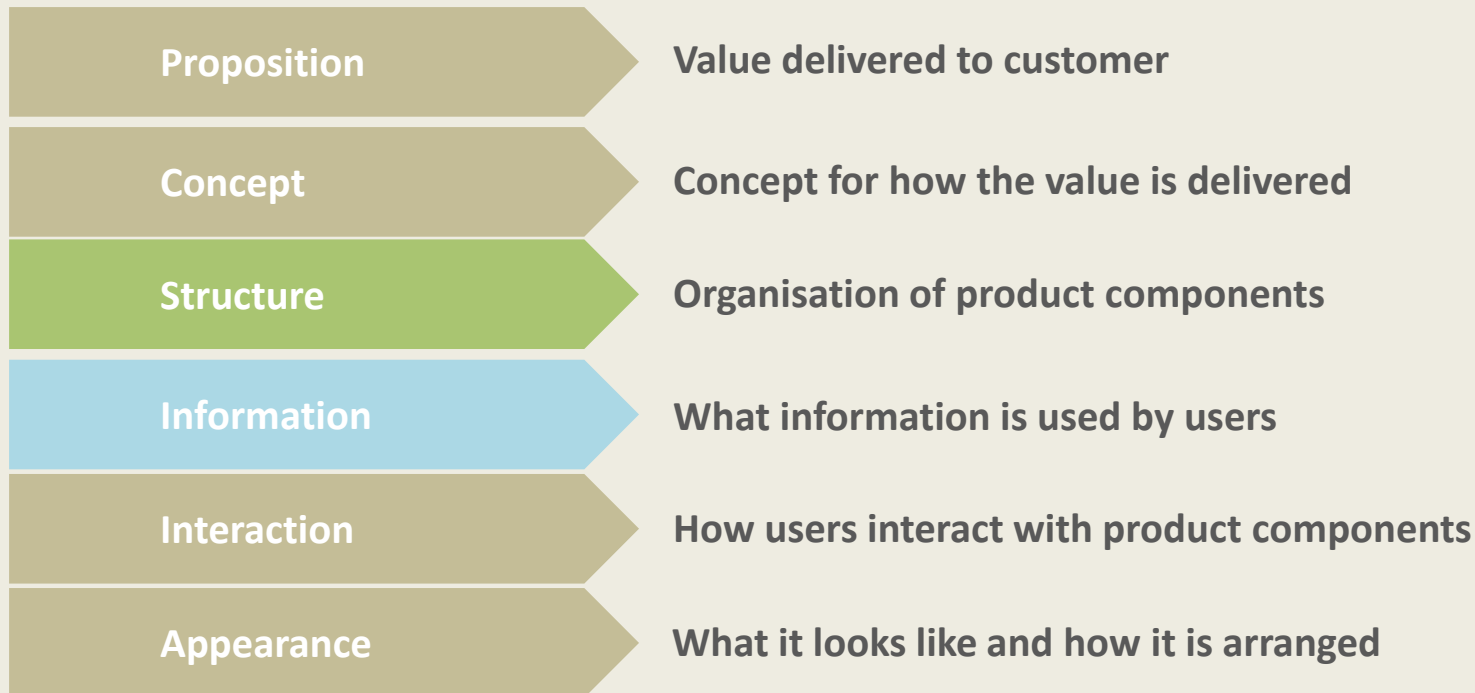


## *2.2.2 Organising Information*

# The elements of user experience



...one view of it. [Here's another one](#)

# Organisational challenges

Organizing complex information on a web site presents huge challenges:

- **Findability:** Users need to be able to find what they want among a potentially huge numbers of items
- **Ambiguity:** Language is ambiguous, e.g. multiple definitions, cultural differences (the words "pitch", "catch")
- **Heterogeneity:** "Objects composed of unrelated or unlike parts" Most Web sites are very heterogeneous because they have multiple formats, usually all mixed up together
- **Differences in user perspectives:** Ignoring different user perspectives can make parts of your site unusable; make sure that you know your user!

# Labelling systems

- **Can't present all information at once**, so need to use informative short cuts, i.e. labels
- These need to **communicate information effectively**

## Why labels are important:

- Users have **short attention spans** (avoid high "cognitive load" for your users)
- **Bad labels make bad impressions**; they frustrate users
- **Self-centred labelling makes a bad impression** (avoid business-speak & terminology)
- Labelling systems need serious planning.

# An unplanned labelling system...

- **Technology Interface Unit**
- **Project QA**
- **Business & Media Interaction**
- **Internal Services Office**
- **New Media Center**

These assume that the user knows what you are talking about!

# A planned labelling system...

- Arts & Humanities
- Business & Economy
- Computers & Internet
- Education
- Entertainment
- Health

These might also make us wonder... e.g. what resources are contained within these categories? We do know what subject areas are covered, though. It's also a common system. Users have seen it before so they only need to learn the system, not individual labels (familiarity breeds contentment!)

# Organising information

Information can be organized in the following ways:

- **Alphabetical**, e.g. [Cambridge Uni](#)
- **Chronological**, e.g. [The food timeline](#)
- **Geographical**, e.g. [Twittervision](#)
- **Topical**, e.g. [DMOZ](#)
- **Task-oriented**, e.g. [Blogger](#)
- **Audience-specific**, e.g. [UWE](#)
- **Metaphor-driven**, e.g. [JK Rowling](#), [Hothorse](#)'s [old site](#).

# Organising information: Classification and hierarchies

- **Taxonomy is the classification of things.** e.g. [Dewey Decimal System](#), [Linnaean classification](#)
- **Not all taxonomies are hierarchical** e.g. days of week
- Classification schemes provide important metadata for a Web site. They provide the basis for (i) efficient search and information retrieval and (ii) sharing of data between Web sites.



# The hierarchy: a top-down approach

- A more rigid approach with usually **mutually exclusive categories**
- You can choose a **narrow and deep approach**; fewer sections, more levels of sub pages beneath
- Or a **broad and shallow approach**: lots of section with fewer sub pages.
- If you expect your site to grow, **it's easier to incorporate change into a broad and shallow design**
- **Don't feel trapped by hierarchies**, and don't force topics in a hierarchy, hyperlinked or database driven approaches are useful too

# Relational databases: a bottom-up approach

- Better where users want to retrieve information in different ways, having different starting knowledge.
- Content created "on-the-fly" depending on requirements
- Examples of a bottom-up approach are **search based** sites, or **faceted navigation** e.g. [Amazon](#) or [Ebay](#)

# Folksonomies

As the web becomes more social and interactive, it becomes **harder to maintain formal taxonomies and structures.**

- Informal structures are becoming much more common and there's a move towards getting users to start tagging their own content e.g. [Flickr](#) or [del.icio.us](#)
- Tags are often visualised as a [tag cloud](#)
- See also: the [Wikipedia entry for Folksonomy](#)
- The implications of user-generated tags & content [are huge!](#)

# Folksonomies

Suggested by 12 customers

★★★★★ (40)  
Suggested by 11 customers

★★★★★ (40)  
Suggested by 8 customers

> [Explore 118 other items related to "paris hilton"](#)

## Tags Customers Associate with This Product ( [What's this?](#) )

Click on a tag to find related items, discussions, and people.

[overrated](#) (41)

[trash](#) (33)

[horrible](#) (25)

[pathetic](#) (25)

[makes me wanna smash the radio](#)  
(22)

[disgusting](#) (18)

[useless](#) (14)

[fun](#) (13)

[rubbish](#) (12)

[talentless](#) (12)

[paris hilton](#) (11)

> [See all 211 tags...](#)

Your tags: [Add your first tag](#)

**Help others find this product - tag it for Amazon search**

No one has tagged this product for Amazon search yet. Why not be the first to [suggest](#) a search for which it should appear?

## Rate This Item to Improve Your Recommendations

[Sign in](#) to rate this item



☐ I own it

Sometimes the [results of allowing users to tag content](#) can be interesting...

# Common labels within navigation systems

- Home / home page / main / main page /
- Search / find / browse / sitemap / index / table of contents
- Contact / feedback
- Help / FAQ / frequently asked questions
- News / what's new

**Some of these have clear user expectations attached to them; use these in your favour!**

# Using metaphors

- Sometimes the use of metaphors helps users understand things
- Use them wisely to support your navigation
- **Steer away from metaphors that are obscure or ambiguous,** or have different meanings in different cultures
- Common metaphors include: Checkout, Shopping basket, Home



# Card sorting

- Card sorting is a simple, quick method for **understanding how site users classify content** (by shuffling cards around, hence the name).
- The method is used to generate an **overall structure for your information**, as well as **suggestions for navigation, menus, and possible taxonomies**.
- See also: [Card sorting: a definitive guide](#) on Boxes & Arrows and [Information design using card sorting](#)

# Steps in a card sort

- **Select the content to be tested** (pages of existing site? new content?)
- **Find the participants** (should be representative of site users)
- **Prepare the cards** (write names of pages on cards)
- **Conduct the tests**
  - **Open sort** - participants create and label groups for the cards as they see fit
  - **Closed sort** - how do the cards fit into an existing classification? (validation of an existing classification)
- **Analyse the results** (common groupings? cluster analysis?)



## ***Task: Conduct a card sort***

Go to [optimalsort.com](https://optimal-sort.com)

**Working in groups of 3, conduct the open card sort on the site.** Try to group the cards in a meaningful way (what is 'meaningful'?) and try to produce appropriate labels for the groups.