**Page ID**: **#.# Contextual Inquiry**

# Primary Content

**Title**

Enter the **Title** of the **Method** here (REQUIRED).

**Contextual Inquiry**

**Description -- i.e., What it is:**

Enter the **Description** here (REQUIRED).

A qualitative research method that uses semi-structured interviews and observations to understand user behavior in their natural environment.

Contextual Inquiry (CI) is used to discover how people complete tasks in real-life scenarios. Unlike usability testing where all participants users are given a task to perform, CI is used to determine what users do without directing them to do a specific task.

Within the naturalistic setting a range of questions can be answered. What are the steps? What are the reasons behind the decisions they make while completing the steps? What elements of the task and/or setting help with task completion? What elements interfere? Are there any workarounds that influence how users get the job done?

In CI, users are asked a set of questions related to the context of their work, observed, and then questioned again. Interviews and observations are followed by debriefing sessions to confirm the meaning of user words and the observed actions. Finally, findings are organized using affinity diagrams, which place data into groups and themes to get deeper insights for design ideas and/or improvements.

**Recommended Uses**

Enter the **Recommended Use** here. If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

* Identify user needs and requirements.
* Understanding user personas.
* Understanding context of use, such as the environment in which tasks are completed and typical workflows for specific tasks.
* Identifying specific pain points in workflows that users experience.

**Limitations**

Enter the **Limitations** here. If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

* Time consuming -- travel to user location

**Outcomes**

Enter the **Outcomes** here. If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

A report that provides:

* A detailed description of the user’s operational environment and the nature of the tasks.
* An inventory of user needs identified through observation.

**Required Skills and Expertise**

Enter the **Required Skills** **and Expertise** here. If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

* The interviewing component of CI is generally best done with some professional support and/or practice.

**How to Proceed**

If there are no details, insert TBD.

* **How-To Guide.** Review step-by-step instructions on how to conduct a Contextual Inquiry.
* **Schedule a Consult.** Connect with a usability specialist for support on your project.

[BEGIN: How to Do It]

**Introduction**

Enter the **Introduction** here (REQUIRED).

Contextual inquiry is a qualitative research method where the interviewer gathers information about how users complete tasks, use tools, or interact with teammates in a natural setting. This method uses semi-structured interviews to gather data from users as they work in their own environments.

**Procedure**

Enter the **Steps** here. (Required).

Contextual inquiry methods may vary slightly depending on what is being studies. However, here are some general guidelines for conducting a contextual inquiry.

1. Conduct a traditional interview at the start of the session. This will let you get some background information about the user and their work. This will also help you build rapport with the user.
2. Adopt a master-apprentice approach when observing the user. The user will be the master and you are the apprentice who is supposed to learn from them as they perform their tasks. Make sure you inform them that you plan to watch them perform tasks and that you may occasionally interrupt them to ask questions.
3. Observe the user as they work. Make sure to record as many observations as you can. The more detailed the better! If recording it yourself is too difficult then consider having a second observer with you who can record notes too.
4. Summarize what you have learned with the user. Make sure to note their reaction to the summary and be attentive to it. You want to make sure you are getting candid feedback from them. You may have to make changes to your summary based on the user’s feedback. Keep asking the user questions if you feel that the summary is not quite accuracy.
5. Once you finish, you will need to analyze the data. One of the most useful methods of analyzing the data may be Affinity Diagramming.

**Tools**

If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

* N/A

[END: How to Do It]

**Author**

Enter the **REFERENCES** here. If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

* Human Factors Engineering (HFE), Office of Health Informatics, Veterans Health Administration

**Sources**

Enter the **REFERENCES** here. If there are no details, insert N/A or TBD.

* N/A

**References**

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* N/A