# Reflective writing on practical activities

## Week 1

We were tasked with designing our ideal games and critique them among the group. My game, a fantasy RPG set in a modern universe, was generally well received its weakness laying with its difficulty of implementation. My peers pointed out that even thought having a lot of intricate features might sound exciting, a good design should also account for what is feasible to implement using today’s technology. This was a great pointer to keep in mind for future projects and I learned that I should keep my aspirations proportional to my abilities.

For the next task, we had to create designs as a pair, the other students in the group acting as users.

Creating a design as a pair was more difficult in some regards since our creative opinions were quite different. I felt frustrated at the time, but looking back, the fact that our ideas opposed each other led to a brilliant result. Our design was shaped by the agreements we made which turned out to be the perfect midline between the extremes that were our opinions. I am thankful to have gained such valuable insight about the importance of working as a team.

## Week 2

One of this week’s tasks was to write down our mental model of how a specific voice assistant works. We also had to consider the issue of how trustworthy (regarding user privacy) the device was. My understanding of how the device worked was mostly correct. I was never actually taught any of it, which made me realise that well designed human interaction must absolutely be intuitive. On the issue of how well user privacy is preserved by this device, after debating it with my peers I came to understand that this aspect is relative to context. The fact that the device is always listening is usually found to be an uncomfortable truth by the average user, even if it only starts recording after it hears its wake word. I feel I became more aware of issues that different interaction and feedback modes may have in different contexts.

I enjoyed this exercise as I had never actually thought through how these devices’ functionality was designed. I was able to gain a better understanding of mental models and how my preconceived knowledge influences how effectively they work.

## Week 3

The practical activity for this week consisted of creating a persona and taking part in a scenario od iteratively designing a book website for said persona.

Taking both the role of a designer focused on human computer interaction and the one of a user, taught me that good communication between the parties is a must, if the final design is to be any good.

Taking interviews proved to be a bit frustrating, as we were instructed to keep everything quite brief, there were a few instances where the interviewers seemed to misinterpret what the interviewees wanted. If I were to go through a similar experience, I feel that I would be better at phrasing my questions in such a way that misunderstandings would be more difficult to occur.

Based upon the data obtained from these interviews we created a persona that we then immersed in a scenario of using our yet to be developed system. I really enjoyed this part of the practical as I found scenarios to be very effective in interaction design. We were able to think about a good number of intuitive features using this method and I will definitely be integrating it in any future designing endeavours.

## Week 4

To start this week’s activity, our group was tasked with producing two designs taking different approaches when interpreting a given brief. Our two designs turned out to be quite different, as each of us created low level designs and the group picked the most different ones to further implement upon.

We then identified which HCI principles better corresponded to each of the designs in relation to the brief. I found this to be more difficult than I was expecting it to be. This was in part because the designs were at a very early development stage. Working with my team, I managed to grasp how to recognise specific principles exemplified in our designs. I believe this will help me to better adhere to these principles when working on future designs.

I feel that I have gained a better understanding of how to present my designs and the rationale behind them in a comprehensive manner.

The second part of the practical had us creating a HTA diagram for our final design. As this was the first time, I ever worked with HTA diagrams I found the activity both frustrating and interesting. I could see how useful integrating a diagram in the design process was, especially when comparing tasks, but was frustrated with the lack of proper software for creating it.

## Week 5

This week’s activity involved creating a paper prototype of a tablet app and demonstrating its functionality, receiving, and giving feedback and ultimately, create a digital version of another student’s paper prototype.

I had never made a paper prototype prior to this activity so the premise was very intriguing. I started by sketching the main screen layout and moved on from there creating all the other screens. The reason this was my first ever paper prototype is because I thought them to be a waste of time, mistakenly so. While doing this exercise I found that I was able to come up with a design quicker than usual. Using paper helped to visualise my concepts more effectively and make rapid adjustments, as pen proved to be quicker than any digital prototyping tool I have tried.

When the time came to present my prototype to my peers, I was once again impressed by how much quicker I was able to put together a comprehensive representation of how my app would flow.

The last part of the practical was to transfer someone else’s paper prototype into digital format. I found myself frustrated at times when the prototype was not entirely clear, in terms of interactions and visual representation. This would be issues that the author of the prototype would not likely face, this being perhaps one of the weaknesses of paper prototyping, that its comprehension might be somewhat limited to the person who makes it.

# Reflective writing on required reading

## Week 2 “Personas”

Even though I understood that personas were a very important part of any well-made design, I had not quite understood why that was or how important it was to adhere formal practices when creating one.

When reading the article, it became clear to me that personas are a useful for creating empathy with the target user, which seems to be the most effective driving force for creating a user experience centred design.

I also gained understanding of the importance of using data from real users when creating personas. The article offered all the necessary features of a good persona while presenting an excellent example of one. The persona presented in the article was so compelling that I found myself empathising with it, which made me realise how powerful of a design tool this is.

Learning of all the benefits of using personas when designing, made me reflect on all the ineffective designs I have ever come across and how much would have been employing this design tool.

## Week 3 “What are User Scenarios?”

By reading this article I was able to infer that scenarios are design exploration tools that are extremely useful in usability testing.

I found the paragraph on design thinking especially interesting and informative. I was able to gain a better understanding of how personas and scenarios work in relation to each other.

There were a few points that I found confusing. When offering tips on creating compelling user scenarios, the author says that one should “focus on the bigger picture but keep to the point”. I found this statement to be contradicting, the explanation following it, while being good advice, not really being related to the previous statement.

## Week 5 required viewing

Paper prototype animation

I chose to write about this video, because I loved the way that the paper prototype was presented. I found the use of stop motion animation to be a wonderful and inspiring idea. I was able to easily observe the flow of the prototype without being distracted by the change of papers that usually disrupt paper protype presentations. Cutting out the paper transitions also made the video wonderfully brief yet conveying all the information it needed to, which is always a positive.

Paper Gmail Art

Even though this video does not exactly show paper prototyping, I found the presentation to be very creative and engaging. However, I found myself paying more attention to the way the windows and buttons were being painted and constructed that to the functionality of the design. While this approach to paper design may be a bit too distracting to be used in a professional environment, it inspired me to keep a creative and innovative mind even when being constricted by formal protocols and practices.

## Week 6 required viewing

Watching this video helped me gain a deeper understanding of Jakob Nielsen's 10 Usability heuristics. The information was well structured, and the narrator delivered it simply and clearly.

I felt enlightened by the explanations of each principle as, prior to watching this video, I failed to understand what some of them meant. I particularly enjoyed learning about the third and seventh principles. The third “User control and freedom” taught me that I should always consider that users will inevitably make errors and that I should always include a clearly marked route of escape in my designs. While listening to the explanation about “Flexibility and efficiency of use” I realised that my systems should incorporate accelerators which are unseen to the novice user but that allow the expert user to navigate faster with frequent actions.

# HTA

### Design features

* Books are exchanged for credits to avoid users receiving books and never submitting any
  + Submitting a book for exchange gains one credit
  + Requesting a book spends one credit
* Users may offer a larger number of credits as a way to find a book that may not be available
* Books may be found by search bar or filter system
* Users may choose to gift a book to a contact as long as it is in the contact’s Wish list
* Users may choose to exchange books within their university (where books are exchanged at university libraries) or nationally (where books are mailed)

