Persona

# Description

Personas are fictive description of a hypothetical actual end-user and its purpose is to embody the key end-users of a product during the entire design process. Personas are created from previous studies of potential actual end-users (interview, observation, survey and so on). They “are only as good as the research behind them”[[1]](#footnote-1): qualitative research should have high priority.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Generally, the elements of a persona are biography (name, age, user group, education, personality…), their goals and their professional, health and technological status. “Although they are imaginary, they are defined with significant rigor and precision” [Cooper p.158[[3]](#footnote-3)]. To make the persona more realistic, names and personal details are fictional while the rest is “based on qualitative and some quantitative user research” [usability.gov]. Even though “it sounds trivial […] it is tremendously powerful and effective in every case” [Cooper p.158[[4]](#footnote-4)].¨

# Benefits

* make the users seem more real, to help designers to be empathic and keep realistic ideas of users[[5]](#footnote-5)
* increase the focus on users and their needs,
* effective communication tool,
* it has direct design influence because it leads to better design decisions and defines the product’s feature set [[6]](#footnote-6)
* can provide a return of investment on up to four times[[7]](#footnote-7)

* “Project developers need to understand how users approach their products from the product’s infancy, and regardless of what the product might be. Developers should be able to describe the user of the product via vivid depictions, as if they – with their different attitudes, desires and habits – were already using the product. In doing so they can more clearly formulate how to turn the product's potential into reality”.[[8]](#footnote-8)

# Best practices

Effective personas are when they:

* “Represent a major user group for” a product
* “Express and focus on the major needs and expectations of the most important user groups”
* “Give a clear picture of the user's expectations and how they're likely to use your” product
* “Aid in uncovering universal features and functionality”
* “Describe real people with backgrounds, goals, and values”[[9]](#footnote-9)

**To ensure that, an ideal process for developing personas is the following:**

* **Conduct** [**user research**](http://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/user-research.html): Answer the following questions: Who are your users and why are they using the system? What behaviors, assumptions, and expectations color their view of the system?
* **Condense the research**: Look for themes/characteristics that are specific, relevant, and universal to the system and its users.
* **Brainstorm**: Organize elements into persona groups that represent your target users. Name or classify each group.
* **Refine**: Combine and prioritize the rough personas. Separate them into primary, secondary, and, if necessary, complementary categories. You should have roughly 3-5 personas and their identified characteristics.
* **Make them realistic**: Develop the appropriate descriptions of each personas background, motivations, and expectations. Do not include a lot of personal information. Be relevant and serious; humor is not appropriate.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Recommendations

* “develop one or more personas for a project but limit yourself to the main” users. “For any given project, creating only three or four personas is best.”
* give the persona a name, as “[a] persona without a name is simply not useful”. (p.128) During the design process the persona is referred to by name rather than “the user + photo or sketched caricature. All these details serve to make that persona a concrete person in the designer’s mind and in the minds of the design team[[11]](#footnote-11)
* “successful personas and persona efforts are built progressively” as it happens in actual life when people get to know each other[[12]](#footnote-12). So, the descriptions should be evaluated and updated at regular intervals[[13]](#footnote-13) in order to “developing a relationship with them”[[14]](#footnote-14)
* It is important to keep in mind that people are different so it is recommended to not consider that all users use the product in the same way: the can have different way of interaction techniques and strategies, experiences, expectation and preferences. **[[15]](#footnote-15)**
* Personas are just a generalisation of a user in a certain end-user group**[[16]](#footnote-16)**

“Reported failures seem to be due to:

* Sloppy research and data gathering.
* Too few resources are put into the project.
* The quality of the persona descriptions is inconsistent. Some are well-written stories and engage stakeholders using supportive material. Other descriptions are unrealistic and badly written and do not think of those using the descriptions.
* Those who are to use the descriptions find it hard to understand how to use them.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

# examples[[18]](#footnote-18)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Persona:** | USDA Senior Manager Gatekeeper |
| **Photo:** | eadshot of a man |
| **Fictional name:** | Matthew Johnson |
| **Job title/ major responsibilities:** | Program Staff Director, USDA |
| **Demographics:** | * 51 years old * Married * Father of three children * Grandfather of one child * Has a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics. |
| **Goals and tasks:** | He is focused, goal-oriented within a strong leadership role. One of his concerns is maintaining quality across all output of programs.  Spends his work time:   * Requesting and reviewing research reports, * preparing memos and briefs for agency heads, and * supervising staff efforts in food safety and inspection. | |
| **Environment:** | He is comfortable using a computer and refers to himself as an intermediate Internet user. He is connected via a T1 connection at work and dial-up at home. He uses email extensively and uses the web about 1.5 hours during his work day. | |
| **Quote:** | “Can you get me that staff analysis by Tuesday?” | |

1. usability.gov [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Browne](http://www.interaction-design.org/references/authors/jonathan_browne.html), Jonathan (2011). *Customer Experience Professionals: Break Through Persona Obstacles Now*. Forrester Research <http://www.forrester.com/Customer+Experience+Professionals+Break+Through+Persona+Obstacles+Now/fulltext/-/E-RES58814> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cooper p. 158 (<http://www.itu.dk/people/russel/B%F8ger/Pearson.-.The.Inmates.Are.Running.the.Asylum.pdf>) http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=553473 bibitex [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cooper p. 158 (<http://www.itu.dk/people/russel/B%F8ger/Pearson.-.The.Inmates.Are.Running.the.Asylum.pdf>) http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=553473 bibitex [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.uiaccess.com/accessucd/personas.html#ref1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (Cooper, 1999; Cooper et al, 2007; Grudin & Pruitt, 2002; Long, 2009; Ma & LeRouge, 2007; Miaskiewicz & Kozar, 2011; Pruitt & Adlin, 2006). http://www.interaction-design.org/encyclopedia/personas.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (Drego & Dorsey, 2010 [Drego](http://www.interaction-design.org/references/authors/vidya_l__drego.html), Vidya L. and [Dorsey](http://www.interaction-design.org/references/authors/moira_dorsey.html), Moira (2010). *The ROI of Personas*. Forrester Research <http://www.forrester.com/The+ROI+Of+Personas/fulltext/-/E-RES55359> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Nielsen](http://www.interaction-design.org/references/authors/lene_nielsen.html), Lene (2012): *Personas - User Focused Design.* Springer [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. usability.gov [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. **http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/personas.html** [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. libro p.48 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <http://books.google.ch/books?id=Ct7kU5kO_T8C&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr#v=onepage&q=list-based&f=false>, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. [Browne](http://www.interaction-design.org/references/authors/jonathan_browne.html), Jonathan (2011). *Customer Experience Professionals: Break Through Persona Obstacles Now*. Forrester Research <http://www.forrester.com/Customer+Experience+Professionals+Break+Through+Persona+Obstacles+Now/fulltext/-/E-RES58814> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://books.google.ch/books?id=Ct7kU5kO_T8C&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr#v=onepage&q=list-based&f=false>, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. **http://www.uiaccess.com/accessucd/personas\_eg.html** [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. **http://www.uiaccess.com/accessucd/personas\_eg.html** [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <http://www.interaction-design.org/encyclopedia/personas.html> ch. 3.6 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/personas.html [↑](#footnote-ref-18)