

JOUR 500 The Contemporary Magazine

Needfinding Tools

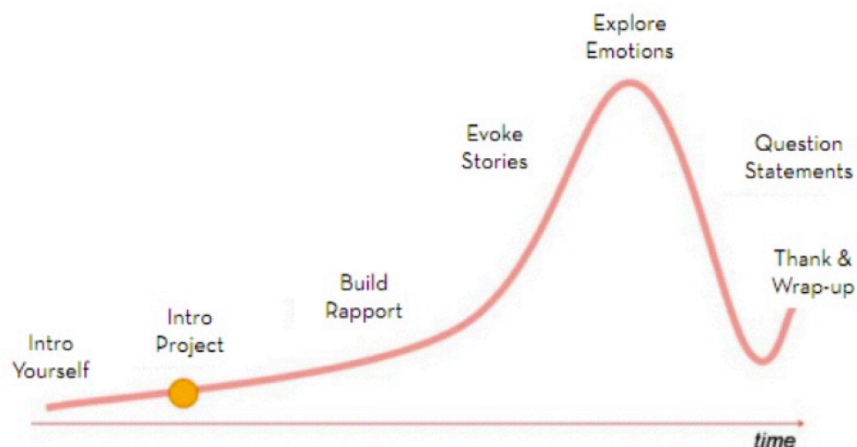
“Needfinding is the art of talking to people and discovering their needs—both those they might explicitly state, and those hidden beneath the surface. It is only in truly understanding people that we can gain meaningful insights to inspire and inform a final, impactful design.”

--Rizwan Javaid, User Experience Designer at Closed Loop

There are two basic kinds of needfinding tools: observations and interviews. Understanding the anatomy of a good needfinding tool will help you use the tools to their full potential and even invent some of your own. At the highest level, good needfinding tools need:

- ✓ Good subjects (interesting, open, expert, unusual, observant, etc.)
- ✓ Good environments (comfortable, friendly, “safe”, etc.)
- ✓ Structure and flexibility (have a plan and goals, but pursue new opportunities)
- ✓ Great stories (capture images, quotes, etc. that bring your interview to life)
- ✓ Iterative designs (iterate interview structure or observation techniques based on results)
- ✓ Ways to avoid Hawthorne effect (distortion of behavior due to observation)
- ✓ Room for silence – if you listen, they will speak
- ✓ Respect for your subjects
- ✓ Interviews
- ✓ Visually, the interview process might look like this:

Frame of the interview



Source: Michael Barry

INTERVIEWS

Here are some examples of questions for each stage of an interview:

Introduction

“Hi, I’m a San Francisco State University student developing a launch plan for a new magazine. I’m interested in hearing about your experience with magazines. There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear what you have to say.”

Kick-off

“What’s your favorite magazine?”

Build rapport

“Can you describe the most memorable experience you’ve had reading a magazine? Where were you reading the magazine? What was the story? Where did you read it? How did you feel about it?”

Grand tour

“How often do you read magazines now? What do you look for in a magazine? Which magazines have you read over the years? How important are magazines in your life? What do you look for in a magazine?”

Reflection:

“If you were designing the ultimate magazine based on your ideal magazine reading experience, what would it be like? What features would it have? What would make you more likely to read the magazine?”

OBSERVATION

What: Viewing users and their behavior in context

When: You want to see users in their element and learn about their experience

How: There are several methods

- ✓ “Deep hanging out” – spend time in the vicinity of the subjects (example: ask to observe someone reading a magazine in print, on a computer, on a tablet, on a phone, etc.)
- ✓ Walk in the subject’s shoes: assume the role of the subject (read a magazine yourself in a print publication or online, on a tablet, on a phone, etc.)
- ✓ Paparazzi – observe and photograph anonymously (example: watch people reading magazines in a library or public place or reading a magazine on a bus, in a café, etc.)

The most important thing about needfinding in design thinking is that we look without presupposing what we are looking for. We trust that our ability to define the problem will emerge during the needfinding process.

OTHER NEEDFINDING TOOLS

Lead user interviews

What: Interviews with fanatics (the most rabid consumers of an experience)

When: You would like to see the future of usage, or understand an experience from the perspective of its most critical subject.

How: Beyond traditional interview structure, you should

- ✓ Look for the most extreme users (magazine junkies, journalism and political science students)
- ✓ Make contact, and state your interest in them and their views
- ✓ Ask questions that are more open ended and blunt: “How do you see magazine readership changing?” “What do you think we need to know?”
- ✓ Engage them in an ongoing way – lead users make great testers for your prototypes!

Expert interviews

What: Interviews with subjects who have domain expertise – magazine vendors, journalism professors

When: You need to come up to speed on the context of magazines quickly

How: Beyond traditional interview structure, you should:

- ✓ Ask open-ended questions that allow them to educate you. “When do people buy the most magazines? How do major news events drive magazine sales?”
- ✓ Try to understand their role in the user’s experience. “If I come into your store to buy a magazine, what happens? Do you generally talk to customers about the magazines they buy?”
- ✓ Gather ideas for needs that experts may uniquely see. e.g. “What bothers you most about selling magazines? What do magazine consumers complain about?”

Surveys

What: A series of carefully structured questions that can be administered individually

When: You would like to get many perspectives rapidly or quantify/test insights

How: Steps

- ✓ Identify screener for subjects
- ✓ Develop and sequence questions
- ✓ Include explanation of survey in instructions
- ✓ Provide progress updates throughout survey
- ✓ Ask at least one open-ended question
- ✓ Test the survey before releasing it
- ✓ SurveyMonkey.com and other tools are very useful

Focus Group

What: A carefully structured group discussion

When: You would like to get many perspectives and have people share ideas, thoughts and feelings

How: Steps

- ✓ Invite participants to the focus group
- ✓ Develop and sequence questions
- ✓ Discuss the goal of your focus group: “We’d like to understand what you want from a magazine.” “We’d like to understand your experience of reading this magazine.”
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions
- ✓ Encourage discussion among participants

History interview

What: An interview intended to understand a sequence of events

When: You would like to understand the historical context, or where subject’s behavior, feelings, or thoughts came from

How: After traditional early interview elements

- ✓ Establish subject – “What is your favorite magazine?”
- ✓ Signal interest – “How long has it been your favorite? Why?”
- ✓ Establish start – “What is your earliest memory of reading that magazine?”
- ✓ Walk forward – “When and where do you generally read that magazine? Do you do other things while you are reading? How long do you generally read for? What makes you stop?”

Process mapping

What: A tool to understand the COMPLETE experience

When: When you want to explore and improve the user’s experience

How: Start with the experience you are considering (e.g. buying a magazine)

- From the user’s point of view, mentally step back to the earliest stage of the process (e.g. going outside to pick up a magazine delivered to their mailbox, going out to buy a magazine at a news stand or bookstore, turning on a computer to read a magazine online, etc.)
- Step through every element of the process, recording it
- Analyze your map: what happens at each of these stages? Why? How do the stages relate? What opportunities do you see?

Cultural context interview

What: An unfocused tool for understanding

When: You would like to formulate implicit needs based in part on the more general values of a subject

How: This interview requires a good amount of trust, so you may use this tool at the end of another type of interview. This interview is relatively unstructured, but there is a list of questions that we have found to be illuminating. Note the need to sequence the questions.

- Start with a statement of intent – “I’d like to get a sense of who you are and what you care about.”

- Where did you grow up?
- How did you like that?
- What was your family like?
- What are your favorite (books, movies, TV shows)? Why?
- Do you have any hobbies? What are they?
- What is most important to you?
- What do you wish for?
- What do you feel insecure about?
- Note that the magic is in the follow-up questions. Everywhere your subject displays enthusiasm, give them room to run. Ask lots of follow-up questions, and go deep into the drivers of their enthusiasm.
- Analyze your findings – the seemingly disjointed pieces you gather in this interview can be combined with insight from other tools to form a great story.

Intercepts

What: A brief question-and-answer session in the field

When: When you want quick and specific in context information

How: The key is to be approachable to your informant

- Dress like your subjects
- Approach them on exit politely “Hi, I’m a San Francisco State University student studying [subject]. Can I ask you a question about your [experience] today?”
- Do not press
- Ask your question, and capture the answer
- If appropriate, ask to take a photo or ask follow-up questions

How do you know when you’ve got an Ah-Ha?

- You have uncovered a surprise or found what is missing
- You can explain why people do unusual things
- You can explain a contradiction
- In interviews, you know what the subject will say next
- You can tell a good story
- You want to tell your friends, significant other, and strangers on the train what you learned

Adapted from materials developed at the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford