

# Lecture 5: Design & Design Critique

SE for Startups

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## **Snow plow app:**

**You have a product idea. You have user stories.  
You've got a team to help you realize it.**

**But how do you generate a good design  
with your team?**

# Design & Design Critiques

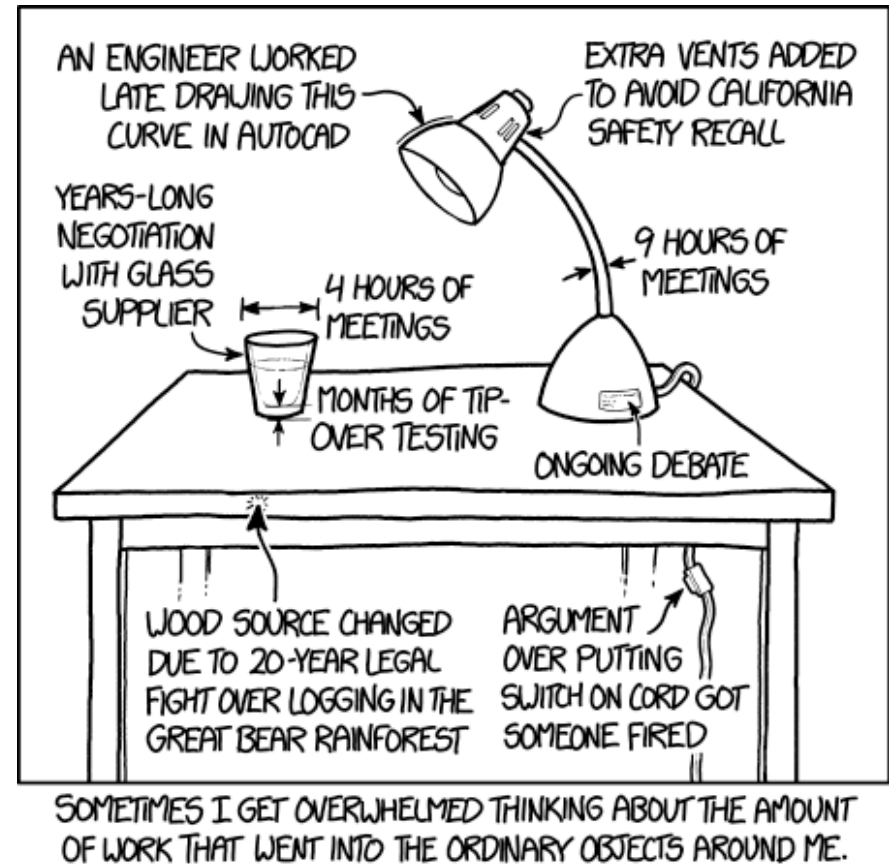
## Based on:

- the excellent resource by Andy Ko: <http://faculty.washington.edu/ajko/books/design-methods/>
- the book, *Discussing Design: Improving Communication and Collaboration Through Critique* by Adam Connor and Aaron Irizarry
- Scott Berkun's many wonderful essays <http://scottberkun.com/essays/>

# Design is much more than what's visible

*Quickly I learned that design was much, much more than what was visible. Design was where ideas came from. It was processes for generating ideas. It was methods for evaluating ideas. It was ways of communicating ideas. I learned that design was **problem solving**, and that it was the problem solving that shapes the world. After all, look around you: nearly everything in the space you're reading this in is designed by someone, somewhere, to solve some problem. As this XKCD comic illustrates, once you realize the designed world around you, it's hard not to see the design work behind everything around you:*

— Andrew J. Ko



# Design is where the power is in companies

Designers determine what companies make, and that determines what people use.

## Example design jobs that often have this power:

- Interaction designers,
- software engineers,
- user experience designers,
- project designers/managers,
- graphic designers

## 8 skills you need to be a good designer:

1. **Multiple perspectives on a problem** (you need to seek them! Even if they are conflicting.)
2. **Divergent thinking**, aka envision new possibilities
3. **Convergent thinking**, aka cull best possibilities from many
4. **Exploiting failure**. Embrace it, failure is your best teacher
5. **Externalizing ideas**, aka realizing ideas so others can see
6. **Maintaining emotional distance**. Don't get too attached to your ideas, you always want to see what's best, even if it's not your idea
7. **Seeking critique**. Get more perspectives on your ideas!
8. **Justifying decisions**. You must be able justify the decisions you've made.

# Design critique is...

A tool to give  
useful,  
constructive  
feedback

“Design Studio”  
process for  
designers to  
give/get  
feedback via  
critiques



# Critique is...

...all about ***iteration*** and ***improvement***.

*Recall the goals of agile development! Design critique fits right in!*

So long as you're looking to improve on whatever it is that you're doing, whether it be an app, interface, business idea, or anything else, you've got an opportunity for critique.



**Also, not to forget...**

## **Design is a career in itself**

To learn to be a designer, in design school, essentially all in-class time is spent in **design “studio” critique**.

Generating ideas is hard. Iterating on those ideas and learning from what you generated and where you failed is harder.

But it always makes you a better designer.

# Activity

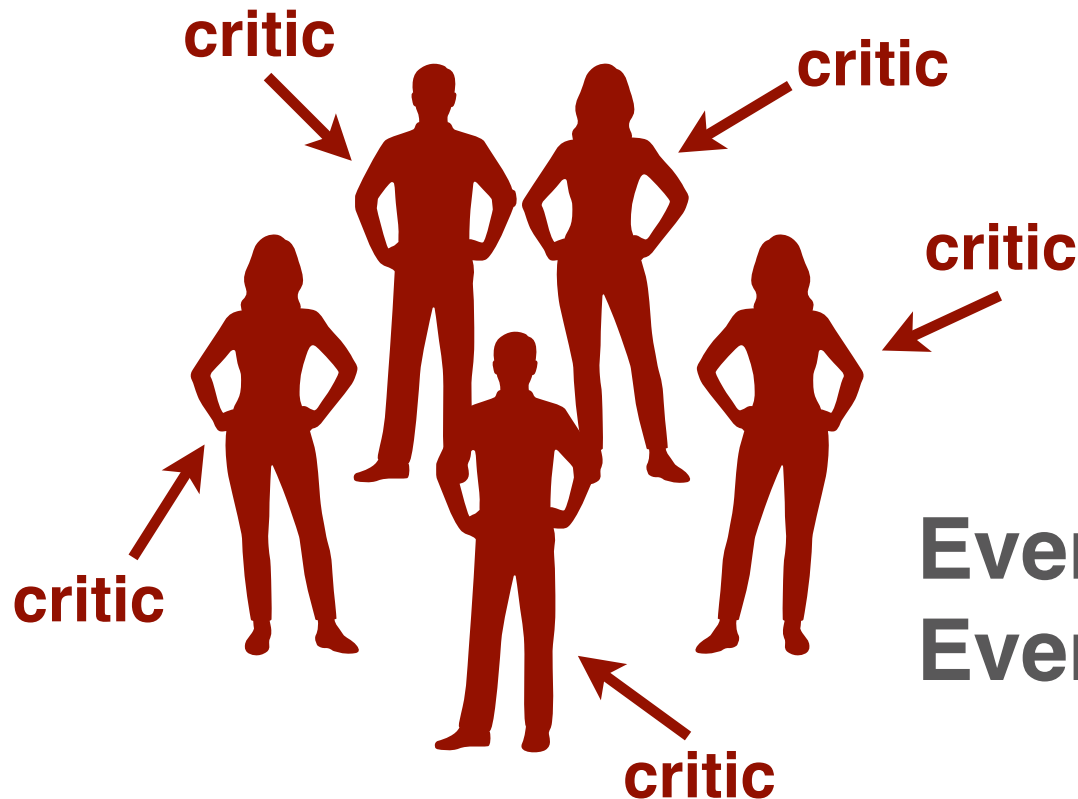
# Deciding on a prototype for the snow-plowing app

Assemble into your project group.

Hang up your 4 wireframe drawings.

But before you start...

# Roles in a design critique:



**Everyone is a critic**  
**Everyone is equal**

But before you start...

# Rules of critique:

1. Everyone is a critic
2. Everyone is equal
3. The designer is responsible for the next steps

*(i.e., doesn't have to follow all advice)*

**But before you start...**

# **Critique process:**

- 1. Start with a critique goal**
- 2. Go round-robin to each member of the group asking questions**
- 3. Everyone at all times: active listening!**

## When it's your round-robin turn:

### One at a time, Round Robin format:

- Ask every question you can think of about every detail, uncovering rationale.
- Balance positive and negative feedback.
- Keep notes on the critiques to practice capturing critiques while listening.

## Specific Useful Feedback

Avoid high level feedback like

**“Yeah, it’s good”,**

or

**“Not great, could be improved”**



## Good Critiques are:

**Two-way:** It is not just a person providing feedback, but also the designer articulating rationale for their decisions.

**Deeply engaged:** the critic should be deeply engaged in the substance of the problem. The more expertise they have the better

# REMEMBER:

## 8 skills you need to be a good designer:

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# **Round 1: Now, go!**

**Establish your team's critique goal for your team critique, and do several rounds of round-robin critique in pursuit of that goal.**

## Good Critiques are:

**Divergent and convergent:** Part of saying why something doesn't work is articulating what alternative designs might work and why

# Critique should not be abuse

Your critique should be a critique of the work,  
NOT of the person

You should balance your feedback, 1 positive for  
every negative thing you say

# Questions work well

**Clarification** questions help the designer clarify their thought process

Questions can challenge the designer's **assumptions**

Questions can prompt the designer to consider **alternative perspectives**

Questions can encourage the designer to spell out the **implications and consequences** of their design

## Concepts to avoid

**Intuitive:** Humans are not born with much innate knowledge. Often people mean that they can infer something about the design

**User-friendly:** what does this even mean? is it nice? supportive? helpful? Be more specific.

# When it's your round-robin turn:

## The Rules of order for good critiques:

- **Start with clarifying questions.** Clarify any assumptions about what the presented design is intended to do, or what kind of experience it is intended to create
- **Listen before speaking.** Many times in work environments, we confuse conversations, which should be exchanges of ideas, with opportunities to inflict our opinions on others. If you take a moment to listen and understand before voicing an opinion, you're open to hear something new that might challenge your old thinking.
- **Lead into explorations of alternatives.** Ask questions that surface other choices the designer might not have recognized.
- **If it fits with the goals of the critique,** point out situations, sequences, or elements within the design that may be problematic given what you know about your customers, the scenarios involved, or the project goals.
- **Avoid statements that refer to absolutes.** Instead, make points referent to the goals of the design. Bad example: This sucks and it's ugly". Good: "Well, if the goal is to make this feel friendly, black and flaming red doesn't convey that to me."
- **Speak in context of your point of view.** It's fine to have a personal opinion, expressing your own preferences. But don't confuse this with your perception of what your customers need or want.



# Possible discussion points/questions to use:

- What are the user scenarios the site is designed for? Walkthrough how each design would enable those scenarios.
- What known usability / design / business issues are these sketches trying to solve?
- What is the intended style of the design, and is it appropriate for the target audience?
- What is the intention of the style, and does it achieve the desired effect?
- Are there standard brand elements that should be used, and are they used appropriately?
- Are there similar software products or features that these designs should relate to?
- What usability heuristics does each design support well? (or not?)
- Where in the design are the most likely places for users to have trouble? and why?
- Are there reasonable design changes that might avoid these problem points?
- Does each design idea take advantage of things the user might already have learned?
- What are the pros and cons of each design idea, relative to each other?
- Are there any hybrid design ideas that are worth exploring, based on the designs in the room?
- What open issues might best be resolved by a usability study or other research?

## **Round 2:**

**Reflect on the designs you have critiqued.  
Synthesize a plan for your team's final wireframe  
based on what you've seen/discussed in Round 1.**

# Plan Revisions

- Synthesize feedback into written plan.
- What will you change about your design?
- What will you not change about your design?
- What questions do you still have about your design that demand more insight?
- What prototype could you create to answer these questions and how would you use the prototype to answer them?

# Reflection

What was difficult about giving critique?

What was difficult about receiving critique?

Were there things you feel you could not say during critique?

What are the limitations of this method of evaluation?

## **Round 3:**

**Hang up your identity document (colors/logo/fonts)  
Critique your team's ideas for your snow plow  
app's identity**