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HCI 471
Objective
To analyze the information architecture of a web site in visual and structural terms and to assess its navigational structure. Without using the Search tool, navigate to find “Dino Spell” (an educational video game).

Documentation

Google’s main page.

I decided to look for “Dino Spell” which is an educational software program for kids.

Here is the log of my journey:

- [http://www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
- Directory
- Games
- Video Games
- Educational

Design Analysis

The site presents a good use of visual design principles that contributes to the success of the site’s organization and visual structure. The clear communication of the site’s structure helps the user to develop a mental model. The site definitely shows unity, integrity, readability and control. The site presents a good use of control over things like typeface, color and size. The default blue and underlined text clearly communicates to the users that the words are a link.
Have the designers use the following techniques?

**Grouping** -- Yes, categories are grouped together with their respective topic. The footer section displays the same group of links throughout the site.

**Hierarchy** – Yes, even though there is no apparent indication of order of importance because the topics are arranged in alphabetical order, visual hierarchy is achieved by increasing the weight and size of the typeface to distinguish the topics from the categories.

**Relationship** – Yes, the relationship is established by relating categories under a common topic establishing a parent-child relationship.

**Balance** – Yes, particularly the “Directory” page is a great example of visual balance.

**Negative Space** – Yes, the design shows good use of white space. Even though there is a lot of content, nothing seems over crowded.

**Examples of Gestalt principles:**

**Proximity** – is use almost everywhere, links are grouped together under a topic. The tabs Web, Images, Groups, Directory and News are next to each other implying some type of relationship.

**Alignment** – left alignment is use through out the pages.
Similarity – links are always underlined. Topics are bolded and consistently using the same font type, size and color. Logo, Help, Search box and “Go to Directory Home” link appear together throughout the site.

Presentation Analysis

What information structure or structures are evident in the design? The site uses hierarchical information structure, which by the way is one of the most used interface solutions on the Web. Subcategories are always smaller than their parent category and the parent category is smaller than their parent topic.

Does the navigational structure coincide with the information architecture? Yes, I would agree that the navigational structure also uses the hierarchical structure. They increase the weight and size of the typeface to distinguish the topics from the categories. Those distinctions effectively communicate hierarchy.

Were the “Navigational Top 10” suggestions followed?

01) Navigation should support user’s goals and behaviors – Yes, the site provides access to the same pages on the site, but with different user goals in mind. For example: Search box is available for users that want to locate specific topics and are not interested in anything else. The site also displays topics based on the site’s map. Finally, an alphabetical resource index is also provided.

02) Navigation should be easily learned – yes, the site provides a clear visual organization and clear labeling.
03) Navigation should be consistent — yes, the deep structure of the site’s content is exposed in a consistent interface.

04) Navigation should provide feedback — yes, a progress bar is always displayed at the bottom of the screen when an action is taking place.

05) Navigation should appear in context — yes, for example links use the same color throughout the site and are underlined. Another example is that when moving the cursor over the link it indicates its “clickability” (cursor changes to a hand with a pointing finger). In general links are indicated through defined contextual clues. The URL structure is another example of navigational context. For example, http://directory.google.com/Top/Games/Video_Games/ (the address bar indicates where the user has landed).

06) Navigation should offer alternatives — yes, a Search box, content based on the site’s map and alphabetical resource index are provided.

07) Navigation should be easy and fast — it all depends, I did not encounter any difficulties to locate the information I wanted but some user might. Most users would use the Search box to locate specific topics. For the purpose of this assignment I was not allowed to use the Search box so I did get the feeling of “am I there yet?”

08) Navigation should provide clear visual cues — yes, the use of navigational hierarchy (topics-categories-subcategories) provides navigational guidance. Links follow links conventions and the controls are clearly visible.

09) Navigation should have clear labels — links and buttons are simple meaning the words are meaningful and clear.

10) Navigation should be appropriate to the site’s purpose — yes, the type of navigation used is nothing new, in fact it’s the most widely use on Web sites (no attempt was made to present mysterious navigation).

Final Destination:
Conclusion
In summary, the design successfully matches the site’s mental model with the one the user is progressively building while navigating the site. Each link takes the user deeper in the site, which is probably just what the designer intended when building a mental map of the site as a hierarchy. The interface elements provide navigation by presenting the topic and categories in a parent-child relationship. Each category then leads to subcategories that are progressively more detailed. Definitely the success of this design can be in part attributed to the fact that users bring previous experience with them when visiting a site and this site uses one of the most popular Web design solutions.