How to Carry Out User Observations

Observation is one of the best methods to understand your users in their own context because participants remain as undisturbed by the researcher as possible. These "fly on the wall" observations can also help you uncover the needs people have—whether they're aware of them or not! Ultimately, observations can help guide your innovation efforts, identify the right end users to design for and discover emotions that drive user behaviors.

It's important you carry out the observations with an open mind. We recommend you use the following steps to help you do this:

01: **Identify a group of people** who possess certain characteristics that are representative of your target audience.

02: **Choose a location** to observe your user group as they experience the problem you want to solve. This could either be in a natural setting or during sessions with the design team or consultants you've hired to gather information.

03: **Introduce your user group to your study and method** before you start your observations and explain you want to interact with them as little as possible. Tell them it's best to pretend you're not there! Try to set a relaxed tone to put your participants at ease.

04: **Obtain consent** from your user group to confirm they are happy for you to take photos and/or record the session.

05: **Set up your recording device** so it can clearly capture your user group as they carry out the task—and in good light too.

06: **Choose a place to stand** that means you won't get in the way of the user group while you observe.

07: **Observe your participants** as they experience the problem you want to solve. Try to notice:

- What your participants do.

- What your participants say.

- Your participants' facial expressions.

- Your participants' environment.

- What your participants use.

08: **Take lots of photos as you observe**. Take plenty of photos from different angles and distances to help you tell a story. Make sure to ensure the lighting is good, and don't use flash as it wipes out all the details. What's more, you'll want to focus your photos on the design features—think about what's really important for you as a designer to understand.

09: **Manage any interruptions**. It can feel awkward for your participants to be observed, so they might start to talk to you. Try to answer as briefly as possible—often a simple "mhm" is enough. If it happens continually, politely remind them they should just pretend you're not there.

10: **Round off the session** once you feel your observations are complete, and thank the user group for their help.