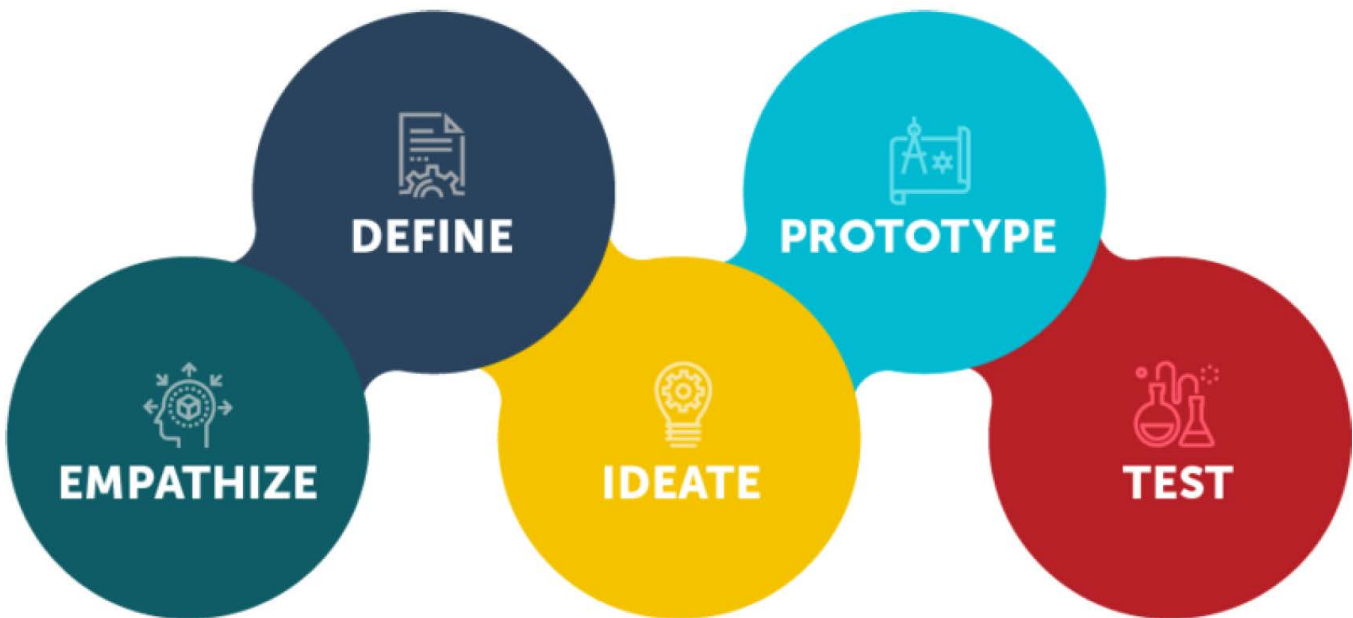


Design Thinking: Crafting How Might We Questions

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Design Thinking fundamentally changes the typical approach to problem solving by focusing first on the user behind the problem in order to find a human-centered solution, considering their specific needs. In using the Stanford Design Thinking Model, shown below, How Might We statements are the bridge between the Define and Ideate stages.



(Image from CX Network)

There is such power in the three-word statement “How Might We” and the way in which design thinking uses this exact question to spark innovation and human-centered solutions. Rather than simply focusing on problem statements, the How Might We technique utilizes a reframing approach to open up creative thinking and increase innovation. Instead of asking how we *will* do something, we are considering how we *might* do it. This encourages broader thinking and true brainstorming rather than limited idea generation by focusing the thought process on a singular answer. This mindset also introduces a deferral of judgment as everyone in the design team is actively ideating solutions and nurtures creative and out of the box options. When using the brainstorming approach, you are implying a solution can be found.

As outlined by [Conceptboard](#), the three words in this statement are very purposeful:

How: Suggests we do not yet have the answer, but allows the design team to explore a range of concepts and ideas instead of jumping straight into the solutions. This is especially beneficial in organizations and industries that are typically known to be helpers and fixers where the quick fix or easiest solution is often the most attractive or manageable but oftentimes does not truly serve the user’s needs.

Might: Places emphasis on the possibility there are multiple ideas and options leading to a solution, allowing everyone to contribute without judgment in a true brainstorming session. This can be particularly beneficial in groups of design thinkers with varying seniority or power dynamics are at play. Introducing solutions in quantity rather than quality invites all thinkers to be as far-fetched and creative as possible.

We: Frames the problem as only truly solvable through collaborative problem-solving, group buy in, compromise, and true teamwork. This emphasizes the value of having a variety of individuals from different positionalities and perspectives as members of your design team as it introduces what should be long standing collaboration and brings in new eyes and ears to hear of the user's needs across their entire experience.

Identify Themes from the Empathy Mapping Process through Problem Statements

Carrying out empathy interviews during step one, empathize, introduced the design team to the specific needs of your users. Within Work+, this may be our student employees or student employee supervisors. Through the empathy interview and empathy mapping process, we receive a depth and breadth of information. When considering your How Might We statement, it is critical to consider the experiences of all those we interviewed and to glean themes from their needs based on what they said, thought, did, and felt.

This can be done by finding common themes across those you interviewed and creating problem statements based on those overarching experiences. A problem statement is a concise and actionable sentence or question that defines your user's experience based on the information gathered and mapped throughout your empathy interviews.

Finding your problem statements can be done collaboratively across the design team through discussion and conversation. Another approach is to have each design member jot down their own considerations of the problem via post it notes (one statement per post it note) and after working individually, bringing all ideas together to see commonality across the team. Aim for quantity not perfection in either approach. Discussing these commonalities and deciding together on the chosen or designated problem statement can then be accomplished.

From a Problem Statement to a How Might We Statement

With your problem statements drafted, it is now the exciting next step of creating your How Might We statement. In similar fashion, you will want to ensure each member of the design team creates as many How Might We statements as possible and share out to the group to narrow down and find commonalities and themes to rewrite or combine together as a group.

This process involves turning your problem statement into statements of possibility.

For example, here is a potential problem statement related to the student employee experience:

“On campus student employees need to work to support their educational expenses but don't have time to successfully carry out course work, job responsibilities, and their extracurricular or experiential opportunities.”

Taking this problem statement and turning it into a How Might We statement may look something like this:

Example 1: How might we support campus student employees in balancing their competing priorities while attending college?

Example 2: How might we help students with time management and prioritization of experiences available to them at their institution?

Example 3: How might we redefine the student working experience for them to see that as an experiential opportunity in and of itself?

Example 4: How might student employee supervisors, faculty, and experiential campus partners partner to envision the student experience across all areas of involvement?

Example 5: How might we more intentionally overlap curricular content into experiential opportunities for students to connect all experiences together in a more direct way with less time overall for all stakeholders involved?

Rather than limiting opportunities for solutions by focusing on the problem in a closed-off way, How Might We statements flip the script and allow for creativity by examining the problem through the user and with ideation towards multiple solutions as the focus. Each problem statement can typically be broken up into multiple How Might We statements, opening up creativity even more.

Process of Creating “How Might We” Questions

You can approach How Might We Questions through this process outlined by [Interaction Design Foundation](#):

1. Capture the core of the problem or challenge through a concise and clearly defined problem statement.
2. Break down the problem statement into its key components.
3. Choose an action verb that prompts the right action and promotes exploration.
4. Insert the subject that is relevant to the challenge or problem.
5. Don't be afraid to stretch your comfort zone by including an element to the How Might We statement that encourages creative thinking.
6. Generate as many How Might We statements as possible by varying the action verbs, subjects, and creative thinking elements. When you hear pain points, reframe them as opportunities.
7. Review and prioritize the How Might We questions based on their relevance and potential impact and refine language for clarity. Do not eliminate or prioritize based on feasibility or ability to execute as that will dampen the ideation.
8. Test How Might We statements within the design team or with the stakeholders involved in the process. Iterate based on feedback and insights and explore variations of questions.
9. Develop follow-up questions to deepen understanding and guide the ideation process.
10. Repeat the steps as needed, as feedback is received, and as insights are gained.

What to do With the How Might We Statements:

Now that you understand where How Might We statements fit into the design thinking process, how to get from empathy interviewing themes to problem statements and then to How Might We statements, you may be wondering what you do with the statements and questions you have now created.

How Might We statements and questions act as the catalyst for the Ideate stage of the design thinking process and guide you to your prototyping and testing. They ensure you continue to stay user centered in your approach to solution generation and can be continually altered and edited as you get more insight and begin truly practicing your solutions. Aim for a scope of creativity to explore unconventional ideas and have fun with it.

Additional Resources

[How Might We \(HMW\)](#)

[How Might We? Template and guide](#)