

Discovery: Who is the user?
Analyze information

Persona

Create an imaginary person, with characteristics drawn from real users, who interacts with the new system in a design scenario

Introduction

User-centered design, not surprisingly, involves centering the design around a user. However, it is much easier for interaction designers to design for specific people than to design for general categories of users. If you consider how a specific person, in a realistic situations, would interact with your design, you will consider new design opportunities and more easily consider (and fix) potential breakdowns.

Personas are imaginary people who share key characteristics with your target audience and experience situations in which your design would benefit them. Personas should be as specific as possible – do not try to design a system that “works for everyone”. Perhaps counter-intuitively, keeping personas specific will help you generate significantly more ideas. Even better, if your design truly meets the needs of a small, targeted group of users, you will usually find that the design can easily be expanded to a much wider audience. For example, many designers create tools for the kitchen, for ‘normal’ cooks. The *Oxo Good Grips* brand was designed instead for elderly people with reduced mobility and weak hands. This constraint led them to design a series of very clever kitchen tools and utensils, such as a one-handed salad spinner and a an easy-to-turn pepper grinder, that were so elegant and easy to use that they are now available in exclusive kitchen stores such as Williams Sonoma, as well as large department stores.

What to do

The primary role of a persona or extreme character is to animate a scenario, either to represent what users currently do (use scenario) or how they would react to your new design (design scenario). It is helpful to have an idea of what kind of scenario you would like to create before you define specific personas, although the details of the scenario will be directly affected by the particular personas you choose.

Preparation (before)

Gather your notes and quotations from your interviews and observations of real users.

Procedure (during)

Decide how many personas you will need. (This varies, but usually a scenario will use one to three personas.)

Use a highlighter to indicate key user characteristics from the interviews and observations. Make a list of the personal characteristics of the people you interviewed or observed, including age, gender, current occupa-

Time	15-45 minutes
Difficulty	beginner
Participants	design team
Supplies:	– pen and paper – computer
Input to:	– use scenario – design scenario – storyboard – video prototype

Goals

- identify typical users who are the target audience for the new system
- identify extreme users who push the limits of your new system

Workflow

Minimum Requirements

Interviews or observations

Complementary technique

User profile

Useful for

User profile, use scenario, design scenario, storyboard, video prototype

Audience (who is it for?)

- Interaction design team
- stakeholders (clients, funders, management)
- real users (optional)

Participants (who does it?)

Interaction designer or team

Roles

Design team or individual activity

- **Moderator** Focus the discussion on identifying relevant user characteristics
- **Scribe** Record user characteristics
- **Everyone** Generate ideas for personas and extreme characters

Paths / step

Tutorial	1/6
Bootcamp	–
Introduction	2/8
Advanced	2/13
Small Project	1/7
Product	2/9

Credits (Contributors)

not applicable

Trade-offs

Pro Helps you imagine real users, so you can better understand how they would interact with the new system

Con Focuses on specific users and their characteristics, but does not provide an exhaustive list

tion. Consider how well these characteristics match the target audience for your new design: do you have a good cross-section or do you need to find additional people to interview?

Draw from the specifics of your interviews, observations and other user studies to clearly target your audience. You can always generalize later. It is best if you can visualize each persona: what does he or she look like? Does she have any interesting, relevant personality traits? Think about how this person interacts in a real-world situation and what kinds of breakdowns can occur. Be as specific as possible.

For example, *Marie is a 28-year old Masters student taking classes in interaction design in Paris. She is looking for a new apartment and needs to be sure that she can find one near public transportation. She has a dog and needs to find a roommate, since she cannot afford her own apartment. She tends to be a bit messy and is trying to quit smoking.*

Create a Design Resource (after)

Create a list of personas. Specify each person's name, age, gender, occupation, and anything that helps you and other members of the design team visualize them. Also, consider their current situation: what do they like to do, what do they need to do, as relevant to the design problem. Consider finding a photo or drawing to help you visualize your personas and extreme characters.

Redesign

As you create additional scenarios and explore design breakdowns and possibilities, you will need to reassess your personas. Do you need a new extreme character? What if your regular personas are placed in extreme situations – what happens? Do you have additional input from users, through interviews, observations or participatory design sessions, that suggest other user characteristics to explore?

Variation: Extreme Characters

You can create personas that represent typical members of your target audience; you can also create 'extreme characters' (Djajadiningrat & Gaver, 2000), who push the limits of the situation. For example, the Oxo company designs kitchen items for the handicapped. Relative to the rest of the industry, their designers worked with 'extreme users'; but the limits these users imposed on them forced them to create better designs which were then appreciated by a much wider audience.

Be careful when choosing extreme characters – it is tempting to choose people who are shockingly extreme, *but not necessarily extreme with respect to the design problem at hand*. Say, for example, that you are designing a mobile device to help users keep track of their medications. Normal personas might include a working mother with allergies, a teenage boy with the flu, and a retired truck driver who takes heart medication and vitamin pills. Relevant extreme characters might include a body builder or a cancer patient, who are extreme because they want or need to take an exceptionally large number of pills. In this case, a heroin addict could also be considered an extreme user. However, avoid choosing a heroin addict just because it sounds extreme: the character's extreme characteristic must be directly relevant to the problem at hand. If the design problem was to create an app that helped people to exercise regularly, the heroin addict would not be a good extreme character.

Coaching

- Identify key characteristics of the people you interview and use them to build personas
- Be as specific as possible: you should be able to visualize each persona
- Focus on user characteristics that are relevant to the design problem
- If the people you interviewed or observed do not match your target audience, try to find additional people who do match
- Limit the description of each persona to include realistic, but also relevant characteristics
- Extreme characters should share particular characteristic with regular personas, but pushed to its limit

Did you:

- Derive your personas' characteristics from your interviews and observations of real users?
- Give your personas names, ages, occupations, and personalities?
- Give your personas individual personalities and activities relevant to your design?
- Ensure that your personas are realistic with respect to your intended target audience?
- Reflect on why these personas in particular need or want your design?
- Include at least one extreme character?
- Ensure that the characteristics that

Commented [NT1]: Wendy, je trouve que les extreme characters ne sont pas assez bien présentés et expliqués, de plus on y fait référence un peu plus haut dans le texte, sans les avoir présentés. Je me dis qu'on devrait : soit en faire une autre méthode (autre chapitre) soit mieux les développer ici... Des circonstances ou des attributs de ces personnes les empêche de suivre le how to standard, vont-ils pouvoir s'en sortir ?

Download the spreadsheet template or pdf at:

<http://do.it/tpl/persona>

The advantage of designing for extreme users is that they add constraints and often force you to be more creative. Even if you end up rejecting the situations that involve extreme characters, considering how they behave and what they need may lead to more innovative solutions for the rest of your target audience.

Selected references / Bibliography

Pruit and Adlin (2006) *The Persona Lifecycle*, Morgan Kaufmann is an entire book about personas, from a business as well as a design perspective.

J.P. Djajadiningrat, W.W. Gaver and J.W. Frens (2000) *Interaction Relabelling and Extreme Characters: Methods for Exploring Aesthetic Interactions*, In *Proceedings of ACM DIS'2000, Designing Interactive Systems*, Brooklyn, N.Y.