# User Research Workshop Activities

Here are three user research activities that I typically do in succession with project stakeholders. As always, adapt for your needs. Take a look at the book *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers* by David Gray, James Macanufo, and Sunni Brown. And whenever possible, validate what you learn by conducting research with actual users. I recommend the book *Just Enough Research* by Erika Hall for ideas.

## 1: User Scenario Brainstorm and Prioritization

In a large group, brainstorm the scenarios in which your audiences are likely to visit your site, interact with your app, and so on. Ask participants to write their scenarios on large sticky notes (for example, 4x6 or 5x8) in the following format (write this on the whiteboard or a wall sticky for reference):

*As a* <description of person>*, I need* <description of information need or task> *so I can* <description of user goal>*.*

When they are finished writing their scenarios, have them take turns reading them aloud and putting them on the wall. As each person reads scenarios, some duplicates will likely emerge; have them read the duplicates and place them on top of the similar scenario already on the wall.

Once all the scenarios have been read and any clarifying questions asked, it’s time to prioritize. Give each participant five votes to place next to the scenarios they think are most important. You can give them little dot stickers or just have each person use a marker to put a checkmark or star next to the priority scenarios. They can split up their votes or use one or more of them on a single scenario.

Count up the votes and announce the top four or five scenarios. Facilitate a discussion and make adjustments based on the discussion to arrive at a final list of four or five priority scenarios.

## 2: User Journeys

Once you have your prioritized scenarios, ask teams of two to work together to write stories about the users represented in each scenario. Tell them to be creative, yet realistic, and really try to put themselves in their users’ shoes.

Depending on time and perception of what the participants will “go for,” I do this exercise one of two ways.

• **A Hero’s Journey:** Have each group write a story for the scenario they’ve been assigned using the prompts in the worksheet at the end of this document. The worksheet is loosely based on A Hero’s Journey, which is referenced on pages 88 and 89 of
*The Content Strategy Toolkit*.

• **Before/During/After:** Have each group separate a piece of paper (scratch paper or a wall sticky) into three columns: **Before**, **During**, **After**. Then, have them brainstorm and record details about the person in their scenario related to what they are doing, feeling, thinking, and so on, *before* they interact with your content, *while* they interact with their content, and *after* they interact with their content.

Ask each group to share their stories and facilitate a discussion to dig into the details, ask clarifying questions, and so on.

## 3: Yelp-style Reviews

Have each participant write pairs reviews for your content from the perspectives of users described in your priority scenarios. For each scenario, they will write a two-to-three sentence positive review and a two-to-three sentence negative review. Then have them share the reviews (one scenario at a time). Facilitate a discussion to dig into details, ask clarifying questions, and so on.

# A Hero’s Journey

Scenario Description:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1) What is the trigger for seeking information or completing a task? | 2) What barriers are likely to stand in the way of the user seeking information or completing a task? |
| 3) Who is the user likely to consult with related to the situation at hand? | 4) What is the next step they take in seeking information or completing a task? |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 5) What positive and negative things might they encounter as they seek information or complete their task? | 6) How do they go about making a decision related to the information they are looking for or the task they need to complete? |
| 7) What happens immediately after they find the information they need or complete the task they set out to complete? | 8) How is their life different after they found the information they needed or completed the task they sought to complete? |

How did this exercise make you think differently about the content you need to provide to this user?