## 1.1 What is UX?

**In our quest to learn about UX, an important place to start is to be clear about what we mean by the term “user experience”.**

**We know that companies like Google, Apple and Facebook invest massively in their user experience design teams. But what is this “user experience” that they’re trying to design?**

Well, if you type “user experience” into Google, and you’ll find this definition on Wikipedia. Which kind of makes it the semi-official definition.

It says “user experience includes all the users' emotions, beliefs, preferences, perceptions, physical and psychological responses, behaviours and accomplishments that occur before, during and after use of a product, system or service”.

Now that’s a very technical and very academic definition. And what I think they’re trying to say - and what’s a much more precise definition - is that user experience is what it feels like to use a product system or service.

**So user experience is not just about usability. It’s not just about how fast you can get through a process. Or how few mistakes you make when doing so. And it’s not just about functionality. The ability to do A or B or C. How users *feel* when they’re doing A or B or C is just as important.**

What sort of feelings are we talking about? Often they’re subtle, but extremely powerful. Consider these:

* I feel in control
* I feel confident
* I feel smart
* I trust this product

Simple emotions and very powerful when you consider their opposites. I feel out of control or I have no control. I’m doing something important - like buying a house - and it feels like the system or the process or some anonymous account handler has more control than I do.

I don’t feel confident about this system or product or company. I don’t think it’s going to work well or do what I want it to do. I feel stupid. Or I don’t trust this website or app or the company behind it.

These are not the sort of emotions we want our users and our customers to feel when their using our products.

**So UX isn’t just about solving problems as we discussed in the first video. It’s also about generating positive emotions and we’re going to explain this emotional aspect different types of design that go into making high quality products. The first two - functional design and aesthetic design - are generally understood. But the third - experience design - isn’t as familiar and often gets overlooked.**

Let’s take a look at each one.

Functional design determines what a product is built to do. It defines the engineering that gives a product its capabilities. So with a car, for example, things like horse power, engine size, the type of transmission, how fast it can go from 0 to 60 will determine what sort of car it is - whether its a sports car, a family car or an SUV. Each of these types of car would have a different functional design underpinning it.

The second type of design is aesthetic design. How does the product look? How visually appealing is it? What sort of personality does it have? What do its looks say about the product’s brand? And you can imagine that the sports car, the family car and the SUV would each have a different aesthetic design corresponding to the type of car they are.

The third category of design, the one that’s less familiar to us all, is experience design. What does it feel like to drive this car. What does it feel like to sit in the driver’s seat, hands on the wheel, as you drive this car along the road.

How responsive is the steering wheel? How smooth is the gear stick. How easy is it to adjust the controls on the dash.

What sort of sounds does the car make? What sound does the engine make - for example - when it’s idling in traffic? Or cruising on a motorway? Or overtaking on a country lane?

What’s it like to do mundane things like stick your golf clubs in the boot? Strap the kids into the back seat? Or adjust the position of the driver's seat?

**Consider this important point. All these small details on their own might seem trivial or mundane. But when added together, these details determine what it *feels* *like* to use this car. And companies that are serious about creating great products don’t leave any of these details to chance.**

**Because - here’s another important point - experience design doesn’t happen by accident. It’s a deliberate, intentional focus on the small details that matter to customers.**

Mercedes, for example, doesn’t the workers on the factory floor determine the smoothness of the gear stick. Or the sound of the engine. Or even the feel of the buttons on the dash. Of course not.

And it’s not that their workers aren’t capable. It’s just that Mercedes knows that these details create a massive emotional reaction with customers. And they want that emotional reaction to be a positive one. So these details are too important to be left to chance. And they are defined long before the car hits the factory floor.

**We talked about the three types of design in a sequence: functional design, aesthetic design and experience design. But that’s not how it works in companies like Mercedes. You don’t leave experience design until last.**

All these small little details are defined at the same time as the functional and aesthetic design. The three types of design need to be working together in harmony. And we’ll see an example of that in another video when we look at the design process at BMW.

Finally, the details aren’t there for fun. Each detail has been carefully crafted to solve a genuine problem for users, be it air conditioning, entertainment, navigation or pacifying kids.

Before we move on to the next video it’s worth recapping what we’ve learned about UX. If you’re ever asked in an interview “What is UX”? A smart answer is to say that it’s a problem solving discipline. Identifying user problems and building software to help solve them

On top of that, you can also say that great products solve user problems *and* generating positive emotions while doing so.