

The Quick Start Guide to **Designing Experiences Instead of Things**

No matter what project you are working on, the principles of experience design apply equally.

experience
design  certificate
program 
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No matter what project you are working on - be it an immersive experience, an organizational structure, a piece of software, or Thanksgiving dinner - the principles of experience design apply equally.

The four steps in the guide below can be used at the beginning of any project to transform your design into an experience design.



Determine Your Experiential Aim.

This is your “Phase Zero”. Forget about what thing you’re making and ask what experience you want the person on the other end to have with that thing. Are you thinking of making a chair? The experiential aim may be comfort or elegance. Are you thinking of making a ritual for someone who passed away? The experiential aim may be mental clarity, mourning in community, or even levity in the face of the terrifying.

Take five minutes to write down your experiential aim in as few words as possible.



Make an inventory of your assets and their experiential affordances.

It is essential when designing experiences to learn to view everything you work with through the lens of experience. An **experiential affordance** is what the experience makes possible.

The experiential affordance of a seat in a theater may be sitting, but depending on its proximity to other chairs, it also could be whispering to the person next to you.

The experiential affordance of an app may be helping you find an apartment to rent on vacation, but it may also include offering design inspiration for your own home.

The experiential affordance of a song may be the joy of listening and also an invitation to reminisce about where you were the first time you heard the song.

Make a list of fifteen activities of things you might involve in your design. In as few words as possible, list the experiential affordances of those things, focusing on the ones most relevant to your design.



Narrate the potential user or audience experience.

Write, in a stream of consciousness, an encounter with your design from the point of view of the user or audience. Use “I” rather than “they”. Describe what the person sees, touches, thinks.

Set a timer for five minutes. Write until the timer goes off.



Create a User Journey Diagram or Timeline.

Read over what you’ve just written and create a step-by-step timeline of the typical user’s or audience’s passage through the experience. Consider the various “touch points” when the person interacts with something you’ve designed. You can draw this as a timeline, or as a storyboard, or in some other way that feels right.

Spend five minutes sketching this out. Then share with any collaborators who need to know what the experience you’re creating should be.

Designing Your Experience Worksheet



What is your experiential aim?

[illegible]



Narrate the potential user or audience experience.



Create a User Journey Diagram or Timeline.

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