



Best Practices for Paper Prototypes

Paper prototypes are interfaces that you draw on sheets of paper. You typically use them in early stages of your design process. They're great for testing novel interface ideas, so you can validate your idea's usability before committing more resources to create it.

Pros and Cons of Paper Prototypes

Pros of paper prototypes

- Paper prototypes are **cheap and easy to create** as well as modify.
- **You can create rough “animations”** by sliding pieces of paper to give users a more realistic idea of how the interface will work.
- You can **ignore the deeper, superficial details** of an interface, such as the color of a button. This allows you to test the concept of your idea, rather than its visual execution.
- Paper prototypes are **very obviously unfinished**; therefore, users are unlikely to hold back their critiques for fear of hurting your feelings.



Cons of paper prototypes

- While generally easy to create, sometimes **you might spend a bit of time** to make a paper prototype. You might get emotionally attached as a result and become unable to objectively evaluate its merits.
- Paper prototypes are **less helpful to test commonly used user interface patterns**. That's because users are likely to already know how the user interface works. In such cases, you should skip the paper prototype and move on to a higher-fidelity prototype instead.
- You can only **test paper prototypes in person**. Since the prototype is physical, you'll find it very difficult to conduct remote tests with it.
- While better than sketches, paper prototypes still **require imagination from users**. This means some users might struggle when they try to understand how the interface works.

When to Use Paper Prototypes

- Use paper prototypes **when you're exploring novel solutions**, to test whether people understand your solution.
- *Don't* use paper prototypes when you're revisiting the same solution, or using a standard user interface pattern to solve a problem. In such cases, you can skip the paper prototype and move to the next stage of your design process.
- Use paper prototypes when **you're exploring different ways of solving a problem**. For instance, if you have different interface ideas to achieve the same user goal, you might want to sketch out a couple of different paper prototypes to test them on users.



Best Practices and Tips for Paper Prototypes

- Paper prototype sketching templates can help you speed up your process. However, you don't *need* them and simple sketches on blank sheets of paper will work just as well.
- You don't even need to use a ruler—however, you should ensure your paper prototypes are **neat and legible**, of course.
- **Test your paper prototypes on users.** Play-act with them to let them know what happens when they click on a certain button, for instance.
- **Do a dry run** of your paper prototype testing session before you involve real users. Get your team-mates to try it out first. This is because you'll likely find that it's more difficult to host a paper prototype testing session than you think. You'll need to know how to explain to your user the way your prototype works, as well as answer the many questions they will ask you.



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