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User Research & Personas
Getting Your Project Started

Why are you doing this?

User research and the creation of personas are the foundation of user experience work.

Once you have selected a website to work with, it's time to start talking to users. You need to find out what their experience with the website has been, what they'd like to see on the website, problems with the current website, etc. You are not doing market research (e.g., market size and shares, trends, market segments, demographics, etc.). For the purposes of this class, we will assume that has already been done. Rather, you should focus on people's behavior, how they solve everyday problems, use a website, etc. User research provides a direction about how to design a product, and to what extent it meets user needs. It focuses on producing qualitative data about what lies behind what people say. It looks specifically at what they literally do while using a product. Also, it prioritizes design guidance and improves the user experience.

What is a persona?

After you have completed your initial user research you build personas. Personas can help you design pretty much anything that will be used or experienced by a human being, such as a website, mobile app, services, etc. Personas are helpful in accomplishing a wide range of activities including defining and designing the product, communicating with stakeholders about your audience, building consensus, and rallying a team around a goal.

Personas are detailed descriptions of imaginary people constructed out of well-understood, highly specified data about real people. They encapsulate and explain the most critical behavioral data in a way that designers and stakeholders can understand, remember, and relate to. Personas are more than just lists of characteristics and needs; they use *storytelling* to engage the social and emotional aspects of our brains. (See this IxDX article about story telling ⬀ for more information about story telling in UX.)

What are your deliverables?

Slide Deck/Presentation: One of the most important tasks we have as user experience professionals is to make sure our clients and stakeholders understand not only the work product we give them but the user experience development cycle. Many companies know they should care about user experiences so they hire UX experts, but they don't know specifically how we can help them develop their product or why they should care about some of the information we share with them. This can be particularly true for User Research & Personas--admittedly made up stories about their users and how they use the website. Your slide deck should contain at least the following slides:

- Title
- List of content
- Project team
- Participant criteria (How did you pick your users?)
- Key findings (You should have a slide for each key finding. You should have at least 2-3 slides.)
- Personas (At least 5-8--one or more should be for a disabled user)
- Next steps

For an example of this type of presentation see femke.designs How to Create a UX Research Report ⬀.

Click here to see a User Report ⬇ and Persona ⬇ document from a previous quarter. NOTE: This is ONE example of a successful User Report and Personas. This does NOT mean that you should use it as a template. There are many ways to successfully complete this assignment.

Who is your audience?

Your audience is your stakeholders. For a website this would be the owners and webmasters of the website. For a mobile app, your audience would be your investors and/or client who hired you.

How will your work be evaluated?

Your work will be assessed based on the rubric below.

How will you turn in your work?

You will present your user research slidedeck to the class. You will also turn in your slide deck here (PowerPoint or Keynote) or if you used Google Slides you will post the URL here.