

# **WHAT'S REALLY THE PROBLEM?**

**Ethnographic interview methods in user experience research**

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# **GOLDEN RULE OF UX**

**You are NOT your user!**

# **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ETHNOGRAPHY?**

To go forth into the world,  
find and experience rich points,  
and then take them seriously as a signal  
of a difference between what you know  
and what you need to learn  
to understand and explain what just happened.

- Michael Agar, “An Ethnography by any other Name” (2006)

# **WHAT IS THE GOAL OF AN ETHNOGRAPHIC iNTERVIEW?**

**In Anthropology:**

To understand a culture in native terms

- James Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (1979)

**In UX:**

To learn how users interpret and navigate a space or service, in their own words and experience

# WHAT PROBLEMS CAN iT HELP SOLVE?

- Identifying user needs and priorities
  - What is important to users and why about your service or space?
- Identifying UX pain points
  - When and in what ways is your service or space difficult to use?
  - What do those difficulties mean to users?

# WHAT PROBLEMS CAN iT HELP SOLVE?

- Creating Labels and Wayfinding
  - What do users call a thing?
  - How do users navigate a thing?
- Designing Information Architecture
  - How do users group and organize things?
  - How do users conceive of relationships between things and why?

# CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

1. Find respondents & Schedule interview
2. Obtain permission to record, if desired (audio is generally fine)
3. Begin in a friendly manner, but move to formal interview mode fairly quickly
4. Let them know that you are seeking to learn from them, and there are no right or wrong answers
5. Listen closely, speak very little, ask clarifying questions, repeat back what they say

# FINDING RESPONDENTS

- Don't go for the easiest people—find real users
- Recruiting in person is most effective; don't recruit too far in advance
- Incentives go a long way

# **TO RECORD OR NOT TO RECORD**

- Recordings are useful for reviewing specific phrasing and details
- Recordings are time-consuming to transcribe
- Your institution may require IRB clearance
- All recordings and notes must be de-identified

# THE INTERVIEW – GETTING STARTED

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner
- Put participants at ease
- Describe what you want to learn and why they are the right ones to help

# THE INTERVIEW – ASKiNG QUESTiONS

**Tip:** Do not try to fill the silences.

**Tip:** Phrase questions in a neutral manner.

# THE INTERVIEW – ASKiNG QUESTiONS

**Tip:** Avoid asking direct questions about what you're trying to learn because participants will tell you what they thing you want to hear.

**Tip:** These questions are most effective when combined with talk-aloud usability testing.

# THE INTERVIEW – ASKiNG QUESTiONS

## 5 Categories of UX Questions:

- What do you think this does?
- Who do you think this is for?
- What would you call this?
- How are these the same or different?
- Which of these things belong together?

# USING THE FINDINGS

- Look for trends
- Test responses with other users to gain more nuanced understanding
- Prototype and test designs that implement feedback

# THANK YOU!

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