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The Taxobook: Principles and Practices of Building Taxonomies, Part 2 of a 3-Part Series (Synthesis Lectures on Information Concepts, Retrieval, and Sevices)

Marjorie M.K. Hlava

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This book outlines the basic principles of creation and maintenance of taxonomies and thesauri. It also provides step by step instructions for building a taxonomy or thesaurus and discusses the various ways to get started on a taxonomy construction project. Often, the first step is to get management and budgetary approval, so I start this book with a discussion of reasons to embark on the taxonomy journey. From there I move on to a discussion of metadata and how taxonomies and metadata are related, and then consider how, where, and why taxonomies are used. Information architecture has its cornerstone in taxonomies and metadata. While a good discussion of information architecture is beyond the scope of this work, I do provide a brief discussion of the interrelationships among taxonomies, metadata, and information architecture. Moving on to the central focus of this book, I introduce the basics of taxonomies, including a definition of vocabulary control and why it is so important, how indexing and tagging relate to taxonomies, a few of the types of tagging, and a definition and discussion of post- and pre-coordinate indexing. After that I present the concept of a hierarchical structure for vocabularies and discuss the differences among various kinds of controlled vocabularies, such as taxonomies, thesauri, authority files, and ontologies. Once you have a green light for your project, what is the next step? Here I present a few options for the first phase of taxonomy construction and then a more detailed discussion of metadata and markup languages. I believe that it is important to understand the markup languages (SGML and XML specifically, and HTML to a lesser extent) in relation to information structure, and how taxonomies and metadata feed into that structure. After that, I present the steps required to build a taxonomy, from defining the focus, collecting and organizing terms, analyzing your vocabulary for even coverage over subject areas, filling in gaps, creating relationships between terms, and applying those terms to your content. Here I offer a cautionary note: don't believe that your taxonomy is ""done!"" Regular, scheduled maintenance is an important (critical, really) component of taxonomy construction projects.

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