

a METHODS zine

for design gatherings

axi lab



Dear Reader,

Sometimes, I wander to loosen my brain. I'll take a walk and watch the light filtering through the leaves in the sky and trip on a root and remember a thought and sit down in the grass and write and draw. Sometimes, you need to play and get warm before you start. Sometimes, you may want to talk things out with a herd of goats. Sometimes, you may want to just sit down and build the darn thing.

We created this little collection to help you decide how to conduct gatherings, design sessions, and thinking activities, as you collectively explore the world. This zine was originally made for the Gathering for Open Ag Tech (GOAT) 2022. During the first GOAT, in 2018, we noticed that all sessions defaulted to small-group discussion format, which, while helpful for boisterous exploratory conversations, does not always lend itself well to engaging in different modes of thinking and doing. To join the GOAT community, visit www.goatech.org,

This zine is a collection of methods to help you design a productive and inclusive session to allow for diverse participation and group-work styles; to explore ideas and topics of varying maturity; to support the propagation of concepts to actions and outcomes; and to aid in finding a common ground.

There are 5 genres of methods in this zine. Each section includes methods listed in increasing order of formality and are applicable to ideas of increasing maturity. You can build on the outputs of each activity and set up a sequence of sessions to explore a concept from idea to implementation. You can use these methods alone, in pairs, as a collaborative group, as a group engaged in parallel work, and many other configurations. There is a list of references at the end of this zine with resources that contain further method details if you need more guidance. This is but a starting point so tinker and tweak the methods to make them work for you.

So, here's a little methods zine to help you think and work. Together, alone. out loud, or quietly. In an hour or over a week. With minds and bodies. We hope you find this helpful.

Lightspeed,
Ankita

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PLAYING

Methods to open your mind and body.
Consider *Jeu Libre* (free play) to liberate yourself from the moment.



DISCUSSING

Methods to engage in cooperative dialogue.
Give voice to the voiceless: those here, those not with us, those without, and those within.



DESIGNING

Methods to dream practically and fantastically.
Design services, models, and tools for living beings, environments, and the universe.



WRITING

Methods to write together and alone.
Articulate your thoughts and bring to reality our co-created visions for the future.



BUILDING

Methods to build the building blocks for a more resilient future.
Make art and objects, hardware and software, processes and systems.



PLAYING

NATURE WALK



Take a meandering stroll in nature, in a group or alone. Consider leaving with a meditative prompt and taking some paper and pen to make notes or sketches as you think and walk.

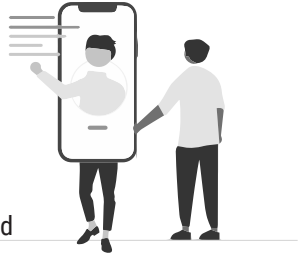
WEREWOLF



Move hard and move gently. Play basketball, take a yoga break. Move your body as you see fit and take some time to suspend reality. Alternatively, stay indoors and play a round of werewolf (aka mafia) to shake the dust off your group. Choose a moderator to facilitate and uncover your group's capacity for curiosity, deductive reasoning and playfulness.

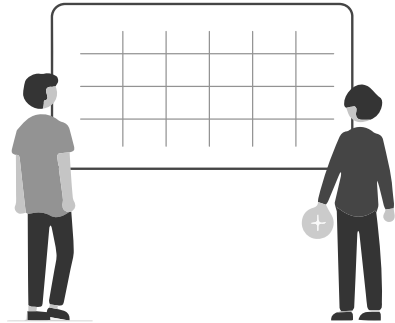
WIZARD OF OZ

In this role play based prototyping method, designer(s) stand in for the computer, simulated computational actions, while another human stands in for the user. First, the team must determine what genre of technology and functionality will be simulated by the wizard. You can create props, as necessary, or in the spirit of the *bodystorming* method, you can improvise with space and found objects. Actors are encouraged to think out loud, describing their interactions with the imagined spaces, places, objects, and other actors.



CREATIVE MATRIX

Select a design challenge to focus on. Create a matrix on a wall: your columns represent categories related to people (user groups, problem types, use cases), and your rows are categories for enabling solutions (services, policies, technologies). Participants are invited to place sticky notes representing ideas at the intersections of the grid. Consider summarizing your most populated categories through discussion.

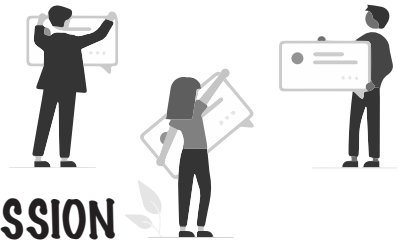


DISCUSSING



INTERVIEWING

Use an interview format to elicit ideas, needs, or concerns. You can interview each other or even create a panel. Begin by creating a loosely interview guide to ensure that you are asking questions across the full set of topics you seek to explore.

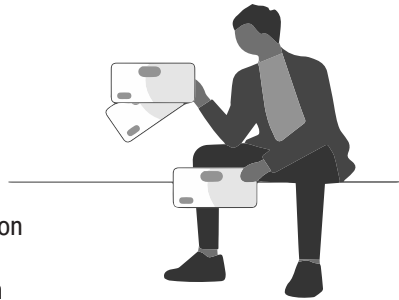


SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

Even in groups, the Socratic method of asking, listening, and answering may be adopted. Consider setting the scene by defining topics and scope, even if you want an open-ended discussion. Be mindful to give each other time and space to speak – a talking stick or timer may be a helpful externalized guide.

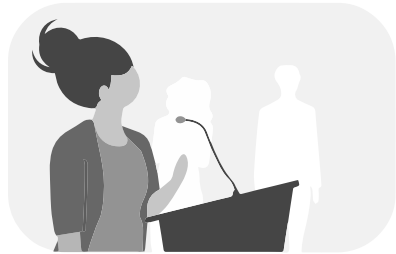
CARD DECKS

There are several card-based discussion guides available, such as- the *Envisioning Cards* to consider longer term implications of design, *The Oracle* to envision transfeminist technologies, and the *Innovation Cards* for planning a human-centered design process. These cards can be used to facilitate a more guided discussion in pairs, a group, or even with yourself.



DEBATE

For topics with highly contradictory popular stances, setting up a debate can allow for very diverse perspectives to be laid out as arguments. Begin by formulating a topic statement. You may have three debaters on each side, where you alternate speakers from each side. Speaker one introduces the topic and position, speaker two performs a rebuttal, and speaker three provides concluding statements. Optionally, the audience may be invited to determine which side made a more compelling argument.

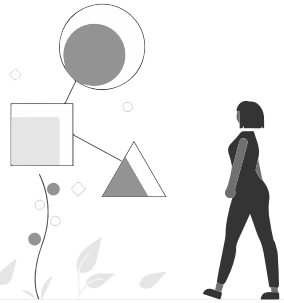


DESIGNING

CONCEPT MAPPING

Mind maps, cognitive maps, and mental models are all part of the family of concept mapping. In all cases, you begin with a set of core concepts and map out connected ideas.

When something disconnected comes up, a new network is formed. These are easily done on digital or virtual whiteboards or even just on paper. Consider coming to agreement on a core set of concepts to begin with, alternating between quiet reflection (and writing) and then group discussion and placement of concepts on a common map. Spend some time clustering common concepts into themes or demarcating lines of thought through connected concepts. Create a summary of the network of ideas.

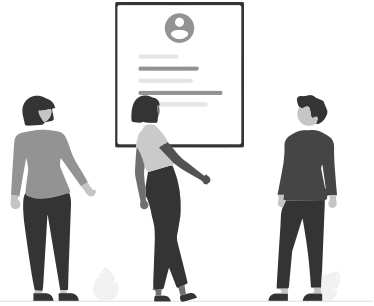


SKETCHING

Several methods for brainstorming and articulation of design concepts through guided drawings exist. At minimum, set up a prompt to guide your sketching activity. For idea generation, you could do a *Crazy Eights* activity: fold paper into 8 squares and draw out a grid, set a timer for 8 minutes, and draw out your thoughts across the 8 spaces. If done as a group, you may bring your best sketches together and vote on elements that you all like the most. These can be combined into a storyboard articulating a full concept. Content can range from mobile app interfaces to comic-book style narratives, and everything in between.

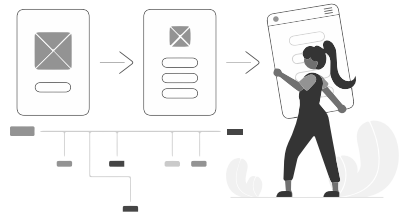


CO-CREATING PERSONAS



A persona is an archetypal yet fictitious representation of groups of people. It is not a stereotype. It can be a representation of non-human living beings like animals and ecosystems and can also be used to represent systems like farms and communities. Personas are generated based on empirical evidence: you're not just making up things about people but constructing realistic archetypes that may be based on interviews, expert informants, observations, literature, and other data. These are used to orient subsequent design work to be, ideally, user-centered, and contextually sensitive.

USER JOURNEY MAPPING



Whether designing service or software, you can create a timeline that maps out actions that a user needs to perform to accomplish a goal. Begin defining the scope of your user's journey: where do they begin? What do they need to accomplish? In addition to mapping the steps of their journey, you may also layer on information that may additionally guide the design: what obstacles may they encounter? How may their emotional state or resource availability fluctuate?

WRITING

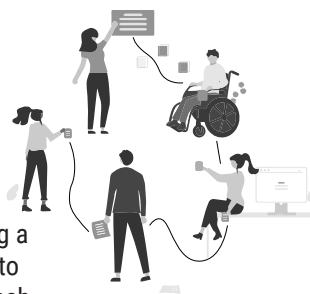
AUTOMATIC WRITING

Writing stream of consciousness essays can be a helpful if not cathartic means to opening the doors to a set of ideas. Begin by meditating on a prompt for 5 minutes. If you're really stuck, go so far as to pick a word or a letter to start your first sentence with. Set a time for 5 to 20 minutes. Take a deep breath and write anything that comes to your mind. Let the words flow through your fingers and do not think about what came before or what comes after. You are channeling raw thoughts and the goal is to simply put words on the page. Later, you may come back to this text and refine, discard, or reflect.

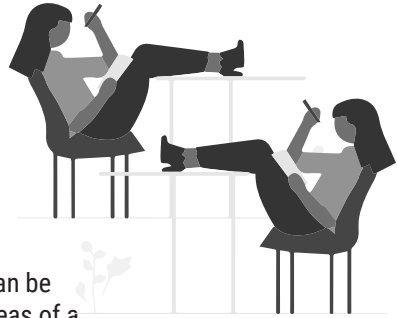


PASS THE PAPER

In this group activity, you begin by formulating a motivating focused yet open-ended question to explore together. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Each person takes a piece of paper and writes their thoughts on the topic. Pass the paper to the left, set a time for 2 minutes and read what the previous person wrote. Set a timer for 5 minutes and respond, rebut, revise, or build on the previous idea. Continue till you have moved through the entire group. These documents can later be used to draft a co-authored essay or as input for another activity.



CO-WRITING



Targeted, collaborative writing time can be an effective way of articulating the ideas of a group while allowing for asynchronous work. Set up a prompt and discuss the scope of the writing. Consider deciding on a target venue and audience for your work to orient your efforts. Set up a shared digital document with basic formatting infrastructure and set aside space for metadata like authors and update logs as necessary. It may be beneficial to create a document outline together and subsequently divide sections among participants to create a first draft. Be sure to have agreement on etiquette and rules of engagement, such as revising someone else's text by leaving comments or using a change-tracking mode, versus straight edits.

DESIGN FICTION



Creating fictions is a means for engaging in critical and speculative design. Writing design fiction can help with envisioning alternate realities, critiquing the state of the art or present, reflecting on implications on alternate pasts, and playing with the notion of what's possible. Design fiction can take many forms, from abstracts of aspirational essays to creating short stories and films. It can be helpful to engage in some light *worldbuilding* to lay out the scope of the fictions you are creating. Are you changing one thing in the present to envision its implications in the future? Are you suspending all laws of physics?

BUILDING

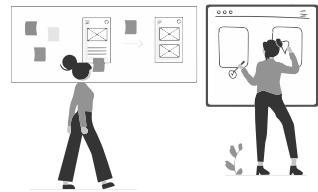
PAPER PROTOTYPING

Developing a set of sketched “screens” with physically interactive components. Once you have a specific technology that you are interested in prototyping, you can either sketch a sequence of screens, use additional physical components (like little paper buttons) to “simulate” user interactions, like clicking on a button to open a map. Such prototypes allow you to very quickly visualize a tangible implementation of an idea and assess next steps. Keep things simple and informal!

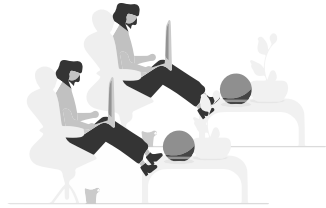


WIREFRAMING

Mid- to high-fidelity prototypes are useful for visualizing more mature technological concepts. If developing software, you can use wireframing tools that come with libraries of user interface components (buttons, image/text areas, map widgets) which you can use to describe specific user journeys through your envisioned technology. Tools such as Miro, Figma, Sketch, and others can aid in the prototyping process. For hardware developers, you can prototype widgets using 3D printers.



PAIR PROGRAMMING

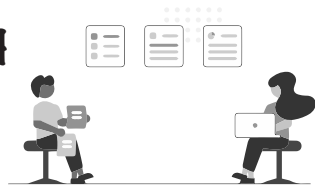


It's dangerous to go alone! Take this a friend. When implementing a new feature or prototype, pair programming offers a method of coding together. Two people share a workstation, the programmer at the keyboard is the driver, and is responsible for actually writing the code and describing their actions out loud. The second person is the navigator, and is responsible for designing the algorithm, providing instruction (Eg.- When clicked, this button should accept X input from the user). In classic pair programming, both people are programmers and they simply switch every so often. However, you can create an interdisciplinary team with a domain expert or user advocate serving as navigator for the full duration, working in concert with a seasoned programmer.

COGNITIVE WALKTHROUGH

Once you've built something, usability testing methods can help ensure that you are indeed scratching a real itch. A Cognitive

Walkthrough involves guiding a user through a defined set of tasks, asking them to answer questions regarding their experience as they move toward their goal. Consider asking a short set of targeted questions (<5) that the user answers as they perform groups of tasks. Though this method is commonly used with implemented software, it can be done with any type of technology, including with prototypes of varying fidelity (paper-based, wireframes, coded).



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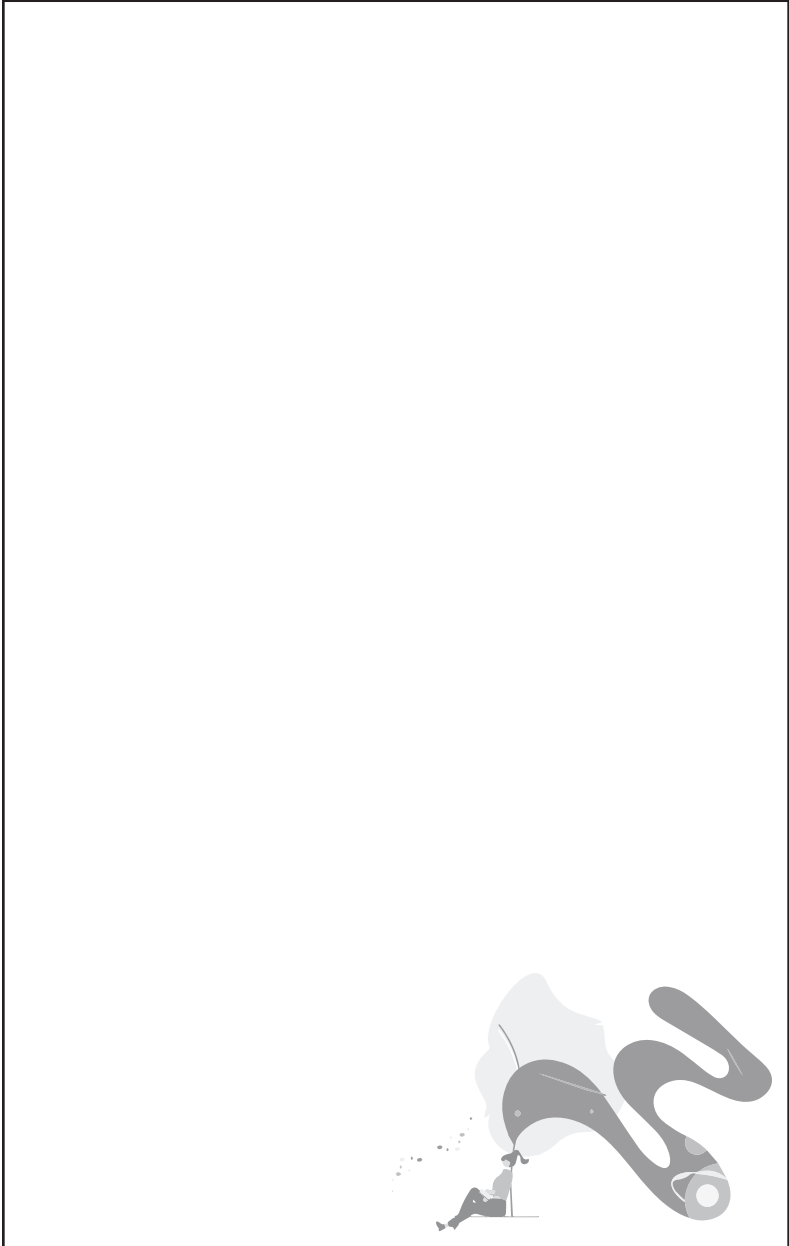
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Please share your thoughts

We would love to hear from you. Please feel free to use this page for leaving any and all feedback for the organizers and help our community grow. Thank you, friend.

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hope it helps

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