"How Might We" Questions

Once you've defined your design challenge in a Point Of View (POV) statement, you can start to use "How Might We" (HMW) questions **to reframe your POV and open up the design challenge to look for solutions**. Instead of saying "We need to design X or Y", for example, you can add "How Might We" to the beginning and ask "How might we design X or Y?".

Why and When to Ask "How Might We"

The "How Might We" (HMW) technique maintains a level of ambiguity on purpose because its job is to open up the exploration space to a range of possibilities. It's a re-wording of the core user need which you uncovered through deep interrogation of the problem in the Empathize phase, and synthesized in the Define phase. Let's break the question down into its component parts now to see how it achieves this task:

"How"

"How" suggests that we do not yet have the answer. "How" helps us set aside prescriptive briefs and explore a variety of endeavors, instead of merely executing on what we "think" the solution might be.

"Might"

"Might" emphasizes that our responses are possible solutions, not the only solution. "Might" also allows for exploration of multiple possible solutions, and means we won't settle for the first idea that comes to mind.

"We"

"We" immediately brings in the element of collaboration. "We" reminds us that the idea for the optimal solution will most likely come from collective and collaborative teamwork.

"How Might We" (HMW) questions serve as a transition step between the Define and Ideate phases of design thinking. They help you identify topics that represent subsets of your POV before you move on to the mass generation of ideas in the Ideate phase. In this way, HMW questions provide the best way to open up brainstorm and other ideation sessions where you can explore ideas to solve your design challenge in an innovative and user-centered way.

The HMW method is cleverly constructed to open up the field for new ideas, admit that we do not currently know the answer to the design challenge and encourage a collaborative approach to design solutions. Your HMW questions should be broad enough to generate a wide range of solutions during ideation sessions, yet narrow enough that specific solutions can be created for them.

For example, if your POV is: "Teenage girls need to eat nutritious food to thrive and grow in a healthy way."—the HMW question may go as follows:

- How might we make healthy eating appealing to young females?

- How might we inspire teenage girls towards healthier eating options?

- How might we make healthy eating something which teenage girls aspire towards?

- How might we make nutritious food more affordable?

These are simple examples, all with their own subtle nuances that may slightly influence different approaches and techniques in the Ideate phase. Regardless, your HMW questions will ensure that your upcoming ideation and design activities are informed with one of more HMW questions that can spark the imagination of you and your team and align well with the core insights and user needs you've uncovered.

Best Practice Guide to Asking "How Might We"

01: Ensure your POV hits the sweet spot: Without a statement of a clear vision or goal in a well-framed Point Of View, "How Might We" questions are obviously meaningless. The technique requires a well-framed objective (a POV in other words) which is neither too narrow nor too broad.

02: Always begin with your Point of View (POV): HMW questions should always relate to your POV. Rephrase and reframe your POV as several questions by adding "How Might We" at the beginning.

03: Break up your POV with multiple HMWs: You can digest and ideate on your design challenge further when you segment it up into smaller actionable and meaningful questions. Five to ten HMW questions for one POV is a good starting point.

04: HMW questions come before solutions: It's often helpful (and logical) to brainstorm the HMW questions before the solutions brainstorm.

05: Check the breadth of your HMWs: Look at your HMW questions and ask yourself if they allow for a variety of solutions. If they don't, broaden them. Your HMW questions should generate a number of possible answers and become a launch pad for your ideation sessions.

06: Ensure your HMWs are focused: On the other hand, if your HMW questions are too broad, you may need to narrow them down. You should aim for a scope that's narrow enough to direct the start of your ideation sessions, yet broad enough to give you room to explore wild ideas.

You can use our blank worksheet on the next page to follow these best practices and write down your POV statement and HMW questions!

How Might We Worksheet

Start by writing down your **point of view** below:

_____ **needs** _____
[user]   [user's need]

because _____ .
[insight]

"How Might We" Questions

Based on your POV, craft some **"How Might We"** questions:

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

How might we _____ ?

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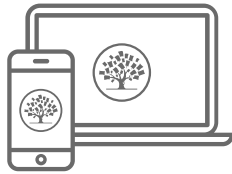
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