

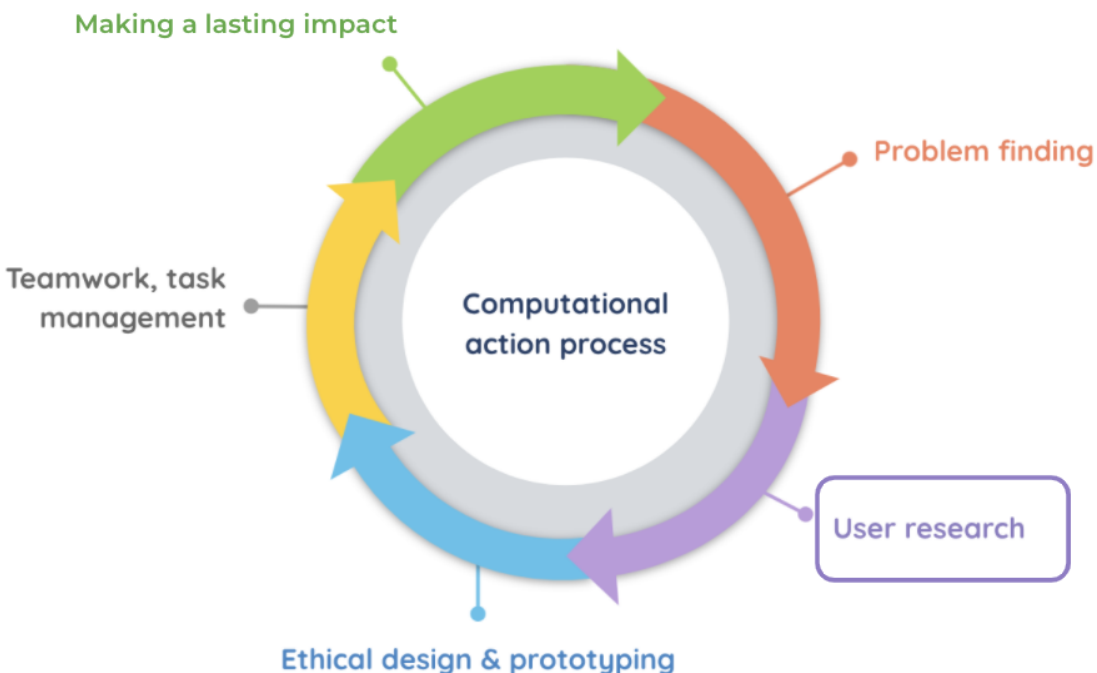
User Research: How to understand real users' needs

Once you have found a target user group, you may be tempted to ask your users: “What do you want?”

Henry Ford, who created the first car (the Ford Model T), is thought to have said, “If I asked people what they wanted, they would have said they wanted faster horses.” At that time, the only mode of private transportation that existed in the world were carriages drawn by horses (or shared transportation in the form of locomotives). Since this is all that existed that people were familiar with, it is natural that a user would respond to the question by saying “Get me stronger and faster horses.”

But in this (possibly apocryphal) story, what is the *real user need* that they have, but are not voicing verbatim? It's: faster mode of transportation. Henry Ford, understanding the *real user need*, and being an innovator and inventor, was able to take the problem he saw and invent the first car.

This is what we have to do with user research. The way to use user research well is to: **1. Ask the right questions** and **2. Summarize and synthesize the feedback to understand the *real user need* or problem**



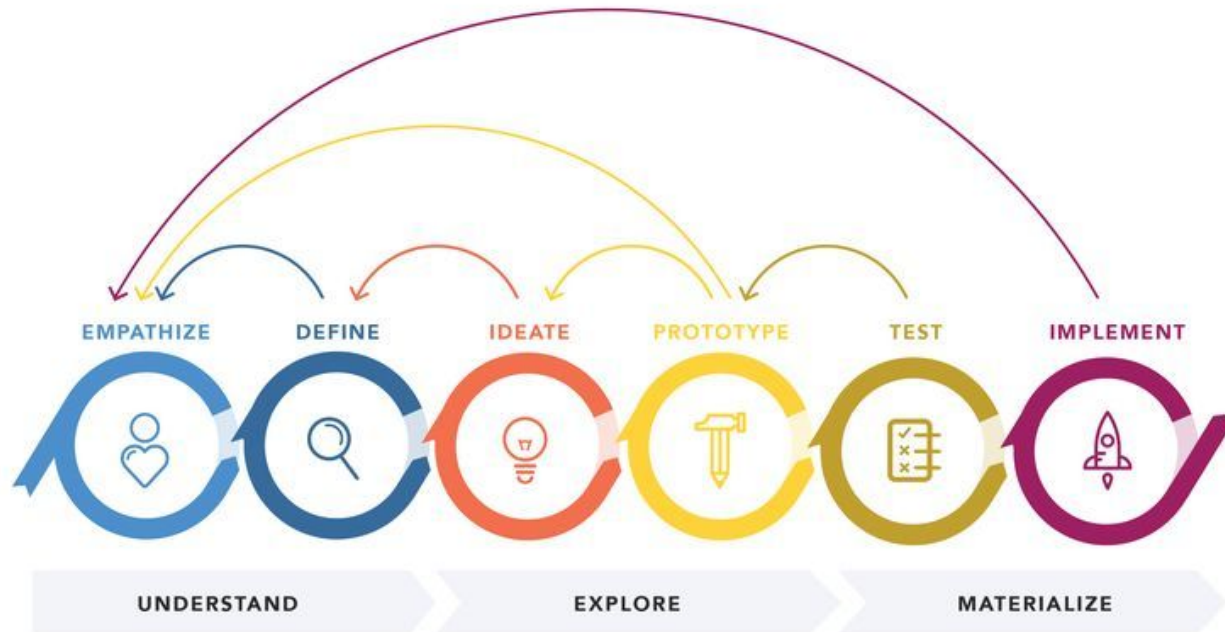
Asking the right questions

Here is a cheat sheet of tips on asking the right questions:

- Don't ask users what they want. Focus on their problems and what they're trying to do.
 - We can accomplish this by asking questions focused on *how* they do something or *their user journey* through a problem (e.g. what their day looks like surrounding this issue)
- Ask open-ended questions. Don't ask yes/no questions.
 - Allow users to answer a question fully, in their own special way, instead of giving them predefined options to choose from. The more a user answers in their own words, the more information you'll get.
- Try not to ask leading questions
 - Leading questions = you're nudging your users towards a certain answer. This can be in the shape of: "Do you find yourself annoyed by..." or "Isn't it hard to..." or similar questions where your opinion is sneakily inside the question.
 - Try to take your opinion out of the question!
- Listen to their stories with empathy and curiosity
 - The more your users can talk (or answer in writing), the richer their story and the better you can understand their real needs
- Ask the stupid questions! Don't assume
 - It's always helpful to ask basic questions. Don't worry if it seems too basic - it's not! Never assume you know something about the user. Instead, ask them a question to get their perspective.
- Follow up! If they mention something interesting, ask follow-up questions
 - If conducting a live or virtual user interview, ask follow-up questions when something interesting or unexpected is mentioned.
 - Usually the best insights come from digging deep and following a trail of interesting/unexpected answer and getting the user to elaborate more
- Respect privacy and confidentiality: never mention other users
 - This also helps you get info from each user without influencing them by mentioning how others responded to the same question
- Ask the user to show you! Show & tell - 1 "show" is worth 1000 words
 - If conducting a live or virtual interview, have a user walk you through how they approach the issue you're discussing, if relevant. You can gain a lot of info from observing
 - Often, we answer questions one way but actually do / or interact with an object or product a completely different way.
 - For example: think about how you'd answer interacting with a door. Then go and close or open your door. Did you do it differently than how you described it? Did

you push vs. pull, or perhaps have to do something special for it to lock, or stay open?

- Asking the user to show you can give you a lot of useful information!



Use the principles of design thinking as you define the problem space and understand user issues. Empathize and be curious!

Questions to ask

Here are some example types of questions to ask. Generally, these types of questions are asked in this order, from discovery into deep dive. You can create questions based on this template for your user research.

Demographics

- Age, gender, location, occupation

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

- Can you tell me your experience with [topic]....? / What are you trying to do?/ What problems have you encountered while [doing this]...?
- How often do you [topic]....?

UNDERSTANDING: DIGGING DEEPER INTO USER'S TASKS

- Can you describe how you would go about doing [task]...?
- Can you walk me through how you [activity]....?

SHOWING

- Please show me how you [task]....

OPINIONS, DESIRES, ATTITUDES

- What is the ideal experience you would like for [task]...?
- What do you like/dislike about [existing products]...?
- What do you think about [your product idea]...?

Example

Problem topic: mental health and wellbeing for young people

User research questions:

- Can you tell me your experience with wellbeing in your daily life? Weekly? What do you tend to do for physical and mental health?
- What issues, if any, have you encountered while trying to improve or keep up good wellbeing?
- What do you know about wellbeing and physical and mental health? Is there anything you wish you could know more about?

How to conduct user research

Now that you know your questions, here's tips on how to quickly and easily conduct research and get responses:

1. Create a list of questions in Google Forms (forms.google.com) for easy data collection. Choose from the questions list above. You don't have to have every questions! Work with your team to decide the relevant questions that will give you answers that will help you define the problem and brainstorm solutions.
2. Each question should have a "text box" answer format for your users to reply in their unique way.
3. Send the link to the Google Form to your target audience. You can use relevant mailing lists, or rely on your network (social media, etc).
 - a. **Hint:** ask your mentors, teachers, etc! Rely on your network to help you get the survey out to your target audience. For example: if your target audience are doctors, ask your program mentors and friends & family if they can forward the Google Form link to doctors that they may know.

How to conduct virtual or in-person interviews

If you are able to set up in-person or virtual interviews, you don't need more than 3-5 interviews! In fact, generally user interviews conducted at companies cap at 9-10 users for each specific

problem, because there are diminishing returns after. You can learn a lot from just a few user interviews!

Conducting a virtual interview can be easier to schedule and also allows a user to share screen, if relevant for the problem space.

Key parts of conducting a video or in-person interview:

- b. Interviews should go no longer than 45 min or 1 hour. Aim for a 20-30 min interview that goes through a few discovery, understanding, and showing questions.
- c. Ask the same list of questions you created for the Google Form, but ask them to your user (you won't send the questions to the user)
- d. OBSERVE and LISTEN!** Observation and listening will give you the most information during in-person or virtual interviews. Give your users time to answer your question fully. They may want to add on a story or follow-up topic. Users are generally very interested in describing their experiences or problems, so be sure to listen and give them time!
- e. Divide and conquer (team roles): 1 person asks the questions, the other teammates are observing and taking notes (usually silent). You can also ask follow-up questions, but remember to **empathize** with the user: you don't want to overwhelm them! It's usually more comfortable to do 1:1 interviews. Your observations and note taking will be invaluable because the person asking the question should respect the user by giving them their full attention and asking follow-up questions if something is unclear.