

# Information Architects: What They Do and How to Become One

Amber Swope  
Information Architect & President, DITA Strategies, Inc.  
amber@ditastrategies.com

## ABSTRACT

Every organization relies on information to communicate with prospects and customers – blog posts, articles, whitepapers, user manuals, web portals, videos, tweets, social media posts, moderated forums, and more. This means that many people are creating content and are delivering it in multiple ways. To meet our users' needs, we need information architecture (IA) to provide the framework for developing and delivering this information.

Although most content creators do not think of themselves as information architects, many of them perform tasks that are information architecture responsibilities. If you decide what information gets created and delivered, identify keywords to support findability, or organize the hierarchy for a table of contents, you are performing IA tasks. To learn who was performing these tasks and how they ended up with this role, I conducted a survey. This article presents my analysis of the results based upon my experience and relevant industry sources.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.0 Information Systems: General

## General Terms

Documentation, Design

## Keywords

Information Architecture, Information Architect, IA, Content Strategy, DITA

## INTRODUCTION

I started my career as a technical writer 30 years ago working for multiple high tech companies and earned my Master's in Professional and Technical Writing to learn the best practices for creating and structuring content. Although the ways we deliver content have changed, that foundation served me well as I transitioned to information architecture (IA) at IBM and became an information architect consultant in 2006. I currently help teams across a wide spectrum of industries to structure their content into modular units with appropriate metadata to enable delivery for unknown future formats. Many of these teams implement the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA), which is an open-source XML architecture supported by the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS). Based on my experience in the information development field, I was curious about how others came to be information architects and the role they play in the corporate landscape. Because there is no single, absolute definition for the discipline of IA, there can be no concise description of the information architect role. This means that IA practitioners have a great deal of freedom in how they define the scope of their domain and their path to the role of information architect.

Although there are a number of resources about the role of the information architect, this article provides a perspective on this role from a survey of IA practitioners. In this article, I describe the varying activities and training paths of information architects, drawing from my experience as a practicing information architect, research of available sources, and informal survey of 35 practicing information architects. This article may be particularly appealing to IA practitioners as well as people in academia, those who want to do research inspired by the survey, those who employ or manage information architects, and educators who train students and aspiring information architects.

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## Notable Survey Results

- IA experience ranged 1-19 years
- Only 13 respondents have “Information Architect” in their title
- Fifteen respondents have no formal IA training
- Sixteen respondents have no formal technical communication training
- All respondents perform non-IA tasks

## Respondent Demographics\*

**Region:** 63% North America (20 USA, 2 Canada), 14% South Asia (5 India), 14% Europe (2 France, 1 Switzerland, 1 Denmark, 1 Ireland)

**Gender:** 57% male (20), 34% female (12)

**Education:** 83% undergraduate degree (29), 66% advanced degree (23)

\*9% not known (3)

## WHAT IS INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE?

The first challenge when writing about the role of the information architect is that there is no standard, agreed-upon definition of what information architecture is. According to the Information Architecture Institute, “Information architecture is the practice of deciding how to arrange the parts of something to be understandable” (The Information Architecture Institute, n.d.). This definition is very broad and could encompass almost anything.

The United States Government posits that “Information architecture (IA) focuses on organizing, structuring, and labeling content in an effective and sustainable way” (Usability.gov, n.d.). This definition may be too narrow in that it limits the field to working with content.

The definition that most closely articulates my view is from an article in the *Journal of Information Architecture* (Downey & Banerjee, 2010):

IA is the art and science of organizing information so that it is findable, manageable and useful. There is also a perspective from enterprise architecture that views information architecture as an enterprise wide activity that includes such aspects as data architecture, metadata management and knowledge management (Stiglich, as cited in Downey & Banerjee, 2010, p. 25).

Based on my 30 years in technical communications, this definition reflects my observations and experience in the field. The acknowledgement that this domain is both an art and a science strongly resonates with me.

## What is an Information Architect?

Just as there is no single definition of information architecture, there is no one information architect role description. However, to provide context for my research and experience, I defer to Richard Saul Wurman’s (1996) definition:

information architect. 1) the individual who organizes the patterns inherent in data, making the complex clear. 2) a person who creates the structure or map of information which allows others to find their personal paths to knowledge. 3) the emerging 21st century professional occupation addressing the needs of the age focused upon clarity, human understanding, and the science of the organization of information.

Notice that this description does not focus on a single type of content or delivery method. Instead, it focuses on using organization, structure, and design to serve the needs of the content consumer. Because people, businesses, and devices are creating content and data at an unprecedented rate (Schultz, 2017), users are consuming an incredible amount of content every day (Dieker, 2016). To help consumers successfully navigate this new world of content, more people need to participate in developing information architecture.

In my experience, although most content creators may not think of themselves as information architects, many of them perform tasks that are commonly considered information architect responsibilities. Anyone who decides what information gets created and delivered, identifies keywords to support findability, or organizes the hierarchy for a table of contents, is performing IA tasks. My career has spanned the advent of the Digital Age, and with it the content landscape has changed dramatically. I have observed the role of the information architect evolve to support changing content requirements in response. Whereas people used to limit their decisions to a single document or document set, information architects now support any and all content that is accessible from any location on any device. This means that more people are becoming information architects than ever before – and they may not even realize it.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

For those who discover that they are enjoying information architect tasks and want to pursue that role as a career, what should they do? Where are all the information architects that have a mandate to create scalable architectures getting their education? Where are they going to learn new skills? And what is the path for people who want to become information architects? To answer these questions, I created a survey asking members of the IA community to share their experiences. In the following sections, I present my interpretation of the survey data as well as quotes from the survey responses.

## Survey Methodology

This article incorporates responses and analysis of feedback from a survey of practicing information architects. The survey included ten open questions and was designed to get feedback in the participants’ own words rather than having them select from a list of values.

To collect responses, I shared the SurveyMonkey link on LinkedIn and Twitter as well as in individual emails to information architects in my community. I also encouraged recipients to share the link with other information architects. There were no controls over who took the survey, in what industry they work, or if I know them personally. Thirty five people completed the survey between September 5 and December 15, 2017.

## Survey Questions (# Responses)

1. Please provide your full name and job title. How well does your job title represent what you do? (33)
2. How long have you been an information architect? (35)
3. What was the job progression that led you to become an information architect? (34)
4. If you had any formal IA training, what was it and where did you get it? (35)
5. If you had any formal technical communication training, what was it and where did you get it? (35)
6. What informal learning have you acquired? (35)
7. What skill or experience do you think has most helped you be a successful information architect? (34)
8. What are the most frequent IA-related tasks that you perform? (35)
9. If you perform tasks other than IA tasks, what are they? Create content, deliver training, develop or update transforms, administer tools, create templates, etc.? (35)
10. What is one piece advice you would give to an aspiring information architect? (33)

## ARE YOU AN INFORMATION ARCHITECT?

The first thing I wanted to know is if the people performing IA tasks have information architect as their job title. Of the 33 respondents who provided this information, only 12 have “information architect” as part of their official job title. In my opinion, there are several possible reasons for this:

- They have a multi-faceted position of which information architect is only one aspect;
- The company has fixed position titles that do not include information architect;
- Their title is a variation or related title, such as content strategist; or
- They are no longer an information architect.

According to UX Booth (2015), the survey results are not surprising;

“Information architecture is a more difficult field to define than many others. Unlike content strategy, which is accomplished by content strategists, or interaction design, which is accomplished by designers, information architect is very infrequently a job title. It is, however, a valuable and necessary field which crosses multiple roles.”

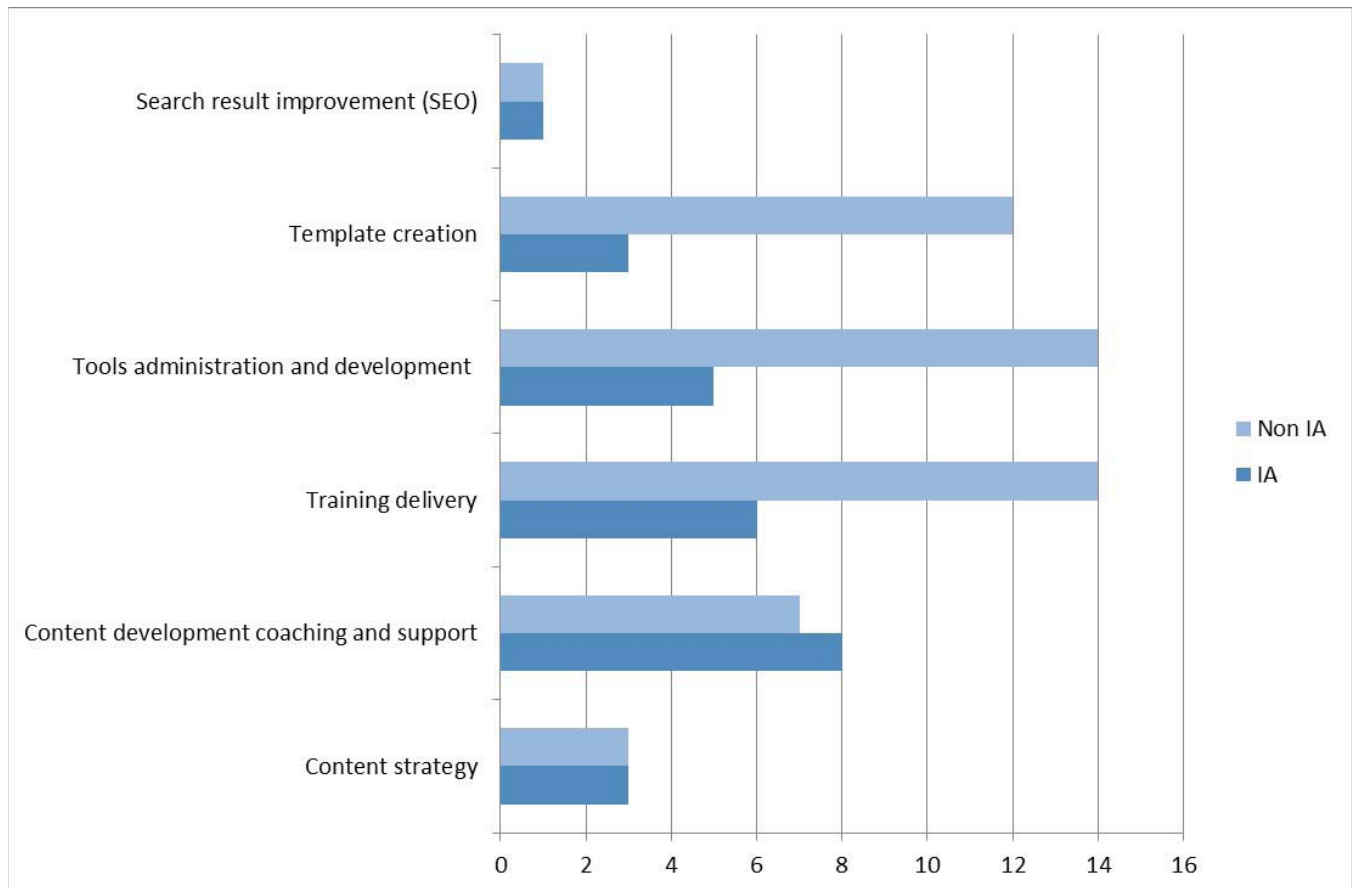


Figure 1. Tasks Listed as Both IA and Non-IA

From the responses about the non-IA tasks that respondents perform, it is clear that even those with the formal title of information architect carry out many other tasks. One way to interpret this data is to conclude that most of the people performing IA are doing so as one of several roles they fulfill for an organization. Another option to consider is that there is not an adequately uniform definition of what an information architect does to consistently apply the title.

## WHAT DOES AN INFORMATION ARCHITECT DO?

If we can't tell an information architect by their title, I wondered if we can identify them by what they do. In a brief review of six information architecture job postings from the transportation, health care, financial, industrial, and government industries, there was a wide range of responsibilities and very little consistency.

As noted in the previous section, there are many articles dedicated to defining the tasks that comprise IA, none of them come to a consensus. Rather than guess what information architects do, I asked the survey respondents about their tasks and harvested (and in some cases paraphrased) the language that the respondents used to describe what they do.

To see what tasks people think are IA tasks, I asked, "What are the most frequent information architecture-related tasks that you perform?" I also wanted to know what tasks people perform that they do not think are IA tasks, so the survey asked, "If you perform tasks other than IA tasks, what are they? Create content, deliver training, develop or update transforms, administer tools, create templates, etc.?"

My first observation is that some of the same tasks appear on both the IA and non-IA task lists (see Figure 1). This list of contested tasks may be caused by the lack of a consistent definition for the information architect role, or it may be that the respondents listed the tasks that they would prefer or not prefer to perform based upon their skills.

Rather than being confused by these results, I consider the apparent conflicting data as an opportunity to define the information architect role based upon what individuals do well. For example, my IA practice is focused on designing content and metadata structures, identifying technology requirements, and coaching – it does not include many of the more technical tasks that some other information architects prefer.

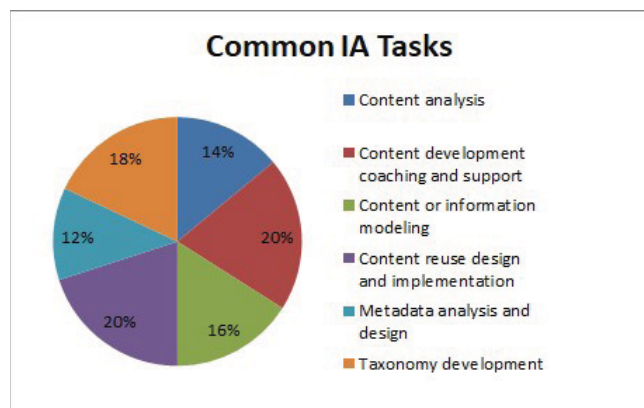


Figure 2. Common Information Architecture Tasks

One of the tasks that appear among both the IA and non-IA responses is content strategy. While the disciplines of IA and content strategy are related, they are distinct. Fouche (2013) suggests that "Content strategy focuses on the delivery, governance and planning content creation. ... Information architecture... deals with the design of an information space and to ensure that users can easily find what they're looking for." Halvorson (2008) provides another description: "Content strategy plans for the creation, publication, and governance of useful, usable content." In contrast, "Information architecture is the practice of deciding how to arrange the parts of something to be understandable" (The Information Architecture Institute, n.d.). In my experience, the information architect implements the content strategy developed by the content strategist. However, there is no reason that individuals cannot perform tasks for both roles as long as they can do both well. In organizations where there is no content strategist, the information architect may be the best qualified person to perform that necessary role.

Training delivery and coaching and support for content development also appeared in both groups of responses. The information architect knows how the organization needs to implement the IA; this means that many organizations may expect the information architect to also provide and deliver the IA training. In addition, content authors use tools to create content and apply the IA, so there is a good chance that information architects may also be called upon to provide and deliver the tools training. This is great if they understand instructional design and are a good instructor. If, on the other hand, an individual is not particularly skilled in those competencies, it can be helpful to reach out to others in the organization for collaboration as it offers them an opportunity to both learn about the IA and do what they do well. This may seem like common sense, but in some organizations it may not be easy to accomplish.

## Information Architecture Tasks

Although all 35 respondents answered the question about what IA tasks they perform, some did not provide specifics. See Table A1 in the Appendix for my interpretation of the IA task responses.

Figure 2 shows the most common tasks from the survey data.

Of the most common tasks, the only one that appears on the contested task list (see Figure 1) is "content development coaching and support." It may appear on both lists because of the type of support the respondents provide, such as troubleshooting, or because of the amount of time the information architect devotes to performing it.

Because the other five common tasks are ones that I frequently see on job descriptions, I wasn't surprised that they appeared in the responses. The most unexpected result was the relatively low number for "content analysis." As an information architect, content analysis is one of my primary tasks. The low response number may reflect the maturity of the architecture in that the respondents are primarily supporting established content types and do not need to analyze new content types.

Although taxonomy values may be represented as a type of metadata, I listed "metadata analysis and design" separately from "taxonomy development" on the survey.

According to UX Booth, "A taxonomy—generally speaking—aims to understand a set of subject-specific concepts, and creates a vocabulary for those concepts, in order to ultimately organize



the ‘physical things’ related to those concepts and make them easier to find or interact with” (Khan, 2017). This means that the taxonomy is the basis for online navigation and search optimization and is fundamental to the user experience (UX). Taxonomy also plays a crucial role in machine learning and artificial intelligence. “Taxonomies and ontologies provide machines powerful tools to make sense of data” (Knight, 2017). Therefore, all taxonomists are information architects, but not all information architects are taxonomists.

In addition to the most common IA tasks, a number of the respondents indicated that they perform the following technology-oriented tasks:

- Authoring environment design, including templates (9%)
- Tools administration and development, which includes component content management system (CCMS) configuration and development (14%)
- Document Type Definition (DTD) design and maintenance (9%)

An information architect using structured XML may be involved in specifying the requirements for the technology used for creating, managing, publishing, and delivering the content. The survey data indicates that some information architects perform some of the technical implementation tasks as well.

Because the survey did not identify which of the respondents are using XML, there is no way to know if the participants doing technical tasks are limited to XML environments or whether information architects supporting content in other formats, such as XHTML, are performing technical tasks. For teams using XML, they must have a DTD that defines the document structure for the content. Although the DTD design and maintenance are specific to XML environments, all content requires some technology support. Unless an information architect are writing on the back of a napkin, the architect is using technology to create content whether it be desktop publishing tools or XML editors.

In my experience, information architects who are supporting structured content architectures are usually also responsible for developing the conversion mapping from the original (legacy) content sources into the structured content source. As the person who analyzed the original source to design the IA, the information architect is a logical and efficient resource to create this mapping. Only 9% of the respondents listed this as an IA task. This low reporting number could be attributed to the following: the information architects for established (mature) content collections have not recently performed the task, the respondents are not supporting a structured content collection, or the organization exclusively applied the IA to new content (and did not convert any legacy information).

Because it appeared in the “useful skills” section and many of the information architects I know do this task regularly, I was surprised that Proof of Concept (POC) development was not listed in the common tasks. This may have happened because of the nature of the survey questions or, again, may be related to the maturity of the IA the respondents are supporting, in that they are not regularly prototyping or testing new solutions.

It is unrealistic to expect to get everything right on the first attempt, and one popular strategy for mitigating risk when trying a task for the first time is to create a Proof of Concept (POC). POCs allow

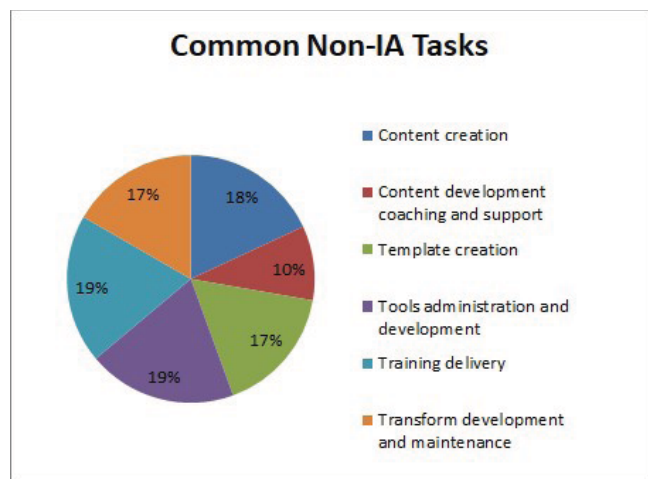


Figure 3. Common Non-Information Architecture Tasks

stakeholders to test out the principles and prove capability with minimal investment. It is important to clearly identify the business challenge that the POC addresses and track metrics for future use.

### Non-Information Architecture Tasks

The non-IA tasks that respondents listed included a range of actions. See Table A2 in the Appendix for my interpretation of the non-IA task responses. Although there was a clear pattern for the most common non-IA tasks (see Figure 3), over half of listed tasks were performed by only one or two of the respondents. The variety of the tasks makes me wonder if information architects are asked to perform tasks because the role is not clearly defined, no one else is available to do the tasks, the information architect role provides the scope of knowledge needed for the tasks, or if the individuals acting as information architects have versatile skillsets, including problem-solving, analytical thinking, communication skills, and a willingness to change. I have been an information architect for almost 20 years and can attest that I have performed many of these “one-off” tasks for all of these reasons.

For the non-IA task question, the suggested responses likely influenced how the respondents answered the question. Specifically, I listed “create content” as one of the possible tasks. More than one respondent mentioned that they believe information architects should create content to understand the implications of the architecture on content and what the information architect is actually requiring content creators to do. Information architects must document the IA, so they will always be creating content. Therefore, if I were to rerelease the survey, I would not include “create content” as a possible non-IA task.

The most striking observation I have about the common non-IA task results is that four of them are also listed as common IA tasks (see Figure 1). This seemingly contradictory data shows me that there is a wide range of possible responsibilities and each information architect has the opportunity to tailor the role to their specific abilities.

The next most obvious pattern is that there are many technology-related tasks, which cover a range of technical expertise. An information architect may not have to be very technical to create authoring templates, but publishing transform development requires programming skills. The skills required to administer and develop tools really depends upon the type of tool and specific tasks an

information architect is expected to perform. For example, they may be considered a CCMS administrator if they have permissions to create user accounts. At the other end of the spectrum are tasks like integrating tools using Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), configuring workflow management, and customizing the user interface. More than one respondent indicated that their technical background was very helpful to becoming a successful information architect.

Of the management tasks that respondents listed, project management was cited most frequently (five times). In my experience, there is always some project management in the information architect role. This may simply be tracking an individual's work or may include more formal project management responsibilities. In addition, multiple respondents listed translation management and personnel management.

The survey results also include some UX tasks. Again, I think that IA and UX are related, but discrete, disciplines. One description summarizes the distinction nicely: "Information Architecture concerns structure... User Experience concerns emotion" (Northcott, 2012). IA must enable well-designed user experiences; being involved in both areas can be valuable. Another way of describing the relationship between UX and IA is "Many people are curious how IA is related to user experience (UX) design. UX designers practice IA every day; the two are closely connected. Put simply, IA is an important skill within UX and other disciplines, such as content strategy, technical writing, library science and interaction design" (The Information Architecture Institute, n.d.).

## HOW CAN YOU BECOME AN INFORMATION ARCHITECT?

Because there is no one type of information architect, there is no one way to become or be an information architect. Based upon the survey responses and my own experience, here are some observations.

### Does It Matter Where Information Architects Start?

The good news is that, according to the survey, it absolutely does not matter where information architects start! The majority of respondents started their careers creating content (19 tech writers, two course developers). There is also a discernable path from technology, including software development, to IA. In reviewing the data, the vast majority of the respondents (67%) had technical

communication experience either as the starting point or as part of their career path. This is not surprising given that information development requires technical writers to not only write content, but also to organize it.

In addition to information about where each information architect started their career, many respondents provided the progression of positions they have held. Half of the respondents who started as software developers became technical writers before progressing to information architect. Many of the participants who started in information development followed the traditional technical communication career path through several levels before turning toward IA. When I started my career, there was no official position of information architect. My career progressed through multiple levels of technical communication with a detour into management, then to information architecture.

### What Education or Training is Essential?

In an informal review of six information architect job postings, the required education requirements varied greatly. Two of the positions had no required education and included only skills and experience requirements. Of the four that listed educational requirements, three included a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited institution in computer-related degrees and two listed information technology degrees. They also listed a variety of industry-specific degrees, but none listed a Master's Degree as a requirement.

When I performed an internet search for IA training and courses, the majority of the results were focused on effectively delivering content and were under the UX umbrella. Because I believe IA is related to UX but is a separate discipline, I am disappointed to see that many of the current training options are almost entirely geared toward designing content for website or application-specific delivery.

To better understand how participants gained their IA skills, the survey included three questions about learning (see Survey Questions). As part of my analysis, I classified the responses into the following categories:

- Formal training – knowledge gained through structured educational experiences
  - o Academic – courses offered by an academic institution
  - o Professional – courses offered by a professional organization or business

**Table 1: Job Progression Survey Data (34 responses)**

Position	Field	Number	Percentage
Technical writer	Information Development	19	56%
Software developer	Technology	7	20%
Archivist	Library Sciences	2	6%
Course developer	Training Development	2	6%
Copy editor	Production	1	3%
IT administrator	Technology	1	3%
Publications manager	Production	1	3%
Technical editor	Editing	1	3%

**Table 2: If you had any formal IA training, what was it and where did you get it?**

Category	Information Architecture Training		TC Training	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Academic	9	23%	9	26%
Professional	8	28%	6	17%
None	19	54%	22	64%

- Informal training – knowledge gained via other methods
  - o Informational sessions – minimally or non-participatory sessions, such as webinars, podcasts, and conference sessions
  - o Publications – information gained by reading books, whitepapers, articles, blogs, or forums
  - o Coaching – one-on-one or small group coaching or mentoring in a professional environment

The answers for these questions were not mutually exclusive; for example, I have taken academic classes and industry courses, read books, blogs, and forums, attended conference sessions, and received coaching. This means that the number of responses for a category may exceed the number of responders.

Because IA is related to UX and other domains, many academic programs include information architecture principles, but are not exclusive to IA nor named as IA programs (The Information Architecture Institute, 2018). According to the list of academic resources provided by The Information Architecture Institute (2018), there are 106 academic courses or programs that provide IA education. Of those, only 17 include “Information Architecture” in the name and 18 of them include “Library Science”. The programs have a wide range of names, including Master of Information, Information Science & Technology, Master of Information and Data Science, Master of Information Management, Master of Design, Advanced Web and Interaction Design Certificate, and Advanced Certificate in User Experience.

When I analyzed the responses to the survey’s questions about learning, the most striking pattern I found was the lack of formal training in either IA or technical communication. Less than half of the respondents indicated that they had any formal training (see Figure 4) and instead relied on informal sources for information and on-the-job experience (see Table 3).

Technical communication is an established field with numerous certification and educational programs. In contrast, IA is an emerging field with comparatively fewer formal programs. Given the number of technical writers who become information architects, it is surprising that more participants reported having formal training in IA than in technical communication.

**Table 3: Informal Training Survey Data**

Category	Number	Percentage
Publications	23	66%
Informational sessions	22	63%
Coaching	7	20%

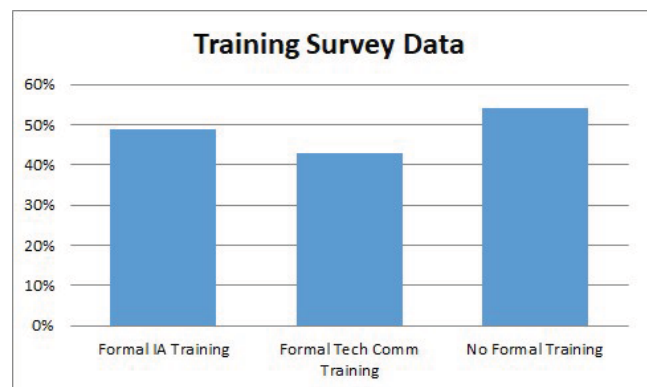
Of the formal training sources, there were academic programs with degrees or certifications, internal training programs developed by large corporations, and training classes provided by professional services companies and industry organizations. The Society for Technical Communication (STC) and the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) were most often listed for the industry associations. Another source of training came from tool vendors.

Because IA is usually considered a subset of skills used in other disciplines, it was difficult to discern what formal IA training actually is. Because the IA Institute lists Library Science degrees as IA education, I included it in the formal academic category. The master’s degree program I attended didn’t have any courses designated as “information architecture,” but I certainly learned the basic IA principles in the program. Table 2 lists the formal training survey results.

For the informal training, respondents listed publications and informational sessions in almost equal numbers as sources for knowledge (see Table 3). For informational sessions, 13 of the 22 responses listed conferences and 10 listed webinars. Twenty of the 23 responses listed books and only 10 listed other types of publications.

In addition to multiple mentions of publications and blogs from popular industry associations, professional services companies, and tool vendors, participants listed Yahoo and LinkedIn groups as relevant learning sources. For industry associations, I was surprised to see only one mention of the Information Architecture Institute, as I consider this an excellent resource.

Only seven respondents listed coaching (or mentoring) as a knowledge source. Coaching or mentoring provides more focused, personal skills development than most formal training programs. However, many companies may not have the budget to bring in industry experts or the resources for internal mentoring programs.



**Figure 4. Training Survey Data**

## WHAT SKILLS CHARACTERIZE A SUCCESSFUL INFORMATION ARCHITECT?

The survey question asks, “What skill or experience do you think has most helped you be a successful [Information Architect]?” Although the responses were diverse, there are some common themes.

### Experience

Just over half of the respondents listed experience that they leverage in performing IA tasks. Of the 18 responses that listed experience, seven of them involved technical communication skills, including technical communication, developmental editing, and indexing.

As an information architect with formal technical communication training, I can attest that this experience provided a solid foundation for developing my IA skills. Organizing and structuring content, performing user analysis, and identifying metadata are key tasks that I learned as a technical writer. In addition, this training provided valuable insight into understanding how content creators will use the IA.

Several respondents (seven of the 17 responses) listed their technical experience as being pivotal to their success. This experience included engineering degrees, software programming experience, transform development experience, and hands-on tool design and development.

Other respondents cited having a broad range of positions and working in different organizations. These experiences gave them perspective and a lens through which to evaluate their current organization and challenges.

### Skills

Over half (20) of the respondents identified skills or abilities that they thought were important to their success. Because I wanted to limit the survey to 10 questions, I did not include questions that differentiated between skill and ability: “In very basic terms, abilities are natural or inbuilt whilst skills are learned behaviours” (Staff Squared, 2015). I am a proponent of identifying one’s natural abilities and leveraging them, rather than struggling to master skills for which they have no affinity. I, for example, am a natural pattern hunter. I know this because I see patterns in every aspect of my life, not only in my professional career. It makes sense for me to have a role that leverages this ability. Multiple respondents (five) identified pattern recognition or the ability to “connect the dots” as a primary ability.

Multiple (4) respondents listed good communication and collaboration as essential characteristics. An important part of being a good communicator or collaborator is listening and understanding the perspective of others.

Two of the responses included the ability to empathize with the content creators and content consumers. Without understanding the content creator’s perspective, the information architect may inadvertently create overly complex structures that are difficult for content creators to use.

Analytical or logical thinking was a popular ability among respondents (listed five times). This ability is required for determining how to consistently structure content, identifying reuse opportunities, and understanding the processing and delivery implications. In my work, this means being able to visualize the

content structure and how the content moves through a given process.

Many information architects use diagrams to represent structure and processes. Although other information architects may use different methods for capturing their logic, we share the ability to logically decipher the path.

Other useful abilities that respondents listed were having attention to detail, being comfortable with change, and being able to build consensus.

A key skill that appeared in both the experience and advice responses was being able to develop IA to address specific business challenges. It can be tempting to use IA as the way to address every challenge; “if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail” (Maslow, 1966). A best practice is to avoid this pitfall and develop IA support to meet specific business requirements.

Other useful skills included learning English as a foreign language, knowing XML, and applying the Agile development methodology.

## WHAT ADVICE DO PRACTICING INFORMATION ARCHITECTS OFFER?

Although statistical data can be useful, I have always found advice from individuals who are already doing what I want to accomplish to be most valuable. For this reason, I asked what advice the survey respondents would give to an aspiring information architect. As expected, the responses varied widely, but there were a few common themes.

### Know the Content Consumer and Be Their Advocate

I am confident most will agree that the information architect must understand the content they are structuring. However, to be successful, an information architect must also know who will consume it, why they need it, how they want to access it, and what they are trying to achieve. With this knowledge, information architects become the user advocate. This insight provides the content with purpose and informs its structure.

In some cases, the content consumers are not humans, but rather other systems or applications, including bots, self-service troubleshooting applications, and business intelligence technology. These types of consumers have special requirements that information architects must address.

### Know What Business Requirements Must be Addressed

As much fun as it is to do IA for its own sake, it is important to know the ultimate goal. Every information architect needs to know what success looks like and use this as a guide for all their plans and decisions.

### See the Content and Structure Patterns

As a natural pattern hunter, I cannot imagine how one can be an information architect without this ability – and I am not alone in this belief. More than one respondent mentioned the importance of seeing the underlying structure and how the patterns connect the pieces. It appears that pattern-hunting prowess is essential to IA success.



## Keep Learning

Because content is created and consumed in a way that is constantly evolving, information architects must keep learning. In addition to both formal and informal training, it is important to talk with other information architects and, ideally, find a mentor or coach. Join an IA community, such as one of the many groups on LinkedIn, the Information Architecture Institute, AIIM, or a local IA-related Meetup group. Participating in the annual World IA Day activities or going to a conference, such as IA Summit or EuroIA are also excellent ways to gain new skills and find fresh ideas. It doesn't matter how each information architect learns, just that they keep doing it.

## SUMMARY

In 2010, Eric Schmidt said, "Every two days now we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up until 2003" (Siegler, 2010). This means that the role of the information architect is increasingly more important to help content consumers access the right content at the right time in the right context. As the IA field expands and the interaction between content strategy, IA, and user experience becomes clearer, we will need more people to step up and perform this important role.

As one of the founders of the IA discipline, Jesse James Garrett, said in 2002, "IA practitioners come from a wide range of backgrounds, and bring a wide range of experiences to bear on architecture problems. But despite all our differences, there is one thing we all agree on: the world needs better architectures."

I never thought that there was one way to become or be an information architect, and this survey, as limited as it was, supports this belief. Those who have the ability to solve problems analytically, deconstruct content to its basic structure, and decipher the underlying patterns are great candidates to become an information architect. Find a mentor, acquire new skills, try new things, learn from mistakes, and share experiences with the IA community. I look forward to welcoming many new information architects into this dynamic career path.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE TASKS DATA

Table A1 provides a summary of the IA task responses.

**Table A1: Information Architecture Tasks Survey Data**

Information Architecture Tasks	Number of Responses	Percentage
<b>Strategy &amp; Business</b>		
Content strategy	3	9%
<b>Analysis &amp; design</b>		
Content development coaching and training	10	29%
Content reuse design and implementation	10	29%
Taxonomy development	9	26%
Content or information modeling	8	23%
Content analysis	7	20%
Metadata analysis and design	6	17%
Content mapping for conversion	3	9%
Content restructuring or reorganizing	1	3%
Data modeling	2	6%
Deliverable planning	2	6%
Guidance development and documentation	2	6%
Content lifecycle management	2	6%
<b>Technology</b>		
Tools administration and development	5	14%
Authoring environment design, including templates	3	9%
DTD design and maintenance	3	9%
Programming	1	3%
<b>UX</b>		
Wireframe development	1	3%
Content usage analytics	1	3%
Search result improvement (SEO)	1	3%

## APPENDIX B: NON-IA TASKS

Table A2 provides a summary of the IA task responses.

**Table A2: Non-Information Architecture Tasks Survey Data**

Non-Information Architecture Tasks	Number of Responses	Percentage
<b>Strategy/Marketing</b>		
Content strategy	3	9%
Competitive analysis	1	3%
Business requirements definition	1	3%
<b>Management</b>		
Personnel management	1	3%
Translation managements	2	6%
Project management	4	11%
<b>Content &amp; deliverable</b>		
Content creation	13	37%
Training development	4	11%
Training delivery	14	40%
Deliverable assembly	2	6%
Deliverable publishing	3	9%
Prototype development	1	3%
Application troubleshooting	2	6%
Business development	1	3%
Content auditing	1	3%
Content reviewer or editor	2	6%
Content development coaching and support	7	20%
<b>Technology</b>		
Transform development and maintenance	12	34%
Template creation	12	34%
Tools administration and development	14	40%
Environment support, including troubleshooting	3	9%
Authoring environment setup	2	6%
<b>UX</b>		
Wireframe development	2	6%
Search result improvement (SEO)	1	3%
Delivery application prototyping	1	3%
User support	1	3%
User research	1	3%

## APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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