

# User Research

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# A brief overview

# User Research: Six things to remember

1

## Cast aside your biases, listen and observe

- Let subjects tell their own story, and listen for the things that
  - elicit emotion, cause them concern or frustration.

"If you want to find out what people really need, you have to forget about your problems and worry about their lives."

# User Research: Six things to remember

2

Note the contradictions between what people say and what they do

Opportunities for innovation lie within the disconnect between

- action and words.

# User Research: Six things to remember

3

## Listen to people's personal stories

- Let them relate their successes and failures.

Stories encompass the implicit rules that govern and organize peoples lives and reveal what they find normal, acceptable and true. They reveal moral codes, sources of pride, shames, shoulds and should-nots.

# User Research: Six things to remember

- 
- 4 Watch for "work arounds"
    - People make do and work around the shortcomings of products and situations.

In everyday life, we all come up with "work arounds," clumsy or clever, that we usually are totally unaware of.

You must take note.

# User Research: Six things to remember

5

Distinguish between needs and solutions.

- Needs open up possibilities, solutions constrain them.

If you start with a solution then you may overlook the possibility of coming up with an entirely new and revolutionary product or service.

# User Research: Six things to remember

**Look beyond the obvious.**

- 
- Your research may seem so routine and familiar that you feel
    - there is nothing new to be learned.

Boredom and frustration easily set in.  
Stay alert.

The epiphanies and insights emerge  
from the nuances.

# Video Break

## Empathy vs Sympathy



Because the truth is, rarely can  
a response make something better.

# User Research Methods

# Roles

Two main roles that researchers and participants can take in user research:

1. Observational
2. Self-reporting

# Observational

# **Participant Observation**

## **Goal**

To uncover discrepancies between how participants use a space and now it was intended to be used

# **Participant Observation**

**Same intent as Design Ethnography**

**Participant Observation is a form of Design Ethnography**

**Involves active participation in activities**

# **Participant Observation**

## **When**

Use when you want to study a specific space/environment (e.g., to plan improvements such as how technology could support interactions)

# **Design Ethnography**

## **Goal**

**To gain a comprehensive and empathetic understanding of the users**

# **Design Ethnography**

**Quicker than traditional ethnography**

**Days, weeks, or months, not years**

# **Design Ethnography**

**Can change people's behavior if you are interacting with them**

**Choose between becoming a "marginal participant" and a "full participant"**

# **Design Ethnography**

**Sometimes "concurrent ethnography"**

The ethnography is being done at the same time design is under way

# **Fly-on-the-Wall Observation**

## **Goal**

To gain a deep understanding of how people behave in a specific location

# Fly-on-the-Wall Observation

## When

Use when you want to study people unobtrusively (to avoid bias) and you don't require to keep this knowledge on a map

# **Fly-on-the-Wall Observation**

## **How**

**Go to a location and observe what is happening there without interacting or talking to people. Be a fly on the wall!**

# **Behavioral Mapping**

## **Goal**

To uncover discrepancies between how participants use a space and how it was intended to be used

# **Behavioral Mapping**

## **When**

**Study a specific space/environment (e.g., to plan improvements such as how technology could support interactions)**

# Behavioral Mapping

## How

**Unobtrusive (done "at a distance")**

Start with a site plan or map and a list of behaviors that you want to record, then note when specific behaviors happen in specific locations on the map

# Behavioral Mapping



# **Self-reporting**

# **Interviews**

## **Goal**

To collect first hand personal accounts of experiences, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions

# Interviews

## When

Use when you want to maximize the amount of information you can get per time spent, you are likely to have follow-up questions, and if context and time are less important

# **Interviews**

## **How**

**Write an interview script and meet with participants to ask these questions**

**Semi-structured interviews often make sense to allow for more flexibility**

# Interviews

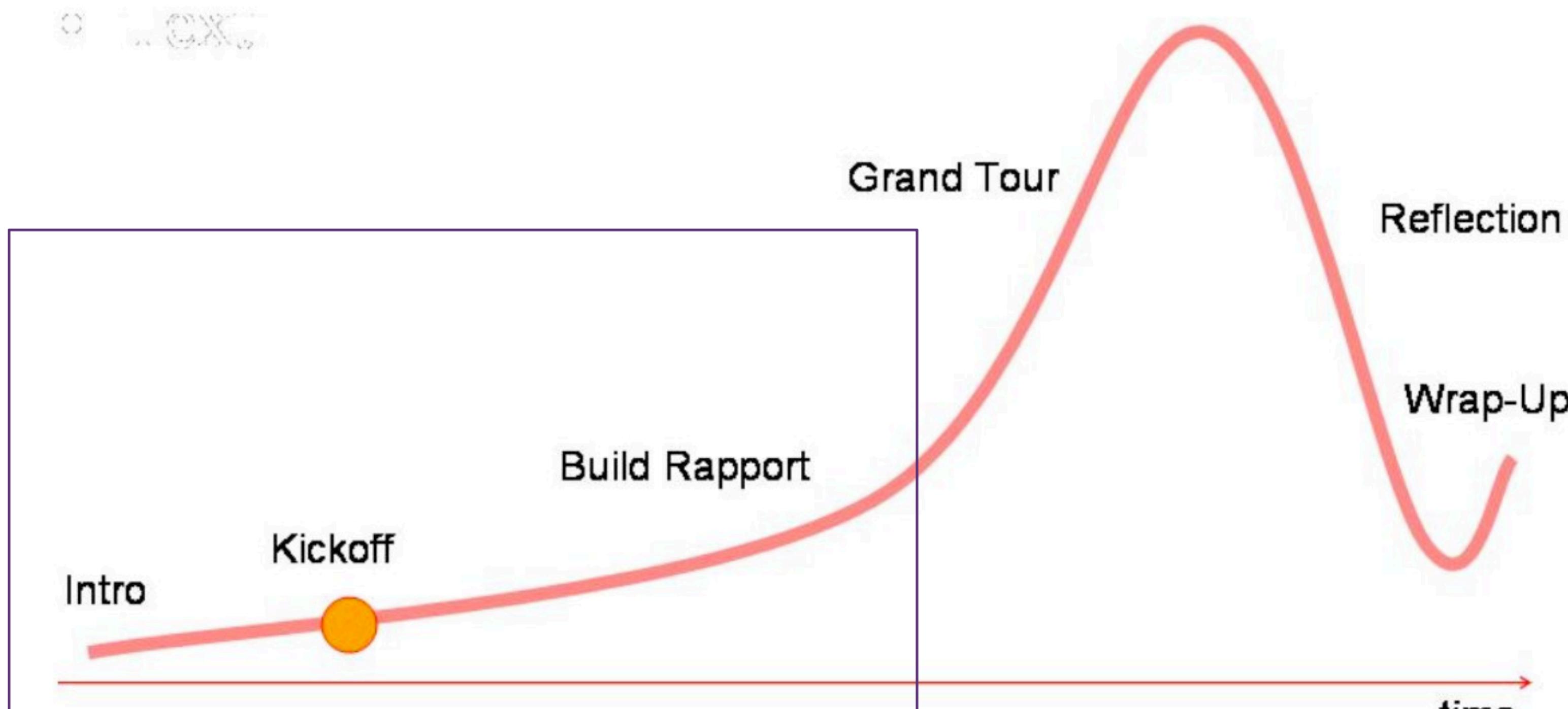
## Why not

People are bad at remembering specific details of events

People remember almost nothing about routine events (a specific time you checked Facebook or sent an email)

People are terrible at estimating frequency (how often do you use snapchat?)

# Interviews



*(Thanks to Michael Barry for this model)*

# Interviews

## Intro

"Hi, I'm a UW student studying coffee. I'm interested in hearing about your experience with coffee. There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear what you have to say."

# **Interviews**

## **Kick-off**

**“Do you drink coffee?”**

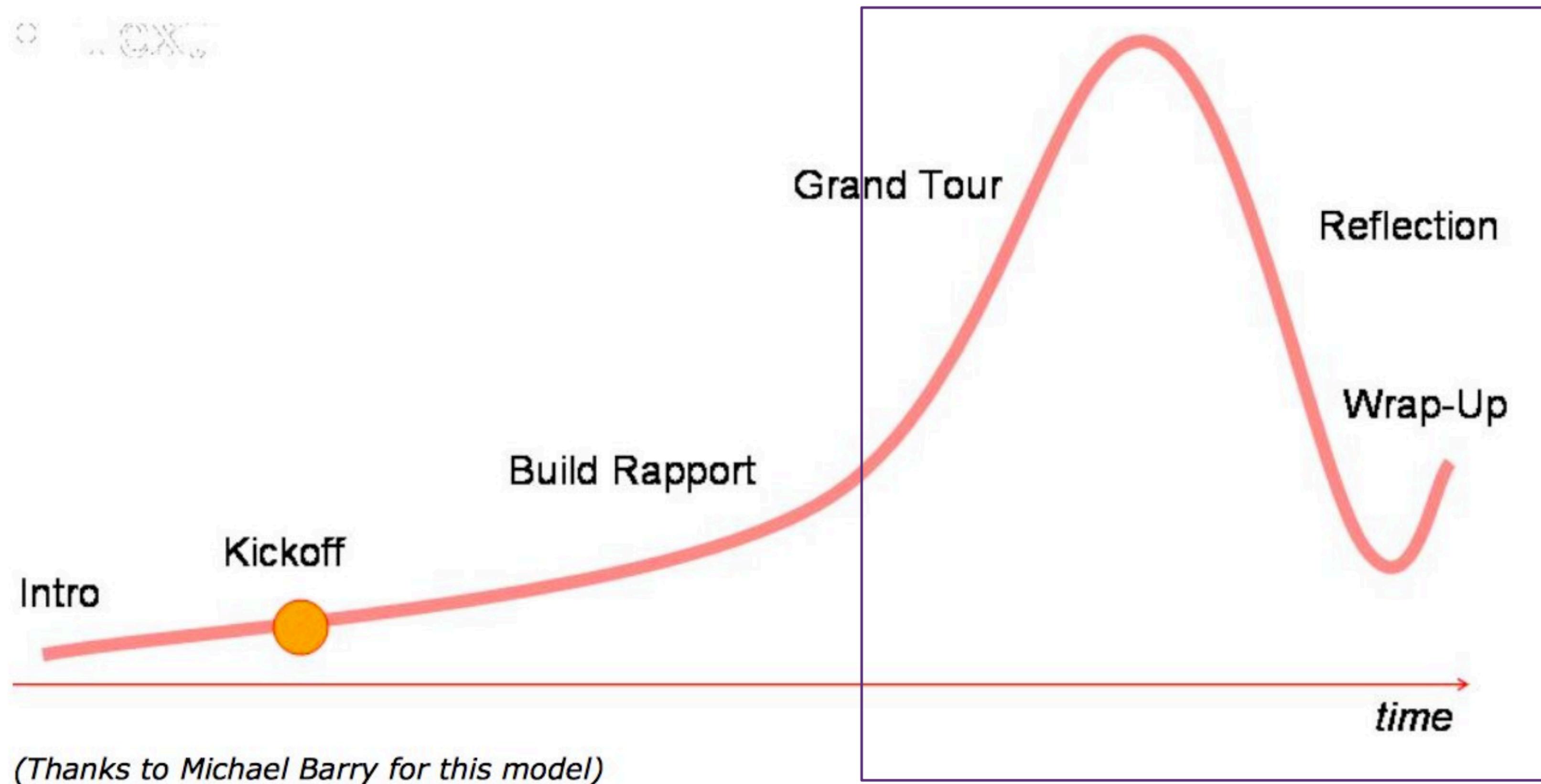
# **Interviews**

## **Build rapport**

**"Did you have a coffee today? How was it? Do you have a favorite coffee?"**

# Interviews

© 2008



# **Interviews**

## **Grand Tour**

**"Can you describe your most memorable coffee experience?  
Why was it so unique? What happened?"**

# **Interviews**

## **Reflection**

**"If you were designing the ultimate coffee shop based on your ideal experience..."**

# **Focus Groups**

## **Goal**

To gain insights into themes, patterns, and trends that are likely to come out more in a group setting.

# **Focus Groups**

## **When**

Use when you want to learn about the opinions, feelings, and attitudes from a group about a specific product, service, brand, location...

# **Focus Groups**

## **How**

**Write an interview script (i.e., a number of questions) and meet with participants in a small group to ask these questions**

**Be flexible enough to allow the group to carry the conversation elsewhere**

# **Diary Studies**

## **Goal**

To capture specific details of real interactions, close to when they happened Capture specific context of interaction (photo diaries, screenshots)

Better understand frequency of use of a feature/app

# Diary Studies

## When

Learn about specific activities over an extended period of time  
(e.g., when it is impossible to observe users throughout that time period)

Doesn't matter that participants are aware of the task you're interested in

Less frequent activities can take months to document!

# Cultural Probes

## Goal

To inspire new forms of self-understanding and communication about participants' lives, environments, thoughts, and interactions

# Cultural Probes

## When

You want to uncover genuinely new ideas that will benefit the group

Ex.: Study bullying in a classroom and enable children to express themselves in their own ways.

# Cultural Probes

## How

Provide participants with kits made up of a variety of items and tasks (e.g., disposable camera, maps, stickers, notebooks)

# Graffiti Wall

## Goal

To collect participants' responses and thoughts on an environment or system, directly in the context of use

# Graffiti Wall

## When

Collect information from people where interviews or observation might be unsuitable

Ex.: to study people's thoughts about the elevator at the light rail station without biasing them with the presence of a researcher

# **Directed Storytelling**

## **Goal**

**To collect rich stories of people's experiences**

# **Directed Storytelling**

## **When**

Collect stories from participants when time or other factors prevent direct observation or longer forms of research inquiry

Good when you wouldn't be able to come up with questions for an interview because more knowledge is needed

# **Directed Storytelling**

## **How**

Similar to interviews, but focused on stories. E.g., "Tell me a story about the last time you..."

# **Surveys**

## **Goal**

To collect large amounts of self-reported information from people

Ex.: to understand how common a specific behavior is

# **Surveys**

## **When**

**Get as many perspectives rapidly and/or quantify and statistically test insights and when you have a good understanding of the questions you want to ask**

**Less flexible than interviews: requires more knowledge about the population, no chance to ask follow-ups**

**Can complement interviews to understand broader patterns**

# **Surveys**

## **How**

**Develop and sequence questions, test the survey, recruit participants**

**Observational**

**&**

**Self-reporting**

# **Contextual Inquiry**

## **Applied design ethnography**

**"The core premise of Contextual Inquiry is very simple: go where the customer works, observe the customer as he or she works, and talk to the customer about the work. Do that, and you can't help but gain a better understanding of your customer."**

# **Contextual Inquiry**

## **Goal**

To study actual behavior in real contexts of use and see how context impacts interactions.

The goal is not to learn to do the task

Instead, the goal is to learn how the participant does the task in order to learn how to support it

# **Contextual Inquiry**

## **When**

**Use when you are not worried about biases (that your behavior will change behavior somewhat) and you are interested in specific tasks**

# **Contextual Inquiry**

## **When**

**Define your tasks up front (ask participants in advance about the types of things that they do and the places where they do them to help design your session).**

**Conduct the session in the place and time that the task is normally conducted.**

**Enlist the participant's active assistance in understanding the task, but minimize interruptions.**

# **Contextual Inquiry**

## **The relationship between participants and researcher**

**The participant is doing stuff**

**The participant explains what they are doing**

**The researcher offers an interpretation**

**The participant agrees or corrects**

# **Contextual Inquiry**

## **Partners**

**Not really an interview**

**Not really an apprentice**

# **Personal Inventories**

## **Goal**

To understand the relationship between the product and users  
from the participant's point of view

# **Personal Inventories**

## **When**

Use when you want to explore the relationship between user and a specific artifact/product

# **Personal Inventories**

## **How**

**Prepare questions that you may ask when the participant talks about the things they own**

**Ask participants to walk through their inventories**

**Ask specific questions to find out their relationship/emotions**

# **Personal Inventories**

## **How**

**Prepare questions that you may ask when the participant talks about the things they own**

**Ask participants to walk through their inventories**

**Ask specific questions to find out their relationship/emotions**

**Which methods are ideal for your project?**

# **Activity!!**

**Complete the User Research Methods handout.**