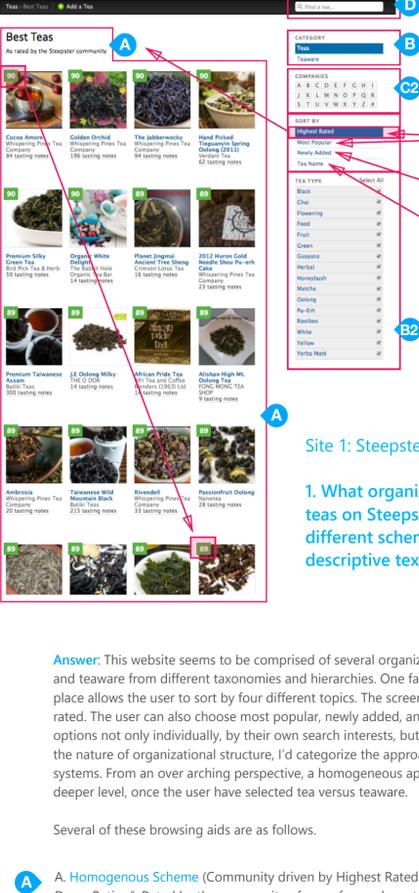


# Assignment: Critiquing Information Architecture

## Background/Introduction for Assignment



The purpose of this assignment is to analyze and critique the organization schemes and structures of two web sites. You have two main tasks for this assignment.

1. To analyze, meaning to accurately identify and describe the sites' organization schemes, structures and navigation.
2. To critique, meaning to assess how well the sites' organization schemes, structures and navigation work for the tasks supported by the sites, and to determine if and how they might be improved.

You are creating an analytical critique, not writing an essay. So skip the long paragraphs and use screenshots, lists, tables, annotations, and whatever else would make your analysis clear, succinct, and compact.

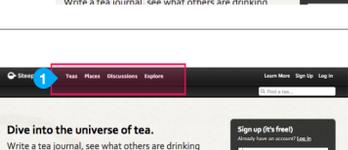
Site 1: Steepster.com – <http://steepster.com/>

### 1. What organization schemes are used for the various teas on Steepster? Use a screenshot to identify the different schemes. Add up to 3 paragraphs of descriptive text.

**Answer:** This website seems to be comprised of several organizational systems, allowing the user to explore teas and teaaware from different taxonomies and hierarchies. One fascinating aspect of the organizational system in place allows the user to sort by four different topics. The screenshot captured above is categorized by highest rated. The user can also choose most popular, newly added, and teas by name. This allows the user to explore options not only individually, by their own search interests, but also driven by community feedback. Because of the nature of organizational structure, I'd categorize the approach to be a Hybrid Approach to organizational systems. From an over arching perspective, a homogeneous approach to the classification of teas is used at a deeper level, once the user have selected tea versus teaaware.

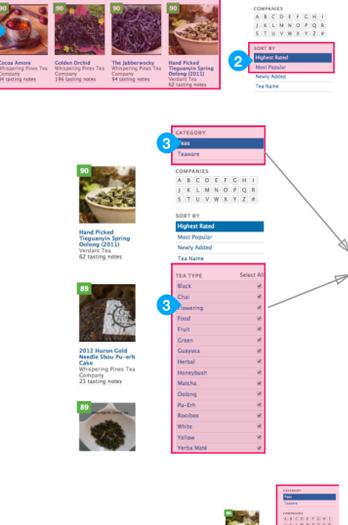
Several of these browsing aids are as follows.

- A** A. Homogeneous Scheme (Community driven by Highest Rated & Most Popular) - Driven by the audiences "Top Down Rating". Rated by the community of users focused on steeping teas. Initially I was going to label the section as an Audience Oriented Scheme, but with some research, I settled on "Homogeneous Scheme". The main search results for most popular teas groupings based on user rated popularity within the community. Additionally, chronology based ratings are shown in each genre as well. For instance - Teas>Best Chi Teas>Coconut Kukicha Masala Chia> (87 Rating).
- B** B. Narrow & Deep Heterogeneity Topic Scheme "High level" (Split between teas and teaaware).
- B2** B2. Broad and Shallow Homogenous Sub-Topic Scheme (By tea type) - Here, the website has allowed the user to navigate by searching tea types by preference. These are subtopics of the broader high-level topic, that is narrow and deep called tea. (Polar bear book p.56)
- C** C. Chronology Scheme - "Newly Added" teas by the date that the user submits to the tea to the community.
- C2** C2. Ambiguous organization scheme (By Company Name) - Also Steepster allows the user to navigate alphabetically via an alpha numeric button system by company.
- D** D. Task Oriented Scheme - One Example is a search box for tea.
- E** E. Ambiguous organization schemes - By Tea Name
- F** F. Audience Scheme - From the homepage, Steepster asks the user to identify with how they want to experience teas on the site: Specific kinds of tea, places they've discovered tea, discussions about teas, or explore tea.



### 2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the organization scheme used on the Steepster tea page. Could it be organized better?

If so how, and why? Use screenshots to illustrate your response. Your critique should be no more than 1 page, including screenshots.



**Answer:**

#### Organization Scheme Strengths - the following strengths are credited towards the originality of the website with respect to compiling useful information about tea and teaaware for a broad community of users that are like-minded.

#### Organization Scheme Strengths

1. Original Audience Scheme - From the homepage, Steepster asks the user to identify how they want to experience teas on the site: Specific kinds of tea, places they've discovered tea, discussions about teas, or explore tea. This is a unique approach to experiencing Tea!
2. Homogenous Scheme - Community driven by highest rated & most popular) - An original tea community of users focused on steeping teas and rating them! I love it!
3. The Heterogeneity Topic Scheme at a High level split between teas and teaaware - Narrow & Deep

The Homogenous Sub-Topic Scheme by Tea Type - Broad and Shallow - allowed the user to easily search multiple tea types by preference. This organizational scheme allow users to go deep into detail very quickly and, supports the original audience scheme as well as the homogeneous scheme above. They all seem to support one another.

#### Organization Scheme Weaknesses

1. The organizational schemes seem to be an afterthought to the user experience. This is a design criticism, however, I also think it pertains to the scope of all of the individual organizational schemes made available to the user. There may just be too many ways to refine a results page. In essence this is confusing.
2. The Ambiguous organization schemes by tea name seems like a useless way to search for teas. Specifically when the search results come back in the thousands.

Could it be organized better?

Yes!

#### How and Why?

All of the navigation for the organizational schemes on the right-hand side of the page appears to be an afterthought allowing the user full access at all times. This makes for potentially intimidating experience, but also reduces the screen real estate of the page by 1/4 Steepsters could be utilizing.

Consolidation of all of the organizational schemes into an intelligent horizontal bar that fits comfortably about the search results would be the first start to burying the visual and overwhelming block of organizational schemes available to the user. Consolidation is the key and offering options in progressive manner visually.

Additionally, adding teaaware to the primary navigational element at the top of the page would allow use of the hierarchical navigation between tea & teaaware without having to go to a second organizational scheme on the right hand of the page.

After making a few changes, there would now be full screen real estate available for all search results, larger pictures, and a consolidation of all of the organizational schemes.

# Assignment: Critiquing Information Architecture

## Background/Introduction for Assignment



### 3. What organization schemes are used for the various teas on RateTea? Use a screenshot to identify the different schemes. Add up to 3 paragraphs of descriptive text.

**Answer:** This website seems to be focused on a comprehensive approach to tea. The organizational scheme strategy seems to be a hybrid scheme. Because of this, there appears to be confusion as to what the focus of the website truly is. Is the focus finding tea, finding reviews, or articles? Like the other website, this website focuses primarily on articles written about tea, the users who do the reviews and recommendations, different styles and brands of tea around the world, and rating teas. This website is clearly focused on the social engagement and building community around people's thoughts and ideas on teas.

The organization schemes are as follows.

- A** A. Homogenous Scheme (Community driven Reviews) - Reviews written and rated by the community of users focused on tea qualities.
- B** B. Narrow & Deep Heterogeneity Topic Scheme at a high level split between styles, brands, regions, people, places, articles. (Polarbear book p.56)
- C** C. Chronology Scheme - "3 Reviews" by the date that the user submitted the tea to the community.
- D** D. Ambiguous organization schemes by varieties, kinds, and types.
- E** E. Ambiguous organization scheme by styles, brands, regions, people, places, articles.

### 4. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the organization scheme used on the RateTea tea styles page (http://ratetea.com/style.php). Could it be organized better? If so how, and why? Use screenshots to illustrate your response. Your critique should be no more than 1 page, including screenshots.



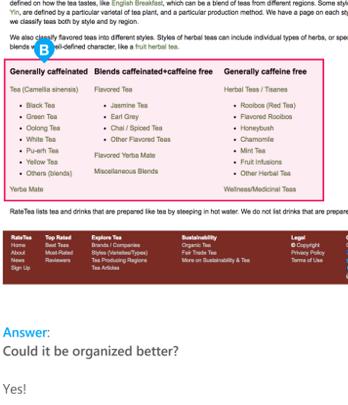
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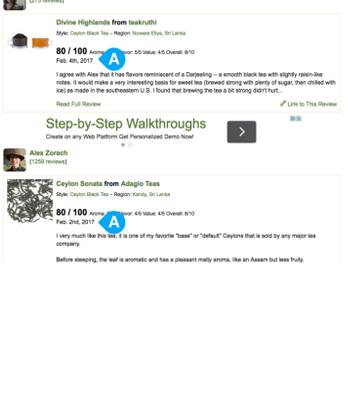
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### 5. Compare the organization schemes and structures used by Steepster and RateTea to organize their teas. Both sites list and rate different teas. How are they similar? How are they different? Identify relative strengths and weaknesses of the approaches. Your critique should be no more than 1 page, including screenshots, so focus on the most important things.

Both Steepsters and RateTea websites add considerable value to the user with respect to the ability to dive deep into the world of tea, their reviews, and ratings. Both of these websites, however, approach reviewing and rating teas a little differently in terms of the outcome of the user experience. Both sites use an ambiguous organization scheme by topic in terms of how they classify the organization of tea on the site. I prefer how Steepsters approaches their ambiguous organizational scheme by focusing on categories of teas that are easily locatable. RateTea approaches the categorization of tea by styles, varieties, and types. Additionally, their subcategories pertain to caffeineation.

**Database Model** - Additional investigation suggests that both websites offer discussion boards where users are able to socially engage with each other to discuss the ins and outs on preferences in teas. This suggests a database model may be in place offering a connection between users, their ratings, the reviews, and specific types of teas. It's possible that these data base models have organizational schemes within them. A possible hybrid approach to these schemes may exist. Chronology Scheme, "Newly Added" by the date that the user submitted the tea to the community seems to be a similarity between both websites.



**Answer:**

#### Organization Scheme Strengths - The following strengths are credited towards the comprehensive nature of this site and its coverage of multiple homogeneous types of teas. Additionally, the reviews captured by users spread across different types of tea is impressive. With that being said, the organizational schemes strengths are as follows.

1. Original Audience Scheme - Asks the user to identify how they want to experience teas on the site. (By Brand, Region, People, Places, and Articles) This is a unique approach to experiencing the world of Tea!
2. Generally caffeinated, blends of caffeinated tea, or caffeine free, generally caffeine free, is a creative approach to organizing sections of interest for users
3. Hypertext linking - The hypertext linking is a positive because the author has chosen to reference styles of tea supporting the the different styles below in (B).

#### Organization Scheme Weaknesses

1. Original Audience Scheme - Asks the user to identify with how they want to experience teas on the site. (By Brand, Region, People, and Places) This is where the problem starts. When the user clicks on "styles", they are introduced to types of tea rather than styles of tea. This may be a semantic difference, however, the labeling on this website is confusing.
2. Ambiguous Organization Scheme by topic; Generally caffeinated, Blends caffeinated+caffeine free, Generally caffeine free labels, while a creative approach to tea discussion, this seems poorly labeled, ambiguous, and difficult to discern.
3. Task Oriented Scheme - The text in the search box is not readable.