

Please note: You may do this assignment alone or in a group of two.

Introduction

This assignment will give you an opportunity to develop your skills for observation, capturing and documenting observations, and organizing field material for design.

Being able to discover how interaction unfolds, where people experience inefficiencies and breakdowns in their actions, and how people adapt to systems through “workarounds” and changes in their actions is a key skill for an interaction designer. Through keen observation, one can identify unarticulated needs and opportunities for improving interactive systems.

Often, researchers (sometimes called “User Researchers” or “Design Ethnographers”) will enter a workplace and study how work is performed, trying to discover what office staff, engineers, and other workers really do. The findings from such studies will, in turn, drive the design process, contribute to goal-setting and ideas for solutions.

Often, it should be noted, people are not able to describe what they do or describe their activities in such general terms that it is not so useful in design. Therefore, observations of real work and workplaces can be essential.

Cell Phones: How are they used in public places?

Mostly for practical reasons, we will not visit a workplace in this assignment. (You will have an opportunity to engage your workplace in another activity.) For this activity, the **goal** is twofold:

1. To: investigate how cell phones – a very common interactive device – are used in three different public and semi-public settings; and
2. To investigate how different settings shape the use of cell phones.

We would like you to make observations in **two** different settings, such as:

- On public transportation
- In a coffee shop, restaurant, or pub
- Lobby of a hotel, office building, grocery store, etc.
- In an outdoor public space – sidewalk, plaza, etc.

The process

1. Spend at least one hour observing people in each setting (at least 2 hrs total time). Please do not observe friends or acquaintances.
2. Keep detailed notes, attending to such things as:
 - a. What is the setting? What is happening in it?
 - b. How do people hold their cell phone? How do they position their bodies?
 - c. Do they call or pick up?
 - d. Do they talk or text?
 - e. Are people stationary or moving?
 - f. Do they speak loudly or softly?
 - g. How do people around them react?
 - h. What information, if any, is posted in the environment about appropriate uses of cell phones? (Or, what aspects of the setting structure how people use their phones.)
3. Try as best as you can to separate your observations from your interpretations (e.g., the difference between how the phone is being held and who you think the person is talking to or what they conversation is about).
4. Document your observations, summarizing the following:
 - a. Specially, where and when did you make your observations?
 - b. How many different people did you observe? How long?
 - c. Try to take detailed notes on how people use their cell phones. The more detailed the better.

- d. If relevant, you may take a picture of the setting but please do not take an identifiable picture of a person unless you ask their permission. (A hand drawn sketch of the setting, showing the use of cell phones, can be useful.)

What to bring to class in week #4 (Oct 23)?

In class on week #4, you need to bring your notes to class (hand-written field notes are fine).

During class, you will develop skills in **affinity diagramming** and develop a conceptual structure of everyone's observations of cell phone use. To make this successful, it is critical that you take detailed notes of your observations and bring them into class. If possible, please bring a digital camera to class.

What to hand in?

Write a report that describes the use of cell phones in the two settings. Your report should contain at least the following information:

1. Details about your observations (where, when, how long, how many people, etc.)
2. Two 300-500 word descriptions of noteworthy cell phone uses, focusing on vivid and concise reporting (optionally, including photographs or sketches of the setting), being careful to separate "observations" from "interpretations"
3. A description of how the affinity diagramming process unfolded, how your observations were represented and organized, and so on (consider including photographs of the process unfolding)
4. Describe the final diagram, including a picture of the affinity diagram, discuss the rationale for the organization of the concepts, and discuss what the diagram tells us about cell phone use.
5. Write a 300-500 word reflective statement on the process of observation and interpretation, the use of affinity diagrams, and what you learned.

How will it be graded?

- 3.7 – 4.0 Excellent. Your report is concise and detailed and the descriptions of cell phone use are vivid and clear. You describe the affinity diagrams effectively. You use images and sketches effectively. You treat all settings and people with respect and nuance. The report is free of spelling and grammatical errors and the visual presentation is strong. The reflective statement shows a strong degree of critical thinking about the challenges of "observation for interactive design," and you draw upon the readings appropriately.
- 3.0 – 3.6: Okay. You describe cell phone use but the written accounts are somewhat vague and the presentation and discussion of the affinity diagram lacks specificity. Details about the observations are incomplete.
- < 3.0: Poor. The field notes were not handed or are incomplete. Details about the observations are missing. The accounts of use are vague and difficult to understand. The use of affinity diagrams and the overall findings are incomplete. The report contains more than a few spelling and grammatical errors. The presentation lacks professionalism. The reflective statement shows relatively little engagement with the concept of "observation/interpretation for interactive design."

Please submit your report, including your field notes, in paper format during class at week #5 (Oct 30)