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## INTRODUCTION TO THE IAD CANON

The Information Architecture Design (IAD) Canon is a developing body of theory concerned with the relationship between information architecture, meaning-making, design, and the artificial realities humans create and inhabit.

While Information Architecture (IA) has traditionally been associated with the structuring of information in digital environments, IAD approaches IA more broadly as a phenomenon of meaning, formation, and consequence operating across artefacts, systems, institutions, and discourse.

The modules collected here represent the first public version of the theory. Together they establish a conceptual framework for understanding information architectures, for studying them in the world, and for intentionally designing them.

This collection should therefore be read not as a textbook or linear argument, but as a coherent body of interconnected propositions.

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### IA and IAD

IAD is not presented as a replacement for IA. Rather, it is one particular school of IA.

The position taken here is that information architectures are not limited to websites, navigation systems, content structures, or digital products. These remain important examples of IA, but they are understood as instances of a broader phenomenon.

IAD treats information architectures as structured configurations of meaning operating within artificial artefacts, systems, and assemblages. From this perspective:

- IA is the phenomenon.
- IAD is a design-theoretic framework for understanding and working with that phenomenon.

In other words, IA is the subject of inquiry. IAD is one way of studying, explaining, and intentionally engaging with it.

This position embraces plurality within the wider field of IA and does not assume that alternative schools, traditions, or interpretations are invalid. Instead, IAD contributes an additional perspective rooted in design theory, constructionist pragmatism, meaning-making, and the consequences of human making in social reality. This commitment to plurality is consistent with earlier arguments made regarding the future development of the field of Information Architecture by the author. <sup>[1]</sup>

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### Why A Canon?

This theory has developed over many years through professional practice, teaching, research, and the author's dissertation on Information Architecture and Design Thinking. As the body of work expanded, certain concepts, models, distinctions, and recurring arguments began to stabilise and demonstrate coherence across multiple contexts.

The Canon exists to:

- provide a stable reference point for the theory;
- make relationships between concepts explicit;

- support teaching, research, and practice;
- create a foundation for future extension and critique;
- preserve conceptual continuity as the framework evolves.

The Canon is therefore intended as an intellectual infrastructure rather than a final destination.

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## **Structure of the Canon**

The Canon is organised into thirteen modules, with an additional six modules planned to expand upon M09 - Development Horizon. Each module addresses a distinct aspect of the framework while remaining connected to the others.

Readers may enter at any point, although the modules are intended to accumulate depth and context when read together.

### **M0 — Orientation**

Introduces the foundational orientation of the framework, the hyperhistoric condition, meaning formation, frame-scale, and the overall structure of the canon.

### **M1 — Epistemological Positioning**

Establishes the epistemological foundations of IAD, including relational intelligibility, compositional modelling, liminal reality, and the distinction between Information Architecture and its analytic representation.

### **M2 — IA in the Wild and IA in Design**

Defines the field through the distinction between Information Architecture as a condition encountered in the world and Information Architecture as a compositional activity undertaken through design.

### **M3 — The IAD Triad**

Introduces the central structural architecture of the theory through Structural Logic (SL), Semantic Formation (SF), and Contrived Ontology (CO).

#### **M3a — Structural Logic and Semantic Formation**

Examines how meaning is composed through the coupling of relational structure and formed coherence.

#### **M3b — Contrived Ontology**

Explores how internally composed meaning becomes socially operative through use, participation, and stabilisation in the world.

#### **M3c — IA Types**

Distinguishes Object-Level, Systems-Level, and Conceptual Information Architecture and clarifies their relationship to frame-scale.

### **M4 — Semantic Mechanics and Socio-Semantic Mechanics**

Introduces the mechanisms through which relational configurations are organised and the reflexive-discursive operations through which meaning is intentionally transformed during design.

### **M5 — Frame-Scale**

Presents the geometric and analytic instrument through which Information Architectures can be observed, coordinated, and understood across different spans of abstraction and consequence.

## M6 — IA as Heuristics

Explores Information Architecture as a practical orientation for inquiry and design through a set of heuristic lenses and guiding questions.

## M7 — The Golden Threads

Introduces visibility, traceability, accountability, and sustainability as mechanisms for maintaining continuity between design activity and social consequence.

## M8 — Contrived Ontology Meta-Framework

Provides an explanatory framework through which the stabilisation of Information Architectures in social reality can be examined using different social-theoretical lenses.

## M9 — Development Horizon

Addresses the future development of IAD as a field of inquiry, research programme, pedagogical structure, community of practice, and design-theoretic orientation.

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## Additional Canon Resources

While the modules form the primary theoretical structure of the canon, they are further supported by:

- A growing Glossary of terms and distinctions,
- Auxiliary notes currently made up of:
  - Historical Notes that trace conceptual and intellectual lineages,
  - Philosophical Notes that explore deeper theoretical implications,
  - Supplementary Notes that elaborate or extend specific concepts,
- And canonical artefacts and examples used for teaching, research, and illustration.

These supporting materials are not included within the core canon documentation, but are available separately.

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## How To Read This Collection

There is no single correct route through the Canon. Some readers may approach it from Information Architecture, others from Design, Systems Thinking, Service Design, Philosophy, Human-Computer Interaction, Strategic Design, or related disciplines.

The modules may therefore be read:

- sequentially, as a developing theoretical argument;
- selectively, according to interest;
- recursively, by moving between concepts and their supporting modules.

Many concepts only reveal their full significance through their relationships to other concepts elsewhere in the Canon. As a result, second and subsequent readings are often substantially different from first readings.

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## About the Author

Jason Hobbs is a designer, educator, researcher, and author whose work has focused on Information Architecture, Design Thinking, strategic design, and meaning-making for more than two decades.

The development of IAD draws upon professional practice, academic research, teaching, publication,<sup>[2]</sup> and the author's dissertation: [Applying Information Architecture in Design Thinking: Ideating Solutions to the Wicked Problem of Addiction \(2021\)](#).

## Contact

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## Website

A public home for the ongoing development of Information Architecture Design is currently in progress and may be found at: [iadframework.com](http://iadframework.com)

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## Footnotes

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### Status

This collection represents Version 0.1 of the IAD Canon. The theory remains active, evolving, and open to extension, refinement, critique, and reinterpretation.

### Citation & Use

The IAD Canon is a developing body of theoretical work authored by Jason Hobbs.

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1. See the article [Footnotes to “Re: The Future of Information Architecture”](#) in the Journal of Information Architecture. ↩
2. Please visit [www.jh-01.com](http://www.jh-01.com) for records of this developmental background. In particular for practice see [Design Work & Projects](#); for theory and research see [Research & Publications](#); and for teaching see [Teaching & Training](#) ↩