Introduction: Communicating Information Architecture
by Laura S. Creekmore, Guest Editor

EDITOR’S SUMMARY
Information architects, like other domain specialists, use their own terminology when working with peers and others in closely related fields. But they also must communicate effectively with business clients, conveying goals, intent and methods in language clearly understandable by those stakeholders. As the nexus of communication, information architects must speak with a variety of audiences, able to express ideas in technical jargon and in everyday language. This special section of the Bulletin delves into the challenges of developing language and other expressions to clearly and accurately represent concepts in information architecture, information modeling, taxonomies and music metadata.

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Communicating Information Architecture

For much of my career, I’ve sat in the same seat that many of you do, I suspect – I’m the person on the team who translates between business and technology. When you work on information architecture (IA), you really do have to speak both languages, and so by default many times, we become that central point of communication.

I’ve also been in this field long enough to know that information architects have developed our own internal language and terminology that only we speak. This issue of the Bulletin of the Association for Information Science and Technology is a challenge to all of us, then, to focus on the communication aspect of our job descriptions in our work.

It is absolutely essential to have wireframes, taxonomies and other deliverables that communicate information architecture clearly. These kinds of documents are essential to the projects we work on. They must translate our intentions to our audience – to the business, to the programming and data team and to anyone else involved.

And yet.

When we’re working to ensure that our strategy and tactics are broadly understood or to convince the C-suite of the wisdom of our recommendations, the inside baseball of our daily documentation is more often a hindrance than a help. We and our project teams must speak the language of our audiences, whenever we communicate.

This issue of the Bulletin focuses on several aspects of communicating information architecture and design to a variety of audiences. I hope that you will enjoy the diverse perspectives and thoughts represented here. Joe
Elmendorf, Andrew Hinton and Kaarin Hoff discuss the use of models, including informal ones, to communicate with clients; Noreen Whysel tackles the larger problem of communicating about IA generally by improving the information about IA in Wikipedia; Alberta Soranzo and Dave Cooksey discuss user testing of taxonomies while Richard Jacobson explains a system to help musicians enter the complex metadata of classical music.

Like our authors, I encourage you to remember your audience in every conversation, always seeking the best way to communicate.