Characteristics of good user experience

Good design is easy to spot but often hard to pin down. What exactly makes a product effective to its users? Is it a matter of simplicity, structure, or functionality? The answer depends on the product in question.

In the earlier video, “The basics of user experience design”, you were introduced to some primary characteristics of good UX. These characteristics—usable, equitable, enjoyable, and useful—can help you evaluate a product’s design. In this reading, you’ll learn more about each one and why they're important.

If a product is usable, it means the design, structure, and purpose of the product is clear and easy to use. As you evaluate a product for usability, you can ask questions like: Is everything in the design easy to find? Is the design’s functionality easy to understand? Can users accomplish specific tasks within the design? As you evaluate, these questions can help you determine whether the design delivers a usable experience.

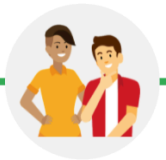
Imagine you are evaluating the usability of an airline app. Assuming the primary purpose of this app is to book a flight, the design should provide a clear and easy way to complete that task. For example, a section where you can easily enter travel and flight details on the homepage would be an example of good usability.

Equitable

If a product is equitable, it means a design is helpful to people with diverse abilities and backgrounds. In other words, the product's design addresses the needs of a diverse audience and ensures a high-quality experience is delivered to all users regardless of background, gender, race, or ability. Equity means providing people with the tools they need to accomplish their goals and support improved quality of life. Equity goes beyond the concept of equality, where everyone is given equal resources, because people often need different tools and support based on their needs. This is especially important to keep in mind for those in commonly disenfranchised groups. As you evaluate the equity of a product's UX, you can ask questions like: Are the needs of a diverse group of users considered? Does the product's design address the needs of traditionally underrepresented and excluded groups? These questions can help you determine whether the design delivers an equitable experience.

Imagine you are evaluating how equitable a social messaging app is. You might consider the design more equitable if the keyboard emoji list includes different skin tones and gender-neutral avatar options.

Enjoyable



If a product is enjoyable, it means the design delights the user. The design reflects what the user may be thinking or feeling and creates a positive connection with them. A product's design doesn't have to be enjoyable for it to function properly. But, an enjoyable design adds to an already functional product and can enhance the user's feelings about the experience. As you evaluate how enjoyable a product's UX is, you can ask questions like: Are there aspects of the design that consider the user's feelings? Does the design inspire delight in the user? Does the design keep

the user engaged throughout their experience? These questions can help you determine whether the design delivers an enjoyable experience.

Imagine you are evaluating how enjoyable a video streaming app is. Design aspects that might increase how much you enjoy the product include personalized recommendations based on previous watching habits, or the ability to customize the appearance of your account.

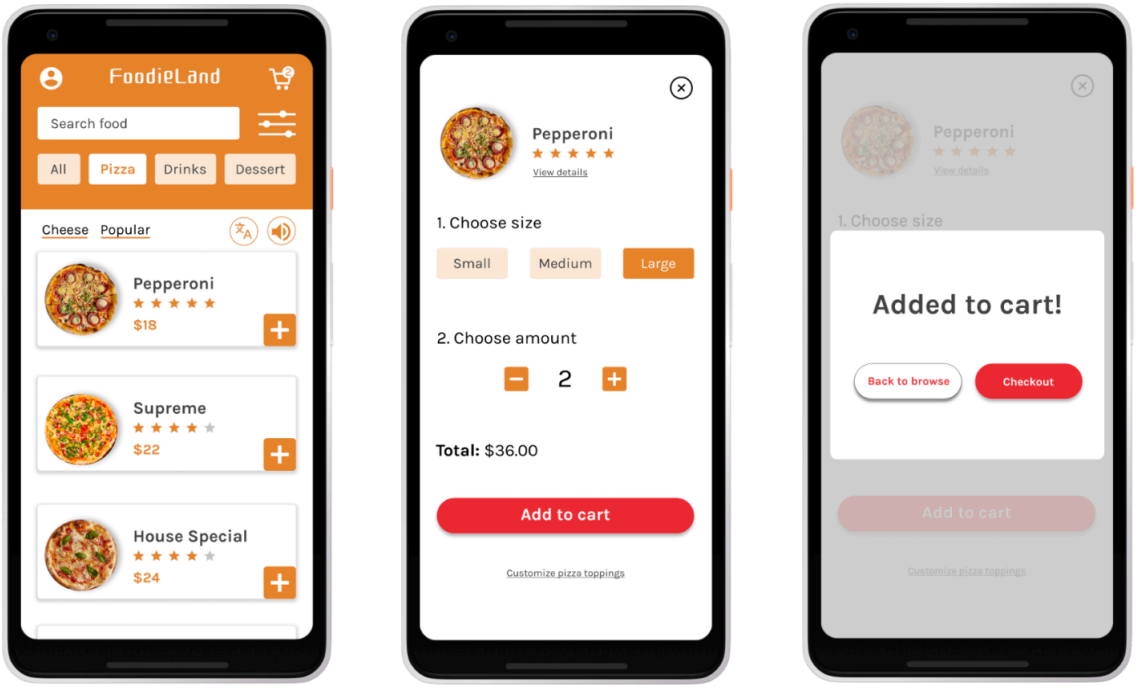
If a product is useful, that means it solves user problems. In other words, the design intentionally solves a user problem that the designer has identified. It's important to note that, while similar, useful and usable have different meanings. A product that is useful isn't always usable. The same is true for the opposite. The distinction between the two is that usability refers to the product working well and being easy to use, while usefulness refers directly to the ability to solve user problems. As you evaluate how useful a product's UX is, you can ask questions like: Does the design add value to the user's experience? Does the design solve a problem for the user? Does the design help the user achieve a specific goal? These questions can help you determine whether the design delivers a useful experience.

Imagine you're evaluating how useful a banking app is. Users typically download these apps because they need a place to manage their money. With this in mind, aspects of the app that might be considered useful are features that can be used to transfer money between accounts and pay bills.

Review: Identify good user experience

Introduction

You've learned about some of the main characteristics of good UX design—usable, equitable, enjoyable, and useful—in the Characteristics of a good user experience reading. Now, let's see how FoodieLand, a mobile app for a fictional pizza business, employed these principles.



You can also view each FoodieLand screen in the PDF provided below.

Usable

The “Add to cart,” “Back to browse,” and “Checkout” buttons in the Foodieland app are examples of usable design because they clearly indicate what will happen next when users interact with them.

Equitable

The Foodieland app’s translation feature is an example of equitable design because it is helpful for people who speak different languages.

Enjoyable

The images used in the Foodieland app are examples of enjoyable design because they are visually appealing and help users understand what they’re ordering.

Useful

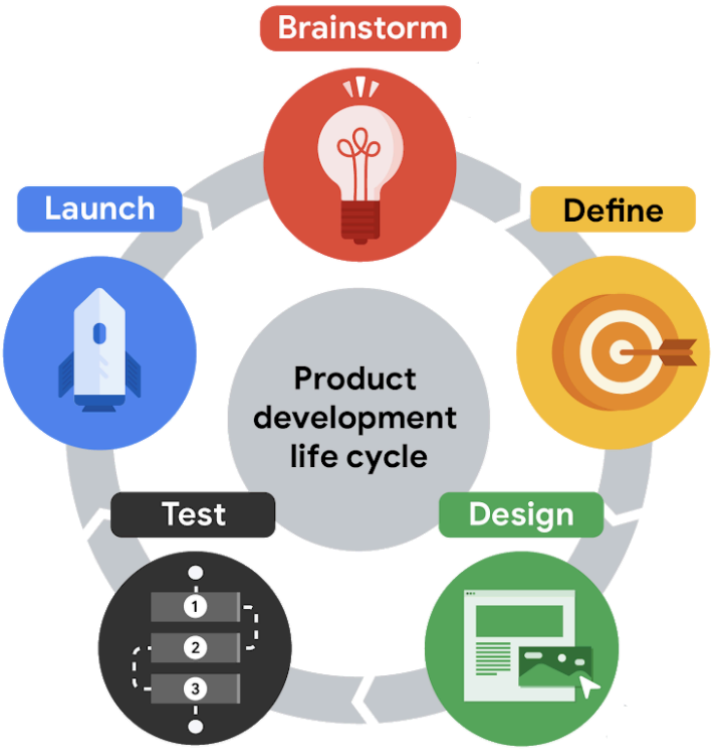
The Foodieland app’s filter feature allows users to narrow down their search. This is an example of useful design because it helps users easily select a pizza to order.

Going forward

As you continue on your UX design journey, ensure that your designs employ these four characteristics of good UX design.

Learn more about the product development life cycle

Every new product, whether it's an app or a physical object, follows a specific set of steps that take it from the first spark of an idea to the release of the final product. This is called the product development life cycle, and it has five stages: brainstorm, define, design, test, and launch. Depending on where you work, the exact names of each stage might be a little different, but the overall process is generally the same.



Around the circle there are icons for each phase of the lifecycle - brainstorm, define, design, test, launch

In this reading, you'll explore the product development life cycle and how UX design fits into each stage. As you might have guessed, UX designers are most engaged during the *design* stage of the product development life cycle, but they work closely with team members — like researchers, product managers, and engineers — throughout the entire life cycle.

As a product moves through the development life cycle, the team might need to spend longer working in one stage than in others, or repeat certain stages based on feedback. The success of each stage depends on the previous stage's completion, so it's important to do them in order.

Check out each of the five stages of the product development life cycle!

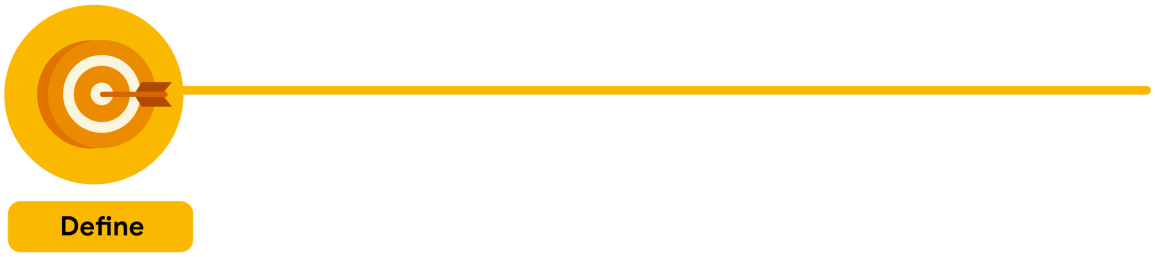
The first stage of the product development life cycle is the brainstorm stage, when the team starts thinking of an idea for a product. Your team might already know the user problem that you want to solve when you begin the product development life cycle. If not, coming up with a list of user problems is a great place to start.

It's important to pay attention to the diversity of your team at this stage. Teams that have meaningful diversity across identifiers like race, gender, abilities, family structure, age, and ethnicity are generally more effective at brainstorming because they bring together a lot of different lived experiences.

Consider this example: If you're designing a new app to help working parents and guardians, your team might start the brainstorming stage by listing common problems that working parents and guardians face, like a lack of reliable childcare, transportation concerns, or trouble managing schedules. Your team might review user feedback about other similar products or the results of user surveys to help guide your ideas. After you've brainstormed lots of user problems, your team chooses one and starts coming up with ideas for solutions to that problem.

The brainstorm stage is also an ideal time to check out your product's competitors and identify if there are already similar products available in the market. You want your product to fill a gap in the market or solve a problem better than existing products. Completing research into both your competitors and your users helps determine what problems need to be addressed by the product's design.

One more thing to keep in mind: A UX designer at a large company might not be very involved in the brainstorm stage. But a UX designer at a startup or small business could have a big role to play!



The second stage of the product development life cycle brings together UX designers, UX researchers, program managers, and product leads to define the product. The goal is to figure out the specifications for the product by answering questions like: Who is the product for? What will the product do? And, what features need to be included for the product to be successful?

During the define stage, your team narrows the focus of your idea. One product can't solve every user problem. Continuing with the example for an app to help working parents and guardians, your idea should focus on helping parents and guardians find reliable childcare *or* manage their schedules, not both. In this stage, a UX designer might help the team pin down the focus of the idea, but a product lead will probably be the one to define the scope of the project.

The research you completed in the brainstorm stage comes in handy now. Using what you've learned, you will pinpoint your potential users' problems. Your team can't assume they know what problems users are experiencing without asking the users directly.

The third stage of the product development life cycle is design. At this stage, UX designers develop the ideas for the product. Generally, UX designers start by

drawing wireframes, which are outlines or sketches of the product, then move on to creating prototypes, which are early models of a product that convey its functionality.

UX writers are also involved in the design stage and might do things like write button labels or other copy within the product's wireframes and prototypes.

At this point in the life cycle, UX designers make sure to include all of the product specifications that were outlined in the define stage. You might also check to ensure that each part of the design fits together in an intuitive way. For example, UX designers might check that the screens of an app flow in a way that makes sense to the user. Or that each interaction, like tapping a button, has a correlating action, like an item getting added to a cart. On the other hand, with a physical product, UX designers might check that one piece of a physical object matches up to the connecting piece. Finally, UX designers also make sure that each task a user needs to complete is clear and easy to understand, like navigating from the homepage to the checkout confirmation page in an app.

Next, your designs move into the test stage. UX designers work with engineers to develop functional prototypes that match the original designs, including details and features that fit the company’s brand, like font and color choices. This also means writing the code and finalizing the overall structure of the product.

Or, if you want to test your designs earlier, another option is to test a functioning prototype of the product, using a design tool like Figma or Adobe XD. You'll learn how to create prototypes of your designs later in the certificate program.

At this stage, the designs go through at least three phases of testing: internal tests within your company, reviews with stakeholders, and external tests with potential users. A stakeholder is a person you need to work with to complete the project or anyone who has some interest in the project, either within or outside of the company.

Running these tests is typically the responsibility of the UX researcher on your team, if you have one.

- First, the team tests the product internally to look for technical glitches and usability problems. This is often referred to as alpha testing.
- Then, the product undergoes a test with stakeholders to make sure the product is aligned with the company's vision, meets legal guidelines for accessibility, and follows government regulations for privacy, for example.
- Finally, there's an external test with potential users. This is the time to figure out whether the product provides a good user experience, meaning it's usable, equitable, enjoyable, and useful. This is often referred to as beta testing.

Gathering and implementing feedback at this stage is absolutely critical. If users are frustrated or confused by your product, UX designers make adjustments or even create new versions of the design. Then, the designs are tested again, until there's little or no friction between the product and the user.

It's important to call out that the product development life cycle isn't a completely linear process. Your team might cycle between designing and testing a few times before you're ready to launch the product!

Finally, you've arrived at the fifth and final stage of the product development cycle: the launch stage, when the product is released into the world! This might involve listing an app in the Google Play Store or Apple's App Store, making a website go live, or putting a physical product on store shelves.

The launch stage is a time to celebrate your work and start promoting the product. Marketing professionals on your team might post about the new product on social

media or publish a press release. The customer support team might get ready to help new users learn how the product works.

Program managers also meet with the cross-functional team to reflect on the entire product development life cycle and ask questions like: What worked and what could be improved? Were goals achieved? Were timelines met? Making time for this reflection is super important, since it can help improve the process going forward.

For a physical product, the launch stage might be the end of the product development life cycle. But for a digital product, like an app or website, launching the product to a wider audience provides another opportunity to improve on the user experience. New users might find problems with the product's functionality or features to improve that no one noticed before. So, after the launch stage, teams will often cycle back to the design and testing stages to start working on the next version of a digital product.

Beyond the product development life cycle

You now understand how products are developed and the role UX designers play in the life cycle. Everywhere you look, you'll find products of all kinds — big, small, physical, or digital — that have been through this very process. The more you see the intention and thought put into everyday objects, the closer you'll get to becoming a UX designer!

User experience careers

There’s a good chance that you enrolled in this certificate program hoping to find work as a UX designer in the near future. UX design is a rapidly changing field with a projected 10-year growth rate of 15% (Burning Glass, 2020). When you check out most job searching sites, you’ll find tens of thousands of job postings for UX-related roles. In fact, recruiters around the world are struggling to fill open positions for UX designers because the demand for people with these skills is outpacing the supply of available UX designers. That’s where you come in.

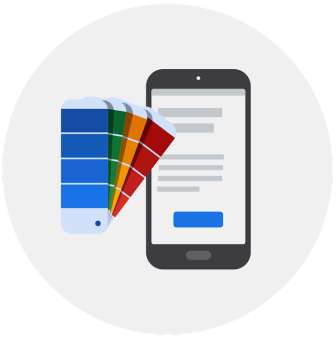
While it might be a little early to begin searching for jobs, it’s important context to know that “UX designer” is just one of many job titles within the broader user experience field. As you continue with this certificate program, you might become interested in a certain specialty or career path within the field. In addition, as an entry-level UX designer, you will likely work alongside other UX professionals with various areas of expertise. To help you get started, this reading will explore a handful of different careers within the field of user experience.

Interaction designer

Interaction designers focus on designing the experience of a product and how it functions. They strive to understand the user flow, or the path, that a typical user takes to complete a task on an app, website, or other platform. At Google and many other companies, interaction designers are a specialized type of UX designer.

An interaction designer's work answers questions like: What should happen if a user taps on this button? How do we make this action easier for users to complete? And,

how are the design elements within the website laid out? Interaction designers focus less on how the product looks and instead strive to make the product easy to navigate and simple for users to interact with.



Visual designer

Visual designers focus on how a product or technology looks. They are often responsible for designing logos, illustrations, and icons, as well as deciding on font color, size, and placement. Visual designers focus on the layout of each page or screen and make all of the design elements fit together in a visually appealing way. At Google and many other companies, visual designers are a specialized type of UX designer.

The role of a visual designer is to answer questions like: What kind of visual style should icons have, in order to fit the product's branding? Or, which color and font should we use for this button? The goal of a visual designer is to delight users with designs that inspire, engage, and excite them.

Motion designer

Motion designers think about what it feels like for a user to move through a product and how to create smooth transitions between pages on an app or website. They

may also create animations or visual effects to bring their design ideas to life. At Google and many other companies, motion designers are a specialized type of UX designer.

A motion designer’s work answers questions like: How should an app transition between pages? How do we show the connection between these actions? And, what’s an engaging animation that will help tell our story? Motion designers focus on design elements that move, rather than traditional static designs.

VR/AR designer

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) designers create products that provide users with immersive experiences, unbounded by the limits of the physical world. Virtual reality involves a wearable headset that takes over a user’s vision; it blocks out their physical surroundings and immerses them in a completely virtual world. For example, VR can feel like you're entering the setting of a magical imaginary land.

On the other hand, augmented reality uses the physical world as a backdrop and adds virtual elements on top of it. Users are still contextually aware of their surroundings, but their reality is augmented, or enhanced, by adding elements through a screen. For example, you can sit in your actual kitchen, and an AR experience can add digital images, like a new barstool or a piece of artwork, to the room around you.

A VR or AR designer’s work answers questions like: How do we create a user experience that leverages 3D space? Or, will this action cause a user motion sickness? To ensure users are comfortable immersing in a VR or AR experience, designers need to carefully consider everything from sound to lighting.

UX researcher

UX researchers conduct studies or interviews that examine how people use a product. UX researchers often identify pain points that users are experiencing and explore how products can help solve those problems. They also explore the usability of existing products, by asking users to complete tasks in an app or website, for example.

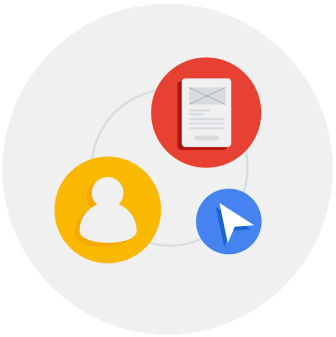
UX researchers answer questions like: What problems are users facing? Is the design of this product easy to use? And, would people be interested in this new design feature? The goal of UX researchers is often to understand how a product can provide a solution to a real problem users are having.

UX writer

UX writers think about how to make the language within a product clearer so that the user experience is more intuitive. UX writers also help define a brand's voice and personality. The work of UX writers often includes writing labels for buttons and determining the tone of language used within an app or website.

UX writers focus on answering questions like: What words should be used to communicate this idea clearly? Should the tone for this app be friendly or technical?

And, what should the language on this button label say? UX writers often become subject matter experts in order to present content that's easy to understand for all users.



UX program manager

UX program managers ensure clear and timely communication, so that the process of building a useful product moves smoothly from start to finish. This might include setting goals, writing project plans, and allocating team resources.

UX program managers answer questions like: What are the overall goals for this project, and what's the plan to achieve them? And, how can we create and improve processes within the team? UX program managers work across departments to make sure that UX is involved throughout a project lifecycle.

UX engineer

UX engineers translate the design's intent into a functioning experience, like an app or a website. They help UX teams figure out if designs are intuitive and technically feasible.

UX engineers answer questions like: How do we implement each interaction? How do we build this design in a way that stays true to its original intent? And, how might

we explore alternatives to determine the best user experience? UX engineers synthesize design and development, bringing product concepts to life.

Conversation designer

Conversational interfaces are everywhere, from intelligent virtual assistants like Google Assistant and Siri, to interactive voice response systems like customer service systems you can talk to. Conversational interfaces even include automobile navigation systems and chatbots! Conversation design incorporates natural, real-world conversational behaviors into the interactions between users and these systems.

Conversation designers make it possible for users to have natural conversations to get things done. They leverage user research, psychology, technical knowledge, and linguistics to create user experiences that are intuitive and engaging. Conversation designers develop the “persona” or personality of the voice, as well as the flow and dialog of the interaction.

Conversation designers answer questions like: What’s the ideal language and flow based on who users are, the task to be accomplished, and the context of the conversation? Does the personality of the virtual assistant seem genuine, engaging, and reflective of the brand values? How does the conversation work with on-screen elements? Does the virtual assistant offer a consistent, usable, and useful experience end-to-end?

Most common UX tools

Evolution of UX tools

The field of UX design and the tools used by designers have evolved over the last several years. Initially, UX designers commonly used Adobe Creative Suite tools, such as Photoshop. These tools were used mostly for print and static design. But, as technology and the demands for UX design evolved, so did the need for increased functionality of digital tools. Sketch was released in 2010 and was the first digital-forward design tool built specifically for UX designers. In addition, more tools like Freehand by Miro, released in 2011, and Zeplin, released in 2015, came along, offering prototype capabilities and opportunities for easier collaboration.

As organizations have continued to digitally transform and move towards dynamic work environments, UX tools have had to keep pace. The increase in remote workers, along with dynamic work environments, has presented a need for UX designers to find the right-sized toolset to fit their desired output.

Today, the demand for modern, digitally collaborative tools has not subsided. Figma and Adobe XD both took center stage in the UX design world when they were released in 2016. Today, Figma holds one of the biggest stakes in the collaborative design and prototyping market. It offers real-time collaboration, Dev Mode for engineers, and in-product prototyping features, in addition to many custom plug-ins for unique design needs. Adobe XD has since gone into maintenance mode, but it offered a robust solution for UX designers for many years. To learn more about Adobe XD's maintenance mode, you can refer to the Adobe XD troubleshooting guide. These features facilitate a collaborative element, for teams who are not working in face-to-face environments.

Going forward

Most of the modern UX tools used by UX designers have similar functionality, with some unique features and robust online learning libraries. You will likely use more

than one design tool throughout your career. However, in this certificate program, the focus will be on Figma. You'll learn how to use it, and you'll work on projects you'll be able to include in your UX design portfolio.

Considerations when choosing UX tools

Don't worry - you don't have to choose a UX tool today! But, at some point in the future, as you dive deeper into your UX design career, you'll want to choose UX tools that work best for you and the specific projects you're working on. As you gain a better understanding of UX design and the UX design tools, there are a few things you'll want to consider when selecting a UX tool:

Who you are as a designer

You may end up pursuing a job as a UX designer. Or, you may end up in a role that is a variation of UX design—for example, a visual designer or a motion designer. You learned about various UX design jobs in Jobs in the field of user experience. Understanding what UX tools work best for you will ultimately be informed by the role you take on and the corresponding responsibilities and job tasks.

The design context

Another consideration for choosing a UX tool will be the design context in which you work. In some cases, the organization may dictate the tool you use simply based on what it already uses. Or, you may have the flexibility to decide on the tool based on the type of project you are working on or the level of collaboration among team members you may need. These are just a few factors that may influence the type of UX tool you choose.

Capabilities of the tool

When you get to the point of choosing a UX tool, you'll also need to consider the capabilities of the tool. You'll learn more about these capabilities later in this certificate program. Going forward, you'll investigate the tool and ask questions such as:

- Does it allow for mobile-responsive design?
    - For example: You may create templates and layouts for various devices. Does the tool account for, and adapt to, different screen sizes?
- Does it allow for prototyping, testing, and reviewing?
    - For example: You'll eventually want to build a prototype, or sample, of a product. Does the tool allow you to build the prototype? Does it allow you to test how it works? And, can the tool allow other stakeholders or designers to review it and provide feedback directly into the tool?
- Does it allow for team collaboration?
    - For example: You will likely work on a team with several people. Can each team member work in the tool? Can revisions or suggestions be made by other team members?
- Does it allow for a centralized design system?
    - For example: You likely won't be the only designer on a project. With multiple team members and collaborators, consistency is key. Does the tool allow the team to view and/or copy styles and properties to ensure consistency across the project?

UX tools—an overview

In this certificate, you'll focus on Figma. Figma is one of the preeminent UX tools. There are other UX tools, mentioned previously, you can look at for comparison.

Sketch, Freehand, and Zeplin

- Work well with very large teams that may struggle to adopt new tools
- Paired most commonly with another of these tools
- Do not require WiFi, enabling offline design work
- Do not afford real-time collaboration, prototyping, or design to development collaborative activities

Figma

- Is excellent for most designers and contexts
- Includes FigJam access, a whiteboard for brainstorming, diagramming, and strategizing
- Requires WiFi connection
- Is a digital-first, remote-friendly, all-in-one tool, allowing for easier sharing, designing, collaboration, and reviewing in our ever-changing, more virtual workspace

Do your research

Check out each tool's website for additional information. As you educate yourself on each tool's features and benefits, you'll be able to choose the UX tool that is right for you. But remember: You'll be introduced to Figma and you'll learn how to use it throughout this certification course.

- Sketch
- Freehand
- Zeplin
- Figma

Stay current with the UX industry

The field of UX design is constantly evolving. To succeed in the field, you have to keep up with the latest tools, standards, and best practices. Thankfully, the UX design community is as supportive as it is innovative: There are tons of great resources out there to help you master the fundamentals, grow your skills, and stay current. Find the resources that work for you, and check them regularly to get support and learn about recent developments.

Thought leaders in UX design

Thought leaders use their expertise to define and improve their fields. In UX design, many thought-leading organizations offer free or subscription-based resources to help you grow your skills and create great designs.

Nielsen Norman Group: Founded by two early leaders in the field, the Nielsen Norman Group offers training, consulting, articles, reports, and other resources to help individuals and organizations grow and innovate in UX design.

UX Collective Blog: The UX Collective offers curated posts from UX designers around the world. You can browse their homepage for topics of interest, check out their editor's top picks, and subscribe to their newsletter for regular updates.

Interaction Design Foundation: Driven by peer-reviewed research and evidence-based design practices, this foundation offers open-access UX design resources, such as articles and textbooks, as well as fee-based courses and classes.

UX Planet: This resource offers guidance on everything from UX design fundamentals to advanced careers in the field. Check out their offerings on User Experience, UX for Beginners, UX Careers and Agencies, and more.

Growth.design: Looking for examples of great UX design at work? Want to know more about the psychology behind UX? Seeking inspiration for your own designs? Growth.design provides weekly case studies of real-world examples in fun, comic book formats.

Case Study Club: This community of UX and product designers shares design case studies to help you build your skills, grow your confidence, and prepare for new roles. It's made up of more than 28,000 members, including Google, Spotify, and Adobe.

Awwwards: Get more inspiration by exploring globally recognized UX designs. Awwwards showcases these designs in easy-to-explore experiences that highlight specific design elements, like font and color.

UXPodcast: This podcast and blog explores how digital media professionals balance business, technology, and society in their work. It aims to break down the organizational and disciplinary silos that separate UX designers and other digital media professionals.

Communities of UX designers

Plugging into UX design communities is one of the best ways to grow your craft while expanding your professional network. These organizations facilitate and host design-centric discussions, meet-ups, and other social experiences. Get connected!

Creative Mornings: This group hosts free virtual field trips and in-person meet-ups for creative professionals in cities around the world. Check out their website to explore upcoming events, watch talks from past meetings, and find a chapter near you.

AIGA: The Professional Association for Design, or AIGA, supports UX designers and other design professionals. In addition to hosting an annual conference, they offer resources on fundamentals, innovations, and professional development in the field.

ADPList: With a focus on designers' growth and professional development, ADPList is a mentorship service that matches aspiring designers with more experienced peers for feedback and advice.

Many UX design communities are developed by and for groups that are underrepresented in the field. These communities support designers and work to make the UX industry more inclusive for everyone:

- APIwho.design
- Blacks Who Design
- Ladies that UX
- Latinxs Who Design
- Techqueria (Latinx in Tech)
- Women Who Design
- Queer Design Club

Tool-hosted UX tutorials

Because most digital design tools are updated regularly, you'll find that online help tutorials can at times have out-of-date screenshots or instructions from older versions of the interface. Thankfully, the organizations that license these tools maintain robust libraries of up-to-date training resources. Here are some links into key parts of the training libraries for Figma, Sketch, Freehand, and Zeplin.

Figma

- Help Center
- Get Started - Guide
- Figma for Beginners Tutorial
- Figma YouTube Channel

Sketch, Freehand, and Zeplin

- Sketch Docs
- Sketch 101
- Freehand
- Zeplin Start Guide for Designers

Creator-made UX tutorials

When in doubt, ask the internet! Whether you're facing an unfamiliar new challenge or just looking for inspiration, there's a good chance that some other UX practitioner has tried something similar to what you are working on. So, use Google and YouTube (including YouTube Shorts) to search for creator-made tutorials about different design tasks and tools. TikTok has also become a very popular place to share tips on Figma. These tips and tutorials are often really detailed, with explanations of specific pitfalls, features, and challenges you may not anticipate.

Open-source design templates

In UX design, there's often no need to reinvent the wheel. Many design tools host libraries of open-source templates, which are licensed to be publicly available for download and for personal and commercial use. With these templates, you can experiment with unfamiliar designs and quickly spin up new designs for your own work. They make it easy to keep features you like and tweak those you don't. As you play with them, you'll start to apply your own style and preferences. Here are links to template libraries from some leading design tools:

- Figma Template Community
- Adobe XD UI Kits
- Sketch UI Kits
- Airtable Template Community
- Miro Template Community

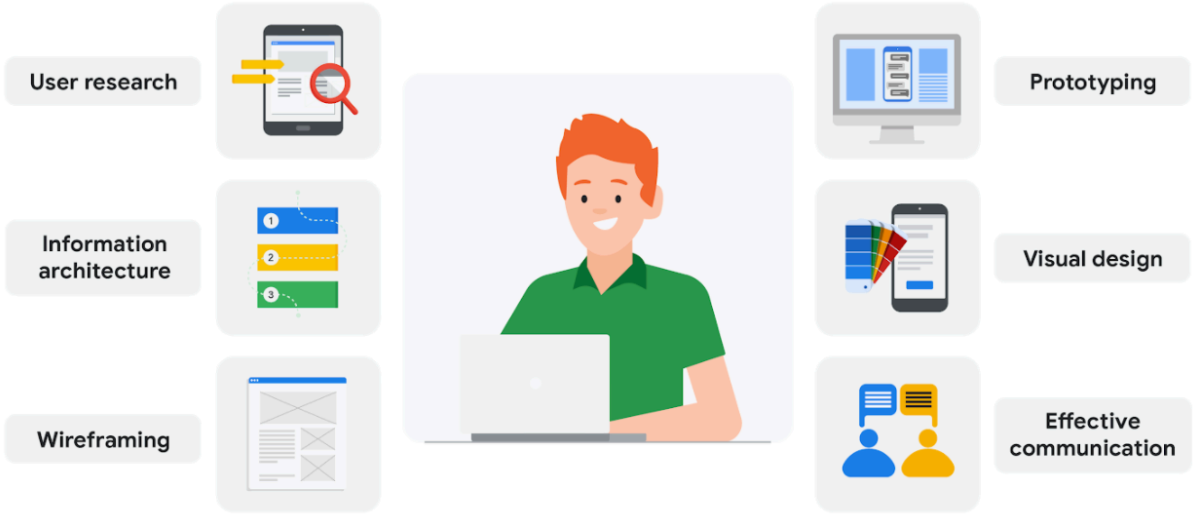
The role of a beginner UX designer

As you start out on your path to becoming a UX designer, you're probably curious about the actual work your new career might involve. In this reading, you can explore the different responsibilities that entry-level UX designers commonly take on during a project. You'll also review the differences between generalist, specialist, and T-shaped UX designers.

But first, a quick call out: You'll probably notice a lot of new vocabulary and unfamiliar terms in this reading. Don't worry! You'll learn about each of these concepts in more depth throughout the certificate program. We'll also provide a glossary of important terms and their definitions at the end of each module of content.

Responsibilities of an entry-level UX designer

As an entry-level UX designer, you'll have a lot of exciting opportunities to gain experience. When you first start out, you'll probably take on a lot of different roles and responsibilities.



Icons include user research (a tablet with magnifying glass over it)
Information architecture (a series of 3 colored, numbered bars)
Wireframing (a graphic of a wireframe)
Protoyping (a graphic of a desktop monitor with protoype of mobile device on screen)
Visual design (a mobile phone next to paint swatches)
Effective communication (a graphic of two people talking)

User research: User research is about understanding the people who use your product. Through research, you'll learn about users' backgrounds, demographics, motivations, pain points, emotions, and goals. Your research methods might include surveys, observations, and interviews. We'll explore user research in much more detail in an upcoming course.

Information architecture: Information architecture, or IA for short, involves deciding how your product is organized and structured. Think of IA as a skeleton that outlines how users interact with your product. Everything in your product should be organized in ways that make sense to the user and meets their expectations.

Wireframing: A wireframe is a basic outline or sketch of a product or a screen, like an app or website. As the name suggests, wireframes look like they were created with wires. They're mostly lines and shapes, with some text. Wireframes can be drawn by hand or created digitally using software. Wireframing helps you bring your design ideas to life, so other people on your team can provide input and feedback.

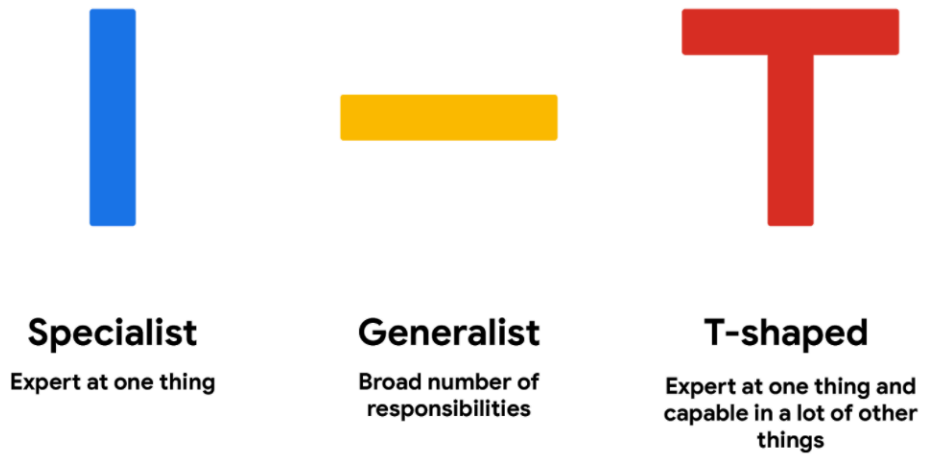
Prototyping: A prototype is an early model of a product that demonstrates its functionality. Prototypes can be in physical or digital formats and can vary in complexity. Sometimes a prototype is made to demonstrate one specific feature of a product, like the transition between screens or the way the product physically looks and feels. You'll make multiple prototypes for any given product throughout the design process.

Visual design: Visual design focuses on how the product or technology looks. As a UX designer, you need to understand the foundations of visual design in order to communicate the connection between a product's functionality and its appearance to users. You'll learn some of the most important principles of visual design throughout this certificate program.

Effective communication: Effective communication as a UX designer means connecting with your colleagues through emails, meetings, presentations, and design software. UX design is a very collaborative field, so being able to communicate both digitally and face-to-face with teammates is important. You need to be a good listener, be receptive to feedback, and share your ideas in a clear way.

Specialist and generalist designers

As you get further along in your career, you can choose to specialize in a certain area of UX design or keep your skill set more broad. What exactly are the differences between specialist and generalist UX designers? Read on to learn more!



Vertical line - representing a specialist, expert at one thing.

Horizontal line - representing a Generalist, broad number of responsibilities

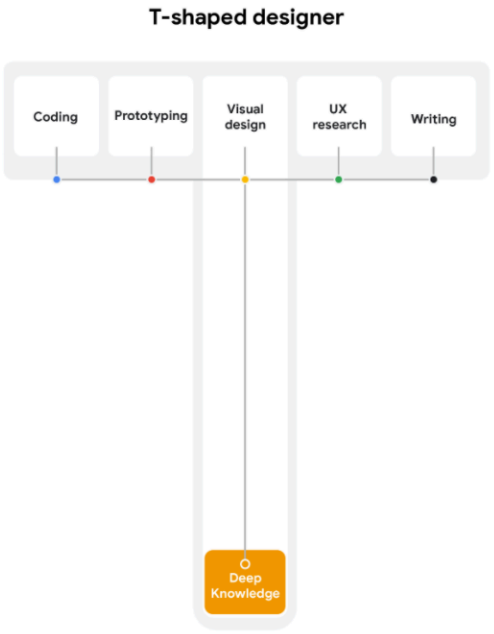
T-shaped - expert at one thing and capable in a lot of other things
Specialist: A specialist dives deep into one type of UX design, like interaction, visual, or motion design, and becomes an expert. Specialist UX designers are more common at large companies that have a lot of designers, like here at Google. Some of the benefits of becoming a specialist include:

- Focusing on one type of design that you enjoy more than others.
- Gaining deep knowledge of one type of design.
- Becoming well-known in the industry for your expertise in a particular type of design.

Generalist: A generalist has a broad number of responsibilities. A majority of UX design jobs are generalist positions, especially at companies with fewer UX designers. Typically, entry-level UX designers work in generalist roles, and some people choose to stay in generalist design roles for their entire careers. There are a lot of benefits to being a generalist UX designer, like:

- Expanding your skills in many different types of UX work.
- Trying a variety of responsibilities and finding an area of UX that you're especially passionate about.
- Keeping your job feeling fresh and new, while doing a variety of tasks.

T-shaped: A T-shaped designer is a specialist who also has a lot of capabilities in other areas. T-shaped designers get their name because the stem (or vertical line) of a T represents their expertise in one area, while the top (or horizontal line) symbolizes their related skills in a broad number of areas. T-shaped designers are great to have on your team, since they come with the benefits of both specialists and generalists. The image below highlights some of the skills a T-shaped UX designer might have. In this example, the person is a visual design specialist but also has knowledge in other areas, like coding and prototyping.



Each designer tends to naturally have a little T-shape in their abilities, even at the beginning of their career. As you start to work on projects, you'll probably notice where your strengths and interests lie. As you get better at one area of design, you'll likely find yourself working on that part of design projects more often, which helps you continue to improve in one area.

You can also decide to direct your T-shape by developing specific skills that will open up future job opportunities. For example, you might work extra hard on your prototyping skills, in addition to your general UX design skills, which can lead to new experiences and professional growth.

Your future as a UX designer

There are so many different paths you can take within the field of UX design. After you land your first entry-level job and start working in the field, you'll get a better idea of whether you want to be a UX design generalist or specialize in one specific type of design. There are plenty of benefits to being a generalist, specialist, or T-shaped designer, so it's all about finding what works best for you!

nteract with cross-functional teammates

UX design is a highly collaborative field, where designers typically work in cross-functional teams. Your future teammates might include engineers, UX researchers, program managers, product leads, fellow designers, and others. Working with a diverse group of people across functions helps you learn from their areas of expertise and explore other domains within the field of UX. In this reading, you'll learn about cross-functional team members you're likely to work with as a new UX designer.

Teams that UX designers work with

Cross-functional teams come in lots of shapes and sizes, depending on the organization you work for and the project you're working on. In general, though, there are a handful of key team members that you'll get to work with as a UX designer.

Engineer

Engineers: Engineers translate designs into a functioning experience, like an app or a website. They help UX teams figure out if designs are feasible from a technical standpoint and bring that idea to life. Working closely with engineers and involving them early in the design process is critical to ensure your project is set up for success.

UX Researcher

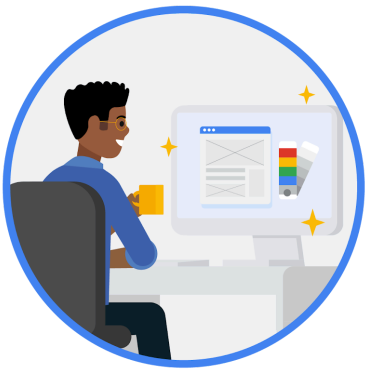
UX researchers: UX research is all about understanding what users need and expect from your product. UX researchers use methods like observations, interviews, and surveys to understand users' unique perspectives. Findings from research can inform your design decisions each step of the way. If you work at a startup or small business, there’s a good chance you’ll get to do your own UX research. At larger companies though, you’ll likely work with designated UX researchers who will provide research findings to inform your design work.

Program Manager

Program managers: Program managers ensure clear and timely communication across the team, so that the process of building a useful product moves smoothly from start to finish. Program managers supervise, support, and keep track of the project as a whole. They assign tasks to team members, monitor the project budget, and manage timelines, among other things. Think of your team's program manager as your go-to source of support when facing any setbacks or issues with your work.

Product Lead

Product leads: Product leads are in charge of ensuring the final product's success and communicating with stakeholders. Your product lead will define the project's core goals and deliverables, so you can focus on creating innovative design solutions. At some companies, product leads are known as product managers.



Other UX Designers

Other UX designers: In many cases, you won’t be the sole designer working on a given project, especially if you work at a larger company and when you're a new designer. For example, as an entry-level UX designer, you might collaborate with a more experienced visual designer who can ensure that your designs adhere to the company’s brand standards for things like color and font. Working with other designers is a great chance to learn and ask questions!

Working together

Creating a strong product requires working with a cross-functional team of brilliant minds, all contributing their unique skills. As a UX designer, you’ll play a vital role that contributes to the team’s success!