Card-Sorting Exercise: Instructions: Part 1

[instructions] [link names] [results]

To be conducted between June 16 and July 7, 1999.

Materials needed for each volunteer:

- set of 106 cards with link names
- some extra blank cards
- pen
- rubber bands
- post-it notes

To prepare, shuffle the deck so the cards are in a random order. Meet with the volunteer at a large table with plenty of room to spread the cards out.

Read to the volunteer:

This test is designed to help us gain some understanding of how our web site users would name the categories of information on our site. This set of cards represents some names of current content from our site as well as some possible future content that we haven't developed yet.

Take these cards and put them into piles representing categories of information that make sense to you. You may make as many or as few categories as you like.

When they are sorted, put a post-it note on top of each pile and write a name for that category on it. The name can be as long and descriptive as you like, we just want to get a sense of why you consider those links to be a group - the name doesn't have to be perfect.

The whole test should take about 1/2 hour. I have some other work or reading I can do while you're sorting, so I won't be looking over your shoulder, but feel free to ask me questions at any time.

This is part one of the test. Part two will be a different kind of card-sorting test and will be conducted between July 7 and 21. Will you be available to schedule a test during that time?

Here are some questions they may have:

1. What if I have no idea what a link name represents?

   Feel free to set aside cards that have no meaning for you and leave them out of the exercise.
2. May I put cards in more than one category?

   Yes. Make an extra card by copying the name on one of the blank cards and put one card in each category. Make a note on the cards that says "also in [category x]."

3. I have some ideas for related or new content I'd like to see on your site. May I include those somehow?

   Yes, just use the blank cards to make up new links of your own choosing and add them to the piles.

4. What if some of the links don't seem to fit into any category?

   Feel free to make a category called "other" or "general" or whatever.

5. Are you really going to allow off-campus access to databases? (or a similar question from a link name for something we don't have yet)

   Some of these items are from ideas that people gave us for what they would like to see on our site. We haven't made final decisions yet about all the content we will include, but we would love to get your input about which features are most important to you.

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When finished:

When they are done, put a rubber band around each labeled pile and then a rubber band around the whole set. Record the name, email address, department, and status of each user (undergrad, grad, faculty, etc.) and keep with the card set. Bring your sets to the web advisory group meeting on July 7.

Thank the volunteer for participating and give them the Toscanini ice cream coupon!
Card-sorting: link names

[instructions] [link names] [results]

link name
A - Z index of MIT Libraries’ web site
about the MIT libraries
access to non-MIT libraries
accessing our databases from off-campus
annual reports of the MIT Libraries
art
art exhibits in the libraries
ask a reference question (OWL)
Barton (online catalog)
bibliographic style guides
BookPage (on-campus delivery of books between libraries)
cd-roms
check out a book online
chemistry
choosing the best databases for your research
circulation policies (returns, fines, holds)
comments and suggestions
copyright policies and procedures
course reserves
course sites
data resources (statistical data)
database of completed Masters theses
database searching (computerized literature search service)
descriptions of library collections
directories
electrical engineering
electronic journals (alphabetical list)
electronic journals by subject
electronic reserves (pilot project)
email updates on new databases - sign up here
corporate histories and yearbooks
FAQ: frequently asked questions about the libraries
find/search (MIT Libraries web site)
floor plans (for each library)
foreign language newspapers & magazines
gifts of materials to the MIT libraries
history
hours
independent libraries and reading rooms at MIT
instructions on database searching
interlibrary borrowing
interlibrary lending (ILL)
internet resources
knowledge-base of librarian expertise (searchable)
libraries privilege cards (for visitors and alumni)
library instruction
library instructional sessions: schedule
library news
library newsletter
library staff listings
library web forms
make an appointment with a librarian
management
map of library locations
media collections and resources at MIT and beyond
meta-search our databases (search several databases simultaneously)
MITnet connections in the libraries (where to plug in your laptop computer to the network)
Networked Computer Science Technical Reports Library (NCSTRL)
new books
new books - general interest reading (with scans of covers)
new cd-roms
new journals
new titles in the Libraries
newspapers in the libraries
online ordering of MIT publications, journals articles, and conference proceedings
ordering MIT theses
patents and patent information
photocopiers in the libraries
purchasing copies of MIT and selected non-MIT publications
quotations
reference desk hours
request a tour or library orientation
research assistance
retrospective collection delivery
scanning and photographic services
selected MIT Press materials
services for outside users
services for persons with disabilities
site map (of MIT Libraries' web site)
Sloan School of Management working papers
specifications for thesis preparation
stack guide
style manuals
suggested purchases
suggestion box
table of contents service (Uncover Reveal)
technical reports/working papers
translations of journals articles
use of Harvard Libraries by the MIT community
use of materials not owned by MIT by the MIT community
use of MIT libraries by Boston Library Consortium
use of MIT libraries by cross-registered students
use of MIT libraries by Harvard University
use of MIT libraries by industrial liaison program
use of MIT libraries by MBL-WHOI
use of MIT libraries by MIT alumni
use of MIT libraries by reciprocal faculty borrowing program
use of MIT libraries by visiting researchers
use of MIT libraries by Wellesley College
use of Reciprocal Faculty Borrowing Program by MIT faculty
use of the Boston Library Consortium by the MIT community
using EndNote software to connect to databases
vacancies in the MIT Libraries
videotape booking
virtual reference collection
virtual tour of the libraries
Card-Sorting Exercise: Results: Part 1

[instructions] [link names] [results]

The inspiration for this test was taken from the methods described in:
Creating Web Site Designs Based on User Expectations and Feedback
Jeanette Fuccella and Jack Pizzolato, IBM Corporation

Purpose

To find out how our users group the information on our site into categories. This test is not so much to find out the exact names people use to describe things, but to find out if there are similarities in how our users mentally group the information in ways that are meaningful to them.

The Test

The test was conducted between June 16 and July 7, 1999.

9 volunteers took the deck of 106 cards, representing link names on our site and sorted them into categories of their own choosing. We took the card sets of each volunteer and laid them out on a table, with similar groupings of cards piled together. Certain trends became apparent at that point.

Summary of Trends

Here are some of the major categories that more than one person came up with: (in no particular order)

Thesis information
  links to items having to do with thesis preparation from all over our site, style guides, our e-thesis collection, ordering MIT theses, etc.

Information by Course
  links to subject info, e-reserves, etc., organized by MIT Course

New materials & library news
  links to anything about new books, journals, databases, etc., and library news

Ordering materials
  how to order materials, whether from doc services, interlibrary borrowing, theses, etc. (whether it cost money or not) - anything to do with ordering things was group together

Access policies for our library and other libraries
  all the links having to do with various outside groups using our libraries, and our community using other libraries

About the MIT Libraries
  people put all sorts of general info in a category like this, having to do with policies, services, hours, locations, etc.
Services
many people used this word to describe links about library services and library instruction

Materials/Content/Collections
these were some terms used to describe links about our collections and physical items (including equipment) in the libraries

Reference
links that had to do with asking reference questions, virtual reference, or reference desk hours were grouped here

Databases
people used this word to mean many different things, a much broader definition of it than we usually think of (no clear trend other than this)

Note: No one used the term, "resources," to describe anything.

Here are some things people said should be easy to get to from any page (perhaps in a navigation bar), or that should be on a top-level page:

Barton, Search, A-Z Index, Maps, Hours, FAQ, Site Map, Staff listings, Comments/Feedback

[web advisory group]