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# The basic rules of UX Research

Why is UX research important to design a successful product? Here are some good practices to start doing research the right way.



UX RESEARCHER ANALYSING DATA

Recent years, startups and big corporations increased their enthusiasm for research among the discovery phase of a new or existing product.

Businesses understand that meaningful innovation requires to learn and understand



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Later on, in the ideation and sketching phase of a product we will play these personas, designers are empathetic amateur actors playing a given role.

*Empathy — the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.*

Here you can find the 7 golden rules to a better user research approach. This is a live document, so if you think we are missing any important rule don't hesitate to [contact me](#) to improve the content of this article.

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## 1. Don't design for you.

“Don't design what you like, design for your audience and what will best engage and communicate with them”. — Marlys Arnold

Have you ever met a friend for a coffee and suddenly, in the middle of the conversation, with a bright spark in the eyes, your friend exclaimed: “I have an idea that will be worth millions, this app will change the way we do laundry!”

You just heard the word million dollars and the first thing you imagine is yourself laying in a hammock in the Caribbean sea sipping a caipirinha while watching a group of dolphins on the horizon.

Your friend keeps talking about how this new app offering laundry services to millennials for a fair monthly membership will change the way they do this tedious task. Your friend talks and talks and you, as a millennial, start to see all the flaws and blackholes of the whole concept.

After your coffee date, at the comfort of your sofa, you start thinking about the “million dollars idea” and you come to a conclusion, **this is not going to work.**

And this is exactly **WHY** discovery research was born.



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*"We don't know yet, research will tell and data will prove".*

If we want to play mediums, the best way to predict the success or failure of a new product is research, this will tell you if that product is on our user's radar.

*Can you see all the power in research? I am sure you do.*

## 2. Learn, empathise, design.

"It is relatively easy to design for the perfect cases, when everything goes right, or when all the information required is available in proper format."  
Don Norman, author of *The design of everyday things*.

Don Norman's infamous book "The design of everyday things" was written back in 1988 when research was completely unknown by the mass, but in one of his most famous quotes we learn that design is easy if we have all the information required available.

This last decade, the number of players on the playground has grown exponentially.

In the past, big software corporations had no competition, but when the Google MarketPlace and the Apple Store were born in the late 2000's, thousands of startups were born, today we can count over one million startups worldwide.

This number means that in order to succeed and survive you need to differentiate yourself from the others by knowing what your user wants (to pay).

## 3. Know your destination and set the scope of the project.

"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first 55 minutes



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Is Monday morning and your PM or PO shows up excited on a planning meeting and reveals Customer Service has uncovered a big problem on a basic feature of your company's product. She wants you to find a solution for it as soon as possible and you start shaking because you have no idea how to.

**Don't freeze, we are here to help.**

It is only after you have a well-defined goal that you will know what you need to learn. And you need a question before you can answer it. With right questions come right answers.

Interviewing users is an art you can learn, but is necessary to spend time learning best practices, as Fabricio Teixeira states in his article [“Asking the right questions during user research, interviews and testing”](#) start creating themes you want to uncover to continue breaking these themes in answerable questions.

#### **4. Quality is more important than quantity.**

I think there is a tendency in science to measure what is measurable and to decide that what you cannot measure must be uninteresting. — Don Norman.



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With the boom of data analytics we tend to look at numbers and charts to reveal the flaws and strengths of a product. I am not saying this is wrong, but, it is always a but.

At this initial stage where we need to discover how to find a design solution to a users problem, we better focus in undercover the flow that will lead the user achieve its goal.

This is a scheme that usually helps my team formulate the right questions:

- Ask the right people: Not everybody is suitable, forget the idea of getting a pen and a notebook and go out to start interviewing the first people you cross paths with. First, be aware who your audience is.
- Ask open questions: Let them express themselves, don't ask closed questions. Give users some space to explain their thoughts, as opposed to asking binary questions.
- What you want to know? The big question is what you want to learn, not what you actually ask. In fact, asking directly your big question doesn't work, people are afraid to reveal their inner behaviour, but they will tell you indirectly what they are looking for when describing their habits.
- Travel to the past. A good way to learn about your users' habits is to ask them to explain what they did in a past given moment. They will remember successful and frustrating past experiences that will unfold critical experiences.



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## 5. Observe.

“Methodology is intuition reconstructed in tranquility” — Paul Lazarsfeld.

I have always been pretty much outspoken and enjoyed participating in open conversations of everything, but as a child I learned a big lesson from a person I admire, my grandma.

I was a loud fourteen years old teen talking with my uncles about the economy on a hot July evening. I remember I was engaged in the conversation at a point that I almost did



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My octogenarian grandmother was nearby listening. At some point in the conversation, she had enough of my lousy voice and told me: “Don’t you see you are not listening?”

I blushed because I have a strong respect for her. She continued: “Before having an opinion on something, you first have to observe in silence, listen carefully, experience it and if you do the work, you’ll be an expert on it”.

My uncle and aunt laugh. I obviously was a bit ashamed of what happened, but I learned a life lesson: “**observe first, talk later**”.

Researchers observe people interacting with a product and look for behavioural clues to understand why they act the way they do.

## 6. Understand and Analyse.

“A mental model is what users know (or think they know) about a system such as your website”. Nielsen Norman Group.

We designers all have assumptions about how a user will use the product we are designing, but in reality, this a reflection of your own mental model.

When a person visits your app, they act according to their mental model. If they click the cart icon they expect to add the item to a shopping list, if they click the plus icon they expect to add another item to the list, and so on. Thus, it is important you define the user’s mental model before designing the product.

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“Let’s chew on the chewables!” — **Pawan Mishra**

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UX Researchers not only observe and understand consumer behaviour, they must also be able to interpret it. You need to chew on the information you previously gathered to create trends and patterns you can share with the design team.

## 7. Pick your weapons.



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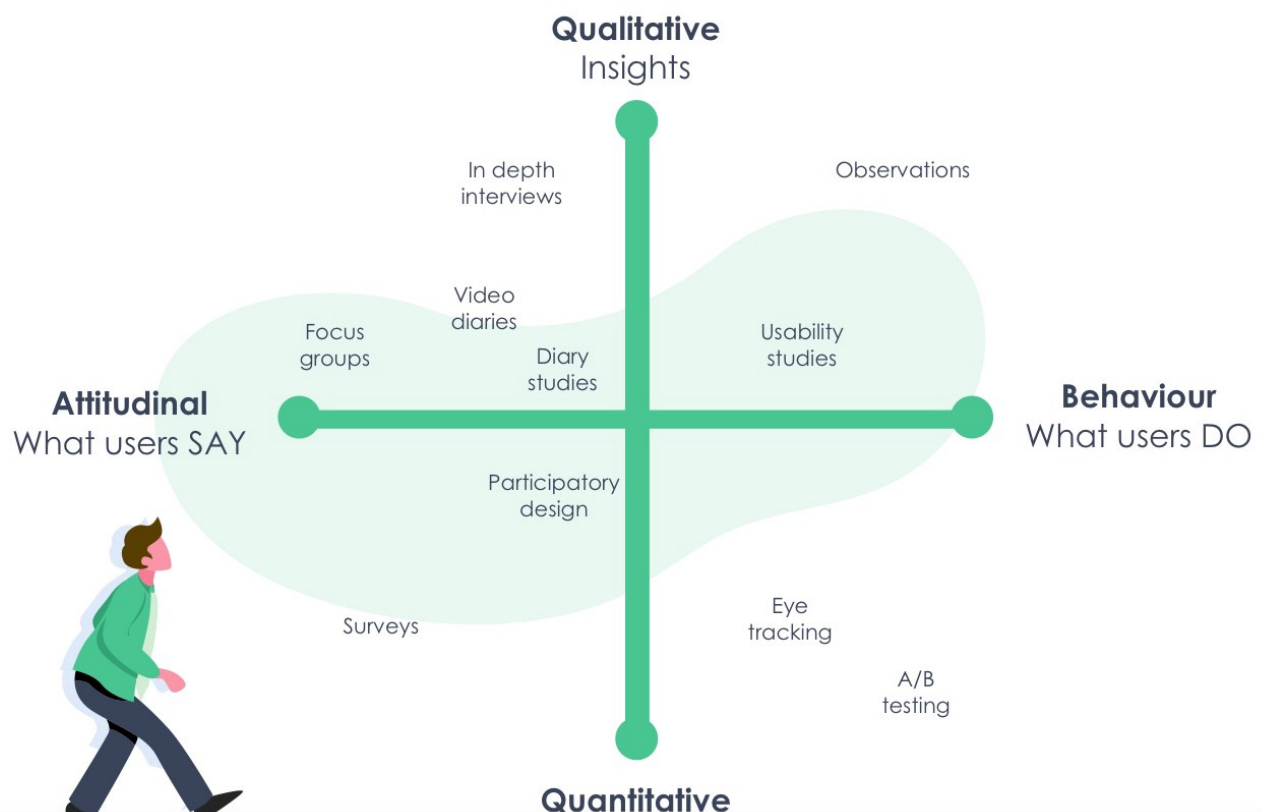
## Chief Executive Officer, Jaguar Land Rover

There are multiple techniques and frames out there that will help you reach your goal, you just need to pick wisely what is best in any given case. You can read more about some of the research techniques in my article [“Rapid UX research”](#).

Just as a sneak peek, I'd like to introduce the secondary and primary research.

Secondary research is a type of research that has already been compiled, gathered, organised and published by others. A lot of secondary research is available right on the Web, simply by entering keywords and phrases for the type of information you're looking for.

Primary research, on the other hand, is research you conduct yourself (or hire someone to do for you.) It involves going directly to a source — usually customers and prospective customers in your target market — to ask questions and gather information. Most common [research practices](#) utilised by researchers and designers include interviews, users surveys and usability tests.





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## Name it, research-based design

Designers are like super-agents with a super tough secret mission, design a product that users love.

Designers are like Sherlock Holmes and researchers are like Dr. Watson, he is a friendly ally always ready to help because he has all the answers. No one can live without each other.

We entered a new era of evidence-based design. Design is an exchange of value. Researchers have to learn what users value and what businesses expect in return, because we can't never forget that businesses are expecting a tasty return.

It's not a perfect way to approach research, but I hope these rules help you start your path. We live uncertain times and getting comfy with uncertainty is something we need to learn quickly.

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Happy research! *Do you need help? [Get in touch!](#)*



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