

COMS W4170

What are Use Scenarios and Personas?

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Use scenarios and personas help you explore your design by making more concrete the people who will use your design and the types of things they will do with it.

Use Scenarios

A *use scenario* is a story or narrative—a thought experiment that is used to help you explore the set of tasks and interactions required for your design. A good use scenario does a number of things:

- Describes the user's goals and motivations.
- Describes a specific task or tasks that need to be accomplished.
- Describes some of the interaction, with enough detail to make it compelling, but not so much detail as to be overwhelming.
- Provides a shared understanding for everyone on your team about what a user might want to do and how they might do it.
- Helps you construct the sequence of events that are necessary to address in your user interface.
- Can be sketchy, as long as it provokes ideas and discussion.

Personas

A *persona* (also known as an *archetypal user*) is an invented person that you use to represent a type of user in your use scenario. A persona can be based on a real person or on a set of real people. The idea is to make up personas to enable you to talk concretely about them as users of your system. For example, if I were designing a music purchase interface, I might create three personas:

- Joe, 19 years old, lives with three friends in a shared apartment. Currently attends college full time. Likes to watch movies every night. Majors in history and doesn't like computers.
- Mary, 45 years old, works part time and has two kids. Watches movies by herself on weekends and has the kids watch during the week while she deals with family matters. Has used computers for many years.
- Paul, 30 years old, a bike messenger,...

Or, if I were designing an office information system, I might create three to five personas representing people in the office, such as the CFO, manager, receptionist, mail clerk, and a visitor. It helps to give each persona a name and personality because you can then ask yourself how they might handle a situation or deal with a particular interface. *They should be different from each other, so that they can represent the diverse range of people who might use your system.*

Have fun and flesh them out! Sketch a picture of each persona and think about where they live

and how they will access your system.

For more information about personas, see <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/UM/People/jgrudin/publications/personas/PDC2002.pdf> and <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/UM/People/jgrudin/publications/personas/PersonaBook.pdf>.

All Together Now

The following is a single persona and use scenario for [LeafView](#), a system that helps botanists identify plant species. This particular use scenario is rather involved and is a bit too specific about user interface elements such as buttons, but worked quite well for the project for which it was created.

Persona: Joe is a 30 year old botanist that works at the Smithsonian Institution. He uses Microsoft Word in his daily work and a little bit of Excel, but isn't always comfortable using computers. He often carries a backpack and makes weekly trips to Plummers Island to collect and identify leaf samples. He wears glasses.

Use Scenario: Joe starts up LeafView and sees the browsing view, which enables him to look around at various plants. He knows he needs to start collecting today, so he closes the laptop and walks along the path looking for a specific plant. He sees what might be the right plant and cuts a leaf off the stalk, placing it on the gray background of the laptop. He snaps a picture and places the leaf in a sample bag. When he opens the laptop, he sees the acquired leaf image and can decide to search based on the image, save the image, or cancel. He searches for the leaf and the top 15 images are returned. He wants to see a comparison, so he brings the comparison image alongside the results. He zooms in on the *Catalpa bignonioides* species, and decides that this is the correct selection, after reading the text and looking at the veins and edges. He presses the select button and LeafView shows the information that will be saved. He clicks the save button and continues working.

How Do You "Use" Personas and Use Scenarios?

It's really the process of creation that's important here. In creating personas and use scenarios, you're forced to think about the context and tasks of the design. Still, you'll want to walk through the use scenarios with your team, as a thought experiment, to see if you all agree on the use scenarios and to see if you might have missed something. Once you have personas and use scenarios, you can then start to design specific elements in your user interface, based on the requirements and interaction described in the use scenarios.

For optional further reading, you can check out:

- [Using video to support interaction design](#)
- [The interaction museum](#)