

The Wallet Exercise

The Wallet Exercise

Developed by Stanford University's d.school, it offers a dynamic way to introduce students to design thinking as a problem-solving process.

This group activity takes students through an entire design process cycle in a fast-paced manner (around 90 minutes). The activity is structured into a series of brief steps, with participants guided by worksheet packets.

Students work in pairs, share their wallets, brainstorm ideas, and create new solutions that are “useful and meaningful” for their partner. This exercise is particularly effective because each student’s wallet (or purse) holds personal significance.

Asking someone about their wallet often reveals fascinating insights. Moreover, the project typically results in tangible solution ideas that can be easily prototyped.

First find a friend, you will be working in pairs. Position yourself at a table – opposite each other.

TASK: Design the ideal wallet for your partner.

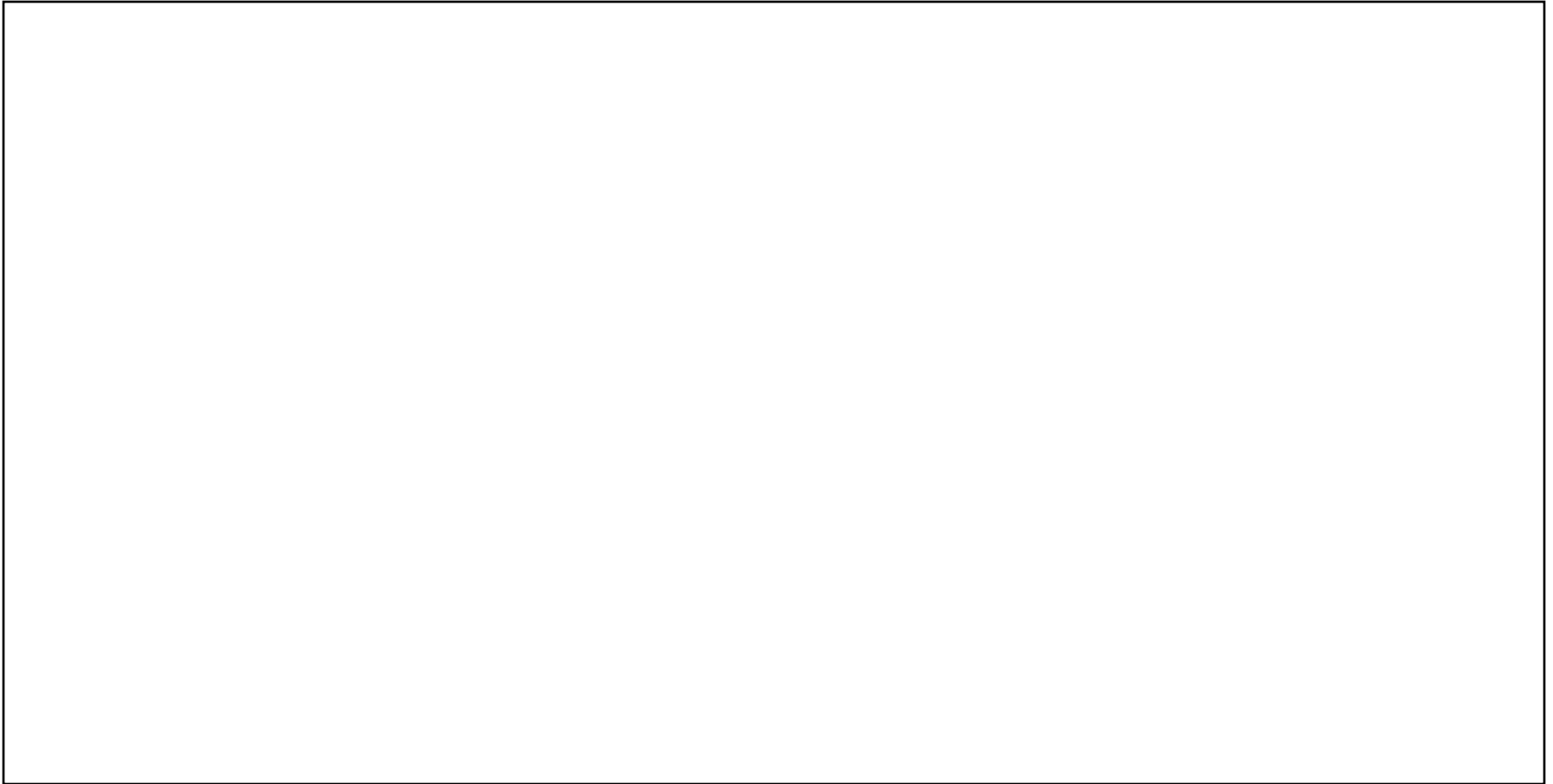
ACTION:

Now without any conversation or sharing of information / ideas, design a wallet for each other based on your own impression about each other – biases, judgement etc. will come into play.

Important - no conversation allowed!

Sketch Your Idea

5 minutes

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for sketching an idea. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the middle section.

ACTION:

Present your design(s) to your partner to see if you 'met' their requirements / expectations. Is it what they wished for, wanted or needed?

Remember ... you never engaged (empathy) with them or asked about their likes / dislikes, life, needs, wants etc. This is what we call a 'false start'. Jumping in without engaging with the user. I am sure your first prototype missed the mark a bit.

So where to from here?

Let us consider the design thinking process.

What is Design Thinking?

Let's think about (definition) design thinking in two parts.

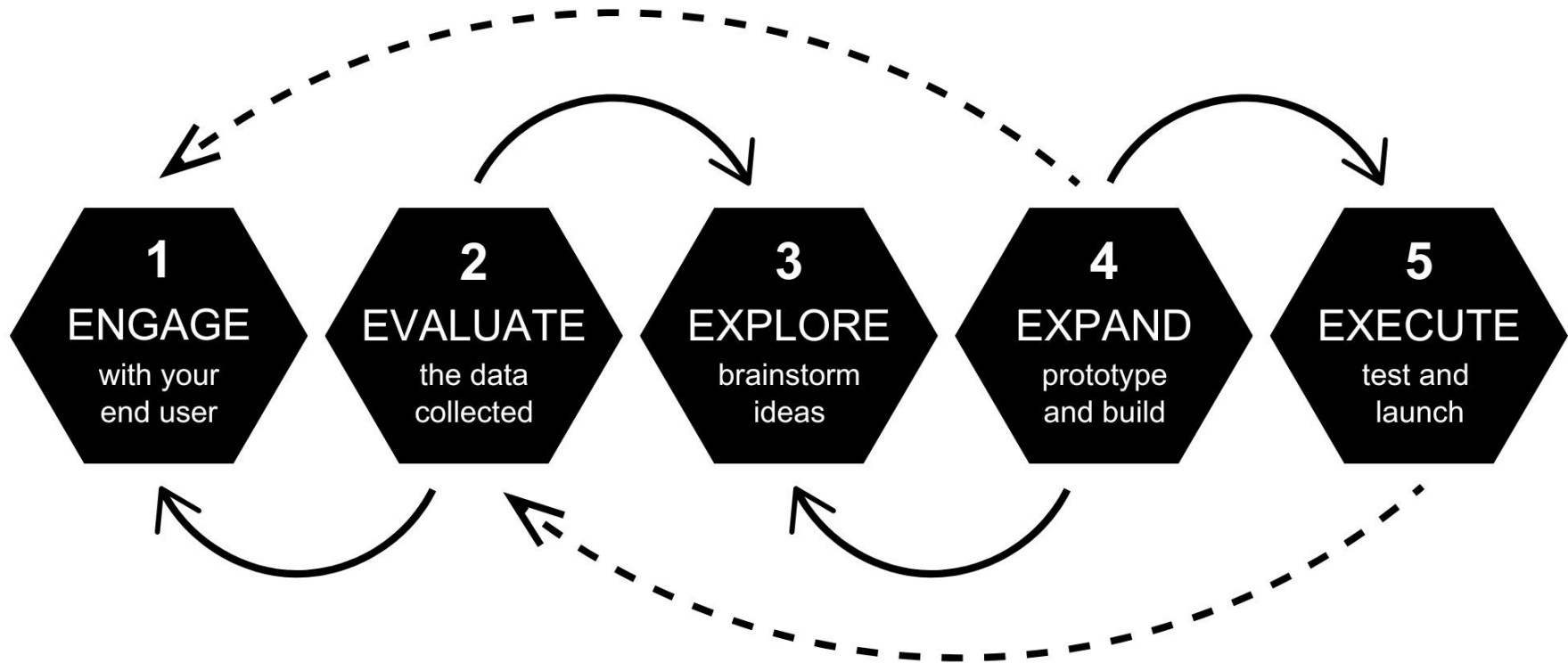
The **first part** is **mindset**. Design thinking is an ideology of approaching every problem in a human-centered way.

The complexity comes in the **second part** of the definition which is the part most people would know. The **five steps**. These steps are only there for you to be able to practice the ideology of human-centered design.

Let's look at the process.

5E Design Thinking Framework

A non-linear problem-solving process



STEP 1 - ENGAGE

Having reviewed the process let's now move on to design the 'perfect' wallet for each other, by following the 5 steps of the design thinking process. The first step requires us to **engage** with the user (empathy).

One way (method) of doing this is to interview your partner i.e. collect primary **qualitative** data to understand your partner's needs, preferences, and pain / gain points related to their wallet experience. Other methods are surveys, focus groups and contextual inquiry.

Interview

Switch roles and repeat interview

Notes from the first interview

10 min (2 sessions x 5 minutes each)

Dig Deeper

Switch roles and repeat interview

Dig Deeper (second interview)

6 min (2 sessions x 3 minutes each)

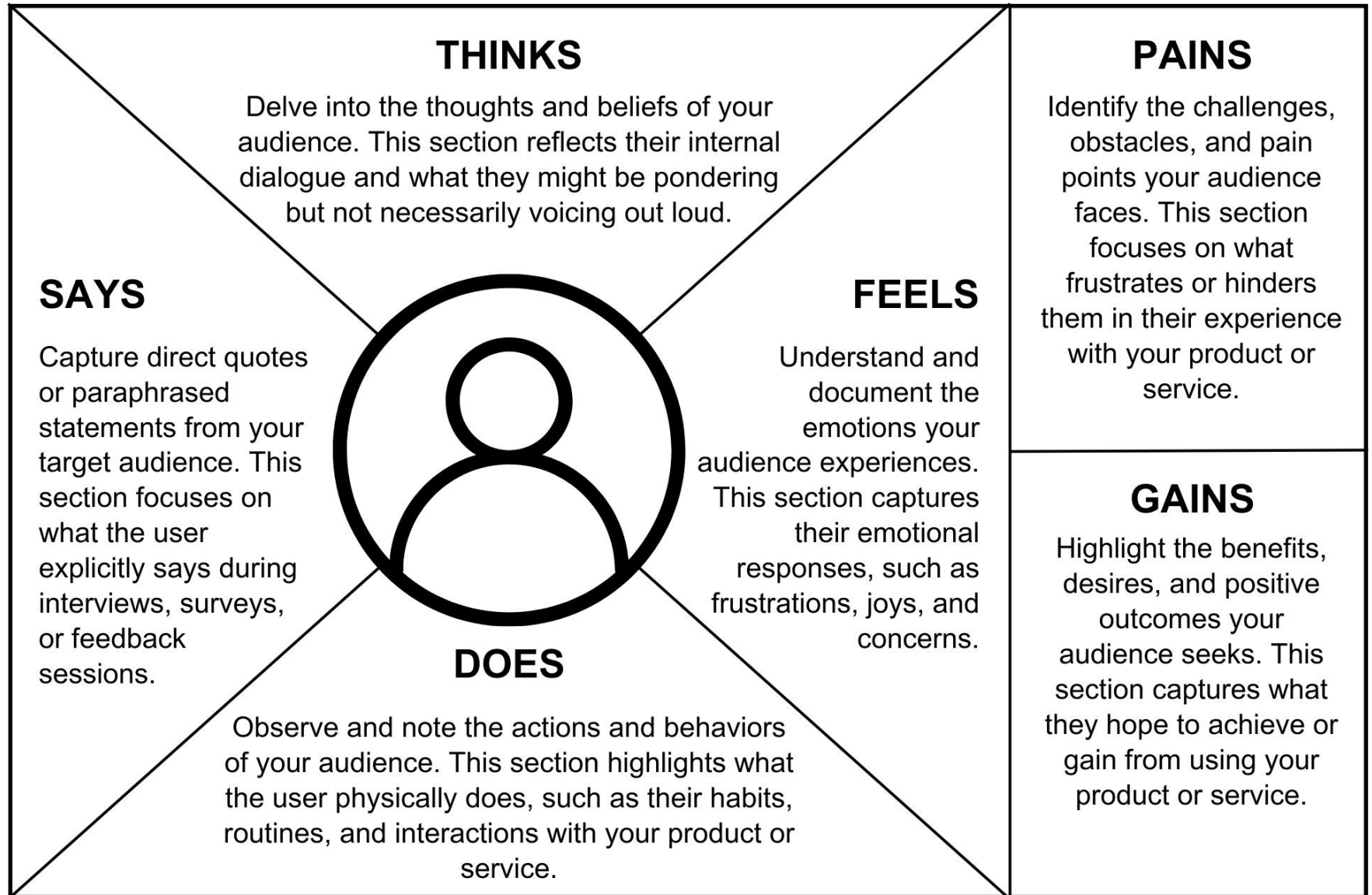
What have the interviews provided?

The interviews have allowed us to gain deeper insight (firsthand data) into our user. From this we can now construct what is called an empathy map.

This is a collaborative tool used to understand the users' emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. It visually represents what users say, think, feel, and do **in a given situation**, helping teams empathize with their needs and challenges.

This fosters deeper insights for designing user-centered solutions.

Empathy Map



Additional Tools

Although you are only developing an empathy map there are several other tools within the designer's (your) toolbox that can be applied to better understand your user needs and identify the real issue.

For example, persona, a user journey map, affinity diagrams and more.

STEP 2 - EVALUATE

We now move on to second step of the design thinking process – Evaluate (define). The purpose of this stage in the design thinking process is to synthesize (makes sense of) the insights gathered during the Engage (empathy) stage and define /reframe these into a clear problem statement.

Contextualising and having clarity around the core (real) problem will help focus your upcoming design efforts in the Explore stage (ideation). A well-defined problem statement guides your thinking, ensuring potential solutions align with the users' real needs.

Findings

5 minutes

Capture Findings

Goals and Wishes: What is your partner trying to achieve? Use verbs.

Insights

5 minutes

Insights: New learnings about your partner's feelings and motivations.

What's something you see about your partner's experience that maybe s/he does not, see?*

Before continuing ...

Note, the “How Might We” statement is a question-based prompt used in design thinking to reframe a problem and spark creative solutions. It requires a clear problem definition, user-centric focus, and an open-ended approach.

The statement fosters innovation by encouraging diverse possibilities without limiting solutions. The statement needs to have a user-centric focus, positive framing, be action-oriented, be broad enough for creative exploration of different ideas and specific enough to focus on a particular challenge or opportunity.

The Problem Statement

Commonly referred to as 'How might we ...'

How might we (intended **action** - verb) +
(**insight** / main issue or need to be fixed) for
(**primary user** identified) in order to or
so that (effect or **desired outcome**).

Consider the Point-of-View (POV). Identify the possible or probable impact. Think about the benefit or real gain you would like to see? What is the opportunity area? A problem statement is rewording of the core need you uncovered through your research. Needs to be actionable and drive your ideation process.

www.stephanhitchins.com.au

Reframe the Problem

Attempt #1	Attempt #2	Attempt #3
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

STEP 3 - EXPLORE

Having constructed the 'How might we' / problem statement in the previous step (Evaluate or Define) you now bring that into the **Explore** (ideation) phase.

It is only now that you are able to start considering potential solutions.

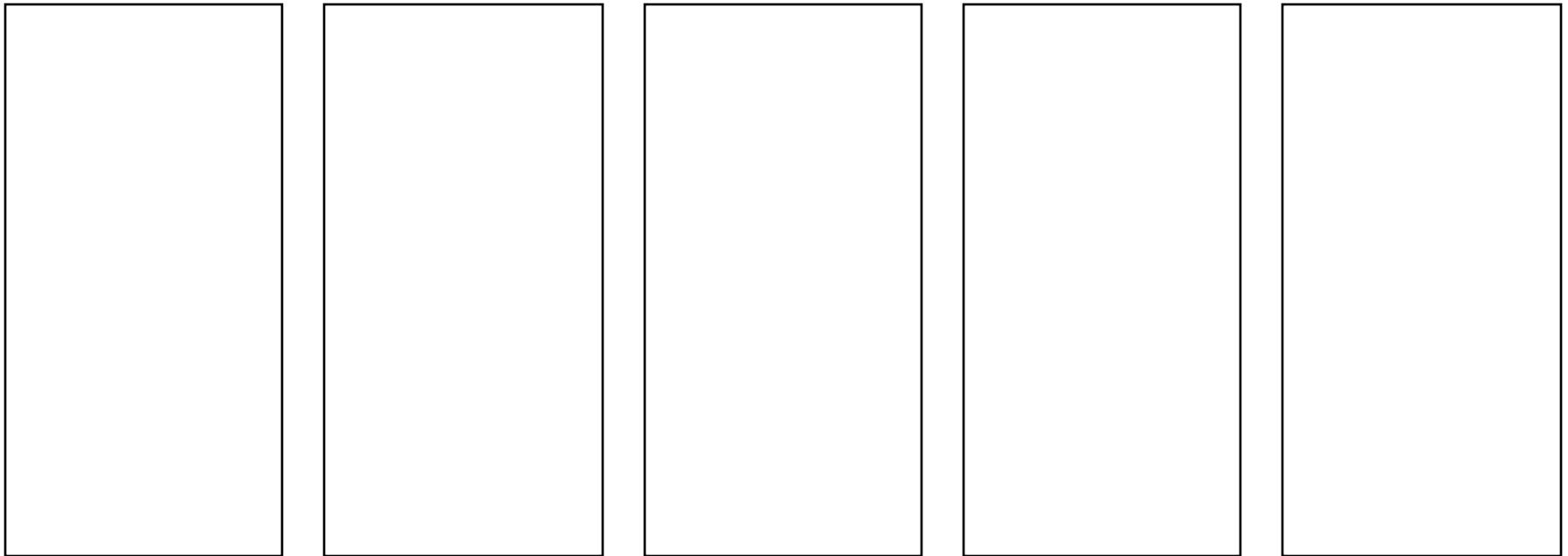
You apply a divergent mindset to develop ideas (think quantity) and then through convergent thinking narrow down the options (think quality).

Ideate Alternatives

5 minutes

Sketch at least five (5) ways (ideas) to meet your user's needs

Write your problem statement here: _____

The form consists of five empty rectangular boxes arranged horizontally, intended for sketching five different ideas to meet user needs. Each box is a simple black-outlined rectangle with no text or markings inside.

Share Your Solutions

Switch roles and repeat sharing

Capture Feedback

10 min (2 sessions x 5 minutes each)

Iterate based on Feedback

5 minutes

Sketch your BIG Idea!

STEP 4 – EXPAND

Create a physical **prototype** of your solution. You should not simply make a scale model of your idea but **create an experience** that your partner can engage with, react to and interact with.

If your solution is a service or a system, create a scenario that allows your partner to experience this innovation. Use whatever materials are available to you - including space!

Be scrappy and quick - you only have a few minutes! Fail Fast.
Fail Forward!

Build Your 3D Prototype and Test

Then share your solution and get feedback.

30 minutes - Build
10 minutes - Share

10 min (2 sessions x 5 minutes each)

What worked?	Improvements?	Further ideas	Questions	Other
--------------	---------------	---------------	-----------	-------

STEP 5 – EXECUTE

Now you're going to have the opportunity to **test** your prototype (share) with your partner. Validation of the prototype is not the point - it should be an artifact that enables or facilitates a new, targeted conversation.

When you test, LET GO of your prototype, both physically and emotionally. Your prototype is NOT PRECIOUS, but the feedback and new insights it draws out are! Don't defend your prototype; instead, watch how your partner uses and misuses it. Jot down things your partner liked and didn't like about the idea, as well as questions that emerged and new ideas that came up.

Notes

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
---	---

Debrief

What did you learn about design thinking, especially comparing the first and second prototypes?

Did you empathise with your user – asking the right questions and listening empathetically?

Questions?