Information Architecture [IA] Theory

& why librarians should care about it

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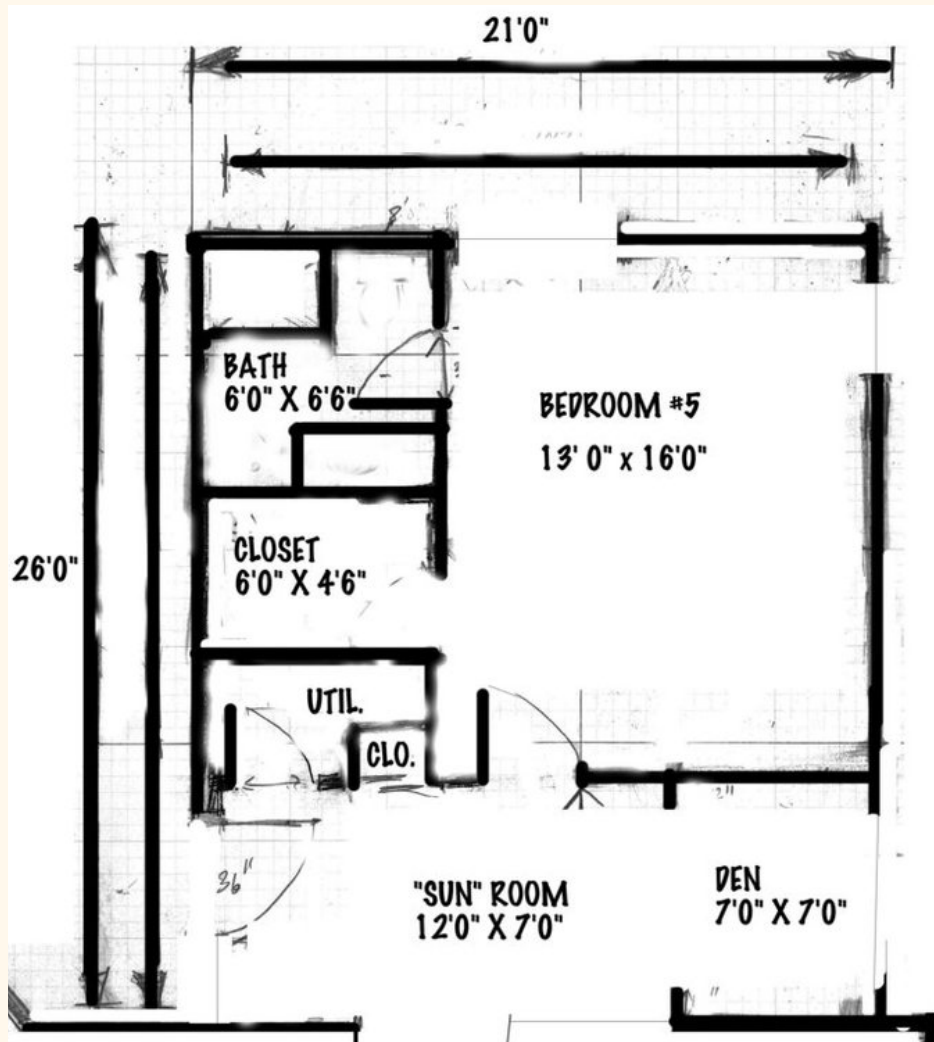INULA Career Development Workshop
Tuesday, 20 March 2012

So what IS this Information Architecture (IA)?

- Good question.
  - Organizing and labeling a digital library properly is an excellent example. But just an example.
  - Proper organization respects system and users

- Better question: What ISN'T IA?
  - Actually, very few things.
  - Information is all around us and must be organized properly.
  - Libraries/etc. technically a form of IA

Why is IA so important for a website?

- Represents organization and relationships between pages
- Properly done IA = easy to use website
- Easy to use website = more customers, users, higher ratings, etc.
- Same reasons we properly organize and put signs in libraries

One basis of IA: Real architecture (Plan)

21'0"

BATH
6'0" X 6'6"

BEDROOM #5
13' 0" x 16'0"

CLOSET
6'0" X 4'6"

26'0"

UTIL.

CLO.

36"

"SUN" ROOM
12'0" X 7'0"

DEN
7'0" X 7'0"

*Wurman RS. "Information Architects", 1976.

- RS Wurman, an archetypal IA practitioner, felt IA was an offshoot of civil architecture.*

- Draft on left designed by yours truly. Actually exists in structure; attached to his parents' house in Westfield, Indiana

- Considerations
  - System
    - Making use of environment
    - Follow civil building codes
  - Cultural/personal (user)
    - Meet typical American expectations of residential architecture
    - Meet customer (parents') specific expectations
    - External aesthetics (don't want angry neighbors)
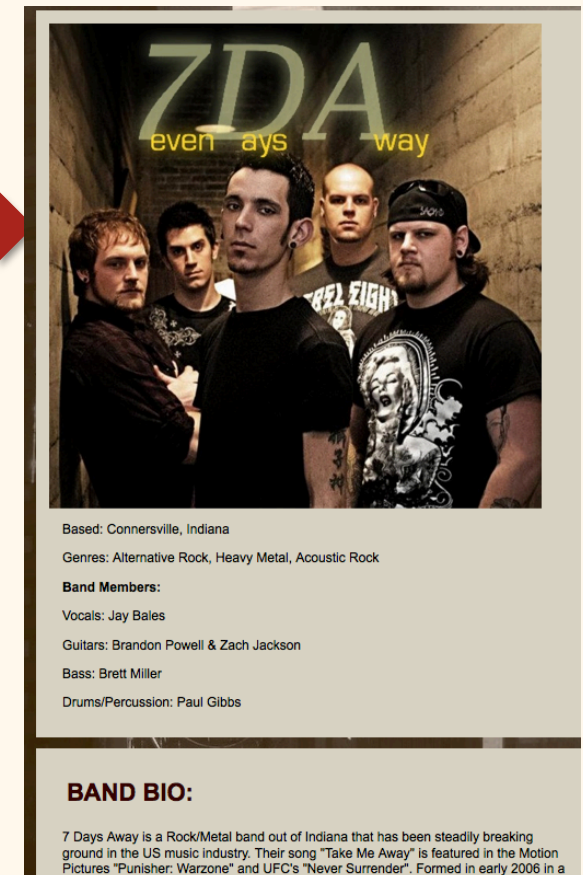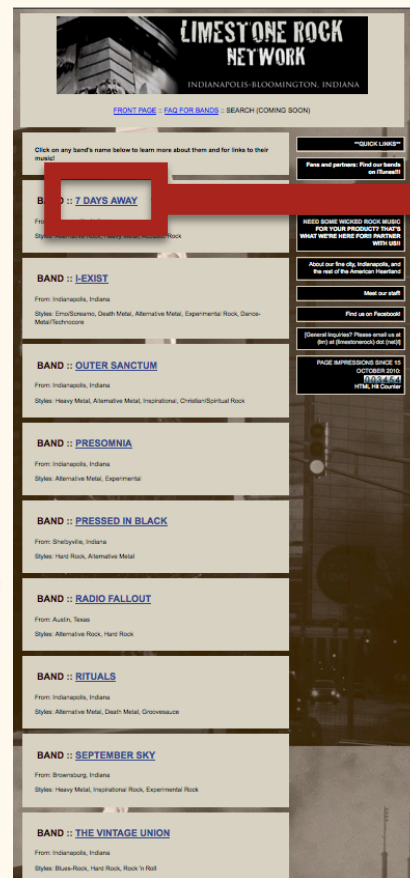
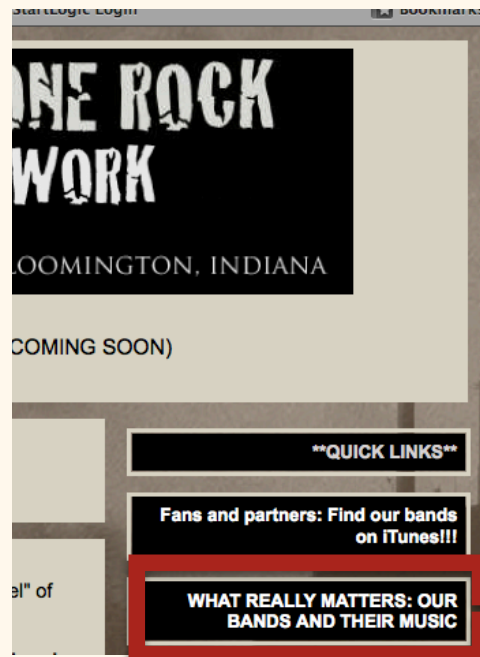# One basis of IA: Real architecture (Product)

Of course, an architectural plan should ideally translate to a navigable product.

One basis of IA: Real architecture

- The actual extension required modifications prior to building.

- System considerations
  - No codes violated, fortunately.
  - Bathroom and closet switched to put bathroom next to water heater/utilities
  - Very large skylights in added to sunroom to actually have light in room

- Respect cultural norms and customer requirements
  - Overall depth shortened to minimize impact of exterior appearance (again, don't want angry neighbors!)
  - Den and sunroom merged at parents' request

Some digital IA: Record label site (Checking out the product first this time)

Source: Kulanthaivel A & Lemen M
"Limestone Rock Network",
http://limestonerock.net/
Bloomington, Indiana, USA
Listed band names are trademarks of their respective bands.

Some digital IA: Record label site
Now, the plan!

[Any page with menu]

→

Our Bands (Menu item)

→

Our Bands (Listing page)

7 Days Away

I-Exist

Outer Sanctum

Presomnia

Pressed In Black

Radio Fallout

Rituals

September Sky

The Vintage Union

[band biography pages]

Source: Kulanthaivel A & Lemen M
"Limestone Rock Network",
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Listed band names are trademarks of their respective bands.
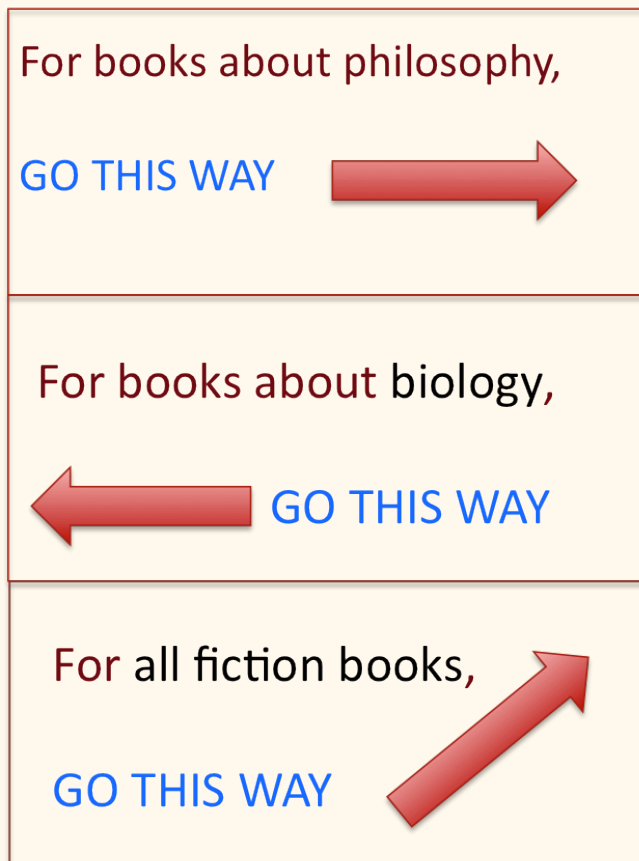
Beyond houses and bands: Signs

- Well-designed signs, labels, and directions are mandatory for proper execution of IA.

- Similar principles followed in physical libraries and museums.
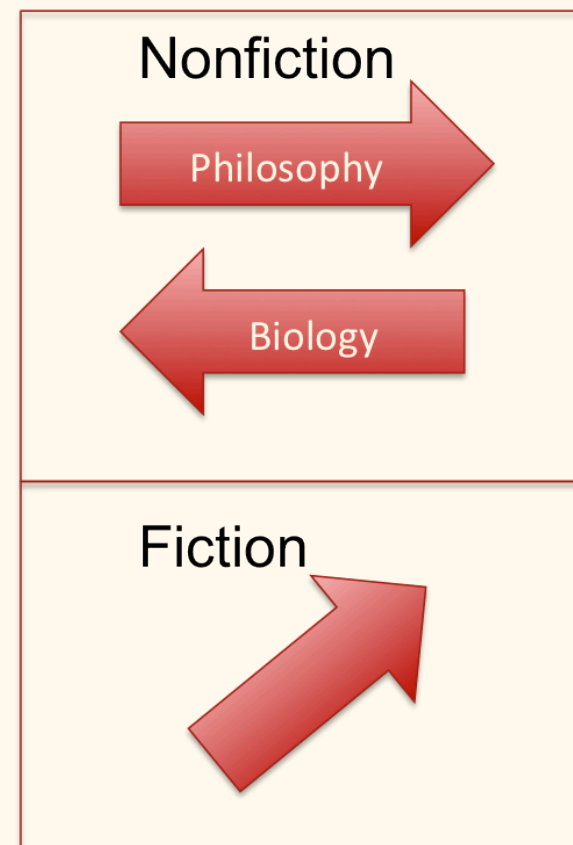 - Technically a form of IA in and of itself!

Proper signage: Digital

- Bad "digital" signage may include poorly designed:
  - Links on the web
  - Menus in computer software applications

- Overcoming this requires good IA practice.

Proper signage: A library

- How would you sign your library?

For books about philosophy,

GO THIS WAY →

For books about biology,

← GO THIS WAY

For all fiction books,

GO THIS WAY ↗

Nonfiction

Philosophy →

← Biology

Fiction ↗

[disorganized, forceful, harder to read]   [more organized, subtle yet useful]

Proper signage: A website

- Unsurprisingly, the same goes for web links.
  - "Click here" is the nemesis of many information architects
  - Verbal cues preferred instead

To see a list of our bands, click here.
To see our staff's biographies, click here.

Links:

Check out our bands!

Meet our staff

[disorganized, forceful, harder to read]   [more organized, subtle yet useful]

Proper signage: General

- Organize, organize, organize (when possible)
  - E.g. Nonfiction/fiction in library
  - On sites: Adding headers (e.g. "links") to organize
  - Can get creative in complex sites/libraries/museums/ etc.
    - Multiple organizational methods

- Good practice: Suggestive but descriptive cues
  - A library sign would never emphasize "go here"
  - Similarly, Webmasters don't emphasize "click here"
  - Caveat: Make sure descriptive cues are extremely suggestive (can confuse readers otherwise!)

Other issues in IA

- Issues in design, signage, organization, building architecture, etc. often paralleled in digital IA.
- Complex organizational patterns
  - Faceted organization: Difficult in real-world spaces, easier on the web/with software.
- Cultural changes and differences
  - Are people getting used to "click here"?
  - Different types of organization for different countries/languages
    - German sites differ significantly from English ones.

Special Thanks

- Dr. Stasa Milojevic, SLIS faculty & SLIS-S515 (Information Architecture) instructor

- Monique Threatt, INULA Social Committee

Questions, comments, etc.?