C5W3 · THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2026

DIVERGENT + CONVERGENT THINKING

Generating Many Ideas and Filtering Your Concepts

PODCAST REVIEW

DID YOU LISTEN?

- Quick show of hands: Who listened to the AI podcast about your ideas?
- This was based on photos from class, the text transcript of the ideas, and a report that I generated analyzing your ideas. Then NotebookLM generated the podcast format.

> 💡 If you like this, I'll make more of these to give feedback as we go

IDEAS THAT FIT VS. DON'T FIT

GOOD FIT

- AI nutrition coach
- Wardrobe recommender
- Budget/subscription tracker
- Productivity apps
- Pet sitting neighbor app

DOESN'T FIT (FOR THIS COURSE)

- Hospital wait times (regulated)
- B2B recruiting platforms
- Medical tourism (liability)
- LinkedIn automation (ToS)
- Nursing home tech (access)

Not "bad ideas" — just outside our course constraints

CAN YOU REACH 10 PEOPLE IN YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE IN THE NEXT WEEK?

If not, pick a different target.

WHO CAN YOU REACH?

EASY ACCESS

- Fellow students
- Young professionals
- NYC residents
- Hobbyist communities you're in
- Social media followers

HARD ACCESS

- Lawyers, doctors, professors
- Enterprise buyers
- Regulated industries
- Elderly populations
- Anyone you'd need to cold-call

💡 Students are a GREAT audience — but not the ONLY option

OUR SCALE TARGET: ~1,000 USERS

10	100	~1,000
FOR VALIDATION	FOR MVP TESTING	SCALE TARGET

This scale target should help you filter your ideas. Can your idea reach this many people in a few weeks?

> 💡 We're capping at ~1,000 users to reduce risk while proving the model works. You can scale past 1,000 once the course is done.

TEAM ROLES: HUSTLE & BUILD

HUSTLE

- User research & interviews
- Outreach & recruitment
- Market analysis
- Customer conversations

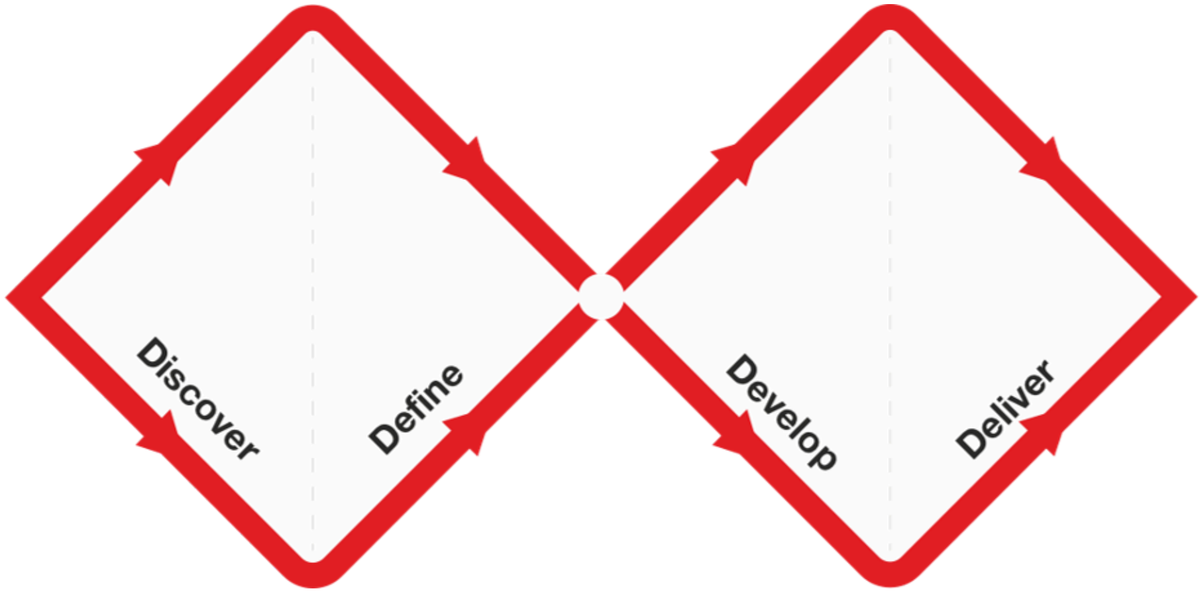
BUILD

- Prototyping & development
- AI tools & automation
- Design & implementation
- Technical decisions

⚠️ Being rigid about applying a specific skill (ML, security, blockchain) rarely works — let the problem drive the solution

DIVERGENT & CONVERGENT THINKING

THE DOUBLE DIAMOND



Source: Design Council (CC BY 4.0)

WHY DIVERGE FIRST?

1

AVOID THE "FIRST IDEA" TRAP

Your first idea is rarely your best idea

2

EXPLORE THE PROBLEM SPACE

You formed teams around people, not problems

3

FIND UNEXPECTED COMBINATIONS

Best ideas often come from weird intersections

OTHER DIVERGENT METHODS

REFERENCE SLIDE

SCAMPER

Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to other uses, Eliminate, Reverse

HOW MIGHT WE (HMW)

Reframe problems as opportunity questions

RANDOM STIMULUS

Force connections with unrelated prompts

MIND MAPPING

Visual brainstorm with branching ideas

💡 We're using **Exquisite Corpse** today — but these are all valid techniques

WHERE AI HELPS (AND DOESN'T)

AI EXCELS AT

- Generating many variations
- Connecting distant concepts
- Applying frameworks consistently
- Never getting tired or stuck

AI STRUGGLES WITH

- Evaluating breakthrough potential
- Understanding YOUR context
- Avoiding "typical" responses
- Knowing when to stop

Our pattern: Humans set direction → AI expands → Humans select

TODAY'S PROCESS

1

EXQUISITE CORPSE REMIX

Generate scenarios from categories

2

MIT IDEATOR

AI-assisted expansion

3

DOT VOTING

Narrow to 3-5 concepts

4

LEAN CANVAS

AI analysis for each

🎯 **Output:** 2-3 concepts to validate next week

EXERCISE 1: EXQUISITE CORPSE REMIX

EXQUISITE CORPSE: THE IDEA

Originally a surrealist game where each person adds to a drawing without seeing what came before.

Our remix: Generate lists in categories, then combine semi-randomly to create unexpected scenarios.

> 🎲 Weird combinations often unlock the best insights

STEP 1: GENERATE LISTS (7 MIN)

Each team creates quick lists (5-10 items each):

DEVICES

Phone, laptop, smartwatch, tablet, TV, voice assistant...

PERSONAS

Be specific! "Columbia MBA student" not "professional"

ENVIRONMENTS

Commute, gym, kitchen, office, dorm, coffee shop...

ACTIVITIES

Studying, cooking, exercising, socializing, shopping...

📸 **Take photos** of your sticky notes or FigJam boards as you go — you'll need them for Friday's submission!

STEP 2: COMBINE (5 MIN)

Pull one item from each list to create scenario combinations:

```
[Persona] + [Device] + [Environment] + [Activity]
```

Example:

MBA student + phone + coffee shop + networking

→ Problems around professional connections, follow-ups, LinkedIn fatigue...

Create 3-5 combinations. Can be random or intentional. Don't filter yet!

EXQUISITE CORPSE — SUMMARY

STEP 1: GENERATE LISTS (7 MIN)

Each team creates quick lists of **5-10 items** in four categories:

- **Devices** — phone, laptop, smartwatch, tablet, TV...
- **Personas** — be specific! "Columbia MBA student" not just "professional"
- **Environments** — commute, gym, kitchen, dorm, coffee shop...
- **Activities** — studying, cooking, exercising, socializing...

Use sticky notes or FigJam — one item per note

STEP 2: COMBINE (5 MIN)

Pull one item from each list to create **3-5 scenario combinations**:

Persona + Device + Environment + Activity

Example: MBA student + phone + coffee shop + networking
→ Problems around professional connections, follow-ups...
Can be random or intentional. Don't filter yet!

EXERCISE 2: MIT IDEATOR

MIT SUPERMIND IDEATOR

ideator.mit.edu — A purpose-built tool for structured ideation

- Scaffolds the thinking process with "conceptual moves"
- Great for expanding on your scenario combinations
- ChatGPT works too, but this tool guides you step-by-step

> 💡 Research shows structured AI interfaces outperform freeform chat for ideation

IDEATOR EXERCISE (12 MIN)

1

TAKE YOUR TOP 2-3 SCENARIOS

From the Exquisite Corpse combinations

2

RUN EACH THROUGH THE IDEATOR

Generate 5-10 problem/solution ideas per scenario

3

RECORD EVERYTHING

Screenshots or notes — we'll filter next

⚠️ **If Ideator is slow:** Use ChatGPT with the backup prompt on the next slide

BACKUP PROMPT (IF NEEDED)

```
I'm exploring problems for [PERSONA] using [DEVICE]
in [ENVIRONMENT] while [ACTIVITY].

Generate 10 diverse problem-solution pairs. For each:
1. The specific problem
2. Why this persona cares
3. A simple solution concept
4. Likelihood this is a real, painful problem (1-10)
```

Copy this if ideator.mit.edu is slow or down

CONVERGENT PHASE

DOT VOTING

RULES

- Each person gets **3 votes**
- Can put multiple votes on one idea
- Vote on problem/solution combinations
- **Silent voting** — no discussion

VOTING CRITERIA

- Are **you** excited to work on this?
- Can you **access the users** for this idea?
- Would you want to spend 12 weeks on it?

🎯 **Goal:** Narrow to 3-5 top concepts

OTHER CONVERGENT METHODS

REFERENCE SLIDE

DECISION MATRIX

Score options against weighted criteria

DVF FRAMEWORK (IDEO)

Desirability, Feasibility, Viability

AFFINITY MAPPING

Cluster ideas into themes, then pick themes

2X2 MATRIX

Plot ideas on two dimensions (effort vs. impact)

💡 We're using **Dot Voting + Lean Canvas** today

LEAN STARTUP CANVAS

THE LEAN CANVAS

Problem Top 3 problems	**Solution** Top 3 features	**Unique Value Prop** Why you're different	**Unfair Advantage** What can't be copied	**Customer Segments** Target users
			Channels How you reach users	
Key Metrics What you measure		**Cost Structure** What you spend		
Revenue Streams How you make money				

We'll use AI to draft a canvas for each of your top concepts

Reference: leanstack.com/lean-canvas — Ash Maurya's official Lean Canvas

AI CANVAS PROMPT

For each of your top 3-5 concepts, use this prompt:

```
Create a Lean Startup Canvas for this concept:

[PROBLEM]: [describe the problem]
[SOLUTION]: [describe the solution concept]
[TARGET USER]: [describe the specific user]

Fill out all 9 boxes of the Lean Canvas.
Be specific and realistic.
Flag any assumptions that need validation.
```

💡 **Pro tip:** Upload the syllabus and course schedule to give the AI context about our constraints

RANK ON THREE DIMENSIONS

A

ACCESS

How easily can we reach users?

E

EXCITEMENT

How excited is the team?

C

CLARITY

How clear is the problem?

Rate each concept 1-5 on each dimension. Total score helps break ties.

TEAM SUBMISSION — DUE FRIDAY

Submit via [assignment link TBD]:

1. **Team name** — Yes, pick one! It builds identity.
2. **Member UNIs** — List all team members
3. **ALL ideas generated** — FigJam screenshots, or photos of sticky notes (LLMs can read them!)
4. **Lean Canvases** — Screenshots or text of your AI-generated canvases

🎙️ I'll generate another podcast with feedback on your ideas and canvases!

NEXT WEEK

CONCEPT VALIDATION WITH REAL PEOPLE

QUESTIONS?

END OF CLASS 5

Next: Concept Validation