Systems: Lesson 2

Relationships

# Need to make clearer that the diagrams need to have a perspective, tell a story

# Introduction

The key to system thinking is to see beyond objects to the relationships between them. This is challenging because while the objects are generally tangible in some way, most frequently their relationships are implied and invisible. Thus we can find the relationships only by observing how changes in one object correlate with changes in others, and then we still can't be certain if the correlation is direct or indirect.

In this lesson, you will practice finding relationships in a tightly defined context: the narrative of Tom Stoppard’s Arcadia.

In addition to constraining the system to that which is described in the play, we make the exercise even more straightforward by considering only relationships between human characters in the play. Your job, then, is to make manifest the relationships between these characters as defined, explicitly and implicitly, by the action of the play.

# Objective

Your objective in this lesson is to produce a diagram that communicates a point of view about the relationship between the characters in the play Arcadia. In addition, for each relationship you identify, you are to define at least one type of information exchanged along that relationship. Examples of information type might be things like

* instructional
* secret
* conspiratorial
* misleading
* warning
* recommendation

Or you could classify the types of messages in terms of emotional content, such as

* warm
* angry
* calculating
* loving
* frustrated
* threatening

Human relationships always support the communication of various types of information. For each relationship (and each direction along it) choose the information type you think is most common, most important, or most interesting, and be prepared to explain why.

# Discussion

This lesson gives you practice in finding the relationships within a system while simplifying many of the normal challenges involved in this work. In this case, the boundary of the system is very clear (the narrative of the play) as is the name and count of objects (consult the list of characters). These signposts allow you to focus, for the purpose of this lesson, on understanding the relationships between the objects, and figuring out how to represent this structure graphically.

There are two complications to consider as you think about this project. The first is that there may be multiple ways to define a relationship between two of the characters. For example, one relationship between Septimus and Thomasina is as teacher and student, but is that the only relationship they share? If not, what are the conditions that cause the relationship to change, or are there always more than one operating?

Another complexity is to do with time. And this itself has two parts. The first is the obvious and familiar feature of time that it moves forward as the narrative of the play progresses and so may have an influence on how relationships are defined. The second complexity is the way the play takes place in two totally different times in the history of Sidley Park.

# Submission

You will submit a presentation containing one or more slides (1680x1050) that contain drawings representing all 13 characters in the play and relationships between them indicated by graphic symbols and connectors. The examples of shared information can be indicated by annotation or symbolically. Not every character need show a relationship to every other, but omissions should be intentional, and you need to be able to defend them.

Every slide needs to contain this information:

1. your name, date, the name of this lesson and the name of this class
2. a number identifying the slide
3. a unique title

The number of slides in your submission is up to you. The goal is clarity; your call how that is best achieved. In addition to the electronic submission, you will bring in a mounted version of your slides that you post on the wall a part of a group critique on the due date for this lesson.

# Learning Goals

* practice understanding system structure in terms out of the relationships between objects
* begin to think about relationships as information vectors defining a direction and type
* practice representing system structure schematically

# Grading Rubric

| **Quality** | **Pass (1)** | **Fail (0)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Completeness | Contains all the required elements | Does not contain all the required elements |
| Presentation | Layout, organization and graphic design of the information is appropriate and facilitates consumption of the information | Information is poorly organized, the graphic design is unattractive or inappropriate and the information contained is difficult to parse. |
| Content | The analysis presented is easy to understand, makes sense, tells a plausible story and follows a clear logic | The connections and relationships are not presented clearly, the arrangement doesn’t follow an apparent logic |