Outline for the discussion of relevance

An entity is relevant for a user if it serves the user's purpose.

More generally: If it is help the user in achieve in a purpose or objective. The user can be a person or a system. Fundamental in IR from the system's perspective for some time – user's perspective has only emerged in last 40 years.

By looking at the purpose and at various characteristics of the user, we can derive specialized definitions for specific types of entities.

Most commonly considered: documents in a problem-solving context.

A very broad definition:
A document is relevant to a user (a person or a system) who wants to solve a problem, if it helps the user to move from his present state of knowledge towards a state of knowledge that supports a better problem solution.

After reading Mizzaro, do you agree with this? Is there more to the story or is this good enough?

What conditions must a document fulfill in order to be relevant according to this definition? Different components of relevance.

Is there a difference between finding relevant documents and finding useful documents?

There are many types of relevance – system, topical, pertinence, motivational and situational – and research into these can be categorized in many ways – foundations, kinds, surrogates, criteria, expression, subjectivity – are there more?

Is a document relevant in one way or relevant in many? Is this dependent on the perspective?

How can we decide when to stop making distinctions about relevance?

Is 'relevance' on the Web different? How does task affect this (home page finding vs. informational vs. transactional)?

Definitions of relevance for other types of entities. For example, what makes a person a good target for an advertising message?

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[1] Part of these notes are based on Soergel, 1999.