

"Everything is information" graphic.

## A Pair of Foundational Concepts

The following is an excerpt from the **ARMA Guide to the Information Profession**.

Words matter and word choices matter. In any profession that is looking to move forward in maturity, there are often vernacular issues that make gaining a comprehensive understanding of the profession a challenge. This is one of the reasons bodies of knowledge are so incredibly helpful: they help to clarify the vocabulary of a profession.

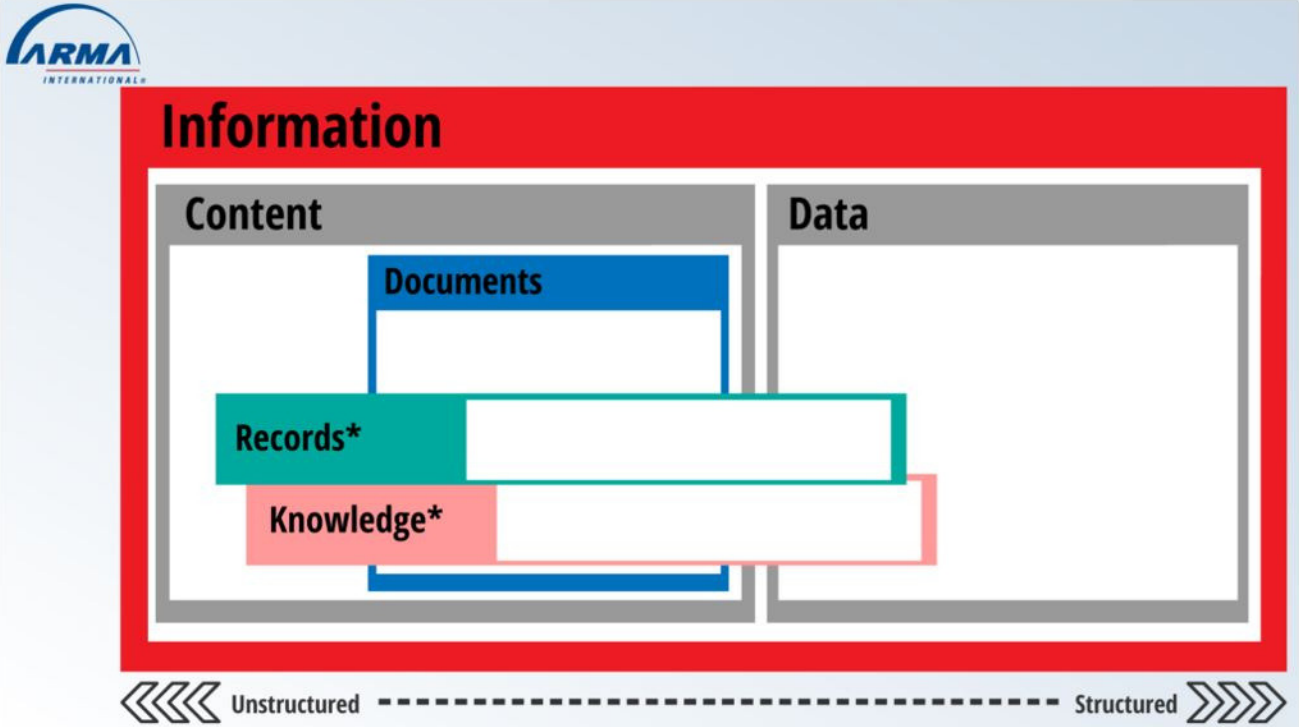
The information profession is filled with confusing terms, misused terms, and confusing acronyms. We revel in using words like “content” and “document” interchangeably (they’re not interchangeable) and misunderstand the differences between “governance” and “management,” all the while tossing around acronyms like ECM, BPM, ERM, IG, and EPR. Ok, I made up that last acronym, but if I didn’t tell you that, you might not have been sure. So, you can see that the issues are numerous.

### **Content or Data or Document or Information or Knowledge or Record?**

One of the biggest issues with the information profession is the misunderstanding and misuse of our information types: content, data, documents, knowledge, and records.

Each information type has a separate and distinct definition, and the terms are not interchangeable. Each type of information is, however, information. For example, all content is information but not all information is content. Confused yet? That’s why these issues exist.

Without a proper understanding of these terms, we cannot have a shared vocabulary across the information profession - this is the most important barrier that we remove in this effort. We believe that the easiest way to understand the differences between these terms is visually:



"Everything is information" graphic.

Everything, whether unstructured or structured (or even semi-structured), is information. Content is unstructured information while data is structured (this is easiest to understand through the structure of a database). Data tends to be relational while content tends not to be.

Documents are a type of content, semi-structured, through the use of a container (either paper or Word or PDF most commonly). Knowledge is a repurposable type of information

that tends to include content more often than data. The goal of knowledge is for it to be shared between individuals within an organization (think of best practices resources). Records, like knowledge, can also be content or data and serve as evidence of a transaction or information that rises to the importance of being preserved.

Through this visual understanding, we know several things:

- Content is unstructured
- Documents are semi-structured
- Data is structured
- Knowledge can be found in any form
- Records can be found in any form
- All documents are content
- Not all content can be considered documents
- All documents are information
- Not all information is documents
- Content is not data
- Data is not content
- Everything is information

## **Governance, Strategy & Management**

We use terms like “governance,” “strategy,” and “management” after the words content, data, document, information, knowledge, and record, but we frequently use these terms improperly. For instance, records managers tend not to utilize a term such as “records governance” or “records strategy.” However, they likely should use these terms to describe the high-level planning, policy, and coordination that records managers do.

Governance and strategy are, for the information profession, interchangeable terms. For example, information governance and information strategy refer to the same work, whereas information management is different.

The terms “governance” or “strategy” should be used to describe high-level planning, policy, and coordination. Whereas the term “management” should be used to describe the tactical execution of said planning, policy, and coordination. The two sides must coexist.



"Governance, Strategy, or Management" graphic.

Presented here are two foundational concepts included in the *ARMA Guide to the Information Profession*. Additional foundational concepts include "Records Management in Flux," "Information Lifecycle," "Capture, Digitization, Imaging, Native Creation, Scanning, & Upload," "Information Assurance vs. Information Security," and "Backup, Business Continuity, Disaster Recovery, and Information Assurance."