Have you ever thought why a specific website is your favorite? Is it because you are able to complete your task quickly, or look up information in the minimum time?

You are able to get your work completed on a website because the website has used an efficient way of grouping and presenting information known as information architecture (IA). IA in its simplest sense is grouping things (objects or information) on a website in order to make it easier for the users to locate them and use them equally well.

Donna Spencer’s *A Practical Guide to Information Architecture* introduces the reader to IA and describes how to learn about your users, content, designing an IA, and effective navigation techniques.

This book has a very easy-to-follow narrative where different IA professionals share their practical experiences. The book, while providing legible diagrams to explain IA concepts, also includes a few interesting questions from the author’s projects and workshops and a useful list of reading resources. The book is divided into five sections and each section has five chapters. The book is written in such a way that a novice reader can read the chapters sequentially or an expert can choose to read a section or chapter of interest. The book is a perfect example of effective IA.

Spencer has been practicing IA since 2000 and is a prolific speaker and teacher, in addition to being a freelance information architect, interaction designer, and writer. She has worked on the boards of the Information Architecture Institute and Web Industry Professionals Association (WIPA), and authored a book on card sorting (http://www.rosenfeldmedia.com/books/cardsorting/). She also runs an annual user experience conference (UX Australia).

Section 1, “About Information Architecture,” introduces the concept of IA and provides background knowledge about the practical relevance of IA. The author explains the different roles associated with IA and the relevant skill sets. An interesting read is the experiences shared by IA experts during their career transition to IA. The “IA for Non Web” chapter is an eye opener because we think that IA is primarily meant for websites. The author has shared some interesting nonwebsite examples where IA fits in. We specifically liked the three methods outlined for working out goals—scenario planning, pain points, and backcasting.

Section 2, “Understanding People,” introduces user research and how users locate their intended information. This section gives an overview and comparison of user research methods and analysis processes such as Term Analysis and $2 \times 2$ matrices, among others. The author talks about documenting information and how to communicate with other stakeholders through personas, scenarios, experience maps, etc. Of particular interest is the chapter on how people go about looking for information and the different types of information behaviors such as exploring, refining, and narrowing, etc. This section concludes by talking about how users think about categories.

Section 3, “Understanding Content,” focuses on understanding the content requirements, content planning, and communication about content with others using content inventory, graphs, sitemaps, etc. The author shares her practical experiences in planning, prioritizing, and releasing the content. A separate chapter, with examples, is dedicated to classification schemes such as time, task, audience, and alphabetic.
Section 4, “Designing an Information Architecture,” explains in detail how to design an IA. This is the core chapter in this book and walks you through how to organize the contents based on research results. Chapters are grouped according to IA patterns, labels and languages, and how to create IA. The section concludes by sharing tips on how to communicate your site structure to all stakeholders. For IAs with limited experience, this is the chapter to refer to if you are designing an IA and do not have time to refer to the other chapters. The methods outlined in this section can serve as a reference point for experienced IAs too.

Section 5, “Designing Navigation,” discusses how to connect the content with navigation. The author introduces the reader to the elements of a navigation system, and the secondary navigation aids. The “Designing Navigation” chapter takes the reader through the process of designing navigation from the content page. One thing readers may find interesting is the chapter on testing navigation design. This section explains navigation patterns. However, there are not many navigation patterns to choose from. The patterns chosen will affect the scalability of the website after launch. This section provides the reader with tips to avoid scalability challenges and concludes with a discussion on communicating navigation through wireframes and prototypes.

Overall, the book is an excellent read for those who are getting into the world of IA. The book is available as a PDF, ePub, and paperback from http://practical-ia.com/.