

# Contextual inquiry and Analysis

## Revised system concept statement

Versatile is an application for the creative writer. Versatile provides a set of tools that helps poets and songwriters, create or polish their ideas as well as analyse the work of their peers.

Versatile's text editor keeps track of the meter/number of syllables. Versatile can read the scansion of a poem and tell the writer what the rhyme scheme of the poem is as well as its metre. Versatile also comes with a scan mode that where other users can analyse the sentiment, or rhyme of poems by highlighting parts of the poem.

### User groups

- Creative writers - including poetry and prose.
- Readers of creative works.
- Critics and teachers of creative writing.
- People trying to get into creative writing.

In selecting participants for this project I will consider two general classes of people: those with experience in creative writing and those without. Further, I will split the experienced group into those who write formally/professionally and those who write personally. Versatile has two aims, to help those with established habits get better at the organising and improving their thoughts as well as helping those who are trying to get into creative writing structure their thoughts and get feedback on them. The poetic tradition has given rise to a number of different forms spread across a diverse population. For this reason I will interview,

- a poetry professor,
- a casual poet,
- a slam poet,
- and a rapper.

### Protocol

- **Introduction:**  
Hi, I'm Michael I am working on an application called Versatile for my Computer science seminar. Versatile is an application for the creative writer. It provides a set of tools that helps

poets and songwriters, create or polish their ideas, as well as analyse the work of their peers. Versatile's text editor keeps track of the meter/number of syllables. Versatile can read the scansion of a poem and tell the writer what the rhyme scheme of the poem is as well as its metre. Versatile also comes with a scan mode that where other users can analyse the sentiment, or rhyme of poems by highlighting parts of the poem.

(Included system concept statement to make sure it was understandable to a non-technical user).

This is going to be an semi-structured interview beginning with an observation. The information you provide will be used in the development of an application for my User Design Class. The point of the class is to make sketches of an idea informed by user needs but I do plan on working on the application after the class is over. *I will first need your verbal consent to transcribe your words and if need be we can come back and check the draft to ensure it truthfully and completely represents your thoughts.*

- **Screener question:** do you do any creative writing?
- **Recruitment method:** word of mouth and street interview.
- **Observation prompt:**
  - Can you show me some finished poems you have?  
Showed five finished poems on a pdf. Used application called pages to show other poems that were finished but not yet exported. Some of the “finished works” were written alongside their earlier unrevised drafts.
  - Can you show me a draft of one of your poem?  
Drafts were on Pages. Had a “Draft book.” Keeps many versions of the same poem. Documents with drafts are called Untitled. Keeps finals in folders.
  - Do you have any poems in progress, if so can I see them?  
Unfinished poems are in notes. Contains ideas. All messy until taken to page. Some are just one line. Quick - no open save etc.
  - Can you show me what your workflow is for writing a poem?  
Start with a note for the idea. Work inside of note for some time - once it is coming together moves to Pages - then starts draft process.
- **Interview questions:**
  - How often do you write?
  - Under what conditions do you write, more specifically does it correlate to any kind of mood?
  - Under what physical conditions do you write?
  - How do you know when a body of work is finished?
  - Do you interact with other media when you write, sound, pictures etc, if so how?  
(Possible clarification: do you record sounds, attach pictures or even listen to music when you write?)

- How do you get feedback for your writing?  
Follow up: why that medium as opposed to any other medium?
- Do you prefer writing on your computer or on paper? (Follow up: why?)
- What are the things do you try and keep track of when you write?
- What applications do you use to write, what are their relative advantages and disadvantages?

## Contextual inquiry

### Participants

- CV is a white, female, Canadian poet with a single published anthology. She mostly does slam poetry and has recently started working on written poetry. CV is an English major at Colgate University.
- JO is a white, male, American poet and a professor in the English department. He has published several works and has been writing for over 30 years.
- AJ is black, male, first generation Nigerian-American rapper and poet majoring in African Americans studies with interests in songwriting and performance.
- TO is an Asian, female, poet from Hong Kong who maintains a blog of poetry. She is a student studying international relations.
- CT is a black, female, Zimbabwean-American actress studying theatre. She is interested in writing but does not self describe as a creative writer.

### Observation notes

Participant	Finished poems	Drafts	In-progress	Workflow
CV	Stored in PDFs	In Apple Pages	Spread between Pages and notes	Notes - pages - PDF
JO	Hard and soft copies.	Hard and soft copies.	Hard and soft copies.	Type - print -type.
AJ	Recorded and written.	Phone notes.	Phone notes.	Phone - write - record.
TO	Tumblr blog.	On text editor.	Text editor.	Notes - text editor - Blog.
CT	Paper or phone.	Paper or phone.	Phone.	Paper <-> phone

## Summary statements

- CV is an active student athlete who sets aside time in her day to write. She needs to be able to see the progression of her thoughts on each sitting because she values the different moods she is in and their creative stimuli. When CV writes she opens another window on her computer containing someone else's poetry. She reads the poetry for some time for inspiration then writes hers. It takes CV anything between a day to a month to finish a poem. As an aspiring author, CV needs a lot of feedback during her writing process.
- JO is an English professor who travels a lot and writes nearly anywhere. JO needs a way to write and edit his poetry. He takes between a month and 5 years to complete a poem. He types out his poem, prints it out, makes changes to it and then retypes it afterwards - this process continues until JO is satisfied with the "form" and "music" of the poem.
- AJ is a student involved in a number of extra-curricular activities, one of the being rap and poetry. When writing he cares most about how poetry feels and sounds as a result he records all his poetry and does so on his phone. His creative process mostly entails listening to the projects as opposed to reading them but he does write often as well.
- TO is a blogger that maintains a poetry blog read by over a thousand users. She writes mostly personal poems and stories. The poems and stories are usually gathered and written in one sitting. In order to keep an active interest in writing she uses prompts to give her cues on what to write about for practice.
- CT writes only for herself and uses her poems and prose as journals. She likes to read other people's poetry and draw from it. She is not sure if wants to write seriously at any point in the future but would like to keep the possibility open.

## Key insights

Storm: <https://www.stormboard.com/invite/379862/league51>

- Feedback
  - All participants expect some kind of feedback from their writing. This might include peers or from more experienced writers.
  - Some participants like to give feedback to other writers.
  - Participants are likely to share their work online.
- Idea generation
  - New writers need a way to generate ideas and practice writing.
  - Experienced writers usually work from memory, an image or from existing poem
- Revision process
  - All participants tend to go back to earlier work and make edits to it.
  - Some participants make definitive edits while others like to see the trajectory their work took.
  - Having a printable sheet available is useful for final drafts or edits

- Creative workspace (the medium)
  - Fonts, margins and form matter in the creative process - spelling underlines can be distracting.
  - Writers with a musical bent like to keep track of form of the music.
  - Some writers require aural and visual prompts to work