

1

What would you like to have with you at the end of this session?

This asks the person presenting to clarify what they want out of the session and directs everyone to work towards that outcome.

WHEN: This is a process question that can be used at any time in a project. It works well at the start of a session, during a session to keep it on track, and at the end to check that the person presenting got what they needed.

Opener / Process

118

2

What is the design supposed to accomplish?

What are the key user needs the design is intended to satisfy, and how will it serve the goals of the business?

WHEN: This is a great opening question early in a project or the first time you encounter a piece of design.

Opener / Value

119

3

How does the solution provide value for users?

The value provided by a product or service can be the new things that the design makes possible, or the way in which the product or service changes how something is done, for example making an activity simpler, faster, more convenient or fun.

WHEN: This is a to-the-point opening question suitable early in a project, or the first time that you encounter a piece of design. It can also be asked if the value proposition of the product needs to be made more explicit.

Opener / Value / Perspective shift

119

4

What is the most important use case? And the second? Third?

People use products and services to do things. The most important things need to be designed exceptionally well.

WHEN: The question is appropriate at the start of a project or the first time that you encounter a piece of design. It can be used as a focusing device at the start of a conversation, or when a conversation is meandering or stuck on a minor issue.

Opener / Best practice / Process

120

5

What is the most important thing in this screen?

What is most important at this point, in this particular part of the design (e.g. in this screen)? Why is that the most important thing here?

WHEN: The question is directed at whatever we happen to have in front of us and helps us understand what we are looking at as well as what is driving the design choices being made. The question can be used in any phase of a project.

Opener

121

6

What part of your design are you most satisfied with?

This question asks a designer to reflect on the work they have done. Satisfaction often stems from a hard problem that has been solved or involves things that are elegant, clever and impactful.

WHEN: The question is a good way of opening a discussion, of changing perspectives, or of summarising and ending a session. It also makes sense to ask this midway through a project, when there has been time to accomplish something, but there is still time left to iterate.

Opener / Perspective shift / Value

122

7

Which parts of the design are you most uncertain about and why?

The person presenting is the person who knows the design best, so ask them where they are having issues.

WHEN: This question can be asked at the start of any session of design feedback, or to get a meandering conversation back on track.

Opener / Process / Perspective shift

123

8

What is most interesting here?

This is an open question that invites a conversation about things that may be challenging, unusual or curious.

WHEN: The question is informal in tone and good when the discussion is casual and unhurried. It can be used in any phase of a project to open up a conversation or to delve deeper into the wider context of a piece of design.

Opener

124

9

Are we doing the right thing right now?

This is a process question that you can ask if you feel uncertain whether time is being well spent. Perhaps the conversation is straying, or lingering too long on some minor point or on some issue that has already been resolved.

WHEN: Can be used in any stage of the design process and at any point in a session.

Process

124

10

Compared to how things are today, what will be significantly easier, simpler or more enjoyable using this design?

A product or service must offer some kind of value to its intended users. This question forces us to clarify what that value is supposed to be, and directs us to explore how well the design is succeeding in delivering it.

WHEN: Good to ask at the beginning of a project or when giving feedback on design you are unfamiliar with.

Value

125

11

What other activities or services is the design competing with? If the users don't use this design, what do they do instead?

By understanding what other options your users have to satisfy their needs, you can contrast and compare with what you are planning to offer them. How is the proposed solution better, easier, more fun, efficient or convenient?

WHEN: This question is especially appropriate in the early discovery phase of a project.

Value / User experience / Perspective shift

126

12

What do we want users to do?

This question prompts an examination of what users are motivated to do, and how well that motivation lines up with what the product or service asks of them. Where is the product in step with users' motivation, and where is it in opposition? What might be done to bring motivations better in line?

WHEN: A good time to ask this is in the early defining phases of a project as a way to align user and business goals.

Value

127

13

What would be a showstopper for your users? How could this be prevented from happening?

What feature, or lack of feature, would prevent users from considering your product? What is something that, if it happened, would lead users to immediately abandon your product? What adjustments can we make to prevent these negative reactions and occurrences?

WHEN: These questions can profitably be asked at the beginning, middle and end of any design project.

Value / User experience / Perspective shift

128

14

What do we need users to remember the next time they use this design?

There may be things that users need to learn and remember in order to effectively and comfortably use a product or service. What in the design promotes the formation of these memories? The question is especially relevant for complex services where users may have much to remember.

WHEN: This question is appropriate when fundamental structure and interactions are in place, as well as at the end of a project.

Usability

129

15

Does the design provide users with a useful conceptual model?

Is there an underlying logic (such as a metaphor or navigational paradigm) that, once understood, helps make sense of the product or service as a whole? If so, how is it being communicated in the design?

WHEN: The question can be asked as soon as there is a conceptual design in place.

Usability

130

16

What in the design helps users learn how to use it?

What do users need to know or understand to use this product? What can you expect them to know already? What will some of them need to learn, and how will the design support that learning?

WHEN: Appropriate in later phases of a project when a product or service has a more definite form.

Usability

131

17

Which terms and concepts in the design might be unfamiliar to users?

Using words, phrases and concepts that are familiar to the intended audience will make a piece of design easier to understand and use.

WHEN: This is good to bear in mind throughout and worth extra attention near the end of a project.

Usability

132

18

Does the user know what to do? When they have done something, do they understand what happened?

Does the design provide sufficient clues for users to figure out what things they can do and how to do those things? Is there then sufficient feedback so that users can understand the results of their actions?

WHEN: Stepping through an interactive piece of design and asking these two questions is a very effective way of inspecting the usability of a piece of design and catching usability problems early on.

Usability

133

19

Does the design deviate from established design patterns? Is there a compelling reason for it to do so?

It is generally best to stick to common design patterns that users are already familiar with. There should be very compelling reasons for eschewing their use.

WHEN: This can be asked in any design phase, but is appropriate a bit later when a product or service has begun to find its form. The question may be also prompted when encountering unexpected or unorthodox design choices.

Usability / Best practice

134

20

What happens when things go wrong? What could prevent this from happening?

Walk through the design and imagine things that could be misunderstood or could accidentally go wrong. Consider ways of steering users away from these hazards, and how you might help them recover when they trip up.

WHEN: This is good to ask when the bulk of the design is in place. It is also suitable when you spot potentially detrimental consequences of an available action.

Usability / User experience

135

21

If we had to remove something, what could we remove? If we had to remove something more, what would that be? Keep going.

Simplicity in design has many advantages. This question is a reminder to check whether complexity can be reduced. Don't just talk about it; try taking things away to see what happens.

WHEN: The question can be asked throughout a project as complexity has a tendency to accrue over time. Most products can do with the occasional trim.

Usability

137

22

What things stand in the way of the most important use cases?

Are there things that are obstructing the ease of executing the core use cases? If so, can these things be solved in another way, moved or removed?

WHEN: The question is suitable in the later stages of a project, when things may have inadvertently accrued that stand in the way of the main use cases.

Usability / Perspective shift

139

23

What could be solved using visual design instead of interaction, and vice versa?

Is there interactive complexity that can be simplified through visual design (e.g. displaying more actions but in a visual hierarchy), or is there visual design that can be simplified by shifting to a more interactive solution (e.g. adding interactive steps)?

WHEN: This question can be asked as soon as the design has found its rough form. It may pay extra dividends when the design has been worked on sequentially by a UX

xxxx

140

24

How does the design capitalise on our different senses? How could visuals, sounds and haptics be combined for maximum effect?

These questions remind us to make use of the full set of human senses, both for the purpose of communication, as well as for shaping and enriching the experience of a product or service.

WHEN: This question might be asked midway through a project, when a lot of design is in place, to explore how that design could be enhanced and refined by stimulating more of our senses.

Usability / User experience.

141

25

How do animations and transitions contribute to users' understanding and experience of the design?

This question reminds us to check that animations and transitions are being fully exploited to indicate states and modes, communicate available actions, and provide users with adequate feedback.

WHEN: Ask this question as soon as there are animations and transitions, or even just before any are in place.

Usability / User experience

142

26

In what ways does the design take users with a broad range of sensory, motor and cognitive abilities into consideration?

An accessible design improves the usability of products and services for all users. An examination is likely to touch on things like colour use, contrast, text sizes, support for screen readers, captioning, sizing of touch areas, as well as customisation options.

WHEN: Accessibility should be embedded throughout the entire design process.

Usability

143

27

In what ways has the context where the design will be used been taken into consideration?

Where will the design be used? What are the physical conditions of those contexts (e.g. lighting and ambient noise)? What are the social conventions (e.g. being silent in a library)? What is the person doing beyond using the product or service (e.g. running)? How much attention and cognitive capacity do they have available for the tasks you have designed?

WHEN: A realistic sense of the context of use is appropriate at the start of any design feedback session.

Usability / User experience / Process

144

28

What expectations does the design give rise to?

What expectations do users bring to the product or service? What further expectations does the design give rise to? How might positive expectations be surpassed, and negative ones prevented from arising?

WHEN: Asking about users' initial expectations is suitable at the start of a project. Exploring how expectations can be shaped by the design is appropriate midway.

User experience

145

29

In what way should the design be perceived?

What impression do we wish the design to make? Should it be perceived as simple, fast, flexible, secure, powerful, polished, fun, wild or something else entirely?

WHEN: Ask the question at the start of a project to enquire about the direction of the product's user experience. Ask at a later stage to explore how well the design is achieving that direction. Needless to say, the end users of the product or service will be the final judges of its user experience.

User experience

146

30

What would we like people to feel when using this product or service?

Do we want our users to feel calm, safe, challenged, on their toes, competent, expressive, in a state of flow, in control, competitive, smart, flirty, creative or something else entirely? What aspects of the design contribute to arousing that feeling or stand in the way of it?

WHEN: Ask early to check for direction, ask it late to guide the final stretch.

User experience

147

31

What in the design might bore or tire the intended users?

Identify things that are needlessly repetitive, convoluted or burdensome. Can these things be eliminated, simplified, or shifted to a more opportune time for users to do them?

WHEN: The question presents an opportunity to refine and streamline a piece of design by focusing on user engagement. Appropriate in later phases of a design project when a product or service has begun to find its form.

User experience

148

32

What in this design needs to stand out more?

Are there parts of the design that could call more attention to themselves? Are there parts that should instead recede into the background?

WHEN: The question is suitable in the later stages of a project, as you are refining and fine-tuning a piece of design.

User experience

149

33

Could the design be made stronger if you disregarded some groups of users?

Is the design a little too bland and generic? Sometimes this can be the result of trying to accommodate too many types of users and sensibilities. Are there user groups that you could disregard which would enable you to make bolder design choices?

WHEN: Ask the question early in a project to clarify the intended target groups. Ask it later to look for opportunities to refine and refocus the design.

User experience

150

34

How do we want people to remember their experience of this design?

How do we want people to remember what it was like to use this product or service? What is the general impression we wish to leave them with? What in the design encourages people to recall the design in this way?

WHEN: This question is a great one at the start of a project to help set the desired direction and goals for the design. It is a question that you may want to return to throughout a project.

User experience

152

35

What reasons do users have for returning to the product or service? How often do we imagine they will use it? What is the probable length and shape of each interaction?

How does the product or service fit into the lives of its intended users? When will they use it, why, and for how long? Plot how a product or service figures in a typical day or week, to calibrate how the design matches their needs and engagement.

WHEN: You should have a realistic idea of the levels of user engagement early in a project. Recalibrate when you have data.

Value / Perspective shift

153

36

How does this work the first time it is used? After a week? Three months in?

How do users' needs, understandings and habits change over time? How does the product or service provide for these shifting and evolving demands?

WHEN: There is a tendency to get bogged down designing for first-time use, or fixating on the idealised case where users are committed devotees. This question reminds us to explore the temporal and systemic aspects of a product or service.

Perspective shift

154

37

How does the design scale?

We are designing at a particular moment in time. How might the product evolve to meet changes (such as increased numbers of users, new user groups, increased engagement, new markets, new devices and platforms)?

WHEN: Products and services are subject to different rates of change. If you are working in quickly evolving circumstances, it may be appropriate to ask this question early. For products and services that shift in a more languorous manner, the question can come a little later.

Perspective shift

155

38

If another designer took over your design right now, what do you think they would change?

This question invites a designer to distance themselves from their work. It often brings forth things that the designer instinctively knows need further attention, but which they have not yet acted on.

WHEN: Appropriate in any phase. Opening with this question is a good way of eliciting more information from a designer and is useful for framing the ensuing discussion. Good at the start of a slow session, and as a way to shift focus at the end of a session.

Opener / Perspective shift

156

39

How might a leading practitioner in our field solve this?

The leaders in our field tend to be driven by clear and consistent design principles. Imagining what they would do allows us to see our work, and the choices we have made, in a new light.

WHEN: The question can be used at any time to get a new perspective on a piece of design, especially if that design seems overly complicated or unfocused.

Perspective shift

158

40

What would you do differently if you could start again from scratch?

The question invites a designer or team to momentarily bracket the current design solution, as well as the demands of the project, to point out things that could be improved. A reboot may not be possible or desirable, but the insights gained from considering alternative paths can still inform the current design.

WHEN: The question can, in principle, be asked after the completion of any design task or phase.

Perspective shift

159

41

If there were no limitations, what would you do?

All design is the result of balancing different considerations. This question asks about the trade-offs that have been made and what might be possible if circumstances were different.

WHEN: This can be appropriate to ask midway through a design project. It can bring design goals, constraints and stakeholder interests to the fore. It is a good way of deepening a discussion and a way for a designer to share insights and design choices.

Perspective shift

160

42

What is your client or boss worried about?

Are there stakeholder concerns and anxieties that could be appeased by moderate replanning of the design work? Quickly addressing justified needs and concerns builds trust and lowers stress all around.

WHEN: The question is appropriate to ask any time that design work is being planned, or when there is friction between stakeholder needs and designer priorities.

Perspective shift

161

43

What other alternatives have you explored and rejected?

It is easier to understand a design problem, and to give feedback, when we can contrast and compare different solutions to that problem. This question simply asks whether there are other versions to look at.

WHEN: The question is suitable to ask when the design problem is a tricky or complex one, and many trade-offs have been made. It's also a way of rescuing good ideas that may have been prematurely rejected or abandoned.

Process / Perspective shift

162

44

How have others solved this problem?

It is easier to evaluate a piece of design when there are different solutions to compare and contrast. What the competition is doing can offer a possible point of comparison.

WHEN: This question can be asked when a group needs a deeper understanding of possible design options.

Process / Perspective shift

163

45

What unrelated service or phenomenon solves an analogous problem or satisfies a similar user need?

Find inspiration by looking at unrelated products, services and situations that satisfy the same or similar needs. For example, the way that expert bartenders work could be a source of inspiration for how to organise a surgeon's tools.

WHEN: The question can be asked when a project is in need of fresh inspiration. This can be a demanding conversation to have, check with the group if it is one they want to have.

Perspective shift

164

46

**What is working well in the design?
How could it be made even better?
Where else in the design could it
be applied?**

These questions are about finding the hidden value in a piece of design. The questions encourage you to uncover value that is already in place, and to maximise the impact of that potential value.

WHEN: Appropriate about midway through a project, when there is enough design in place. It can also be asked when there is a nagging sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of a product or service.

Perspective shift / Value

166

47

**Who might the design be excluding
or discriminating against – for
example on the basis of gender,
ethnicity or culture?**

Do you have a rich picture of the different types of people who will be using your product or service? Inspect the design from the point of view of each. Are everyone's needs and preferences being satisfied in a fulfilling and respectful manner?

WHEN: Consider this question at the start, middle and end of all projects. Talking and imagining is better than nothing, but not as good as working with a diverse team.

Usability / User experience / Value

167

48

**Where might this design fail
a woman?**

Roughly half the people who will use your design are women. Inspect the design for what it assumes about bodies, time, safety and trust. Note where those assumptions hold and where they don't.

WHEN: Ask this as soon as there is design to look at, and again near the end, when the small defaults have accumulated. Ask it too late and the only answers still available are retrofits. Whenever you ask it, notice who is in the room to answer.

Usability / User experience / Value

169

49

**How might this design be
intentionally abused?**

Pose this question to explore ways in which the design could cause harm through wilful misuse.

WHEN: Ask this question if you suspect that a product or service might be vulnerable, or if the consequences of abuse are likely to be great. It is worth asking about any product near the end of a project.

Best practice / Value

171

50

**What in the design might be pushing
users to do things against
their best interest?**

This question proposes that the design be scrutinised to ensure it is not unintentionally, or intentionally, influencing people to do things that they don't want to do.

WHEN: Ask this early to ensure that a project is pursuing positive and ethical goals. Ask again mid project and near the end.

Best practice / Value

171

51

**In what ways does this design
positively impact users, society
or the environment?**

If the design has the potential to make a positive impact, how could that impact be increased? If there is no clear benefit to the wellbeing of people, society or the planet, are there ways in which the product or service could be pushed in this direction?

WHEN: This question is suitable to pose at the start of a project.

Value / Perspective shift

172

52

**What are your personal goals
and wishes for the design? What effect
do you want to have on the world
and your users?**

These are unusual questions. Our personal goals are only rarely relevant (and often deemed impermissible) to the designs we create. We focus on user goals and business goals. This ignores the fact that most of us want to have a positive impact through our work.

WHEN: An unusual but important question. Dare to ask this at the beginning, middle and end of a design project.

Perspective shift

173