**Objective**
To analyze the information architecture of a web site in visual and structural terms and to assess its navigational structure

**Documentation**

**Design Analysis**
Identify the use or failure to use visual design principles to create *Organization & Visual Structure*:

- **Unity:** All the visible elements of Google seem incredibly straightforward working towards a common goal. It’s immediately understood that it’s a search engine and if a user wants to do a search on *images*, then that would be the appropriate place to do so and not in *Directory*. The use of section headings unite that idea.

- **Integrity:** The simplicity in design reinforces the objects to one another in context of the interface. It’s understood that the purpose of Google is to act as a search engine and not as an ecommerce site. Google offers five categories for the user to choose from to facilitate the action of searches.
• Readability: The information is grouped individually with the exception of a relatively small chunk next to the text field box.

• Control: The designer’s determined that they would offer the user community seven categories. The users have several search categories to grab information they may seek and this includes just typing in the topic and clicking on Google Search.

The designers have used techniques of:

• Grouping: The **Advanced Search, Preferences and Language** tools near one another located on the right side. In addition, the designers grouped all related information given the name of the category. If I decide to click on images and hope to find an article about a specific news topic, I will not. I will see images followed by the resource where the image was obtained from.

• Visual: The design of Google is free of clutter which aides the user’s experience of searching and navigating.

• Hierarchy: The information is structured in a tree-like arrangement. It begins with a root (high level) and then followed by more specific (branches, twigs, leaves) categories.

• Relationship: Although we can’t see the exact directory structure that Google uses, since there’s a tree-like structure we can imagine that a top-down hierarchy exists.

• Balance: Google is a great example of the use of balance. It’s centered on the page while only changing the tab button when the user is doing a search under that category. This allows the user to focus on that section and not wonder under which category he/she is in.

• Negative Space: Google use of negative space is used in a positive manner providing a clean and crisp page.

The designers have used the following Gestalt Principles and are evident in the examples below:

• Proximity: The information is grouped individually with the exception of a relatively small chunk next to the text field box.

• Similarity: Google uses the same size font, same size images, consistent colors and buttons.

• Continuity: There is a continuous flow of elements (buttons and tabs), shape, size and color consistent throughout all the pages.
• Figure-Ground Reversal: This principle is not applicable to Google.

• Area: Google is centered on the page while the negative space that surrounds it enhances its visual appearance making it very readable.

• Symmetry: This principle is not applicable to Google.

Presentation Analysis

Information Structure:
Based on my journey and log, the information structure is evident in the design as being, Hierarchy. As an example, I clicked on NEWS on the portal’s main page and proceeded onto the secondary page to the WORLD section. I continued my navigation to a third level and to a link that interested me a headline titled, Argentina headed for runoff.
Does the navigational structure coincide with the information architecture? Why or why not?

After careful analysis, I would agree that the navigational structure coincides with the information architecture. As a user of this site, I chose to find out what new events were taking place around the world. The navigation begins at a high and general level (NEWS). It was then broken down to seven sections which are **World**, U.S., **Business**, Sci/Tech, Sports, Entertainment, and Health.

I chose **World** which then took me to a page that contained various links of story headlines of world events. As to my desire, I randomly selected (my personal thoughts) to learn about a current event taking place in South America. With this in mind, I scrolled down and decided to click on **Argentina headed for runoff**.

**Navigational Top 10:**

- **Supports user’s goals and behaviors:**
  Yes, the user’s goal is to perform a search and then determine how they want to execute it. It provides the user with a Directory, Groups and other categories. Perhaps they want to perform an advanced search on a topic which would be an available feature for them.

- **Navigation should be easily learned:**
  Yes, the purpose of Google is to act as a search engine. It doesn’t surprise the user with out-of-this-world ways of running a search. It’s simple, uses clear labeling, visual organization and therefore extremely difficult to forget how to use Google and run a search.

- **Navigation should be consistent:**
  Yes, all elements of design such as font, color, and buttons do not change throughout the site’s pages. In addition, the navigation stays consistent throughout as well.
• **Navigation Provide feedback:**
  Yes, Google’s feedback is providing the user with the information they requested immediately. I’ve experienced that some tools provide only an hour glass that can run for as long as you let it run, not providing an error message.

• **Navigation Appear in context:**
  Yes, the navigational tools always appear in an unobtrusive location on the pages, but always remaining visible. The browser’s, ‘back’ always takes the user back to the previous page.

• **Navigation should offer alternatives:**
  Google does offer alternatives, although initially it may be difficult to locate because the information is in **Services & Tools**. In this section, the user can choose to search and browse mail-order catalogs to translating text or entire web pages to other languages.

• **Navigation should be easy and fast:**
  Yes, Google has successfully implemented this. The design of the navigation is simple and when used to perform a search the results are immediate.

• **Navigation should provide clear visual cues:**
  Yes, there’s no ‘mystery meat’ here! The controls are visible and appropriately labeled for the user. The links follow link conventions and greatly reduce the amount of thinking the user does in figuring out where to go or what to expect from a link.

• **Navigation should have clear labels:**
  The links and buttons are not cluttered with long complicated phrases, animation or distracting colors.

• **Navigation should be appropriate to the site’s purpose:**
  Yes, all the visible elements of the navigation are straightforward working towards a common goal. It’s immediately understood that if a user wants to do a search on **images**, then that would be the appropriate place to do so and not in **Directory**.

**Conclusion**
Overall, the design of Google is simple, easy to use, and visually pleasing. Most of the Gestalt Principles were applied and those that were not were not applicable. It’s a very easy to learn interface and responds with immediate feedback by returning the information that a user sought out. The purpose of the interface is clear, the navigation, the use of color, font and controls are consistent throughout the pages. Google’s simplistic design strengthens its ease of learnability and it’s effectives to locate information.