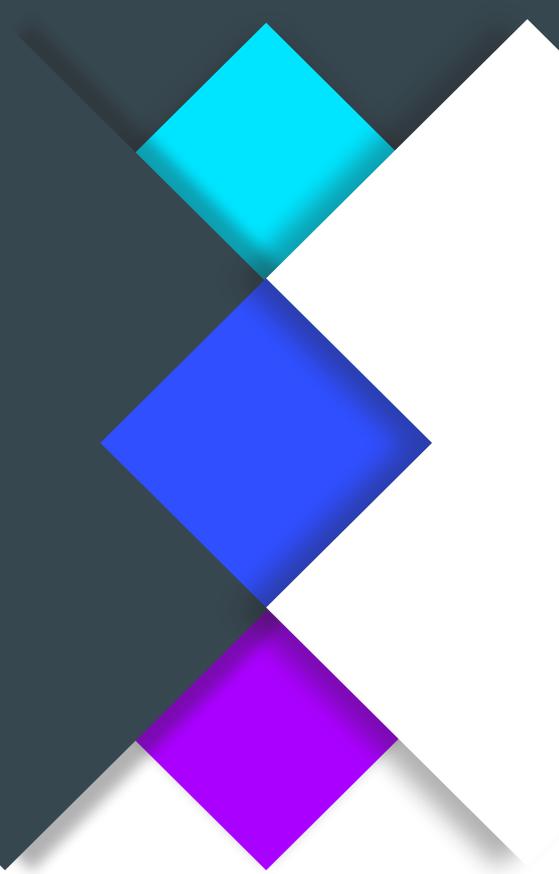




Journalism Design Process Instructor guide



The JxD Project
Journalism redesigned



2017



What is JxD?

JxD is Journalism Design. JxD is about using design methods to imagine new ways of doing journalism. It is about taking what is valuable and important about traditional journalism and exploring how that might be redesigned for social, mobile, or other emerging technologies.

Journalism, like many professions, is grappling with disruption brought about by new technologies and changing audience behaviours. As social networks and tech companies continue to challenge the news business, aspiring journalists need to learn how to work with and design experiences without relying on third-party platforms. Interaction design provides principles and practices that can be used to achieve this.

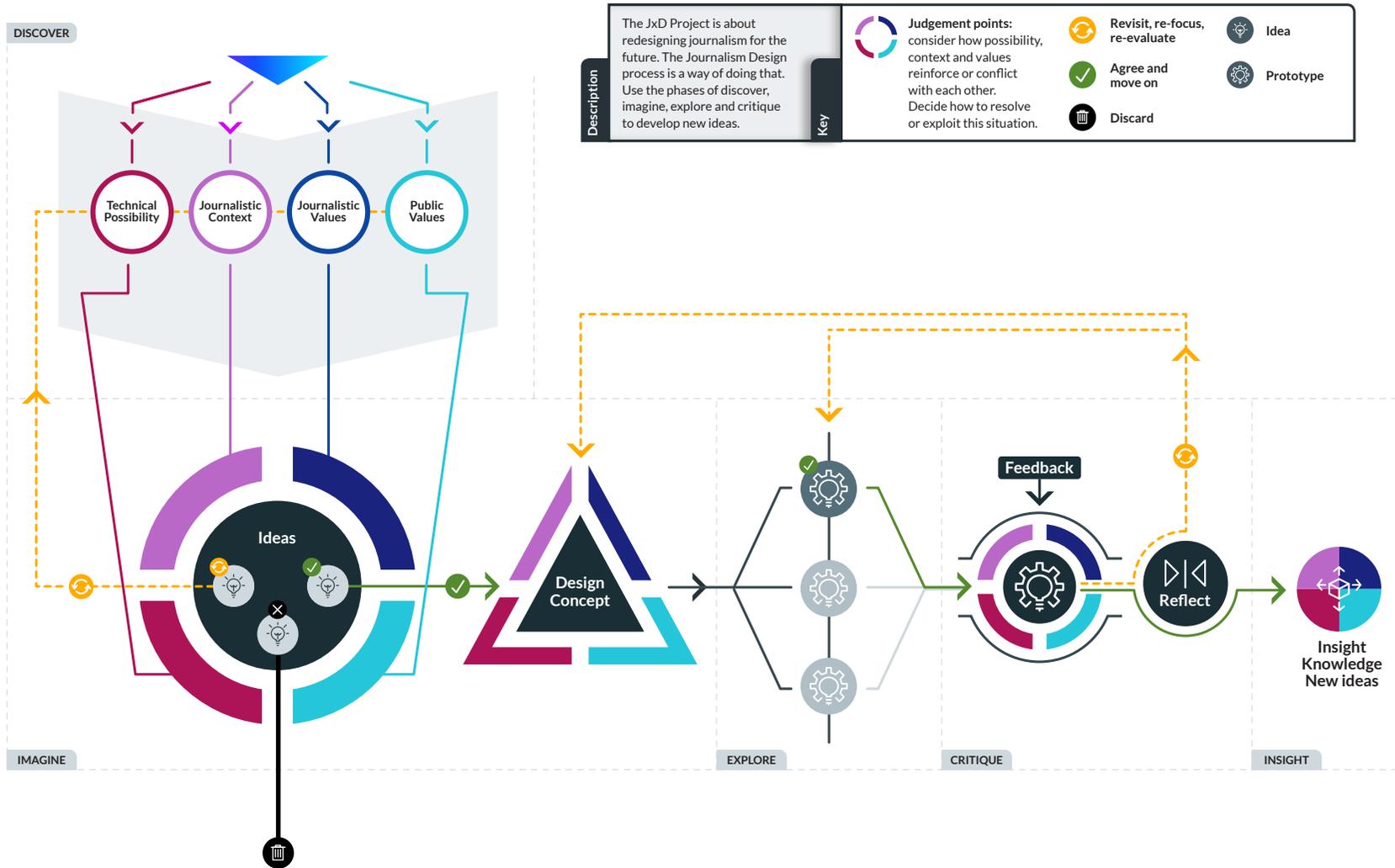
Interaction design (IxD) is a discipline focused on the intersection of people and technology. Interaction designers investigate situations and comes up with ideas, in the form of prototypes, about how to address them. IxD accommodates the values and principles of the people it designs for. This means it can be used to design for the underlying values of journalism. The acronym JxD represents this junction. The JxD process is a way of introducing design methods and concepts to journalism students in a way that resonates with their experience of journalism.

Why a process?

At the University of Queensland we've been teaching interaction design to journalism students for some time and noticed that many struggled with the uncertainty that surrounds designing. Design is about imagining possibilities and, unlike writing a news story, you often don't know where the process will lead.

Like other forms of professional practice, teaching Journalism Design is about understanding the process and making informed judgements. The output is often less important than how it came to be and why it is the way it is. For students, it is through their practice that ideas emerge, problems arise and judgements are made. Reflecting on this process facilitates learning.

This guide explains the JxD process and the activities involved. It provides guidance on methods that can be used during the key phases and outlines two workshop activities to encourage students to imagine new possibilities for journalism. The process is on the next page. An interactive version is available on The JxD Project website. We see the process as a work in progress and have released it under a Creative Commons licence. Feel free to use it, share it and adapt it. And let us know your experiences.



Journalism Design process





How it works

The Journalism Design process provides a structure for students as they design. Through phases of discovery, imagining, exploration and critique, students understand the situation they are designing for, the people involved, and the values at play. They need to consider these in relation to what is possible with technology and what is desirable in the situation they are addressing.

The iterative and reflective nature of design is articulated throughout the process and the need to discard or revisit ideas is explicit. Ultimately, the focus is on gaining new insight into how journalism might evolve in the future.

Discover

This phase is about understanding the situation. Students should think about an aspect of journalism in terms of four perspectives: technical possibility; journalistic context; journalistic values; and public values.

Technical possibility

Students should investigate new and emerging technologies, such as mixed reality, artificial intelligence or tangible interfaces. They should understand what these can deliver and consider the potential benefit, experience or opportunity for engagement that the technologies offer.

Journalistic context

Students should find out about the situation as it is currently. This could be any aspect of practice, eg: sourcing, telling or sharing stories. They need to understand the role of technology, who is involved and the challenges faced.

Journalistic values

What is important from a journalistic perspective? Consider news values as well as principles such as the fourth estate and social responsibility. How are core tenets of practice such as truth, ethics and balance manifest?

Public values

What is important to the people involved? Define the audience, public or user and understand what matters to them. Emphasise here that they (the students) are not the user and that the aim is to understand what matters to other people. This should reveal and challenge their assumptions.

Methods

Interview, observation, documents

Simple ethnographic methods are ideal for this phase of the process and journalism students are often fairly comfortable conducting background desk research



and interviewing people. Observation is another useful method, particularly in design. Encourage students to use a combination of approaches and to document what they find out. Quotes and vignettes are valuable for revealing what people see as important. Observations, in the form of notes and photographs, provide insight into the context in which people are using technologies.

Sticky notes

To make sense of this data encourage students to extract quotes and details that reveal values, principles and challenges. Sticky notes are a good way of working through data quickly and collaboratively. Encourage students to work with the raw material and write only one item on each note before organising the data into themes.

Design workbook

Design workbooks are valuable for generating ideas and documenting design work. They are collections of research, thoughts, inspiration and sketches and they play an important role in helping to understand the nature of a problem and the possibilities for solving it. The workbook helps turn a nebulous idea or concept into something more concrete. Through the process of sketching and annotating students should consider questions like ‘how would this work?’ and ‘how does it help the user?’. Get students to use their workbook throughout the design process. It will prove useful when they need to recall decisions or reflect on their outcomes.

Imagine

This phase is about generating ideas. It is about imagining what might be possible, or desirable, in the situation and thinking about how to achieve that.

Ideas should be plentiful and disposable. While this phase should lead to a design concept, students should not settle on this too early. They need to think broadly and entertain new and diverse ways to address the issues and themes that emerged from their research.

Ideas might originate from any of the four perspectives investigated in the discovery phase. They could be driven by a technology, or a problem in practice for instance, or they might address a behaviour or a value. Encourage students to challenge or disrupt established views or practices, or to imagine how a technology might be more fully exploited if the demands of news production were removed. Provocations can help spark ideas, for example, ask students to sketch ideas for a specific technology or for a particular context. See the exercise below.

Throughout this process students should consider how their ideas reinforce or conflict with possibilities, context and values, and make decisions about how to resolve or exploit that tension. This will mean some ideas might need to be reconsidered, others will be discarded, and others will show promise. Make sure all ideas are recorded and discussed. Sometimes an initial ‘bad’ idea will show potential once it is worked through. The goal is to choose one to develop further. This is the design concept.





The design concept will emerge as strong ideas are fleshed out. Students should take promising ideas and develop them by adding more details about people and use. They should articulate what makes this idea particular to the context and values they are addressing.

Methods

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a good way to get ideas flowing. Encourage students to capture all their ideas, no matter how crazy they might seem at first. Try to avoid group-think by encouraging each student should write down their ideas separately before discussing them with others. Discourage them from thinking about how their ideas might be implemented or operationalised. This is not important now.

Framing

This is a way of looking at a problem from different perspectives and can be seen as a type of reasoning. Through framing we look at the situation via the narratives, values and insights that have emerged and begin to challenge and recast them. Useful techniques include: shifting focus, from an industry to a user for instance; focusing on root causes rather than symptoms; or asking 'what if' questions.

Sketching

If there is an archetypal design activity, then sketching is probably it. Sketching is a way of revealing design thinking and working through problems and possible solutions. Sketches are a way of giving form to ideas and communicating them. They are a tool for thinking and should not be confused with artistic drawing. Encourage students to sketch their ideas in terms of the interaction between technologies and people. Sketches can be made with paper and pencil, or with more sturdy materials such as Lego, cardboard or wire. Have a box of materials on hand for this. Use simple geometric shapes, stick figures and arrows. The process of making a sketch will help them think through the idea.

Explore

The task now is to further explore and express the design concept as a prototype. This is not about creating a fully functioning product, it is about developing the design concept to a point where it can be used in some way by people and the students can get some useful feedback.

Prototypes are an important part of the design process because they embody the research, judgements and understanding that has been produced as a result of the design process. They also show how a design has progressed.

Many journalism students lack the technical skills to develop a functional digital prototype and so the idea of making something can be a little overwhelming. For the purposes of working through the intersection of technical possibilities, journalistic issues and values, low fidelity techniques are sufficient. In fact, low-fidelity, sketchy prototypes are better for new ideas. The more polished and



'finished' a prototype looks, the less likely you are to get feedback about the core concept because people think the decisions are locked in. The goal of these prototypes is to propose new ideas for critique, so they need to communicate the fact that they are unfinished and in development.

The prototype should represent the design concept in a more concrete way than is possible using words or pictures. The prototype should communicate the goal of the design and how people would interact with it in order to achieve that goal. It should also expose the values that have been considered so far.

Methods

Wireframe

Wireframes are ideal for web or mobile applications. They are generally made up of a series of schematic drawings that show the structure, information hierarchy, controls and functions of a design, essentially, what happens where and how the design works. The process of creating a wireframe will force students to think through the practicalities of their ideas and consider how someone would use it. Wireframes can be made of paper or software, and there are many (free and paid) digital prototyping tools available that can be used to create interactive experiences.

Mock up

This approach can be useful if you don't have the time or technical skills to create an interactive system. The idea is to create an illusion of interaction using animations or humans to mock up the intended experience. This approach is also referred to as Wizard of Oz prototyping, in reference to the storybook character. In practice it means animation or people do the tasks that computer code would perform. You might imagine a designer hiding in a box and create reactions as a person 'uses' a cardboard interface.

Critique

Feedback and reflection form the critique phase. This is about putting the design in the hands of the people it was designed for and understanding their experience of using it. This is not about validating the idea, making people happy, or achieving consensus. It is about critiquing the design from a different perspective and reflecting on how that insight could impact both the design and the situation it was designed for.

An important thing to note about prototypes is that they can act as a probe into people's behaviours and attitudes and reveal how those might need to change for a new idea to take hold. By allowing people to experience a new concept, in the form of a prototype, they are exposed to new possibilities. Using the prototype as a provocation for critique exposes the values of the user in a similar way as the prototype exposes the values that the designer has given priority. It also makes value tensions or conflicts very explicit.





By listening and observing, a designer can understand this interaction and the implications of it. Journalism Design is about imagining new futures, so this phase of critique is intended to elicit insights about how journalistic practices might change.

Encourage students to give their prototype to potential users and speak to them about the experience of using it. They should consider how the prototype addresses context and values from that person's perspective and whether it exposes issues they haven't thought of.

The critiques can be used in the same way as the information they gather in the discover stage. This reflection is important because at this stage students are trying to resolve value conflicts that are 'real' and based on someone's experience and expressed in their own words. They should consider whether the design needs to change and revisit the previous phases as needed.

Methods

Interview, observation

Again, simple ethnographic methods are ideal for this phase. Interview and observation will produce useful data in the form of notes, photographs and audio or video recordings.

Sketching

New insights are likely to spark new ideas, so again, sketching is a useful way of capturing, developing and communicating evolving concepts.

Insight

The Journalism Design process encourages students to engage with technology and values in a journalistic context. The phases of discovering, imagining, exploring and critiquing are underpinned by a parallel process of judgement and reflection and the Journalism Design process encourages this reflective practice.

At the end of the process it is useful to ask students to articulate this reflection by articulating what they have learned.

Method

Question

Ask students to answer this question: What does the artefact and the process of making it tell you about the future of journalism?



Activities

Experience tells us that getting started and developing ideas from data are hurdles for students who are designing for the first time. Here are two activities that we have found useful.

Design provocations

Provocations can be used to prompt unconventional thinking and encourage exploration of new concepts. Running exercises like this over a few weeks early in the course is a good way to introduce designerly ways of working such as sketching and building.

Have a box of materials on hand for this. Include paper, pens, Lego, PlayDoh, scissors, cardboard, tape and glue.

Set a reading around a technology then, in class, ask students to explore it in relation to journalism, values and possibility, for example:

- > Journalism to wear;
- > Journalism in public spaces;
- > The fourth estate in connected communities.

Encourage students to use a variety of techniques, including brainstorming, interviewing, observing and sketching (using paper and materials). Encourage students to leave the classroom and interview/observe people outside.

They might do this to inform their brainstorming, or they might use it later in the session to get some feedback on their sketches.

Focus on pushing boundaries and expectations. Discourage thinking about how to operationalise or implement ideas. This will quickly lead them to discard concepts as unviable. The point is to imagine.

The students should document the process and ideas in their design workbook.

Reframing exercise

This activity aims to help students identify themes and issues in their evidence. Working with their data this way will help them to reframe the issues and identify story angles or messages they can design for. This exercise can be used various stages in the design process.





Student should bring interview or observational data to class, e.g: interview quotes or notes from observations.

- > Go through the data and identify insights, that is, quotes or statements that identify aspects of the issue; write each on on a sticky note, then arrange them thematically.
- > Pick a theme, then pick an insight from within the theme and analyse it by asking:
 - What is made to seem normal? What is made to seem extraordinary?
 - What is made visible or noticeable? What is left hidden?
 - What is your attention drawn to?
 - What values are implied?
 - What is taken as universally good or right?
 - How else might one describe this situation?
 - Who has agency? Who is victimised?
- > Challenge these assumptions by coming up with ideas that subvert or invert the norms norms, values or expectations identified
- > Repeat with other insights.

For more ideas check out The JxD Project website: jxd.com.au





Resources

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