ICT

App design

Learning objectives

- The students learn about and discuss how to design an app.
- In the project stage, students design their own app.

Warmer

1 Before class, find images of five popular mobile phone apps. Display these on the board or print them on a handout. If you do not have time to do this, draw the apps on the board (or nominate a student to do so).

2 Ask students to identify the apps and to discuss in pairs which ones they have used, whether they like them and why / why not. In whole-class feedback, find out which is the most popular app and why.

1 Books closed. Write the questions on the board and put students into pairs to discuss them. Books open. Tell students to check their ideas against the text. Discuss answers as a class. You could also ask them to make a list of things they can do on their phones or tablets and to draw a pie chart showing the proportion of time they spend doing each thing on their mobile. Nominate one or two students to present their pie chart to the class.

Answers

1 and **2** Students' own answers.

3 You should try to identify new opportunities for an app, and then think about who will use it, what devices they will be using it on, and what they will see and hear when they operate the program.

2 Check understanding of *programs* (e.g. Instagram), *icon* (draw a popular one on the board), *mobile devices* (e.g. smartphones) and *technical features* (e.g. mp3 player) by asking for examples of each one. Do the first one as an example and then tell students to complete the exercise individually. Check answers.

Fast finishers

Ask fast finishers to write one sentence summarising the whole text. Elicit some examples after checking answers to exercise 2, e.g. *This is a blog post giving four useful tips for designing new apps.*

Answers

1 d **2** f **3** a **4** e **5** b **6** c

3 Ask students to look at the logos and names of the apps and then put them into small groups to discuss the questions. Get each group to give feedback on a different question. For question 5, you could hold a class vote with students raising their hands to choose the most useful feature.

4 Ask students what they think this app does (it allows students to track their grades). Tell them to compare the app in pairs before feeding back as a class. Encourage them to make sentences with comparatives. Ask them if they would use this kind of app and why/why not. One possible problem with the app is that it is quite expensive and also that you have to pay to test it.

5 **2.06** Ask students if anyone has ever designed an app, and if so to tell the class about it. Explain that they are going to listen to a podcast about designing apps and that they need to complete each sentence as they listen. Give them a few minutes to read the sentences and to think of possible answers for each one. Play the recording and allow students to compare their answers before playing it again. Check answers and why/why not. One possible problem with the app is that it is quite expensive and also that you have to pay to test it..

Mixed ability

Ask weaker students to work with a partner for exercise 5. Tell them to focus on just three of the sentences each. Then instead of comparing answers, they should help each other complete the sentences.

Answers

1 They are too complex.
2 They should keep things as simple as possible.
3 Putting too many things on each screen.
4 Under five dollars.
5 Yes (or the first version should be free).

Audioscript

Presenter: Good evening, and welcome to App-cast, the technology podcast about new mobile applications. On today's show, we've got app designer Maggie Prentice, to give some tips for app designers … So if any of you out there have got a good idea for an app, listen closely, because Maggie's going to talk about typical mistakes that people make when they're developing new applications. Maggie? Thanks for being here this evening.

Maggie: No problem, John. It's great to be here. But before I start, let me ask you a question …

John: Sure. Go ahead …

Maggie: Well, I know you use apps, because I saw you playing with your phone earlier.

John: Oh, yes … I've got tons of apps on my phone!

Maggie: Right! But, like most people, you probably download a lot of apps and then you don't use them. True?

John: Very true! I'm always downloading new apps, but there are some that I don't use very much, and ones that I delete, because they're no good.

Maggie: Exactly, and that's my point … Why are some apps not successful? And I'd say the biggest reason is when an app is too complex. After all, the whole idea behind apps is that they should make your life easier, or more enjoyable. So when users open a new app and think it looks confusing, it usually puts them off right away.

John: I agree. I mean, I don't have time to learn how to use an app. I expect it to just start working, and be easy to use. But what should app designers do, then?

Maggie: Well, they have to keep things as simple as possible. The best apps usually do one thing, and they do it really well, in a very simple way, that anyone can learn in a few minutes. They can discover extra features later on, as they use the app. But the first impression has to be, 'Wow! This is so easy! The important thing is a quick start, with no time wasted learning how to use the app.

John: OK, I see what you mean. And what other mistakes are common among app designers?

Maggie: Well, another mistake is putting too many things on each screen. Some apps have too many images or too much text at once, and it looks really confusing. The best designs look really simple, with just a couple of buttons or images, and very little text. Remember, there are always menus for options, so you need to use them intelligently.

John: I'd agree with that. My phone isn't very big, so images and words look really small on the screen. Sometimes it's hard to touch the right words because they're so small.

Maggie: That's a very good point. It's better to have separate screens for separate functions. And you shouldn't have too many functions in the same app. Some designers want to put in so much, when it's probably better to make two or three different apps. Or write one app with only the main functions, and then if it's successful, you can bring out a more complete version, with additional functions, and maybe charge more money for those extras.

John: That's another issue that people often ask about – how much should an app cost?

Maggie: Good question. Many first-time designers make the mistake of charging too much. The apps that people download most often are usually very cheap – under five dollars or even just one dollar or ninety-nine cents. Users want to try lots of apps, to see if they like them, and if an app is expensive, most people don't bother.

John: So cheaper is better, then?

Maggie: Cheaper, or free! At least the first version of the app. You need people to try it out, and get 'hooked'. Then you can charge for the next version with extra functions. The free version is really the best way to advertise your app right away. The more people that use it, the more 'buzz' you create, and your app becomes well-known. Some of the most popular apps, like Candy Crush Saga and Whatsapp, were free programs.

John: OK, well those are some good tips to get you started with app design. We'll be back in a few minutes with more advice from Maggie. Don't go away!

Extension activity

Put students into small groups to discuss what they heard in the interview. Which points do they agree with? How much would they pay for an app? What apps have they stopped using? Tell them to give reasons for their answers. Share some ideas as a class.

Cooler

Put students into groups of four and tell them to divide their groups into two teams of two. Each team should take it in turns to describe words from the App design section for the other team to guess (e.g. *electronic device*, *smartphone*, *tablet*, *Internet*, *app*, *operating system*, *touch-screen*, *GPS locator*, *software program*). Each team has 30 seconds to describe each word. The winning team is the one to guess the most words.

Project

Put students into small groups to discuss the questions. Then tell them to produce a poster describing their app, showing its logo and screens and giving its price. Ask students to display their posters around the room. Tell students they have a certain amount of money and that they need to decide which app to download. They should walk around the room reading the posters and choosing the best app. The winner is the group that makes the most money.