

Planning and designing a user-centred website

Practical workbook

Aims and Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- identify the main features of a successful website;
- define the site's goals, audiences, content and functionality;
- take a user-centred approach to a website's design;
- involve others in the planning and design process;
- decide how best to organise and structure the site's content;
- design an effective navigation system.

Document information

Course files

This document and any associated practice files (if needed) are available on the web. To find these, go to www.bristol.ac.uk/it-services/learning/resources and in the **Keyword** box, type the document code given in brackets at the top of this page.

Related documentation

Other related documents are available from the web at:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/it-services/learning/resources>



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Planning and designing a user-centred website (October 2011)

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Introduction

This document contains support material for the half-day workshop 'Planning and designing a user-centred website'.

When you start thinking about creating a new website for your school or research project, you should start by asking a few questions to identify the goals of your site, its intended audiences and what they will want from the site. Too many websites fail to answer these questions adequately and as a result tend to be inward looking rather than user-centred.

The aim of this course is to explore the "pre-production" phase – the first of four stages in the development process – of your project. Although each stage is essential to the success of the project, the "pre-production" stage is the most critical because it is the foundation of the whole edifice. Poor planning will result in time wasting, a site lacking coherent organisation and structure, and ultimately a site that fails its users. Good planning on the other hand will result in time saving, logical content organisation and structure, and a site that meets its goals and audience needs.

Prerequisites

None.

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Task 1 Introduction

Objectives To identify the main characteristics of effective and successful websites.

Comments Looking at other websites in a critical manner is a great way to learn what works and what doesn't.

What makes a great website?

Creating a great website is not as easy as it may sound because the people usually involved in a web project are likely to have different answers to this question. Designers tend to focus on visual appearance, developers on technical aspects, marketing people on 'broadcasting the corporate message' and pushing the 'brand', and the boss may think he/she knows best and try to impose his/her own ideas, however fanciful they may be!

In this scenario nobody bothers to ask the people who matter what they want from the site: the intended users.

- 1.1** Drawing on your experience as a user of websites, what are the characteristics of effective and successful websites?

It may help to think of bad as well as good experiences.

You probably identified some of the following characteristics, and maybe others not on this list, as desirable features of great websites:

- clear purpose
- goal focused
- content is easy to find
- has good content (i.e. original, fresh, relevant and up-to-date)
- focus and clarity of purpose
- has clear navigation
- meets user expectation (things are where users expect them to be)
- appealing but unobtrusive design
- consistency in colours and design
- user-centred
- logical site structure

More generally, a great website is a site that **provides a great user experience**:

- it meets the exact needs of its target audience;
- it helps users achieve their goal without fuss;
- it is easy to use;
- content is easy to find;
- it is simple and elegant;
- it is a joy to use.

How great are these sites?

- 1.2** Open the two websites given below and, for each of them, try to answer the following questions:

Q1. Looking at the homepage, how easy is it to identify what the site is about? Does it tell you what you can do and find on the site?

Q2. Is the information organised in a coherent and intuitive manner?

Q3. How easy/difficult is it to find what you want (set yourself a simple task such as “I want to find the nearest rubbish tip.”)?

Q4. What do you like and dislike about the site’s appearance?

Bristol City Council (www.bristol.gov.uk)

Skip to main content Skip to main navigation Accessibility 1.5 Spacing

Apply Pay Report My Account Search

A-Z list Sitemap

- Homepage
- Births, deaths and marriages
- Business in Bristol
- Children and young people
- Community and safety
- Council and democracy
- Council Tax
- Environment
- Financial help and benefits
- Health and adult care
- Housing
- Jobs
- Leisure and culture
- Planning and building regulations

Neighbourhood Partnerships Secondary schools Black History Month Bristol in Bloom

Your Councillors See all

Geoffrey Richard Gollop
 Party: Conservative
 Ward: Westbury-on-trym
[More details about Geoffrey Richard Gollop](#)

Get involved

- Register to vote
- Meetings and decisions
- Have your say
- Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Complaints and Comments

My neighbourhood

Q1	
Q2	
Q3	
Q4	

BUPA (www.bupa.co.uk)

The screenshot shows the Bupa website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Careers', 'Contact us', 'Facilities finder', 'Individuals', 'Business', 'Intermediaries', and 'Healthcare providers'. Below this is a secondary menu with 'Home', 'Health insurance', 'Health assessments', 'Self pay treatments', 'Care homes', 'Cash plans and travel insurance', and 'Health information'. A search bar is located on the right side of the page. The main content area features a large banner for 'BUPA HEALTH INSURANCE' with the sub-header 'Bupa By You Affordable new health insurance' and a 'GET A QUOTE NOW' button. To the right of this banner is a blue box with the text 'To discuss your health care needs call us on 0800 606 570*'. Below the banner are three columns of content: 'Health insurance' featuring 'Bupa By You' with a 'GET A QUOTE NOW' button and 'More about health insurance' link; 'Health assessments' featuring 'Bupa Health Assessments from £149' and 'Bupa Fitness Assessment' with 'More about health assessments' link; and two sidebars: 'For business' with links for 'Company health insurance', 'Dental insurance', 'Company health cash plans', and 'Business health assessments'; and 'For members' with links for 'How to claim - health insurance', 'Bupa Health Finder App', 'Member offers', and 'Member feedback'.

Q1	
Q2	
Q3	
Q4	

Task 2 Research: asking the right questions

Objectives To explore the research process for identifying what should go on a website.

Comments This first step should be a team effort rather than the work of one person.

In groups of 2 to 4, choose a website project that one of you is or will be involved in – if you don't have one, you may use the web project detailed in Appendix A.

Defining the goals of the website

- What is the purpose of the website?
- How will the website supports your organisational goals?
- What specific goals do you hope to achieve through the website?
- How will you define and measure success?

2.1 Reflect on the questions above and write a short statement identifying the main purpose of the site and its main objectives:

Learning about the target audiences of the site

- Who are the most important audiences for the website?
- Are there other audiences we haven't thought about?
- How do these audiences currently interact with the department? By phone, mail, email, in person, etc?
- What will these audiences want to do when they visit the website? Why will they come and what will make them return?

- 2.2** Identify the main audiences of your site and write a brief statement about their needs in the box below:

Identifying content and function requirements

Now that you have a clear idea of what you want your site to achieve and who your target users are, you can start thinking about the site content and function requirements.

There are different ways of identifying content and function requirements:

1. **Identifying content in an existing website** – Examine the contents of the existing site and use that content inventory as a starting point. Then decide what needs to be kept, eliminated, modified and added.
2. **Wish lists** – Invite all the staff in the department, and if possible members of your target audiences (eg, students) to create wish lists of the types of content they would like to see on the website.
3. **Brainstorming** – Get a few people (staff, students, etc) together in one room with a white board or flip chart. Explain what you are doing and ask them what they think needs to go on the website and write it down for all to see – this can be fun and most importantly it is an excellent way to generate ideas. At this point all ideas, however far- fetched, are welcome.
4. **Surveys and questionnaires** – These can be useful for larger projects and to gather quantitative data, particularly in the early stages, for example to evaluate your current site and find out what users like and dislike about it.
5. **User stories and personas** – User stories are great to put yourself in the mind of your users and to identify the kind of problems they want to solve. Personas are stereotypes of key users (not only demographics, but also knowledge, interests, goals, influencers, etc); they are a good communication tool and a constant reminder to focus on user needs.

2.3 Use this space to write your own notes from the group brainstorming session:

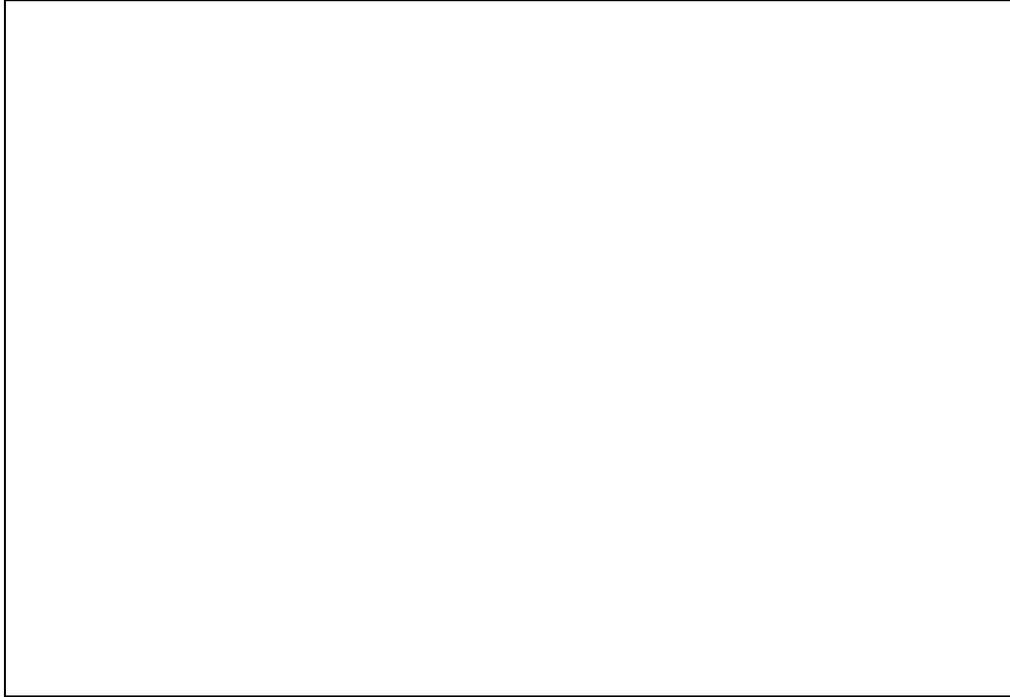
2.4 Write two user stories:

Note The advantage of the wish list and brainstorming methods is that everyone has an opportunity to contribute, and therefore cannot later complain that they were not consulted!

Once you have exhausted the subject, it is time to comb through and sort the wheat from the chaff! Give the participants a few minutes to look at the list of random ideas and as a group decide what ideas should be kept and rejected. Consider each idea on its merits. You may find that an idea that seemed silly at the time looks suddenly good, or that two or three random suggestions together make a terrific one.

Remember at all times to measure your ideas against your goals statements and audience profiles.

2.5 Write down the ideas that the group has decided to keep from the brainstorming session (try to have at least 25 items):

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write down at least 25 ideas from a brainstorming session.

Task 3 Organising and structuring content

Objectives To decide how best to organise and structure content on the website.

Comments This is the stage where you create order out of chaos.

Organising content

First of all, you need to decide on an *organisation scheme*, in other words a logical system for grouping content items. But first of all, a technique called card sorting is going to help you make sense of the list of content items you identified in the previous task.

3.1 Card sorting:

- 1) Write down the items you identified in the previous task (you should have at least 25 items) and write them down on the Post-it notes (one item per Post-it) handed out.
- 2) Group the Post-it notes into categories that will make sense to your site users.

Exact organisation schemes:

These schemes divide information into well defined and mutually exclusive sections:

- alphabetical
- chronological
- geographical

Ambiguous organisation schemes:

These schemes divide information into categories that defy exact definitions:

- topical (by subject)
- task-oriented
- audience specific
- metaphor-driven
- hybrid schemes

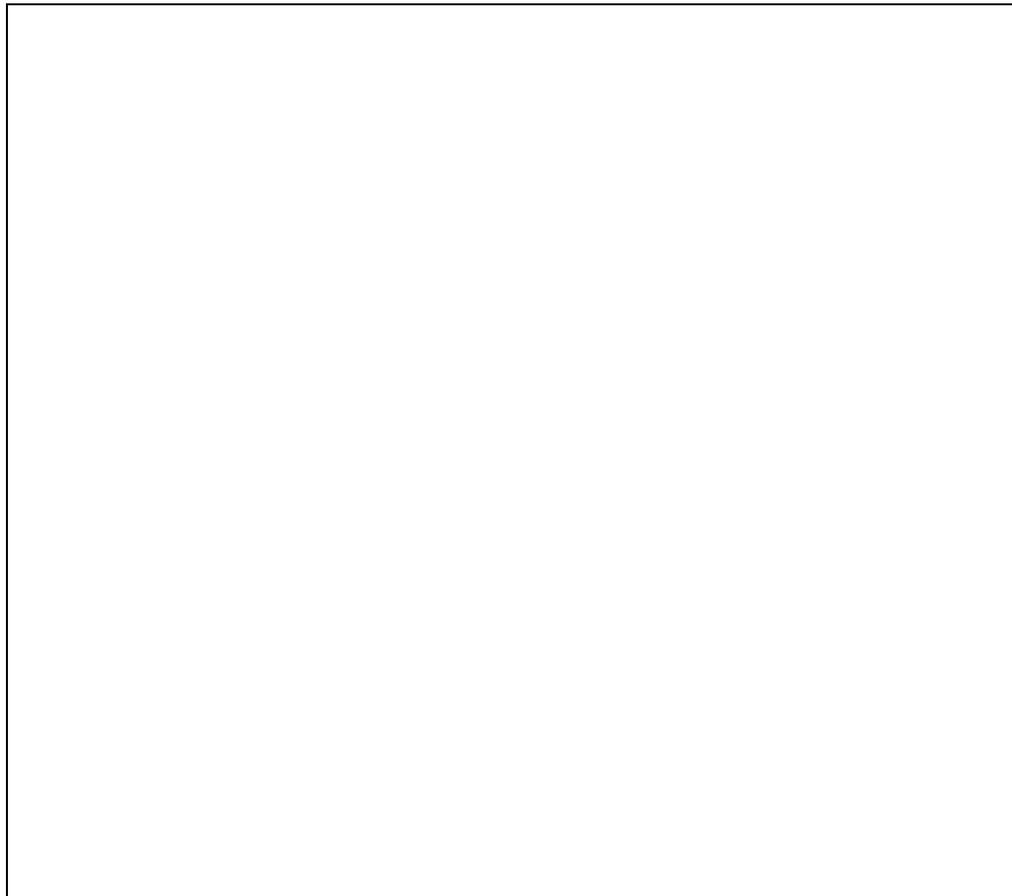
- 3.2 In light of the card sorting exercise, you should be in a position to choose one or two appropriate organisation schemes for your website.

Structuring content

The structure of content defines the primary ways in which users can navigate through a website:

- hierarchical organisation (shallow or deep);
- linear (or sequential) organisation;
- Hub & Spokes organisation;
- Hypertextual or networked organisation.

3.3 In pairs, draw a structure model for your website (you may want to use a larger piece of paper for this):



Task 4 Designing the navigation system

Objectives To design a user-centred navigation system.

Comments The navigation system is the guide that enables the users of your site to find what they want quickly.

Persistent navigation

Persistent navigation refers to navigation elements that are present throughout the entire site; it is also referred to as global navigation.

- 4.1 In your group, decide which elements of the site's navigation system should be global:

Context-specific navigation

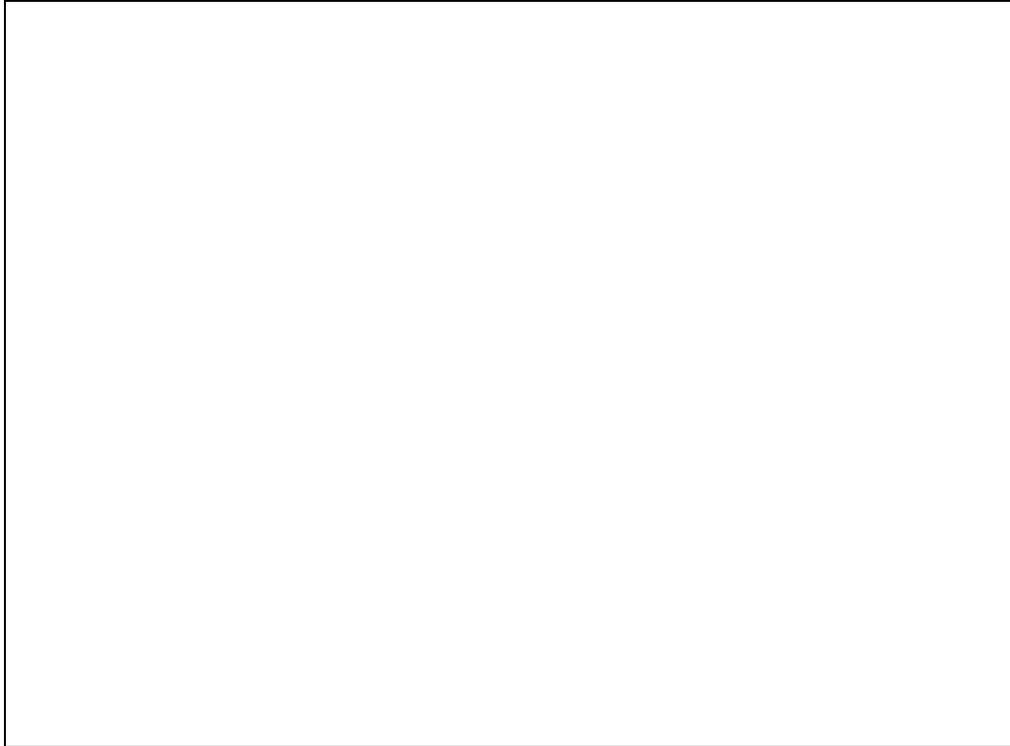
Context-specific navigation refers to navigation elements that change depending on the context of the page or main section; it is also referred to as *local navigation*.

- 4.2 Now decide which sections of the site will require local navigation and write down the page-specific links for one of them:

The homepage

The homepage acts as a gateway to the site's content, therefore it is important to get it right!

- 4.3** Draw a sketch of the homepage for your website (you may want to use a separate sheet to do this task):

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing a sketch of a homepage. The box is currently blank.

Appendix A Web project: planning a website for the Institute of Oenology

The Institute of Oenology is based at the University of Bristol and is the only unit of its kind in UK higher education, with around 12 staff and about 100 full time undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The Institute has three main functions:

1. undertaking and communicating research into Vineyard Management, Wine Tourism and Marketing, Wine Chemistry and Microbiology and Grape Genetics;
2. using research outcomes to inform our teaching;
3. transferring research outcomes to practice via a commercial consultancy service.

The Institute offers the following course programmes:

- Bachelor of Viticulture and Oenology;
- Master of Science in Viticulture and Oenology;
- PhD degrees;
- Life long learning courses.

Appendix B The four stages of website development

1. Pre-production:

- define the goals and audiences of the site;
- define the content (brainstorm, wish lists, etc);
- construct the site architecture (structure, navigation system);
- gather and generate content.

2. Production:

- customise UoB template;
- create the site's framework in Zope;
- test the site structure with users;
- develop and refine content.

3. Publication:

- check all links;
- review site for spelling and grammar concerns;
- carry out validation and accessibility checks;
- If using the UoB Zope-based template, check what you need to do before you launch your site at:
www.bris.ac.uk/web/guide/site-launch/ (UoB only)

4. Post-publication:

- perform routine maintenance;
- add regular updates and additional content to the site as needed;
- promote site to the public (or within the organization in the case of intranet development);
- discuss future expansions and redesigns.

Adapted from Molly E. Holzschlag, *Turning Chaos into Order: Managing Web Projects*

<http://molly.com/articles/webthoughts/2000-01-chaos.php>

Appendix C References

On the web:

A regularly updated list of online resources relevant to this course can be found at www.delicious.com/uobittraining/website_planning

Books:

- Steve Krug, *Don't make me think*
- Louis Rosenfeld & Peter Morville, *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*