See their world

Empathy

Appreciate them as human beings

Understand their feelings

Communicate your understanding

Empathy Map

An empathy map is a visualization tool which helps you sum up what you learned from design research to help you better understand your users and articulate what you know to colleagues and stakeholders.

The most common form of empathy map consists of four quadrants which reflect four key aspects of the behavior users demonstrate or possess during the research stage of the design process. The four quadrants refer to what the user: Says, Does, Thinks and Feels. There's no set order to complete these in; however, it's best to start with the more objective quadrants when you create your empathy map: Says and Does. You can then move on to determine what they think and feel based on the objective insights you have already laid out.

Step 1: Define the scope and purpose

Scope: Decide upon a particular persona, segment of users or individual user that you want to base your empathy map on. Stick with 1:1 mapping at first—i.e., don't go bonkers and think you can cover multiple user personas in one map, initially at least. Create a different empathy map for each persona to ensure you gather the most valuable insights.

Purpose: What is the core purpose of your empathy map? Whether it's to organize your research data or inform the wider team of your findings, you should have a solid question with certain parameters to help you focus.

Once you have defined both your scope and purpose, make sure you have buy-in from everyone on the team. If you have a stakeholder with strong opinions and biases, for

example, make sure they're on board with the plan for your empathy map, and wider design project if possible.

Step 2: Conduct relevant research

It's now time to conduct your user research if you haven't done this already. Carry out user interviews, user observations and other forms of research to gather data about your users. As you can see, empathy maps are best used from the very beginning of the design process (straight after the research phase).

Step 3: Fill out your empathy map

01: Split a table into four quadrants or draw them on a large piece of paper, clipboard or whiteboard. You may also want to use the template later in this document.

02: Review your notes, pictures, audio and video from your research and transfer everything meaningful to a Post-it if not already in that form. Post-it notes make it easy to remove, change and group research data at a later stage of the process.

03: Fill out each quadrant with relevant Post-it notes. Start with the more objective ones (says and does) and then move on to the thoughts and feelings which are more likely to be inferred or guessed. If you come across a piece of data which fits into multiple quadrants, just pick one—it's the insights that are of greatest importance, not necessarily the placement of the data, at this stage.

04: Once you have placed all your data into the most relevant quadrant, look at the empathy map in its entirety. Are there certain quadrants which don't contain very much data? If one or more quadrants looks a bit bare, this is a good indication that you should probably do more research, specifically to populate that quadrant.

Step 4: Analyze the quadrant data

Once you have populated each quadrant, you need to organize and discuss what each one contains. You should:

01: Cluster similar pieces of data together.

02: Give each cluster a name based on the main theme it covers. Note you can use the same name in each quadrant if necessary.

03: Discuss each cluster with your team—what does it show? Are there outliers,
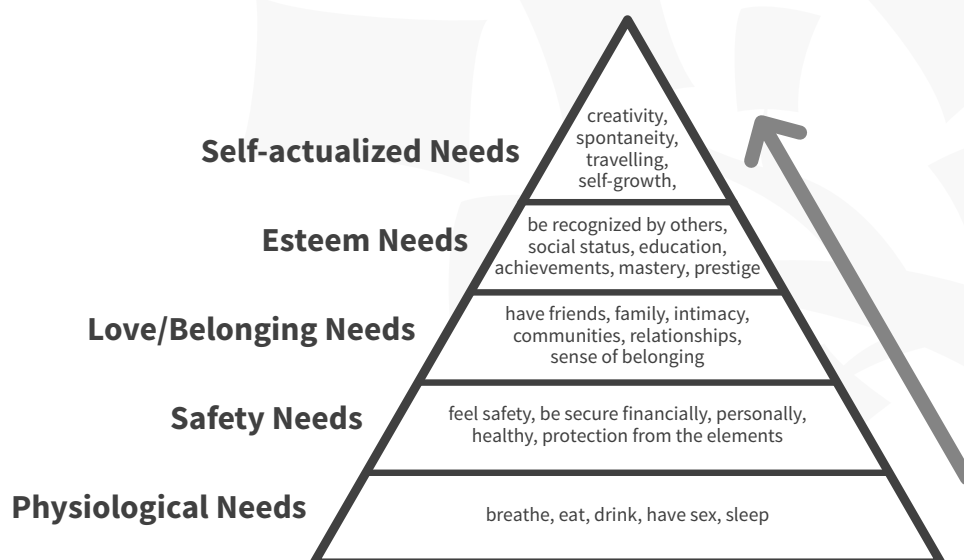
repeated themes or gaps in the data? Have perceptions changed of the user persona, and therefore problem at hand? All of these findings will lead to great insights in the next step of the process.

Step 5: Identify your users' needs

You should look for the following within your data to identify your users' needs:

- Verbs—i.e., activities and desires. Mark and analyze any pieces of data that start with a verb as these are likely to contain or point towards a user need.

- The user traits you noted. Again, mark specific user traits as these will lead towards the true needs of your users.

- Contradictions and inconsistencies. Once you've picked out the users' traits, you should look for contradictions and inconsistencies between them. For example, there may be a disconnection between what a user says and does, or they might show a positive action but portray a negative emotion through a quote.

What's more, you should use the American psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to help you understand and define the underlying needs of your users. In 1943, Maslow published his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation"—in which he proposed that human needs form a hierarchy that can be visualized in the shape of a pyramid.

Self-actualized Needs — creativity, spontaneity, travelling, self-growth,

Esteem Needs — be recognized by others, social status, education, achievements, mastery, prestige

Love/Belonging Needs — have friends, family, intimacy, communities, relationships, sense of belonging

Safety Needs — feel safety, be secure financially, personally, healthy, protection from the elements

Physiological Needs — breathe, eat, drink, have sex, sleep

Author/Copyright holder: Teo Yu Siang and Interaction Design Foundation. Copyright terms and licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

The largest, most fundamental physiological level of needs features at the bottom, and the need for self-actualization sits at the top. Maslow suggested that humans must first fulfill their most basic physiological needs, such as to eat and sleep, before they fulfill higher-level needs such as safety, love, esteem and finally self-actualization. When a lower level of need is not fulfilled, it is technically possible to be fulfilled at a higher level. However, Maslow argues that this is an unstable fulfillment. For example, if you're starving, it doesn't matter if you're the world's leading user experience designer, because eventually your hunger is going to overwhelm any satisfaction you get from your professional status. That's why we naturally seek to stabilize all lower levels of the hierarchy before we try to fulfill and retain higher levels.

Consult all five layers in Maslow's pyramid to help you identify user needs from your empathy map, and start to define which needs your user is primarily focused on fulfilling. This will enable you to reflect on how your product or service can help fulfill some of those needs and, ultimately, define your design challenge.

Make sure to write down your users' needs as they'll come in very handy when you want to define the problem statement of your design challenge (in point of view and how might we activities, for example).

Every time you do more user research, and observe or talk to someone from the same persona/segment, you should revise your empathy map and add to or adjust the data it contains to reflect your updated knowledge.

What the user says

What the user does

What the user thinks

What the user feels

Learn More About How to Use This Template

Methods of using this template are taught in our online course **Design Thinking: The Beginner's Guide**. Make full use of this template and learn more about design thinking by signing up for it today.

Design Thinking: The Beginner's Guide

◼◻◻ **Beginner Course**

The world's leading companies, such as Apple, Google and Samsung, are already using the design thinking approach—because they know it's the way forward when it comes to innovation and product success.

Through **Design Thinking: The Beginner's Guide**, you will deep dive into the five phases of this paradigm-shifting approach to problem-solving—empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test. By receiving detailed guidance on problem-solving activities ranging from ideation techniques—such as brainstorming and using analogies—to ways of gathering feedback from your prototypes, you'll be able to download the other templates involved and effectively use them in your work.

Get ready to unpack, explore and master design thinking—using it to set yourself apart and unlock the next stage of your professional life.

Learn more about this course ›

How to Advance Your Career With Our Online Courses
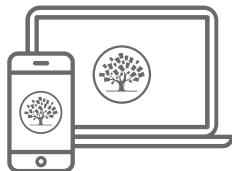
Take Online Courses by Industry Experts.

Lessons are self-paced so you'll never be late for class or miss a deadline.

Get a Course Certificate.

Your answers are graded by experts, not machines. Get an industry-recognized Course Certificate to prove your skills.

Advance Your Career.

Use your new skills in your existing job or to get a new job in UX design. Get help from our community.

About the Interaction Design Foundation

With over 66,000 alumni, the Interaction Design Foundation is the **biggest design school globally**. Industry leaders such as IBM and Adobe train their teams with our courses, and universities such as MIT and the University of Cambridge include our courses in their curricula. Our online courses are taught by industry experts and cover the entire spectrum of UX design from beginner to advanced. We give you industry-recognized course certificates to advance your career. Since 2002, we've put together the world's biggest and most **authoritative library** of open-source UX Design literature created by such noted authors as Don Norman and Clayton Christensen.

INTERACTION DESIGN
FOUNDATION