks that people may want to perform at a bank, such as:

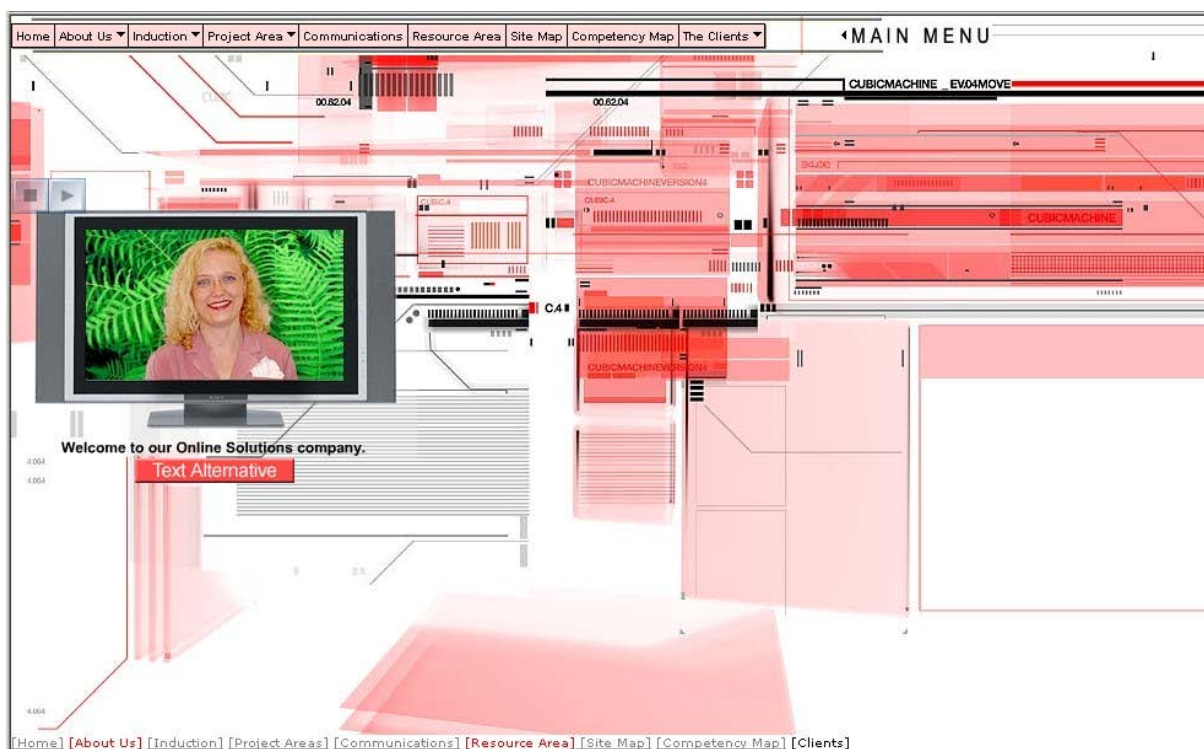
- Online banking
- Online trading
- Applying for services
- Applying for finance

Develop Website Information Architecture

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Hybrid Design

Metaphors are not limited to those discussed here, in fact many websites use a combination of metaphors - a hybrid design. The website you are viewing is based on a hybrid design. The organisational metaphor is reflected by the links to: "About us", "resources", "the clients" and "competency map". The functional metaphor is illustrated by the links to: "induction", "projects" and "communications".



The Site Map

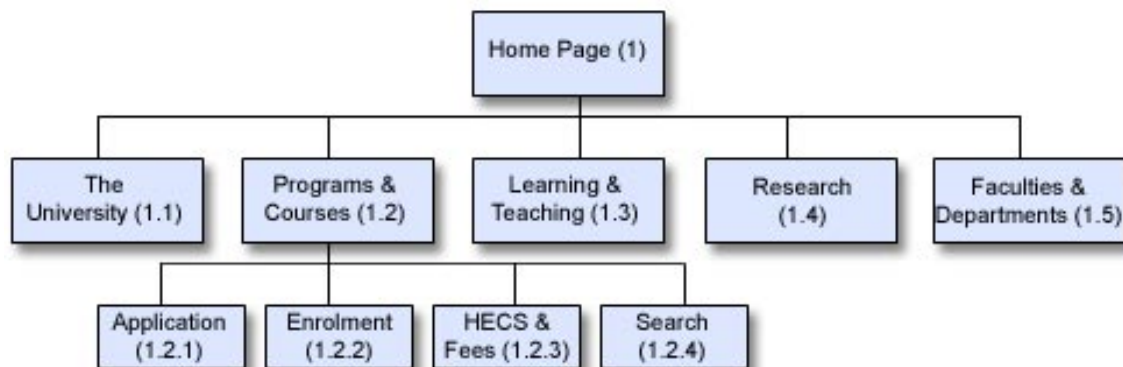
The advantage of developing a metaphor is that it can provide the basis for the content and navigational structure. For example the Adelaide University website, discussed previously, illustrates how the different organisational areas are used to create an "information hierarchy". A hierarchical structure is the most common way to organise websites and information. Even the most basic sites have a home page, which provides links to "child" pages. However the more complex a site is the more appropriate a hierarchical design becomes.

To develop and document this hierarchy it is common to use a site map. The site map provides a visual representation of the structure of the website and allows the design team to easily explore different content structures. The highest level site map starts at the home page and shows the main components of the website. This can be refined as the design progresses. However it helps to start with a top level view to attempt to get the overall organisation and when all stakeholders have agreed to the high level design, work

Develop Website Information Architecture

Web Development Team

can begin on the finer levels of detail. The diagram below shows a site map based on the Adelaide University website viewed earlier.



Example	
Content chunk	Destination web page
Company Background (p12)	About us (shared/html/about_us.htm)
id: 0012	id: 1.1

How to Chunk Content into Scannable Pages

Every website has content. But not every website has content that's easy to scan and understand. That's because they're not chunking their content into scannable pages. Content chunking is a technique of combining and grouping pieces of content into sizable chunks, so that it's easy and efficient for users to consume.

If your website doesn't use content chunking, you'll make users work harder than they need to when viewing your content. This can cause users to miss important information, struggle to find specific information and eventually leave your site due to a poor content experience. (anthony, 2011)

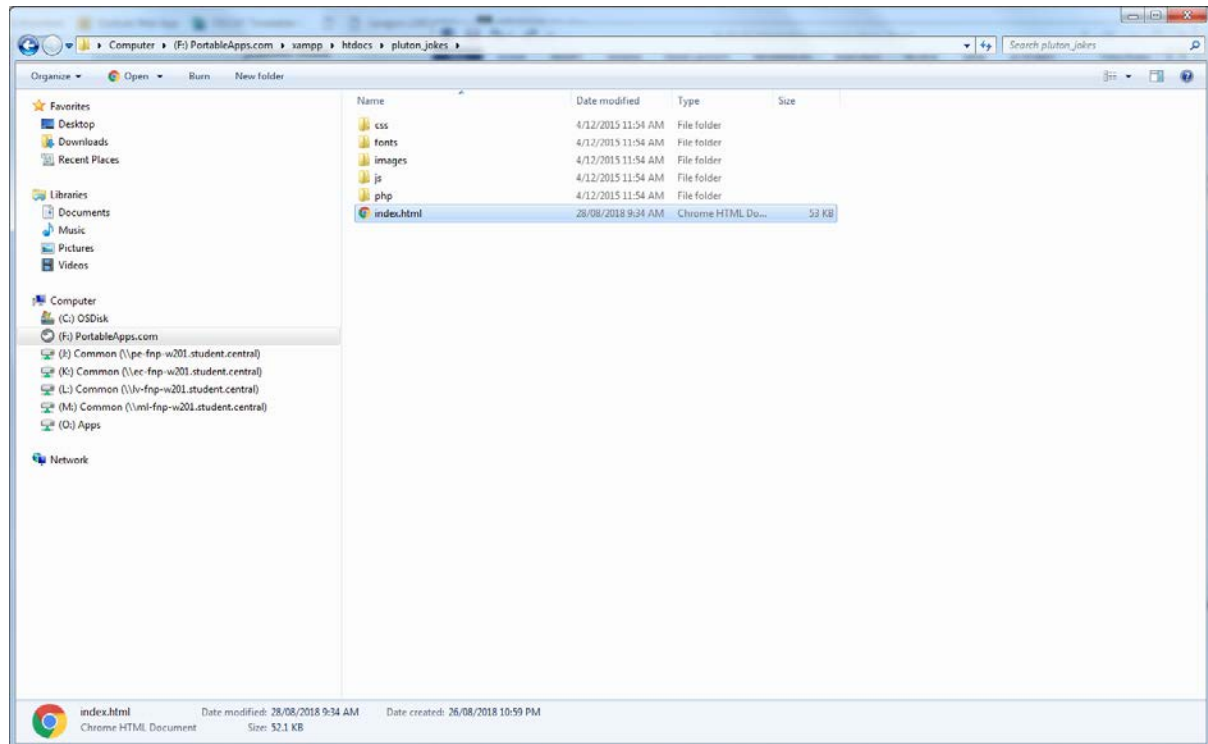
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Web Development Team

Logical versus Physical hierarchy

The hierarchy described in the previous section refers to the logical organisation of the web pages. It describes the structure of the website from the user's perspective as they navigate the site. Another type of hierarchy can be referred to as the physical hierarchy. The physical hierarchy refers to how the actual HTML (and other) files are organised within folders on the server's hard drive. For example a section of the physical file structure of the website you are viewing is shown in the graphic below.



A common method of organising a website is to place all images, scripts, sound, video, animations etc. in separate folders as illustrated in the graphic above. This improves the maintainability of the folder because developers can easily locate specific files. The folder structure illustrated also shows the website content has been organised according to the different content areas.

References

anthony. (2011, June 12). *How to Chunk Content into Scannable Pages*. Retrieved from UX Movement: <https://uxmovement.com/content/how-to-chunk-content-into-scannable-pages/>

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Shiple, J. (2010, February 02). *Information Architecture Tutorial - Lesson 4*. Retrieved from Wired: https://www.wired.com/2010/02/Information_Architecture_Tutorial_-_Lesson_4/

Develop Website Information Architecture

Web Development Team

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