Systems: Lesson 3

Terminology

# Introduction

The purpose of this lesson is to practice perhaps the single most effective technique for identifying the important concepts within a system. That technique is simply to pay attention to the special words that a system expert uses to describe the objects, relationships and behaviors of the system.

The concept of system expert bears some explaining. In most cases, all it really means is someone who has experience operating within the system. Sometimes this individual will have particular credentials documenting his expertise but the lack of formal credentials does not necessarily mean a lack of expertise. However, it does mean a different point of view. A difference that we can detect by listening to the technical words each uses. For example, in Arcadia we have Bernard, a don or professor of literature and we have Hannah, a self-taught author. Both are experts on a similar historical period but both talk about it--describe the details of it--with distinct vocabularies where some words overlap in meaning and others do not.

These kinds of specialized vocabularies go by many names such as terminology, nomenclature, lexicon, lingo or, more pejoratively, jargon. The relevance for the system thinker, however, is that the these collections of labels and the meanings assigned to them are immensely revealing with respect to the understanding of the system by the individuals who inhabit or study it.

# Objective

Your objective in this lesson is to

1. select a topic that interests you, but about which you have no special knowledge
2. find 3 sources online which describe and explain the topic (wikipedia is OK for one of them)
3. identity and define 10 words that each are used in at least two of the sources to convey special or technical meaning to do with the topic

# Submission

You will submit a written document consisting of the following parts:

1. Your name, date, the name of this lesson and the name of this class
2. A name and short description of the topic that you researched
3. A list of the three sources you used, including the URL of each
4. A table with 3 columns:
   1. the word
   2. your definition for it
   3. the sources where the word was used, indicated by a number corresponding to the order the sources are listed in item #3 above.

Make the definitions as concise as possible, while still capturing the required nuance and specificity.

# Learning Goals

* practice discerning the difference between terminology and plain speech
* practice recognizing the assumptions buried in the words a person uses to describe a situation
* practice thinking about the relationship between perspective and perception

# Grading Rubric

| **Quality** | **Pass (1)** | **Fail (0)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Presentation | The document is attractive, clear and easy to understand | The document is sloppy or confusing to read |
| Completeness | Contains all the required elements | Does not contain all the required elements |
| Content | Content is thoughtful, definitions are clear and all are relevant to the selected system | System summary or definitions are fuzzy, ambiguous or otherwise difficult to understand |