A system of multiple viewpoints uses representations of several organizations of a document collection to aid in retrieving information from that collection. For instance, the subject and author catalogs of conventional libraries constitute two viewpoints on the holdings. We are creating a framework for investigating and designing information retrieval systems using multiple viewpoints.

Searching a system of multiple viewpoints may involve moving back and forth among the system viewpoints using transitions, seeking to improve the result set, and possibly refining the query. The results of consulting different viewpoints are organized into a coherent system result by the merge method.

A merge method organizes results from several viewpoints into a coherent whole. It may order results based on time, trust in judgements, changes made to the query, or other criteria.

New searchers may not be familiar with the terms used to index a collection and may be confused by conflicting usage of common terms in different fields. Access to viewpoints representing judgments framed in more than one vocabulary provides a basis to alleviate this problem. Using our framework we are seeking to identify other such benefits of using multiple viewpoints and to aid in designing systems to take advantage of them.