# The role of a beginner UX designer

As you start out on your path to becoming a UX designer, you're probably curious about the actual work your new career might involve. In this reading, you can explore the different responsibilities that entry-level UX designers commonly take on during a project. You'll also review the differences between generalist, specialist, and T-shaped UX designers.

But first, a quick call out: You'll probably notice a lot of new vocabulary and unfamiliar terms in this reading. Don't worry! You'll learn about each of these concepts in more depth throughout the certificate program. We'll also provide a glossary of important terms and their definitions at the end of each week of content.

Responsibilities of an entry-level UX designer

As an entry-level UX designer, you'll have a lot of exciting opportunities to gain experience. When you first start out, you'll probably take on a lot of different roles and responsibilities.
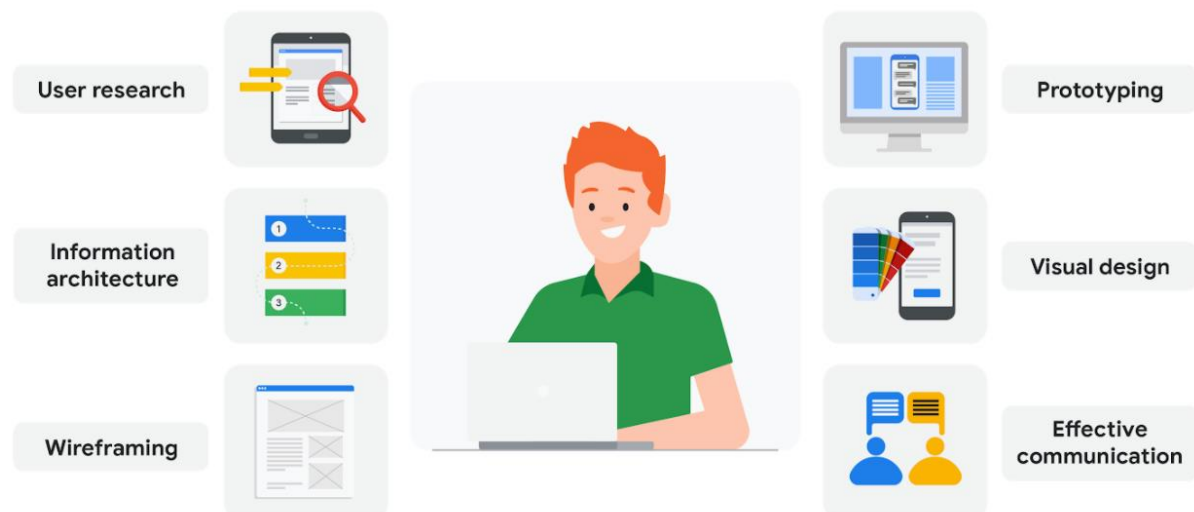
Icons include user research (a tablet with magnifying glass over it) Information architecture (a series of 3 colored, numbered bars) Wireframing (a graphic of a wireframe) Protoyping (a graphic of a desktop monitor with protoype of mobile device on screen) Visual design (a mobile phone next to paint swatches) Effective communication (a graphic of two people talking)

User research: User research is about understanding the people who use your product. Through research, you'll learn about users' backgrounds, demographics, motivations, pain points, emotions, and goals. Your research methods might include surveys, observations, and interviews. We'll explore user research in much more detail in an upcoming course.

Information architecture: Information architecture, or IA for short, involves deciding how your product is organized and structured. Think of IA as a skeleton that outlines how users interact with your product. Everything in your product should be organized in ways that make sense to the user and meets their expectations.

Wireframing: A wireframe is a basic outline or sketch of a product or a screen, like an app or website. As the name suggests, wireframes look like they were created with wires. They're mostly lines and shapes, with some text. Wireframes can be drawn by hand or created digitally using software. Wireframing helps you bring your design ideas to life, so other people on your team can provide input and feedback.
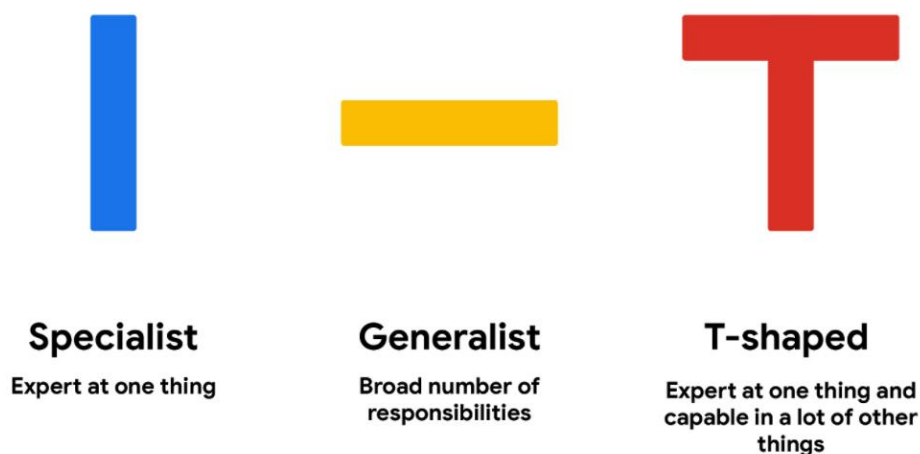
Prototyping: A prototype is an early model of a product that demonstrates its functionality. Prototypes can be in physical or digital formats and can vary in complexity. Sometimes a prototype is made to demonstrate one specific feature of a product, like the transition between screens or the way the product physically looks and feels. You'll make multiple prototypes for any given product throughout the design process.

Visual design: Visual design focuses on how the product or technology looks. As a UX designer, you need to understand the foundations of visual design in order to communicate the connection between a product's functionality and its appearance to users. You'll learn some of the most important principles of visual design throughout this certificate program.

Effective communication: Effective communication as a UX designer means connecting with your colleagues through emails, meetings, presentations, and design software. UX design is a very collaborative field, so being able to communicate both digitally and face-to-face with teammates is important. You need to be a good listener, be receptive to feedback, and share your ideas in a clear way.

Specialist and generalist designers

As you get further along in your career, you can choose to specialize in a certain area of UX design or keep your skill set more broad. What exactly are the differences between specialist and generalist UX designers? Read on to learn more!

Specialist
Expert at one thing

Generalist
Broad number of responsibilities

T-shaped
Expert at one thing and capable in a lot of other things

Vertical line - representing a specialist, expert at one thing. Horizontal line - representing a Generalist, broad number of responsibilities T-shaped - expert at one thing and capable in a lot of other things

Specialist: A specialist dives deep into one type of UX design, like interaction, visual, or motion design, and becomes an expert. Specialist UX designers are more common at large companies that have a lot of designers, like here at Google. Some of the benefits of becoming a specialist include:

- Focusing on one type of design that you enjoy more than others.
- Gaining deep knowledge of one type of design.
- Becoming well-known in the industry for your expertise in a particular type of design.

Generalist: A generalist has a broad number of responsibilities. A majority of UX design jobs are generalist positions, especially at companies with fewer UX designers. Typically, entry-level UX designers work in generalist roles, and some people choose to stay in generalist design roles for their entire careers. There are a lot of benefits to being a generalist UX designer, like:

- Expanding your skills in many different types of UX work.
- Trying a variety of responsibilities and finding an area of UX that you're especially passionate about.
- Keeping your job feeling fresh and new, while doing a variety of tasks.

T-shaped: A T-shaped designer is a specialist who also has a lot of capabilities in other areas. T-shaped designers get their name because the stem (or vertical line) of a T represents their expertise in one area, while the top (or horizontal line) symbolizes their related skills in a broad number of areas. T-shaped designers are great to have on your team, since they come with the benefits of both specialists and generalists. The image below highlights some of the skills a T-shaped UX designer might have. In this example, the person is a visual design specialist but also has knowledge in other areas, like coding and prototyping.

T-shaped designer

| Coding | Prototyping | Visual design | UX research | Writing |

Deep Knowledge

Each designer tends to naturally have a little T-shape in their abilities, even at the beginning of their career. As you start to work on projects, you'll probably notice where your strengths and interests lie. As you get better at one area of design, you'll likely find yourself working on that part of design projects more often, which helps you continue to improve in one area.

You can also decide to direct your T-shape by developing specific skills that will open up future job opportunities. For example, you might work extra hard on your prototyping skills, in addition to your general UX design skills, which can lead to new experiences and professional growth.

Your future as a UX designer

There are so many different paths you can take within the field of UX design. After you land your first entry-level job and start working in the field, you'll get a better idea of whether you want to be a UX design generalist or specialize in one specific type of design. There are plenty of benefits to being a generalist, specialist, or T-shaped designer, so it's all about finding what works best for you!

Interact with cross-functional teammates

UX design is a highly collaborative field, where designers typically work in cross-functional teams. Your future teammates might include engineers, UX researchers, program managers, product leads, fellow designers, and others. Working with a diverse group of people across functions helps you learn from their areas of expertise and explore other domains within the field of UX. In this reading, you'll learn about cross-functional team members you're likely to work with as a new UX designer.

Teams that UX designers work with

Cross-functional teams come in lots of shapes and sizes, depending on the organization you work for and the project you're working on. In general, though, there are a handful of key team members that you'll get to work with as a UX designer.


Engineer

Engineers: Engineers translate designs into a functioning experience, like an app or a website. They help UX teams figure out if designs are feasible from a technical standpoint and bring that idea to life. Working closely with engineers and involving them early in the design process is critical to ensure your project is set up for success.

UX Researcher

UX researchers: UX research is all about understanding what users need and expect from your product. UX researchers use methods like observations, interviews, and surveys to understand users' unique perspectives. Findings from research can inform your design decisions each step of the way. If you work at a startup or small business, there's a good chance you'll get to do your own UX research. At larger companies though, you'll likely work with designated UX researchers who will provide research findings to inform your design work.
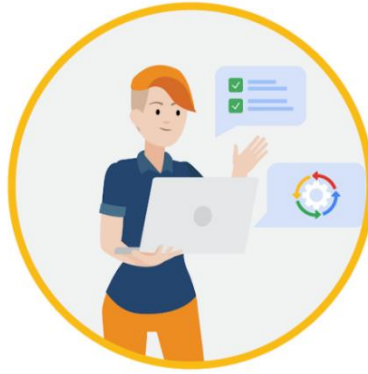
Program Manager

Program managers: Program managers ensure clear and timely communication across the team, so that the process of building a useful product moves smoothly from start to finish. Program managers supervise, support, and keep track of the project as a whole. They assign tasks to team members, monitor the project budget, and manage timelines, among other things. Think of your team's program manager as your go-to source of support when facing any setbacks or issues with your work.

Product Lead

Product leads: Product leads are in charge of ensuring the final product's success and communicating with stakeholders. Your product lead will define the project's core goals and deliverables, so you can focus on creating innovative design solutions. At some companies, product leads are known as product managers.
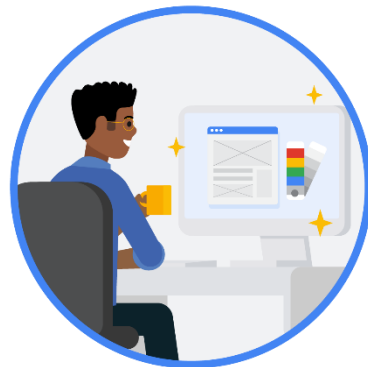
Other UX Designers

Other UX designers: In many cases, you won't be the sole designer working on a given project, especially if you work at a larger company and when you're a new designer. For example, as an entry-level UX designer, you might collaborate with a more experienced visual designer who can ensure that your designs adhere to the company's brand standards for things like color and font. Working with other designers is a great chance to learn and ask questions!

Working together

Creating a strong product requires working with a cross-functional team of brilliant minds, all contributing their unique skills. As a UX designer, you'll play a vital role that contributes to the team's success!