

Getting started with information architecture

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Weave

What is information architecture?

- Not just a site map
- How people find things

Information architecture is the way that we arrange the parts of something to make it understandable.

— Abby Covert, *How to Make Sense of Any Mess*

Information architecture for websites includes...

- Site structure
- Navigation
- Taxonomy
- Search
- Personalisation

**There is no single 'correct' way
to do information architecture,
but there are broad principles**

IA principles

- Use language your users use ('information scent')
- Start with users' mental model, not your own
- Think about user journeys

**Information architecture should
be user-centric, not
organisation-centric**

Mythbusting

- ✘ 'The ideal number of top-level menu items is 7 (or whatever).'
- ✘ 'All content should be accessible within 3 clicks.'
- ✘ 'Shorter menu links are always better.'

3 questions to get started

- What are our most important user needs?
- What content do we have?
- Why is our current information architecture broken?

3 questions to get started

- What are our most important user needs? → user research
- What content do we have? → content inventory
- Why is our current information architecture broken? → benchmark usability testing

Ways of structuring websites

- Audience
- Topic
- Task
- Format
- Organisation structure

Many websites use a combination – this is OK as long as the rationale is clear.

Audience

- First question: 'who are you?'
- Good for sites with very different user needs for different audiences
- Not so good if the audiences are marketing segments



Australian Government
Australian Taxation Office

[Home](#)[Individuals](#)[Business](#)[Not-for-profit](#)[Super](#)[Tax professionals](#)[About ATO](#)

- > Lodge online with myTax
- > Update my details
- > Progress of my return
- > Linking myGov to ATO online services

Login as

Individual



Login

Register ▶

[System maintenance and issues](#)

[Access manager](#)

Affected by recent events? >

Tax tables >

Check the latest tax tables to see h

Superannuation

Ask Alex for help





What can we help you find?

Search

Sign In

Products

Solutions

Services

Support

Deals

Laptops >

Desktops & All-in-One PCs >

Tablets & 2-in-1 Laptops >

Gaming >

Workstations

Thin Clients

Servers & Storage

Networking

Monitors >

Ink & Toner >

Software >

Electronics & Accessories >

Dell: We're here to help.

ers:

COVID-19 virus uncertain, our world feels unsettled. I was with our global team in a virtual t
bout this, and our priorities to keep each other and our communities healthy and safe and



For Home

[View all Monitors for Home](#)



For Work

[View all Monitors for Work](#)

Topic

- First question: 'what are you interested in?'
- The most common kind of structure
- Can work well as long as it follows users' mental model
- Integration with taxonomy can allow for more automation

Coronavirus

Wednesday
18 March 2020

● Live / Australia coronavirus live: NSW reports 57 new cases and one death

○ 7m ago The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has released its wishlist for the second tranche of stin...

○ 8m ago Meanwhile, in very 28 Days Later areas: ...

○ 9m ago On the private schools that have no infections and have chosen to close, both the NSW and Victorian leaders s...



Task

- First question: 'what are you trying to do?'
- Site structure tries to follow the user journey
- Sounds like it should work well...but it rarely does
- Lack of trigger words
- User journeys don't divide up neatly



Format

- First question: 'what kind of content are you looking for?'
- Site structure based on formats or content types
- Can work for common formats that you know people are looking for – e.g. events, case studies
- Big problem when user wouldn't know what format the information is in



KINGSTON LIBRARIES

read... live... learn... collaborate... experience!

Text Resize: A A

Home

eLibrary

My Library

Library Services

Kids' Place

Youth

What's On



City of Kingston's response to COVID-19

TEMPORARY CLOSURES

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Kingston Library branches are closing temporarily

To try to help slow the spread of COVID-19 within the community, we're closing our physical centres temporarily. Online services are still available.

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[Renew My Loans >](#)

[eBooks & eMagazines >](#)

[Movie Streaming >](#)

[Ask a Librarian >](#)

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What's Happening @ Your Library

Upcoming Events



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The 2020 Stella Prize shortlist has been announced! Have you read any of the titles? All titles are available in our collections to borrow or place on hold. Why not check one out today!

FIND YOUR NEAREST

Call us on 1300 135 668

library@kingston.vic.gov.au

Organisation structure

- First question: 'what department do you need?'
- Still common on intranets
- Always bad

Tools to use when developing a site structure



Card sorting

- With stakeholders: good for understanding points of contention
- Online with users: good for understanding how people group things
- Optimal Sort: <https://www.optimalworkshop.com/optimalsort/>
- Card sorting doesn't create your structure for you!

Tree testing

- Test a hierarchical site structure
- Treejack: <https://www.optimalworkshop.com/treejack/>
- Great for spotting false trails and confusing labelling





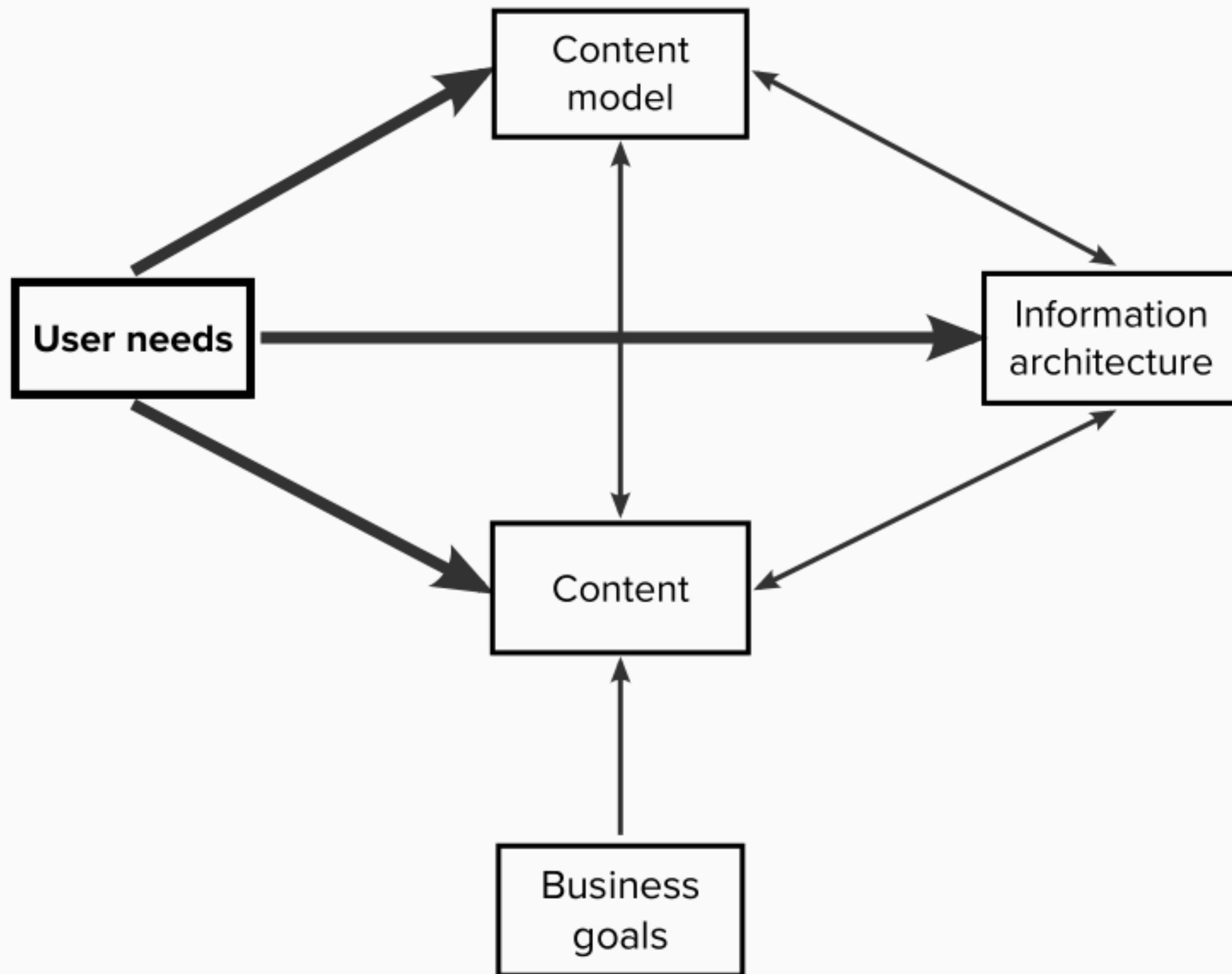
Moderated usability testing

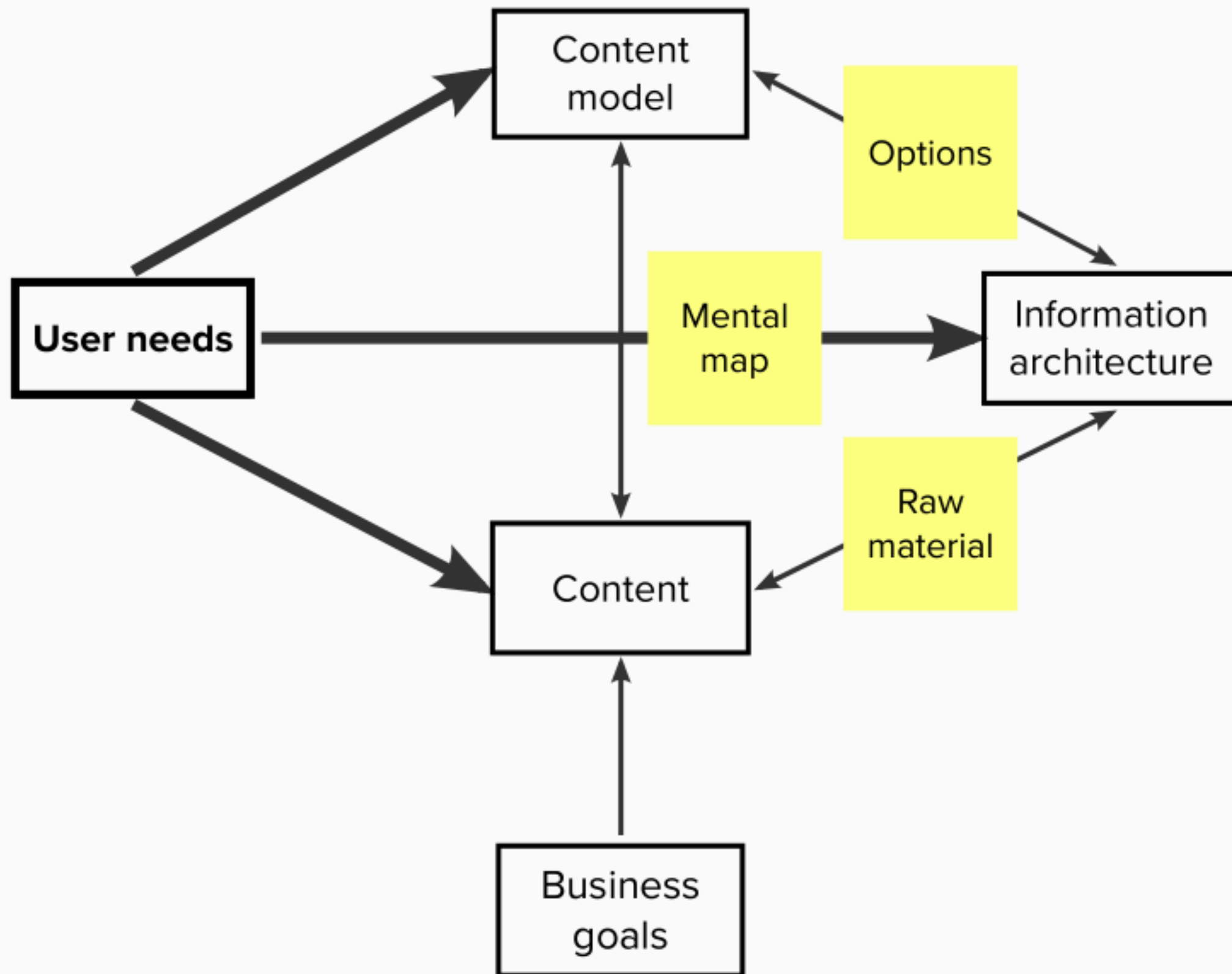
- You can test with anything: a site structure, wireframes, a prototype, etc.
- Test early and often (3 to 5 participants is fine)
- Moderated testing means you can ask why

Documenting a site structure

- A visual sitemap can be useful for stakeholders, but it can be difficult to make changes and it doesn't suit detailed info.
- Use a spreadsheet (or similar) as your source of truth.
- Write guidelines explaining rationale and how to deal with new or changed content.

Information architecture in context





Further reading

O'REILLY

4th Edition



Information Architecture

FOR THE WEB AND BEYOND

Louis Rosenfeld,
Peter Morville & Jorge Arango

A BOOK APART

29

Lisa Maria Martin

EVERYDAY INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

FOREWORD BY Karen McGrane

Questions?

Thank you!

@WeAreWeave

@MelContentStrat

Content design and user research online courses: sign up for info

<https://weaveweb.com.au/services/content-training>