

My Design Process and Philosophy

Kiara Castillo Magallanes

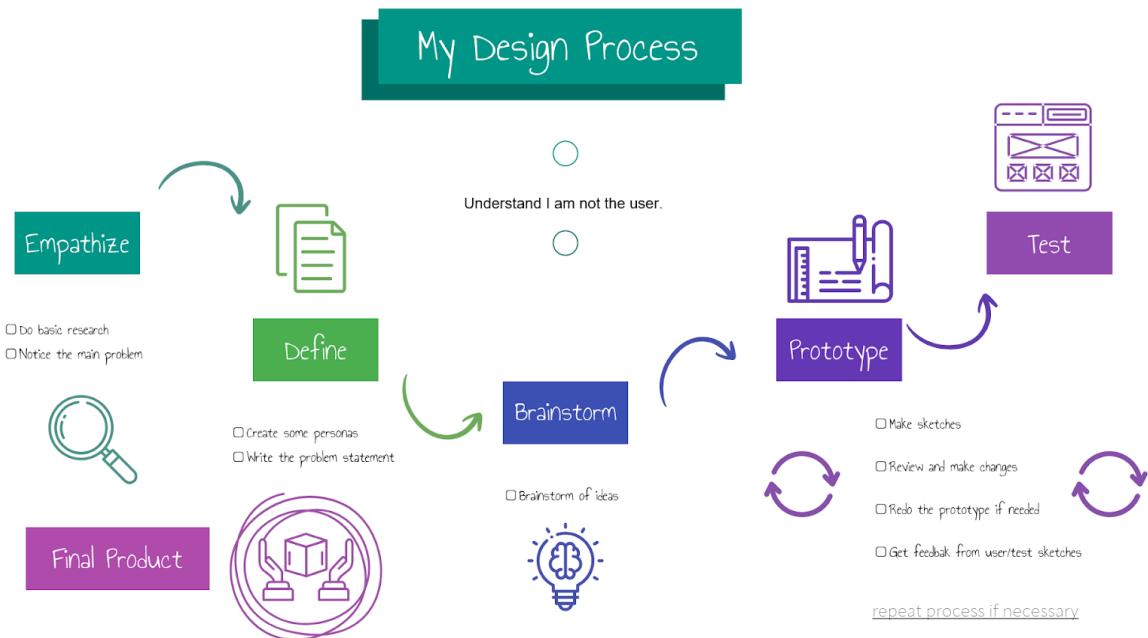
Indiana University Indianapolis

Course: Intro Human Computer Interaction Theory - INFO-I 275

Professor: Julie Stella

May 04 2025

Sketch



Introduction

As a student, I've learned that good design is not just about making things look nice it's about creating solutions that truly work for users. Throughout this course, I've explored methods that help me design with empathy, curiosity, and flexibility. This document explains my design process and philosophy, highlighting how I've grown in my approach to user-centered design.

My process

My design process always begins with a simple principle that I keep in mind: *I am not the user*. This helps me remember that even if something makes sense to me, it may not be easy or clear for real users. Every time I begin a new project, I first try to understand the problem from the user's point of view. This is like the "Empathize" phase in the design thinking process.

Depending on the project, I usually begin with basic research. I might visit similar websites, talk to people around me, or make quick observations. I use sticky notes to organize what I find. Writing everything down helps me see patterns, user needs, and the biggest problems.

Once I have gathered enough information, I proceed to define the problem. I try to write a short and simple problem statement, focusing on what the user needs. Sometimes I create quick user personas to guide my thinking. I know it's normal if things still feel a little unclear here, defining the problem is part of the process, and not everything will be obvious immediately.

After defining the problem, I start the ideation phase. I brainstorm different ideas, even if they seem random at first. I write them down on sticky notes and later organize them by importance or by how well they solve the user's problem. I don't limit ideas too early because fresh perspectives can lead to better solutions.

Next, I move into prototyping. I like to keep prototypes simple at the start, using quick sketches or basic wireframes. I test these early versions by showing them to users or others around me. Feedback is very important because users often point out things I missed or didn't think about. It's one of the best ways to improve a design before spending too much time on it.

After testing, I review and make changes. Sometimes the changes are small; other times, I realize I need to rethink parts of the design completely. This cycle of testing, getting feedback, and improving is key. For me, design is not about getting it perfect on the first try; it's about learning, adjusting, and getting closer to something that works for the user.

My Design Philosophy: I Am Not the User

The main ideas that have shaped my design philosophy are simple but powerful "I am not the user." This phrase has changed how I think about design. It reminds me to be careful with my own assumptions and to always put the user first. Before taking this course, I often believed I could imagine what the user needed just by thinking about the problem myself. But now I understand that designing good experiences means involving users in every step of the process.

This idea comes from multiple readings. For example, Jakob Nielsen clearly says that "designers are not users," meaning that we should not design based on our own preferences or behaviors ([Nielsen Norman Group, 2020](#)). This idea is also part of Eric Reiss's Web Dogma, where he argues that good design is not about impressing other designers, but about serving real users ([Reiss, 2006](#)). These resources helped me recognize that even if I care deeply about a project, my experience does not automatically reflect what others need.

Since I've taken other courses in usability, HCI, and design thinking, I feel more comfortable applying a human-centered mindset to my process. I've learned to follow a structured and iterative approach to design, one that is based on understanding users, generating creative ideas, prototyping, and testing, just like in the Stanford d.school's Design Thinking model. I don't just follow this process because it's what's taught; I follow it because I've seen that it works. It pushes me to go beyond my thoughts and listen to what users are trying to tell me.

I learned the importance of empathy in UX design. One idea that influenced me outside of class was from Living with Complexity by Donald Norman. I found it while exploring design literature on my own. He says, "We must design for the way people behave, not for how we would wish them to behave" (Norman, 2010). This helped me realize that I should never assume people will use a system the way I expect. Instead, I need to observe how they actually use it and support that behavior.

In previous UX courses, I had the chance to practice user interviews and usability testing, which helped reinforce the importance of direct user input. I learned that asking open-ended questions and letting users speak freely helps reveal problems and needs that I wouldn't have thought of myself. [Adivallat \(2020\)](#) explains that building empathy requires "removing your shoes before stepping into the user's." This quote stayed with me because it reminds me to let go of my perspective and focus fully on the user's experience.

A part of my philosophy is the use of iteration and prototyping. I realized that it's okay not to get everything right the first time. The best way to improve a design is by showing early ideas to users and getting their feedback. The book Interaction Design: [Beyond Human-Computer Interaction \(Sharp, Preece, & Rogers, 2019\)](#) taught me that prototyping and evaluation should happen continuously, not only at the end. This made me understand that design is not a straight line, it's a

cycle. When I tested my prototypes in past classes, users pointed out issues I never noticed. That's when I saw the real value of testing with users, not just relying on personal judgment or peer feedback.

Another strong influence on my philosophy came from a reading about design thinking by *Krishna Kumar*. He described the ideation stage as a time for wild ideas, without judgment. That encouraged me not to be afraid of crazy or unusual solutions at the start. Instead of focusing only on what is "realistic," I now explore many possibilities first, then filter them later through user feedback and technical constraints. I also learned the importance of listening to voices from outside the design team, stakeholders, and even people completely unrelated to the project. Their perspectives reveal new angles I hadn't considered before.

Over the semester, I've grown more confident in saying "I don't know" at the beginning of a project. That is a good place to start, because it pushes me to ask questions, observe users, and test my assumptions. I used to feel like I needed to have the answers right away, but now I see that the real answers come from users. My job is to create systems that help them achieve their goals, not to make them adapt to my designs.

Reflection on how I developed my philosophy

During this course, one of the readings that really changed how I see design was *Cyberpsychology: An Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction* by Kent L. Norman. It helped me realize that technology and design don't just solve tasks; they shape how people feel, think, and behave. After reading it, I started thinking more about the emotional side of user experiences, not just the functional part.

Another reading that opened my mind was *Ambiguity as a Resource for Design*. Before, I thought everything in design had to be clear and detailed from the start. But after learning about ambiguity, I understood that sometimes it's better to leave space for users to interpret things in their own way. This made me more flexible and less afraid of uncertainty during the design process. When I first started this course, I believed that good design was about finding quick solutions and making things "look right." Now, I believe good design is about patience, curiosity, and the willingness to change ideas based on real feedback. I learned that it's okay not to have all the answers right away. What matters is asking better questions, staying open to new perspectives, and letting users guide the final product.

This course didn't just teach me tools it changed how I think. I now see design as an ongoing conversation between ideas, users, and outcomes. I've learned that being curious, flexible, and open to change is more powerful than having the "right" answer from the start. That's what human-centered design truly means to me.

References

- Nielsen, J. (2020). Designers are not users. Nielsen Norman Group
<https://www.nngroup.com/videos/designers-are-not-users/>
- Reiss, E. (2006). Web Dogma '06. FatDUX Group
<http://fatdux.com/what-we-do/our-web-dogma/>
- Norman, D. A. (2010). Book Living with Complexity. MIT Press
- Sharp, H., Preece, J., & Rogers, Y. (2019). Interaction Design: Beyond Human-Computer Interaction (4th ed.)
- Adivallat, A. (2020). Design Philosophy. Medium
<https://medium.com/@adivallat/design-philosophy-fc349454951d>
- Kumar, K. (2019). Design Thinking is All About Users, Not About Designers. LinkedIn
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/design-thinking-all-users-designers-krishna-kumar/>
- Norman, K. L. (2008). Cyberpsychology: An Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press
- Gaver, W., Beaver, J., & Benford, S. (2003). Ambiguity as a Resource for Design