Test Your Prototypes: How to Gather Feedback and Maximise Learning

BY **RIKKE DAM** AND **TEO SIANG** | 4 WEEKS AGO | 9 MIN READ

Once you've built your prototypes based on the ideas you and your team generated, it's time to gather feedback from the people on whom you are testing these. Optimising how you gather feedback — and, therefore, learn from your prototypes and users — is essential to help you save time and resources in the Prototype and Test stages of the Design Thinking process – and in any other human-centred design process. Being quick and efficient allows you to move rapidly from creating a prototype, to putting it out to test it, to gathering feedback, and finally to creating a new and improved iteration of your ideas. To maximise learning from your tests, we

will share six best practice tips on how to gather feedback, as well as three methods (with downloadable templates!) on how you can organise your feedback.

Six Best Practice Tips for Gathering Feedback on Your Prototypes

Gathering feedback is a crucial element in the Design Thinking process – and in all other human-centred design processes. In order to maximise the benefits of gathering feedback, however, you need to be purposeful about it. Here are some pointers to take note of when thinking about gathering feedback from your users.

1. Ways to Solicit Feedback

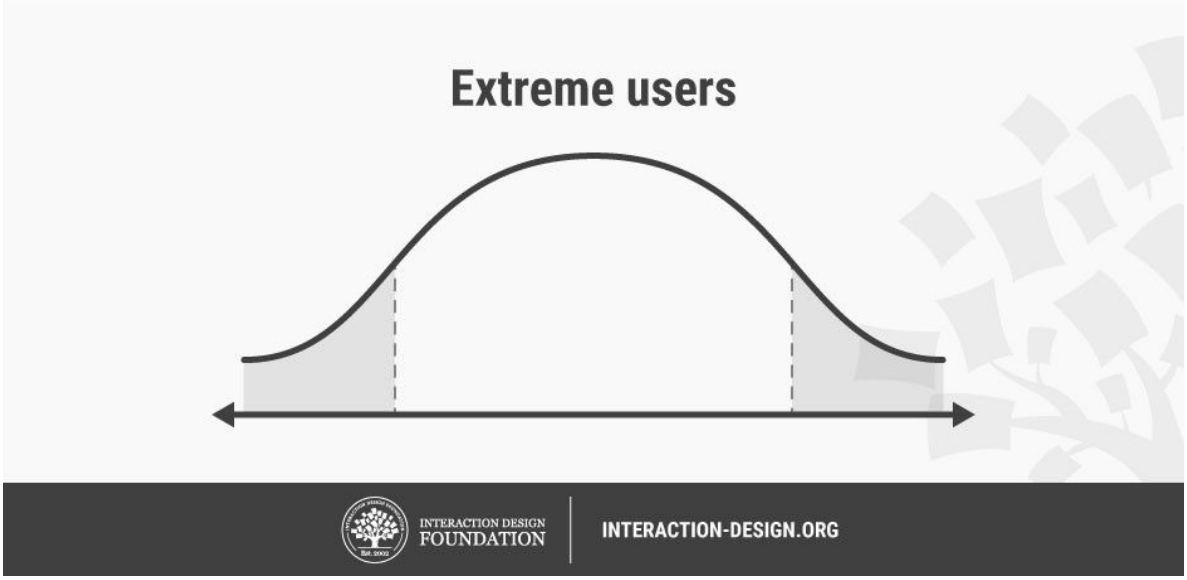
How you solicit feedback from your users (or team-mates, if you are doing preliminary testing with your prototypes within your team) depends largely on what type of prototype you have built. For instance, if your prototype were a role-playing session, the experience of acting out the roles would be a valuable source of observations and feedback in itself. On the other hand, paper interfaces and physical models might require additional interviews with users to get them to talk about their thinking process while using the prototype.

Nevertheless, there are some general rules of thumb you can rely on in order to solicit better feedback. First, you can consider testing out several versions of your prototype on users to gather feedback. This helps to solicit critical feedback — because people tend to hold back on overtly criticising prototypes. When you present your users with alternatives, you allow them to compare the various prototypes and tell you what they liked and disliked about each version, and so you will get feedback that is more honest.

You can also consider using the “I Like, I Wish, What If” method to solicit honest feedback in testing sessions. This method provides scaffolding for your users to voice their opinions in a critical but positive manner. We will cover more on this method, and provide a downloadable template for it, further down.

2. Test Your Prototypes on the Right People

Whom you test your prototypes on will affect the usefulness and relevance of their feedback. If you are in the early stages of your design project and just want some simple and rough feedback, testing prototypes on your team-mates would be good enough. Towards the end of your project, when the prototypes get more detailed and closer to a final product, however, you might want to consider testing on a wider range of users so as to get the most relevant and helpful feedback.



Consider testing your prototypes on extreme users, on top of regular users. In order to find extreme users, you will first need to define a dimension that is relevant to your prototype. If you are working on an idea related to a supermarket, for example, your extreme users could be people who shop at supermarkets every day, and — at the other end of the scale — people who *never* shop at supermarkets. Testing your prototypes on extreme users will often help you uncover some problems and relevant issues that affect regular users, because the extreme users tend to be more vocal about their love (or dislike) of doing things related to your prototype.

If your product or service is cross-regional or international, you should also test your prototypes across regions and countries. Differences in cultures and customs might affect how people living in different areas use your prototype.

Towards the final stages of your project, you should also get feedback on your prototypes from stakeholders other than your users. Internal stakeholders in your company, manufacturers, retailers and distributors will each have their own criteria for building, making or shipping a product or service, and can have an impact on the success of your idea. Gathering feedback from these stakeholders will thus prevent your team from receiving a nasty shock when you realise that you won't be able to implement the product or service you have been developing as feasibly as you had believed.

3. Ask the Right Questions

Each prototype that you test should have a few core questions you want answered. Before you test your prototypes and gather feedback, you should therefore be sure about what exactly you are testing for. For instance, if you have built your prototype to gather feedback about the usability of your product, then you should gear your testing session towards teasing out *how usable* the prototype is to the user. Subsequently, in a post-testing interview session with your

user, you should then focus on finding out the positive and negative feedback relating to usability.

Remember to keep an open mind when testing your prototypes, even though you have a few core questions you want to focus on. Many times, testing sessions can reveal key points on issues that your team did not even know to focus on. After testing, you should evaluate the feedback and decide if there are new questions that you should ask during future testing sessions.

4. Be Neutral When Presenting Your Ideas

When you present your prototypes to your users, try to be as objective as you can. Highlight *both* the positive and negative aspects of your solution, and refrain from trying to sell your idea. Remember that prototyping and testing is about finding ways to improve your idea, and overly selling your idea can be detrimental to that goal.

When your users voice negative feedback about your prototype, refrain from trying to defend it. Instead, probe them further to find out what exactly is wrong with your proposed solution, so you can go back and improve your ideas. Avoid becoming too attached to your idea, and always be ready to dismantle, change, or even abandon it when the need arises. Remember, this stage is like a rehearsal, not the real “show”; you’re *not* being cut to pieces in the marketplace — in fact, any careful corrections you can make that stem from negative feedback will greatly help your chances of success later on.

5. Adapt While Testing

When you conduct tests on your prototypes, try to adopt a flexible mindset. For instance, when you realise that certain components of your prototype are drawing attention away from the core functions of the prototype, you can remove these or change them in order to bring the focus back to the key elements of your idea. In addition, if you think that your planned script for the testing session does not work well, feel free to deviate from it and improvise during the testing session in order to get the best feedback from your users.

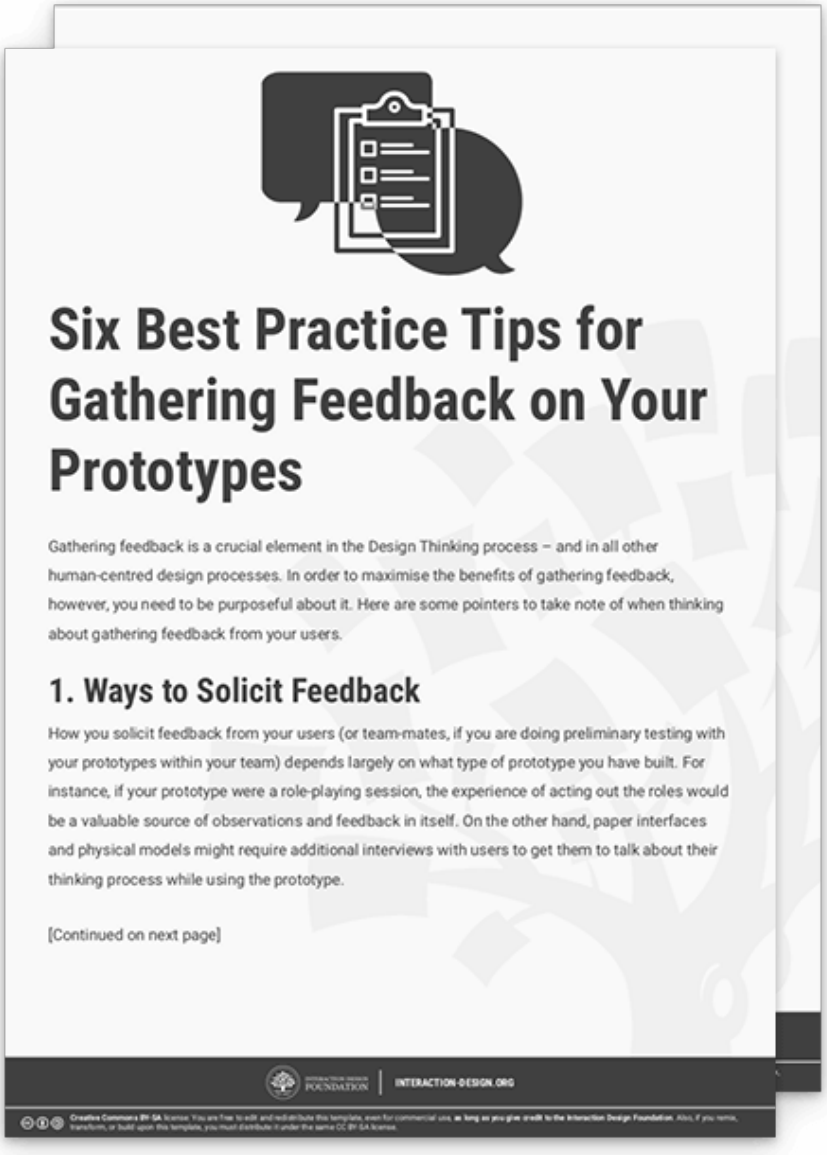
6. Let the User Contribute Ideas

During your testing session, you should allow your users to contribute ideas that build on your prototypes. You can ask your users how the product or service could be improved for them, for instance. Doing so would encourage users to provide useful critiques as well as help improve your solution.

You can also turn some questions that your users ask during the tests around, and ask the users what *they* think. For example, if your user asks you how to charge an electronic product, you can turn it around and ask them what would be the best charging method for the product. Even if you do not adopt their ideas, their feedback would likely give you insights about the key areas of concern that your users have while using your product or service.

For your inspiration, you can go ahead and download our guidelines in this template: "Six Best Practice Tips for Gathering Feedback on Your Prototypes"

Get your free template for “Gathering Feedback on Your Prototypes”



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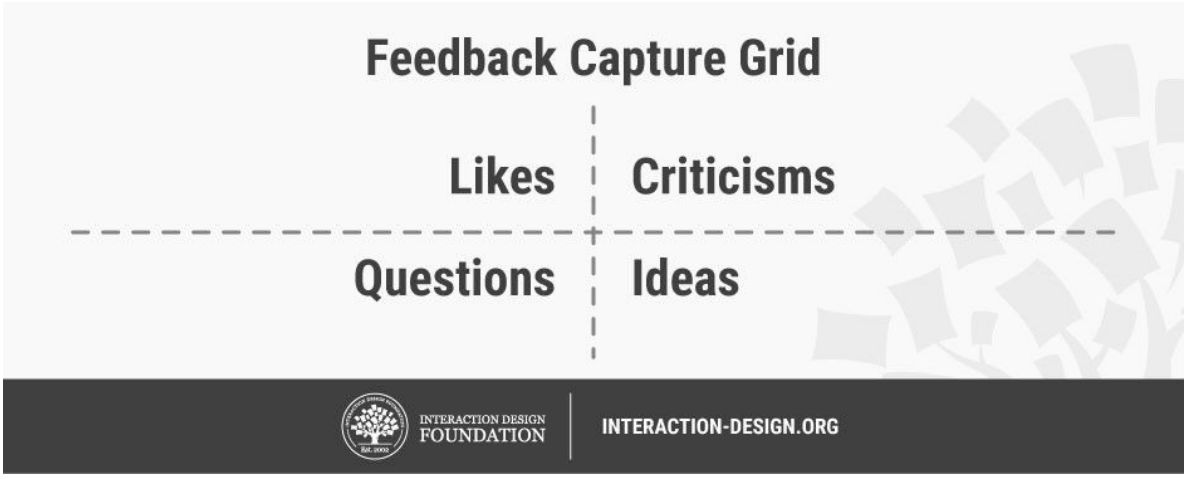
Three Methods for Maximising Learning from Testing

Gathering feedback from testing sessions can feel like a haphazard process. Thankfully, a few methods are available which you can use to provide some structure and organisation to your feedback-gathering process.

1. Feedback Capture Grid

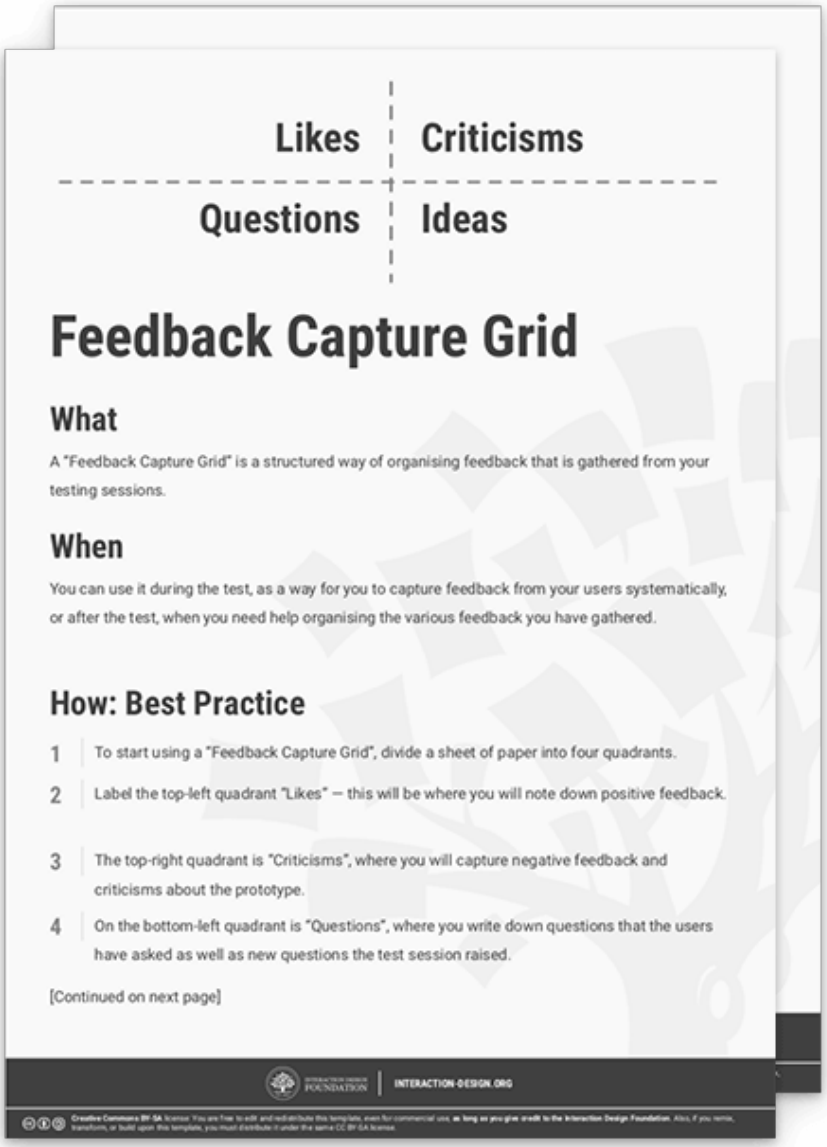


A “Feedback Capture Grid” is a structured way of organising feedback that is gathered from your testing sessions. You can use it during the test, as a way for you to capture feedback from your users systematically, or after the test, when you need help organising the various feedback you have gathered.

To start using a “Feedback Capture Grid”, divide a sheet of paper into four quadrants. Label the top-left quadrant “Likes” — this will be where you will note down positive feedback. The top-right

quadrant is “Criticisms”, where you will capture negative feedback and criticisms about the prototype. On the bottom-left quadrant is “Questions”, where you write down questions that the users have asked as well as new questions the test session raised. Lastly, label the bottom-right quadrant “Ideas”, where you take down any ideas that the testing session had sparked. Try to make sure that each quadrant has at least a few notes. When using the grid during a test session, for instance, you can steer the conversation towards quadrants that are currently not receiving enough input.

To get help with starting, you can download our template on how to use the “Feedback Capture Grid” method:



Feedback Capture Grid

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How: Best Practice

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2. I Like, I Wish, What If

Like the “Feedback Capture Grid” method, the “I Like, I Wish, What If” method provides a structure from which you can collect feedback from your users. Quite simply, the “I Like, I Wish, What If” method invites the user (or your team-mates, during a discussion session) to provide open feedback by coming up with three kinds of statements.

In “I Like…” statements, the user is encouraged to convey the aspects that he or she liked about the prototype. This provides you with positive feedback about your prototype. In “I Wish…” statements, users are prompted to share ideas of how the prototype can be changed or improved so as to address some concerns or issues. This is an avenue to collect negative feedback and constructive criticism. Lastly, in “What If…” statements, the user can express new suggestions that might not have a direct link to the prototype. This opens up possibilities for new ideas that your team can then explore in future iterations of prototypes.

One key advantage of the “I Like, I Wish, What If” method is that it frames the feedback that someone is about to provide in a constructive and positive manner, enabling an open discussion or absorption of his or her feedback. Rather than saying something like “This feature sucks; why is this design even considered?”, users are framed to say something more constructive, like “I wish you would change this part to…” and “What if you moved this…and added…”.

Please feel free to download and print our template for the “I Like, I Wish, What If” method:

3. Sharing Inspiring Stories

Stories are powerful tools that you can use to inspire yourself and your team to think of solutions. After doing a round of tests with your prototypes, getting together with the rest of your team and sharing inspiring stories with one another is a very useful activity. Capturing what resonates with you and your team-mates can help identify ideas and feelings that your team can work on when thinking of new solutions.

Here's how you can build on the power of stories to help you absorb and organise your tests with users. One by one, you and your team-mates can share a couple of interesting and inspiring stories you have observed while testing the prototype with users. Be as detailed as possible, and take down notes and observations about the stories on Post-Its. Put up all the Post-It notes on a wall; that way, when all participants have shared their stories, you have a wall full of Post-It notes. You can then examine the stories you've shared and look for common threads and possible insights about your users so as to translate the inspiring stories into actionable next steps for the project.

To help you and your team get started, you can download our template for “Sharing Inspiring Stories”

Sharing Inspiring Stories

Why

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Build, Gather Feedback, Iterate

Absorbing feedback from your users through prototype testing is useless if you don't put the new information into use in your next iterations of prototype ideas. You need to develop a habit with your team such that you actively integrate what you have learnt back into your process, and consciously develop new iterations of your solutions as you move forward.

You can conduct a post-feedback discussion with your team to achieve this. First, you can use the "Feedback Capture Grid", "I Like, I Wish, What If", or "Sharing Inspiring Stories" method, and then gather and share the lessons you have learnt with your team. Next, start a discussion on how to synthesise the feedback you have received. You can for example start a brainstorming session to help generate ideas to integrate the feedback collected into your prototypes. The next step is to go out there and create your next prototypes. Remember to have a bias towards action! Keep iterating your prototypes by constantly testing and integrating your findings, and eventually you will reach an optimal solution that addresses most of the key areas of your user needs.

The Take Away

Gathering feedback on your prototype can be an exciting phase of your design project. It is also an important phase, which you should try to optimise. Bearing in mind the six tips for gathering feedback on your prototype — from testing on the right people to letting users contribute their ideas — as well as using the three methods for getting honest feedback ("Feedback Capture Grid", "I Like, I Wish, What If", and "Sharing Inspiring Stories") will help you maximise the amount of learning you get from testing your prototypes. Lastly, remember to make it a habit to

use the feedback you have gathered to build new and improved prototypes, and keep working on that iterative process to move towards your final product or service.

References & Where to Learn More

IDEO, *Human-Centered Design Toolkit*, 2009: https://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/

d.school Bootcamp Bootleg, 2013: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/58890239db29d6cc6c3338f7/1485374014340/METHODCARDS-v3-slim.pdf

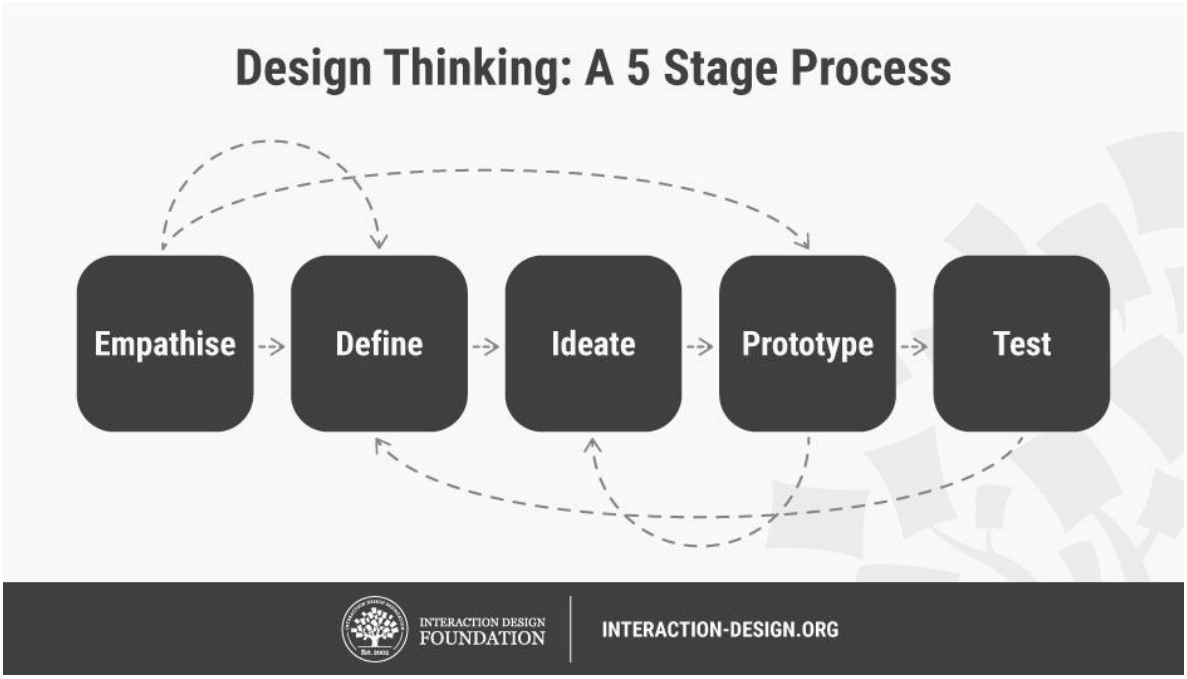
IDEO, *Integrate Feedback and Iterate*: http://www.designkit.org/methods/4

IDEO, *Share Inspiring Stories*: http://www.designkit.org/methods/13

Topics in this article:

Design Thinking Test Feedback Capture Grid Sharing Inspiring Stories

WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT



5 Stages in the Design Thinking Process

Design Thinking is a design methodology that provides a solution-based approach to solving problems. It's extremely useful in tackling complex problems that are ill-defined or unknown, by understanding the human needs involved, by re-framing the problem in human-centric ways, by creating many ideas in brainstorming sessions, and by adopting a ha...

What is Design Thinking and Why Is It So Popular?

Design Thinking is not an exclusive property of designers—all great innovators in literature, art, music, science, engineering, and business have practiced it. So, why call it Design Thinking? What's special about Design Thinking is that designers' work processes can help us systematically extract, teach, learn and apply these human-centered tec...

Personas – A Simple Introduction

Personas are fictional characters, which you create based upon your research in order to represent the different user types that might use your service, product, site, or brand in a similar way. Creating personas will help you to understand your users' needs, experiences, behaviours and goals. Creating personas can help you step out of yourself....

- 170 SHARES
- 1 WEEK AGO

Stage 2 in the Design Thinking Process: Define the Problem and Interpret the Results

An integral part of the Design Thinking process is the definition of a meaningful and actionable problem statement, which the design thinker will focus on solving. This is perhaps the most challenging part of the Design Thinking process, as the definition of a problem (also called a design challenge) will require you to synthesise your observati...

- 461 SHARES
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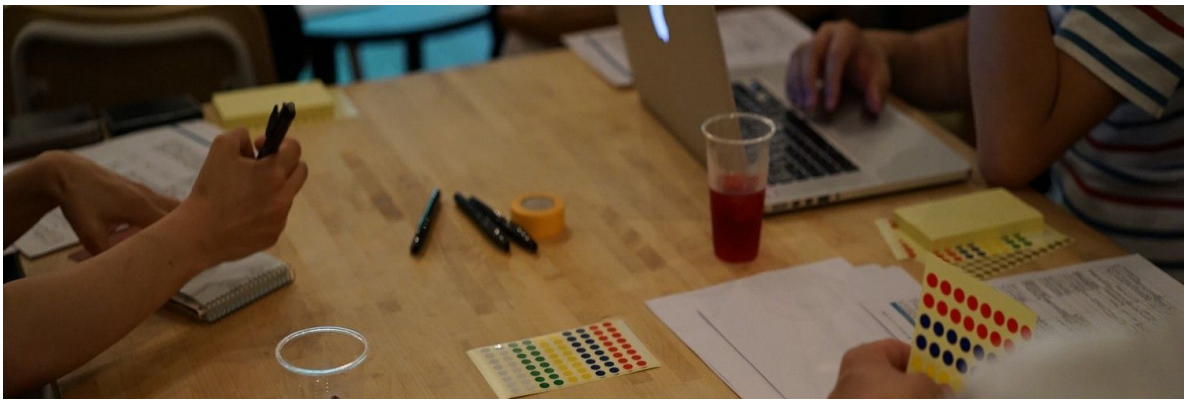


Make Your UX Design Process Agile Using Google's Methodology

In an age of tight resources and constrained finances companies are more reluctant than ever to commit to big design projects without a thorough understanding of their chances of success. Google has developed a methodology to make the design process fast and still offer valuable insight. Forget minimum viable products and focus on prototypes and...

- 325 SHARES
- 1 MONTH AGO

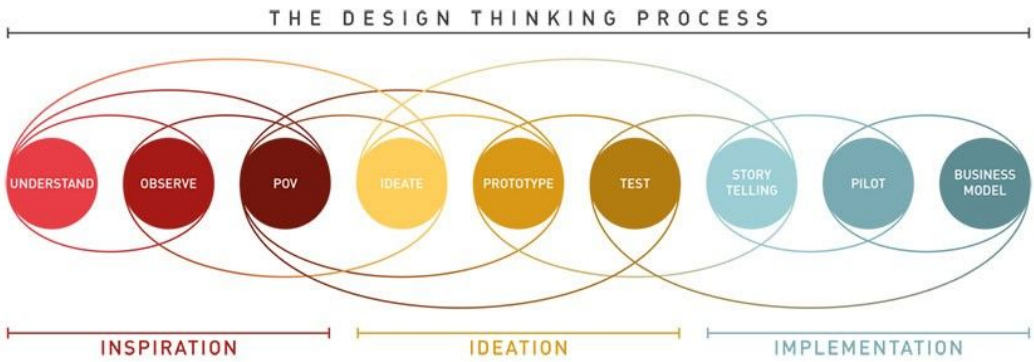
What is Ideation – and How to Prepare for Ideation Sessions

Ideation is the process where you generate ideas and solutions through sessions such as Sketching, Prototyping, Brainstorming, Brainwriting, Worst Possible Idea, and a wealth of other ideation techniques. Ideation is also the third stage in the Design Thinking process. Although many people might have experienced a “brainstorming” session before,...

Stage 4 in the Design Thinking Process: Prototype

One of the best ways to gain insights in a Design Thinking process is to carry out some form of prototyping. This method involves producing an early, inexpensive, and scaled down version of the product in order to reveal any problems with the current design. Prototyping offers designers the opportunity to bring their ideas to life, test the prac...

- 368 SHARES
- 6 MONTHS AGO



Design Thinking: A Quick Overview

If you have just started embarking your journey through the Design Thinking process, things might seem a little overwhelming. This is why we have prepared a useful overview of the Design Thinking process, as well as some of the popular Design Thinking frameworks commonly used by global design firms and national design agencies. To begin, let's ...

- 147 SHARES
- 3 WEEKS AGO

Stage 3 in the Design Thinking Process: Ideate

In the Ideation stage, design thinkers spark off ideas — in the form of questions and solutions — through creative and curious activities such as Brainstorms and Worst Possible Idea. In this article, we'll introduce you to some of the best Ideation methods and guidelines that help facilitate successful Ideation sessions and encourage active part...