# Understand your impact as a UX designer

UX designers have a unique opportunity to improve the way technology impacts the lives of people around the world. **Ethical design** is about understanding how your design work affects the world. This reading will help you better understand your impact on society as a UX designer and ways to stay accountable as you move forward in your design career.

## ● Dominant culture

As a UX designer, you should consider the needs of all different types of people, regardless of privilege or power. Society often enables those with the most privilege and power to shape the dominant culture. A **dominant culture** affects the values or norms that are important for other cultures. If a dominant culture's influence is too strong, many cultural points of view might not be considered in the design process. This means that some users might be left out.

Your goal as a designer is to always put user needs front-and-center when creating a product, and that means understanding *all* of the product's potential users. Conducting thorough research with a diverse group of people is a great way to make sure your work meets all users' needs. Try to notice the assumptions about users that you bring to the research process, then think of ways to challenge those assumptions. Consider questions like:

- How are the people using your product different from you?
- How can you help people from non-dominant cultures feel more included in your product design?
- Are there any challenges that people from certain groups or backgrounds might face as they experience your product?
- If you feel a certain way about the product you're designing, what's the opposite of that feeling? Chances are, one of your users has that opposite perspective.

## ● Marginalized and underrepresented populations

As you design products, consider how marginalized and underrepresented populations might react to your designs. A **marginalized population** is one where people experience discrimination or exclusion from mainstream society because of specific characteristics or life experiences that are wrongfully deemed as inferior. Here are a few examples of marginalized populations:

- People with disabilities
- People with limited access to technology
- People who speak different languages

It's important to design products that are inclusive and easily accessible to all users. For example, if a user is unemployed, they might not have access to a computer with internet at home. Users should be able to fill out a job application just as easily on a mobile phone as they could on a desktop or laptop computer.

**Underrepresented populations** are groups of people whose values and experiences aren't represented often enough in a society that's shaped by the dominant culture and their point of view. Underrepresented populations include people of certain genders or sexualities, people of color, and ethnic minorities, among others.

Think about how a designer's approach to design can be affected by their education, background, and life circumstances. For example, if your default idea of a family is a home with two parents, then you might not consider the needs or perspectives of families with one parent or multigenerational homes when designing products.

Both marginalized and underrepresented populations aren't part of the dominant culture, so they're often not recognized in the design process unless the designer makes a conscious decision to include them. As you make your way in UX design, try to find ways to include marginalized and underrepresented users more often in your own design thinking. Ask yourself:

- How can I design products so that the dominant culture is not always viewed as the norm?
- How can I design products in a way that encourages all perspectives to be included?

By doing this, you'll help make product designs that are inclusive for all users!

## ● Edge cases

**Edge cases** are situations that a user experiences with a product that the designers didn't prepare for. The situation or obstacle that arises is beyond the user's control to fix. As you learned earlier in the certificate program, good UX anticipates edge cases and reroutes users back to the happy path when things don't go as planned.

You should approach edge cases with thoughtfulness because they might promote bias. It's important to anticipate potential issues that could pop up for all different types of users. Be flexible and ready to adjust your designs throughout the process to account for these kinds of unexpected issues among groups of users that you might not have initially considered.

## ● Inclusive design

**Inclusive design** means making design choices that take into account personal identifiers like ability, race, economic status, language, age, and gender. Having a diverse team of researchers and designers, including those from traditionally excluded populations, is key to inclusive design. This practice ensures a variety of unique perspectives is present during all phases of the design process.

The goal of a UX designer is to build experiences that are accessible to users with the widest range of abilities. In other words, no one should be excluded from using a product because designers didn't consider their needs when building it. In inclusive design, there is no such thing as normal, and there is no "average" person to design for.

For a real world example, check out this episode of the InVision podcast "DesignBetter" ⧉ with Airbnb Inclusive Design Lead, Benjamin Evans.

## ● Accountability

One way to help make sure that your product designs are inclusive for all users is to be held accountable by the people you work with and the users you're designing for. Seek out the opinions of users, coworkers, and stakeholders who are different from you. As you learn more about their perspectives, approaches, and how situations affect them, you can incorporate their insights into your designs.

## ● Design ethically

Here are a few ideas to put ethical design into action:

**Create inclusive personas**

Consider marginalized or underrepresented users when creating personas to avoid serving only users who seem "typical" or universal to you. Being intentional and inclusive when creating personas will prevent your product from advancing the same ideas about which kinds of cultures are or are not valued.

As a UX designer, you should still use practical demographic factors like age, gender, and ability to create personas, but you need to be flexible and ready to change them whenever you notice their limitations.

**Broaden your definition of "stakeholder"**

Traditionally, you might think of stakeholders as project leaders, managers, investors, and those in high-level decision-making roles. But if you broaden the definition of the term, a stakeholder is any person or place that a project can affect. By broadening the definition of the stakeholders you're designing for, you can design with a much wider audience in mind.

**Increase collaboration**

The more you collaborate with the many different types of people who are impacted by your products, the more insight you can gain from their participation. And while that's generally better for the greater good of society, it's also often better for your product design, too!

Here are some things to consider to help you better collaborate with many different types of people:

- Ask yourself: Do the small details that go into design decisions encourage *all* perspectives to be included?
- Think beyond universal design. Even the most universal design principles need to be modified to fit a new context, and that context becomes broader as you engage with more diverse users.
- Consider "multiversal" design solutions. **Multiversal** (or, Pluriversal) refers to the many ways that a design works for different people, while universal means that one design method works for many users. A multiversal design principle means making sure that a design has more than just one point of entry or more than one way to meaningfully experience it. For example, when designing for someone with sight and someone without sight, they should both be able to experience the final design equally, without missing out on anything.

## ● You can make a difference

There's still a lot of work to be done to make sure that UX designers incorporate more ethical and inclusive practices, but by learning these concepts now, you're playing an important role in pushing the industry forward. You have an opportunity to make a difference in the world of design for yourself, other designers, and the users of your products. Stay accountable, be inclusive, and don't forget the impact your work can make on the world.

There's so much to learn when it comes to the importance of equity-focused design. The journey of designing for equity never truly ends. Constant learning and growth are required in order to design meaningful experiences for users of all kinds. If you have time, we recommend that you check out this optional resource to help deepen your understanding.

- Benjamin Evans: The power of inclusive design ⧉ - An episode of the Design Better Podcast by InVision

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