

Breaking into UX Design

Clementine Brown
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Who am I?

CLEMENTINE BROWN

I'm Clementine, a Principal Design Consultant at Red Badger, and Design Educator at General Assembly.

I've been designing for the web since before the smartphone 🤖, educating UX designers of the future at since before Brexit 🎓, and mentoring designers and career-changers since before the pandemic 🦠.

You can find me at clmntnbnr.co.uk, cactushandshake.co.uk or [LinkedIn](#)



Breaking into UX Design

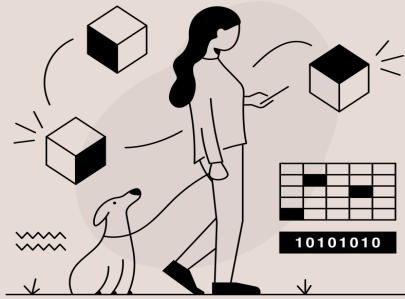
What is a UX Designer?

What is User Experience?

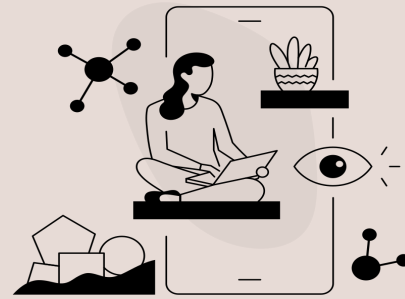
Every **system** you interact with has an **experience** associated with it.



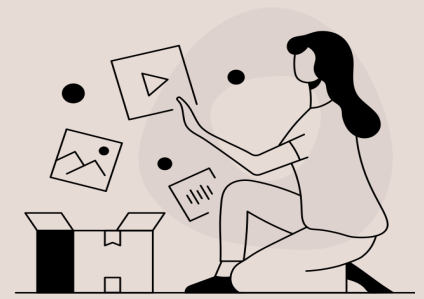
A business



A device or tool



An application or
software



A paper form

User Experience **applies** to digital and real-world experiences

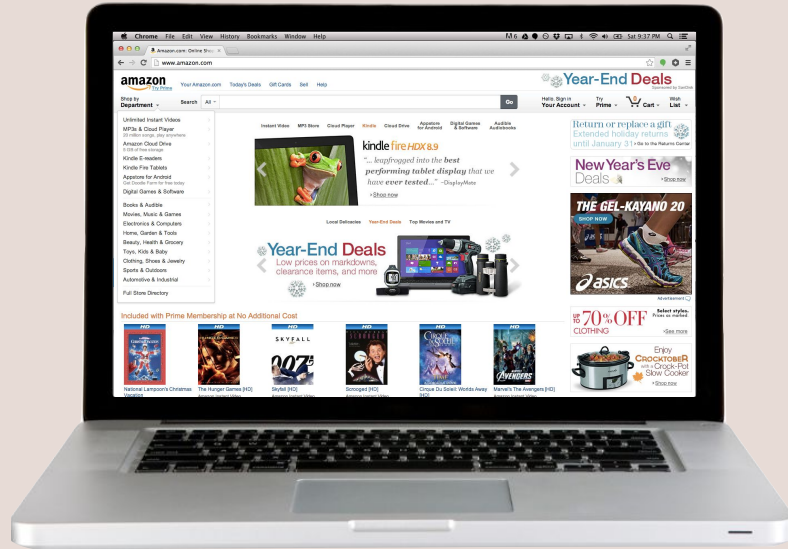


Hailing a cab...



...also hailing a cab

User Experience **connects** digital and real-world experiences



Ordering online...



...receiving at home

The definition depends on your perspective



Customers

UX is the emotional and **functional response** to interactions with products (e.g., goals, needs, desires).



Designers

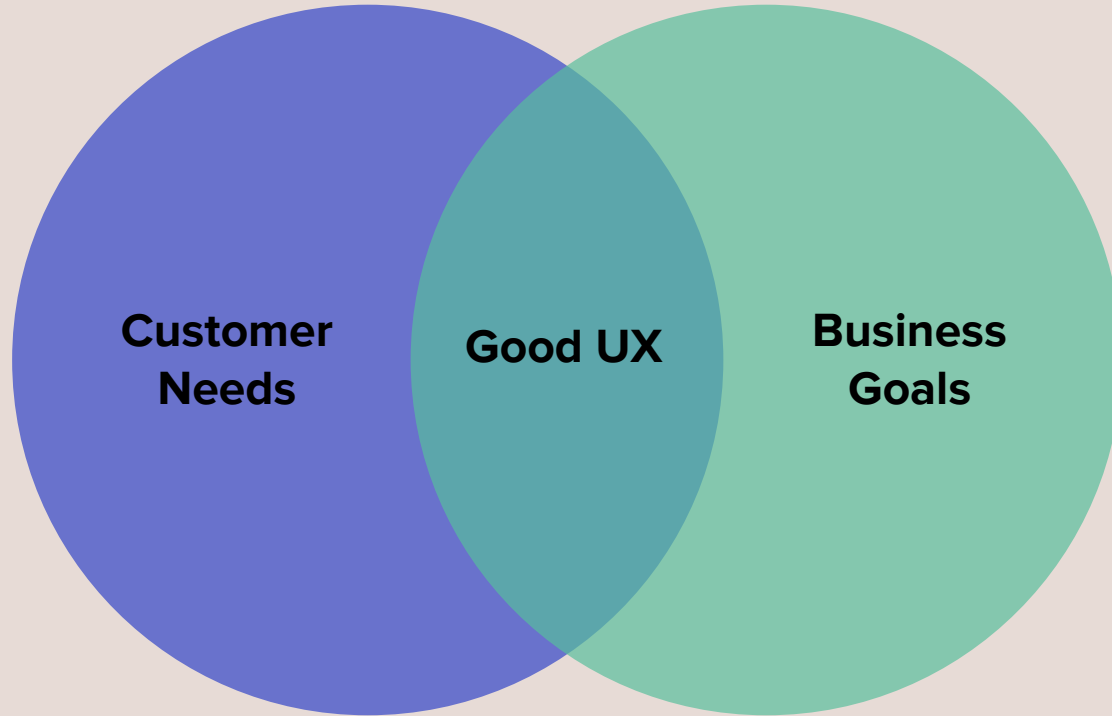
UX is a **skill set**, a mindset, and a process that informs decisions to ensure the product provides value to the business and the end user.



Businesses

UX is a **business strategy** that leverages insights gained from customers and stakeholders to validate and solve problems.

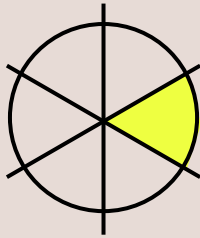
The sweet spot



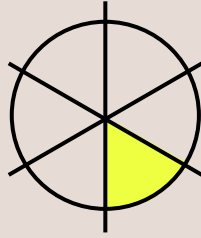
UX Competencies



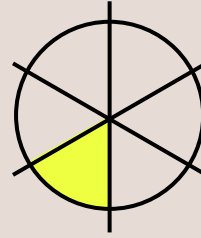
Research



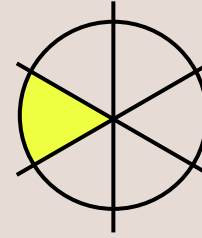
Architecture



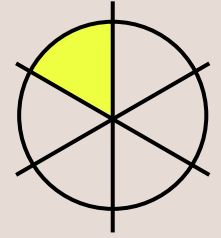
Interaction



Usability

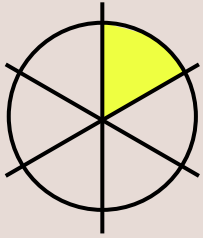


Visual Design

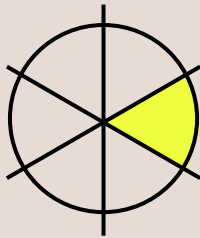


Content

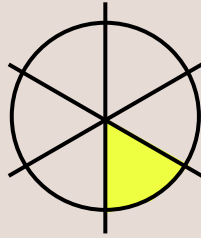
UX Competencies & Methods



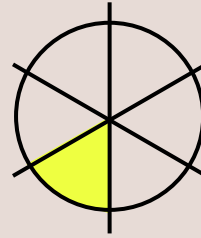
Research



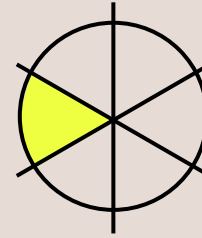
Architecture



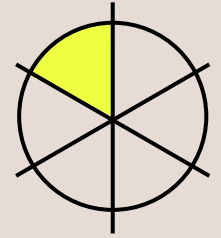
Interaction



Usability



Visual Design



Content

Contextual Inquiry

User Interviews

Synthesising
Research

Creating Personas

Ethnographic
Research

Intuitive Navigation

User Flows

Sitemaps

Card Sorting

Wireframing and
Sketching

Responsive Design

Motion Design

Animations and
Gestures

AI Chatbots

Immersive Design

Usability Tests

Heuristic Evaluation

Task Scenarios

Prototyping

Prioritizing Features

Design Patterns and
Convention

Composition

Colour Theory

Creative Briefs and
Moodboards

Typography and
Grids

Interface Design

UX Writing

Content Strategies

SEO for UX

Writing Microcopy

Be a T!

Most designers are T-shaped

This means that their skills span the **breadth** of UX and cover some **depth** of the competencies.

User Experience

Research

Architecture

Interaction

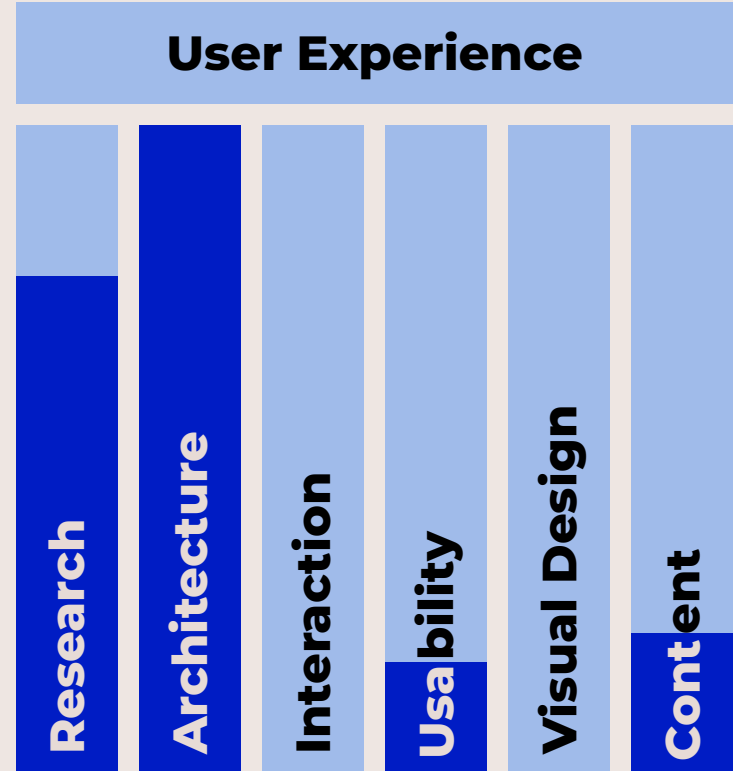
Usability

Visual Design

Content

Then you can specialise

An **Information Architects'** skill set may look like this:



A few types of specialist:



User Researcher



Interaction Designer



Content Strategist



Information Architect



Usability Specialist

Breaking into UX Design

Who makes a good UX Designer?

EVERYONE!



Some people I've taught:



Software
Engineers



Landscape Architects



Game of Thrones
Actresses



Visual Designers



Bakers

They have a story to tell

Breaking into UX Design

Storytelling

**Your narrative arc is
your superpower**

”

“Design creates stories, and stories create memorable experiences, and great experiences have this innate ability to change the way in which we view our world.”

- Christian Saylor, *Senior UX Specialist at Universal Mind*

**The designs in your
portfolio have a shelf life.**

**The designs in your
portfolio have a shelf life.**

**The stories in your
portfolio last a lifetime.**

”

“Good stories do more than create a sense of connection. They build familiarity and trust, and allow the listener to enter the story where they are, making them more open to learning. Good stories can contain multiple meanings so they’re surprisingly economical in conveying complex ideas in graspable ways.”

- Vanessa Boris, *Harvard Business Review*

Stories captivate

Not facts and data alone!

- Think about what captivates **you**
- We have been telling stories in many forms since the dawn of time
- Stories shed light on history and **also** the future

People want to hear your story!



So, what **IS** your story?

”

“Learning which stems from a well-told story is remembered more accurately, and for far longer, than learning derived from facts and figures”

- **Peg Neuhauser**, *Organisational Psychologist*

Where can you tell your story?

Everywhere!

- Portfolio
- Case studies
- Resume/CV
- LinkedIn
- Podcast or social media content
- Interviews
- Meetups and networking events



NOBODY

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Story Structure

Which of these stories is more persuasive?

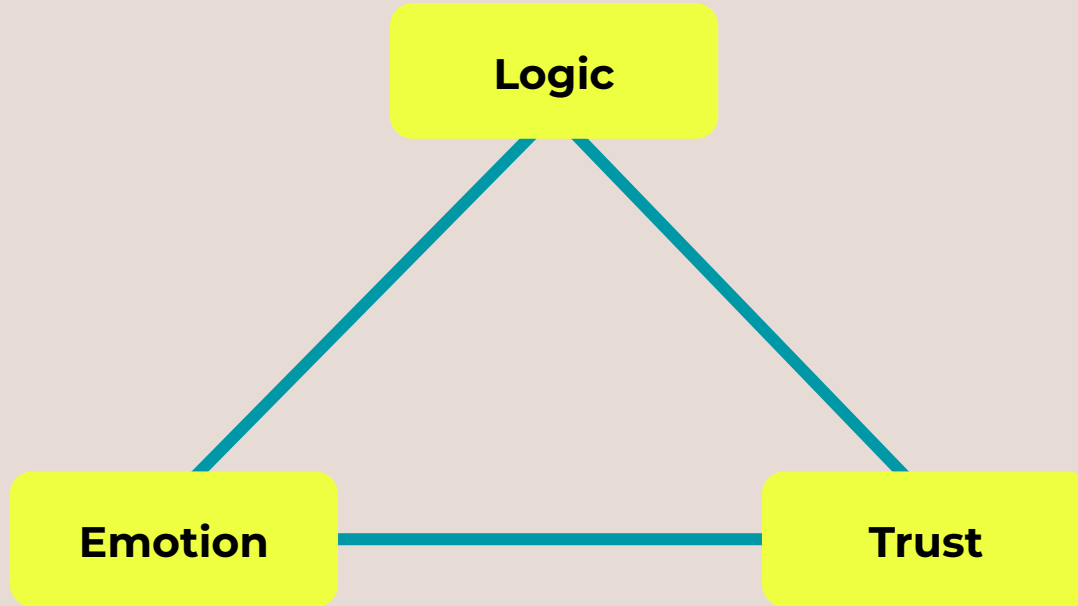
“I am an empathetic, passionate designer who understands the value of contextual inquiry.”



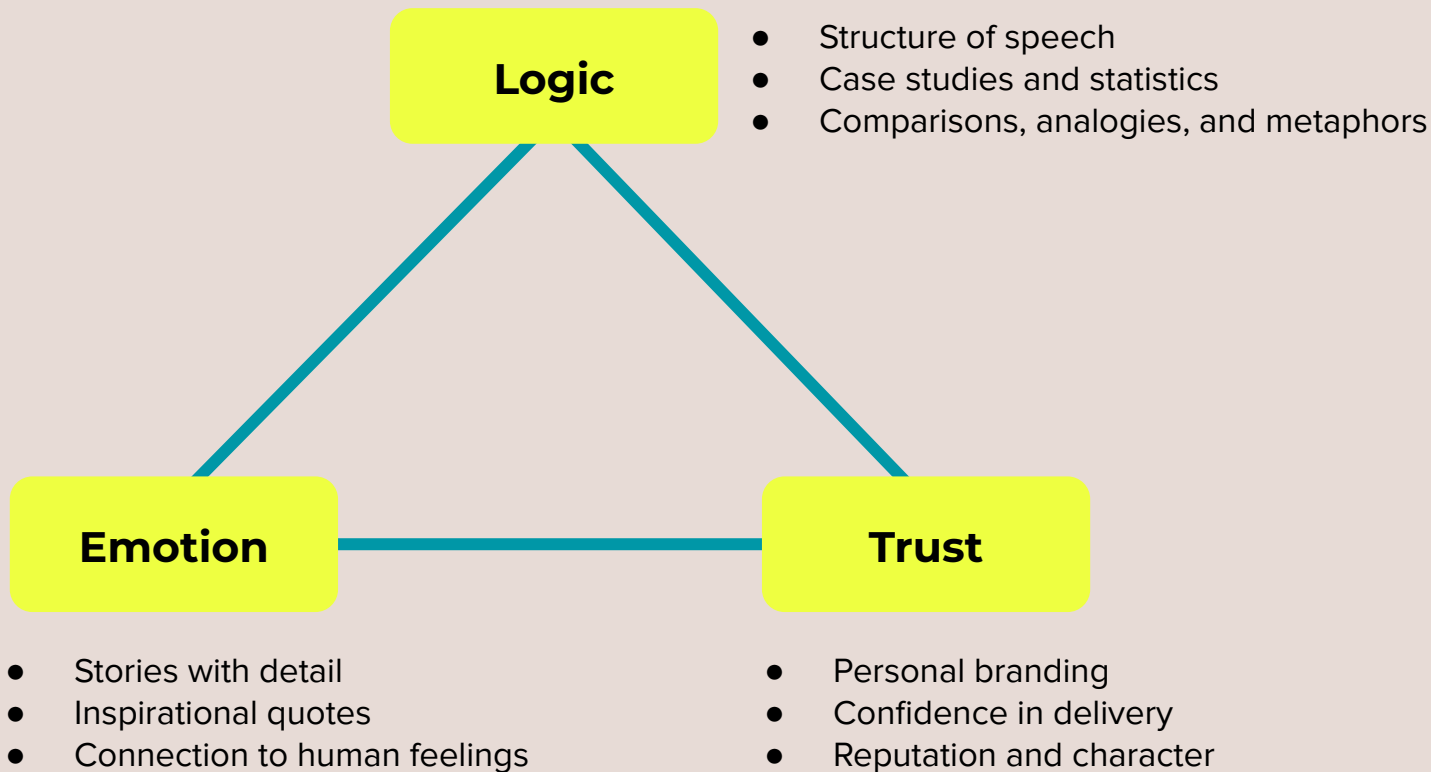
“I stood in the rain for three hours observing and interviewing users, and I came away with three key insights that shaped my design.”



How do you tell a persuasive story?



How do you tell a persuasive story?



Seven types of stories

Slaying the Dragon	Rebirth	Quest	Journey & Return	Rags to Riches	Tragedy	Comedy
Beowulf	A Christmas Carol	The Goonies	The Hunger Games	Trading Places	Romeo & Juliet	As You Like It
David & Goliath	What Women Want	The Odyssey	The Wizard of Oz	Cinderella	Titanic	Arms & the Man
Apple's 1984 Ad	Sleeping Beauty	Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade	The Devil Wears Prada	Harry Potter	Anna Karenina	Pride & Prejudice

Seven types of stories

A story of transformation!



Slaying the Dragon	Rebirth	Quest	Journey & Return	Rags to Riches	Tragedy	Comedy
Beowulf David & Goliath Apple's 1984 Ad	A Christmas Carol What Women Want Sleeping Beauty	The Goonies The Odyssey Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade	The Hunger Games The Wizard of Oz The Devil Wears Prada	Trading Places Cinderella Harry Potter	Romeo & Juliet Titanic Anna Karenina	As You Like It Arms & the Man Pride & Prejudice

The journey and the return

A story of transformation

Call to
adventure



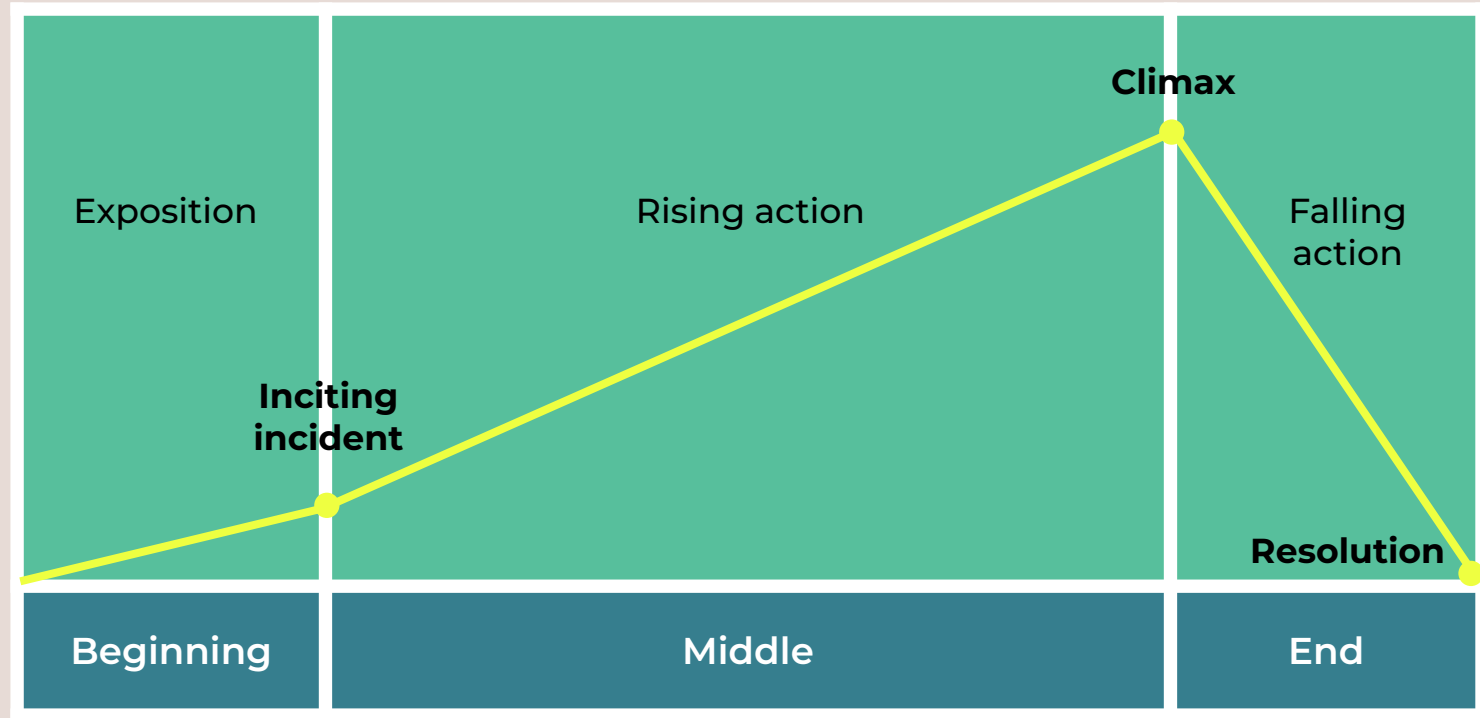
Tests and
ordeals



Resurrection

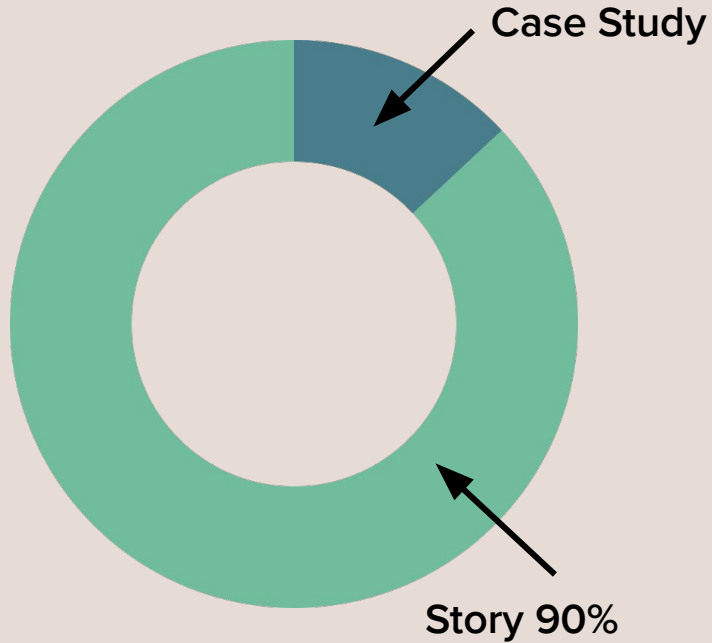


Tell a story

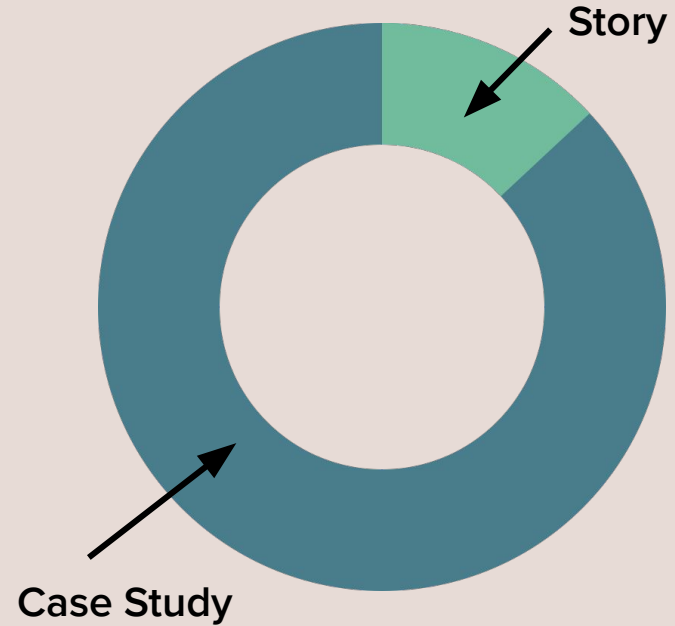


Take away

What gets you across the finish line



Time usually spent



Breaking into UX Design

Turn that story into a portfolio

Your portfolio is...

A case study in iteration!

A **living document**. Think of it as an interactive display of your body of work.

Ongoing. You'll revisit it every time you create a new project or solve a design problem.



It's pretty competitive out there!

Especially for entry-level UX designer roles - so make the best impression you can!

This means telling the story of how **your** process led to great results - your portfolio case study should tell the story of **your involvement** with a project and how your involvement shaped the results.



You need two things:

The trailer: The thing that gets them to call you in for an interview.

The movie: The thing you bring to an interview to walk people through the details of your projects and process.



The Trailer

Your website

Make sure you explain who you are and why you're passionate about UX.

Do not just show the final product. UX is all about process, so give an overview of your process, what you learned, and how it impacted the business.

The Movie

Your case study

Could be a PDF presentation, or a longer case study on your website.

Be prepared for interviewers to ask about deliverables.

Organise your file system beforehand so you can pull them up and review them together.

Don't include anything you can't fully explain. Is there a diagram you can't explain? A data visualisation that looks cool but isn't based on anything? **Leave it out, or risk being called out!**

What does your portfolio say about you?

Often it's your first impression

Communication

How clearly do you communicate your work?

Decisions

Why did you make the design decisions you did?

Methods

What methods did you use, and why?

Your portfolio should include:

At a minimum

- Your name, role, and contact information.
- Something about yourself, but not too much.
- A CV, preferably downloadable as a PDF file.
- **Examples of work, often called case studies.** These are the most important aspects of your portfolio.



[PROJECTS](#) [ABOUT ME](#) [CONTACT](#) [RESUME](#)



Hi, I'm James. Let's play.

I design and build beautiful websites, products and design systems that help people and make a difference. I'm passionate about making life simpler through design and am constantly looking to learn new things everyday.

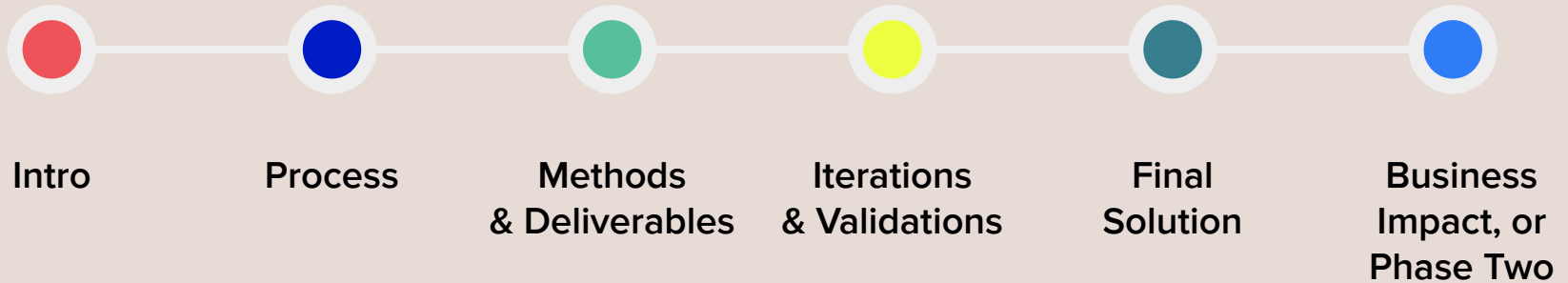
[ABOUT ME](#)

Case Studies are:

- Examples of your work.
- Narratives with visuals that tell the story of a project or **design problem** you solved.
- Displays of **the process** that led to results.
- **Explanations** of why you used the selected methods to solve a problem.
- **Presentations** of why you would be a good fit for the jobs to which you apply.



Components of a Case Study



Introduction



- Your intro sets the scene of the project.
- What company was it for?
- What tools did you use?
- How long was the timeline?
- If it's a group project, what was your role?



The brief.

Respirix is a biomedical company that produces the Cardiospire, a device that records 6 different biometrics at once from the comfort of the patient's home. Not only does the Cardiospire record heart rate, temperature, blood pressure, and blood oxygen saturation, it has the ability to record lung sounds and functions using novel technology pioneered by Respirix. This positions Respirix as the sole provider of proactive cardiopulmonary health monitoring.

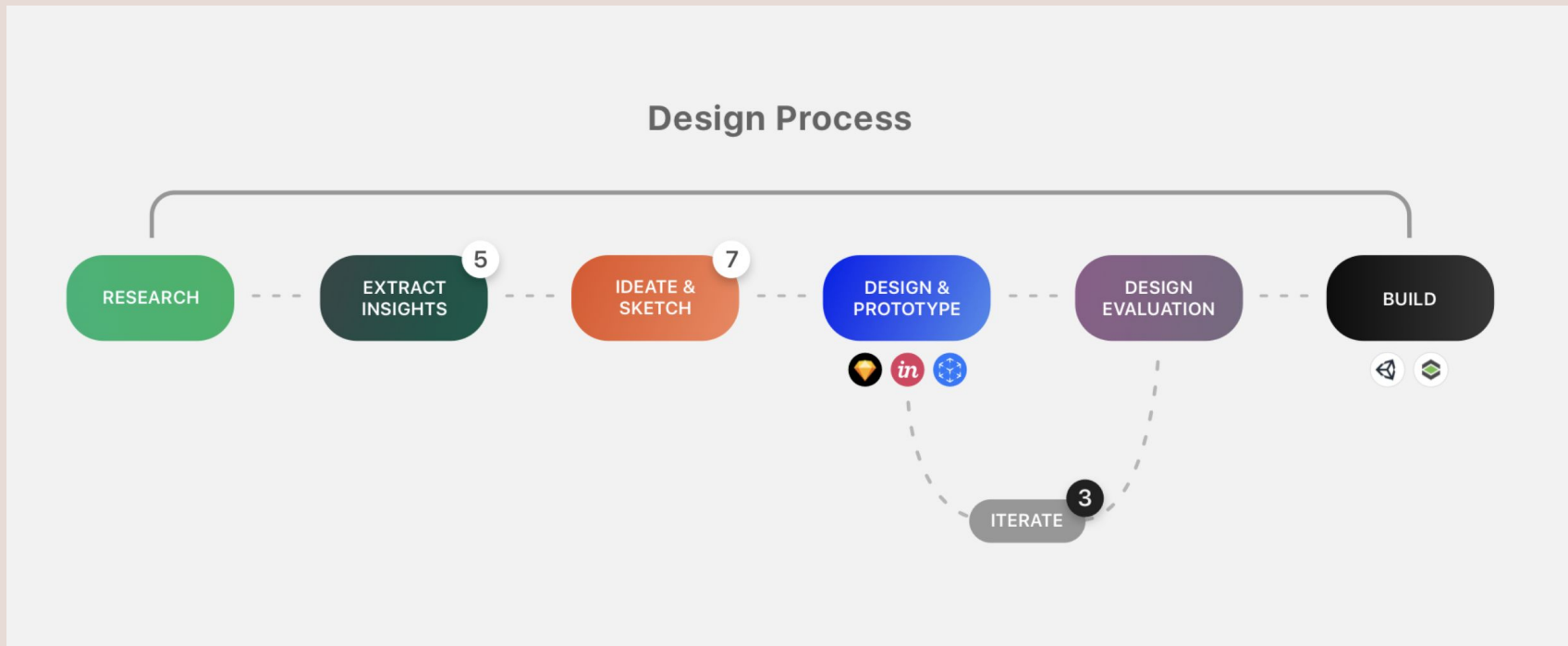
Not only does Respirix need to engineer the Cardiospire and develop an app for patients, they also need to create a platform for health providers to access and assess the patient data, as well as intervene from afar. My team and I were tasked to build the practitioner portal from scratch.

Process



- How did you go about solving your UX problem?
- Why did you choose that method?
- What came of it?
- How did that lead to your next step?

Process diagram



Methods & Deliverables



- What methods and tools did you use?
- What deliverable did those produce?

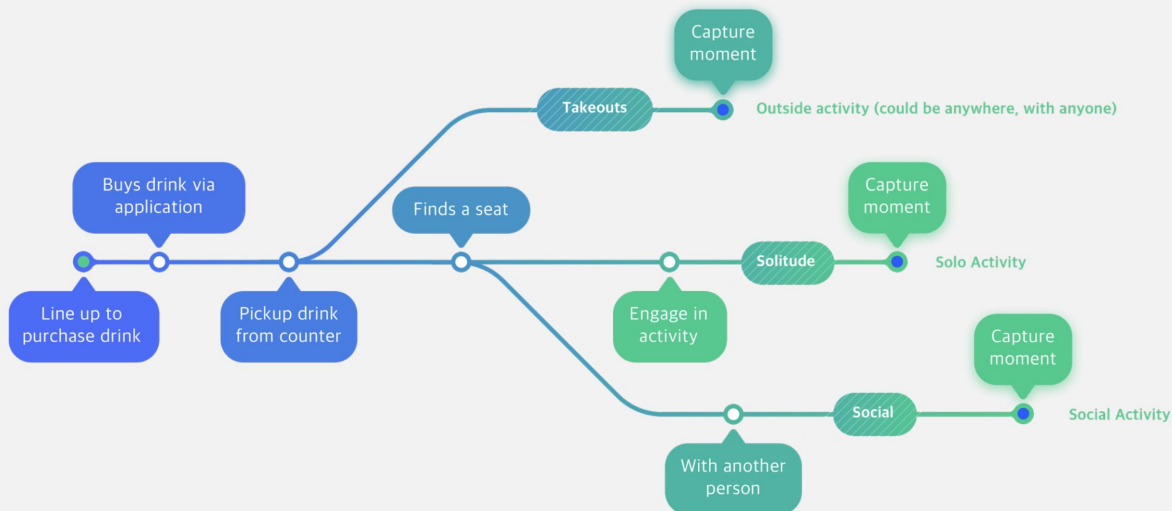


You'll likely use industry terms such as “affinity map” or “user story.” Be sure to provide enough context so non-UX designers can understand them.

Process diagram

3 Scenarios at a Glance

These 3 user scenarios we have can be visualized as the user flow below. As this flow shows, the unique moments in coffee drinking can occur once the user picks up the drink.



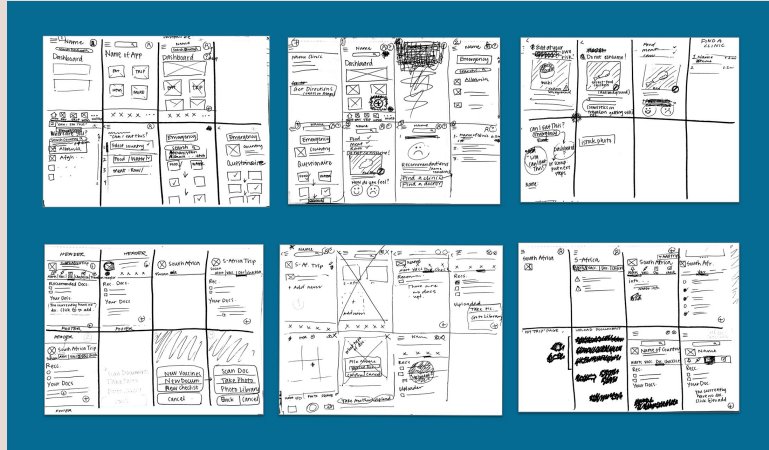
Iterations & Validations



Not every decision you made was right - share that info!

- How did your designs change as you received feedback?
- What was the “before” and “after”?

Real Example Iterations





Key Insights: Mobile

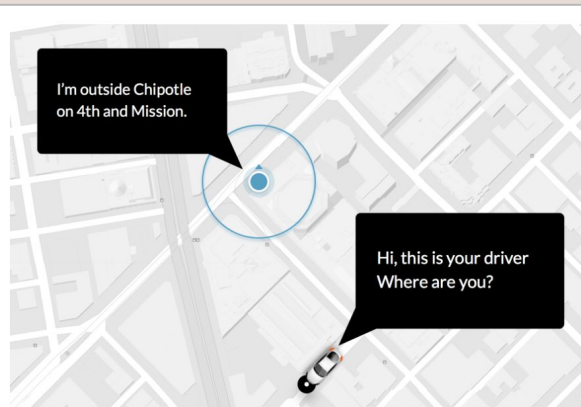
- On Jobs slide, would like to see a CTA that says, “browse jobs near me” to encourage downloading Job Search app
- On Profile Info slide, What if the pencil icon took the user to the “edit profile info” page instead of to the same “add info” page?
- It might be nice to put in a quick “thank you” slide that dissolves after user clicks “finish tour”
- Cool feature could be to tap my image and be able to update with a selfie right then and there.

Final Solution



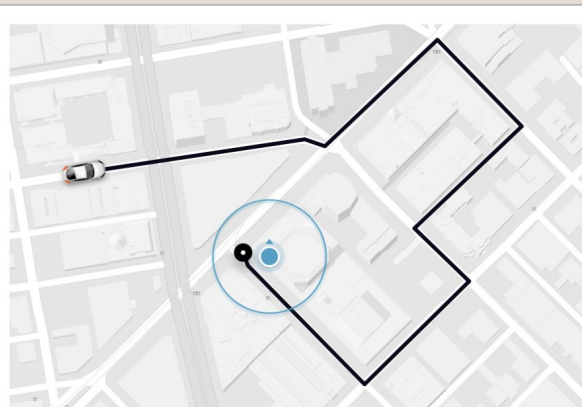
Show what you made in the most appealing format possible.

- Is your work highly visual?
 - Include big, well-shot photos.
 - Consider mockups to provide context.
- Is your work more research-focused?
 - Consider doing data visualizations, tables, and lists.
 - Try adding a research study as a downloadable PDF file.



FREQUENT CONTACT TO CONFIRM OR COORDINATE LOCATION

Riders were annoyed when they were contacted by their Driver to confirm the location. Riders expected Uber to do the work and didn't feel the need to reiterate.



SUBOPTIMAL ROUTES GIVEN TO DRIVER

Riders were frustrated with the specific routes that the Driver used in getting to their pickup location. Riders expected Uber routing to be smarter.

Business Impact

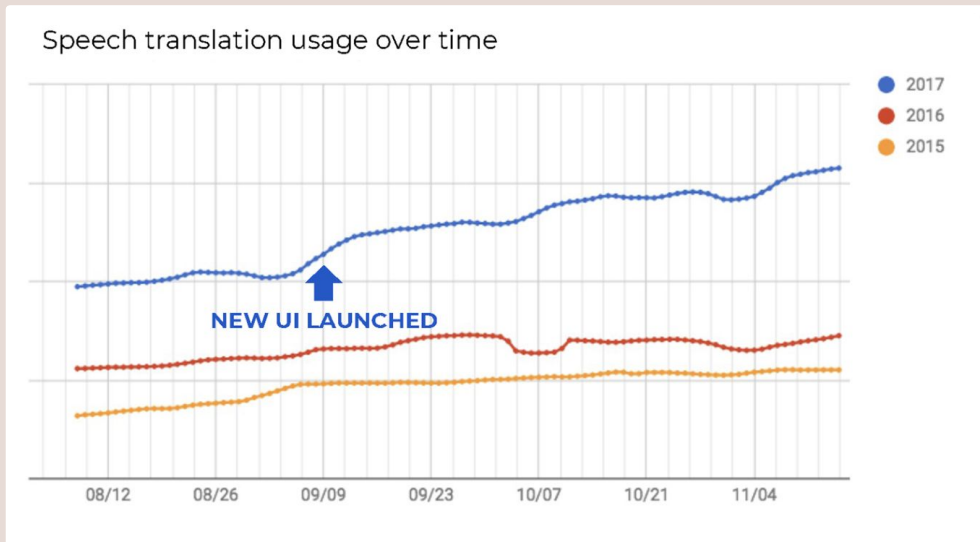
(or Phase 2)



Conclude with any impact you were able to quantify, sentiments from the client, or the current state of the project.

- Is the client pleased? Have they seen any positive impacts to business since implementing your ideas?
- Not implemented yet? When will it be?
- Not quite finished yet? What would you do next if you had more time?

Business Impact



“As a result of the UI changes as well as other technical improvements that made the conversation mode faster, we saw a noticeable increase in the usage of speech translations overall.”

Breaking into UX Design

What Makes a Good Portfolio?

There Is No ONE Correct Answer

Hiring managers are looking for different things

“I want to see variety.”

“I want to see process detail.”

“I have limited time.”

“I only want to see your work.”

vs

“I want to see a few in depth.”

“I want to see final output.”

“I will spend time to see it all.”

“I want to know about you.”

”

“... I realised the problem. Designers are not making user-centered portfolios. They are making self-centered portfolios.”

— **Christina Wodtke**, *Author, professor, and speaker*

Who Are the Users of Your Portfolio?

The User	User Goals
Freelance Recruiters	Find the best fit for their clients.
Hiring Managers	Quickly fill open roles with the best candidates.
UX Team Lead	Find the person who is missing from the team.
UX Designers	Find someone to join the team and work with them.
Project Managers	Find someone who can pick up the work <i>immediately</i> and be counted on to meet deadlines.
The C-Suite	Build a business with a strong reputation and commitment to its mission and vision.

How Do You Make Your Portfolio Stand Out?

Make sure your case studies communicate something in 30 seconds

Here's how to make your case studies scannable:

- Have a flexible format or layout
- Break your case studies into sections to deliver the most important information upfront using:
 - Headings
 - Bullet points
 - Lists
 - Diagrams and images

Breaking into UX Design

Looking for opportunities

There are 3 main categories

- Design agencies
- In-House (Product companies or Startups)
- Freelance



Design Agencies

Many UX designers choose to work in an agency, and this route can be especially appealing to newly qualified designers.

Depending on the size of the agency, you might work in a team of UX generalists or be responsible for one specific area of UX, such as user research.

Design Agencies

Pros

- **Variety**
 - You'll have a conveyor belt of different clients and projects
 - You'll tackle design challenges across a range of industries, and you'll be in contact with all kinds of people
- **Mentorship**
 - The agency environment is great for experiencing a design thinking culture.
 - You'll gain exposure to the most important UX tools and processes, and you'll always have someone to turn to for feedback, mentorship and best practices.
- **Steady income**
 - With an agency job, you can count on a steady income and set working hours

Design Agencies

Cons

- **Short-term projects**
 - The downside of variety is lack of long-term influence
- **Tricky clients**
 - You can't choose who you work for!
 - The client has the final say
- **Communication can get complicated**
 - Depends on the size of the agency, but you won't always be in direct contact with the client
 - Without proximity to the product it can be hard to get a feel of the brand

In-House (Product Company or Startup)

UX designers are also sought after for in-house roles, which are very different to agency work. An in-house position could see you working in a small startup, a large corporation or something in-between.

In-House (Product Company or Startup)

Pros

- **Proximity to the product**
 - You'll have a rewarding sense of ownership
 - Opportunity to iterate until it's fixed
 - You'll see how your decisions shape the outcome
- **Direct collaboration with other teams**
 - Meeting with product owners or handing off to developers
 - Can streamline your work and make communication more efficient
 - Can learn from professionals in other disciplines
- **Exposure to business**
 - You'll see the inner workings of the business
 - Get first hand insight into other areas of the company
 - Master the art of aligning user and business goals

In-House (Product Company or Startup)

Cons

- **Lack of variety**
 - You may get bored
- **You may have to fight for a UX culture**
 - In-house doesn't mean design-first!
 - Company may not understand why UX is important
 - You'll have the challenge of getting other teams to understand what you do
- **Less guidance**
 - Depends on the size - but you may not have a design mentor
 - If your team is small, you'll need to be more autonomous and learn on the job

Freelance

Millennials, especially, are drawn to this lifestyle, and it's certainly not uncommon for UX designers to go freelance.

Given the autonomous nature of freelancing, you might consider this route a bit later in your career, once you've gained some in-house experience. If you are thinking about flying solo, here are some pros and cons to keep in mind.

Freelance

Pros

- **Choose your clients**
 - Freelance = freedom
 - In control of your portfolio
- **Become a digital nomad**
 - Freelance is not location-dependent
 - Travel as you earn
- **Higher earning potential**
 - You determine your rates, and how money is used

Freelance

Cons

- **No guidance**
 - You're on your own!
 - Find a mentor or guide elsewhere
- **Unpredictable income**
 - Work comes and goes
- **Lack of routine**
 - No fixed schedule means it's easy to lose track of hours worked
 - Harder to draw the line between work and personal life

Ask yourself: What's right for you, right now?

- Different types of companies have their own pros and cons. Nowhere is perfect.
- It's just a matter of finding which suits your skills and experience best right now.
- What part of the design process do you like doing the most? Find somewhere that does a lot of that thing.



Breaking into UX Design

The bottom line

Remember this

If you only remember one slide...

- **Stories are memorable.** Tell a story through your case study.
- **Use UX methods on your projects.** For example, make a journey map of your project that measures the value of each design phase.
- **Focus on your strengths** and what you truly enjoy. Your personal brand will build itself.







Fin