

Curtin University  
School of Design

Internet Interactivity Design 392

Chapter 2

**Navigation Design  
for Learning Sites**

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## Navigation Design for Learning Sites

Designing learning spaces on the Web is a lot like designing learning spaces in a museum.

In both cases, audiences:

- are transitory
- move through at different paces
- have different backgrounds or experiences

to bring to the topic. Both museum and web learners tend to:

- lose patience quickly
- prefer quickly digested information
- want to try things out for themselves

User Goals and Expectations for Learning:

<b>First Tier</b> (general navigation questions)	Where am I? Where can I go? How will I get there? How can I get back to where I once was?
<b>Second Tier</b> (purpose-oriented questions)	Where should I begin? Do I need special knowledge or tools? How do I know what you say is true? How can I get information that's right for me? How can I try it for myself? What if I want to learn more (or less)? What if I have questions?

### **Where should I begin?**

We've discussed this quite a bit in previous lectures. One additional option may be to use a combination of navigation strategies that begin with a linear introduction. See the Annenberg/CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) Project: <http://www.learner.org/exhibits/> or <http://www.moma.org/whatisaprint/>

### **Do I need special knowledge or tools?**

Telling people what they'll need saves time (theirs and yours) and avoids potential problems such as inadequate equipment or insufficient background knowledge. Removing these potential barriers means learners can focus on the topic at hand, not on unnecessary problems. See PBS's Interactive sites at <http://www.pbs.org/neighborhoods/fun/> to see how they've handled this or Tommy Swee's site <http://internet.design.curtin.edu/interactive/examples/fengshui/>

### **How do I know what you say is true?**

We all know the Web has a reputation for being untrustworthy. You can argue that this is a navigation issue because people need to know how to navigate through the garbage to get to the trusted sources of information. Having a trusted name, like National Geographic (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/>) or The Annenberg/CPB Project (<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/>), go a long way if their names are displayed prominently, but it is also important to name producers and content creators and reference thoroughly to gain trust. The more weight your references hold, the more trust people will have of your information.

### **How can I get information that's right for me?**

As we've learned in previous lectures, people have a variety of different learning style preferences. Your job is to provide flexibility and alternatives so your learners feel more at ease and less likely to abandon your site. DigitalThink (<http://www.digitalthink.com/>) uses several methods to help communicate a subject to students.

### **How can I try it for myself?**

As you know, your final project should be interactive enough to allow me to practice what you've taught me. National Geographic for Kids does this here: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tigers/maina.html> or The Secret Life of the Brain: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/brain/>

### **What if I want to learn more (or less)?**

It's good to offer different routes through your content – for casual and serious learners. The Annenberg/CPB Project Exhibits (<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/>) build in frequent opportunities for hands-on experimentation and allow people to select how much they want to learn.

### **What if I have questions?**

Where can your users go for additional information?

## Outlining Specific Goals

User Goals and Expectations for Learning Language:

<b>First Tier</b> (general navigation questions)	Where am I? Where can I go? How will I get there? How can I get back to where I once was?
<b>Second Tier</b> (purpose-oriented questions)	Where should I begin? Do I need special knowledge or tools? How do I know what you say is true? How can I get information that's right for me? How can I try it for myself? What if I want to learn more (or less)? What if I have questions?
<b>Third Tier</b> (topic- or audience-oriented questions)	How do I know if I'm saying the words right? What if I come across a word I don't know? How can I try out my new conversation skills? Is there anything I need to know about the culture in order to learn the language?

There are a few things you can do to beef up your knowledge of learner's behaviors and goals, especially where specific audiences and topics are concerned. To find out what these third-tier goals are for your learning site, try adding some of these research tasks to your development schedule:

- Take a class. Learn material yourself. See what you have difficulty with and what others have difficulty with.
- Talk to teachers. Find out Frequently Asked Questions. Find what support materials they use. Find out what they do and DON'T do and why.
- Arrange a test to find out for yourself how learners react to the Web. Have people visit existing educational sites to see what they like and don't like about them.
- Research current thinking in education. Can you incorporate new practices into your site? Pick up a few books and magazines on teaching and training, and see what professionals are talking about.
- Look at CD-ROMS and get feedback from users.
- Go to museums, especially science museums or those that offer hands-on learning. What exhibits are most popular? Are there learning spaces?

- Read training manuals and other self-guided instruction materials. Look at help screens in various software applications. What approaches seem to work? What doesn't?

### **Case studies to examine:**

PBS (American Public Broadcasting Service):  
<http://www.pbs.org/neighborhoods/fun/>

DigitalThink: <http://www.digitalthink.com/>

National Geographic for Kids: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/>

The Annenberg/CPB Project Exhibits Collection:  
<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/>

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### **References**

Fleming, J. (1998), *Web Navigation: Designing the User Experience*, O'Reilly and Associates, Sebastopol, CA.