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The ultimate UX Research cheat sheet

How to combine UX Research and Design Thinking in a useful way.

A black rectangular graphic with the text "UX CHEAT SHEET" in the center. "UX" is in white, "CHEAT" is in red, and "SHEET" is in white. All text is in a bold, sans-serif font.

TL;DR: This article has the following purpose:

- List the top UX Research methods
- Show when to use them in the Design Thinking Circle
- Describe each one briefly
- Link to additional information for each method

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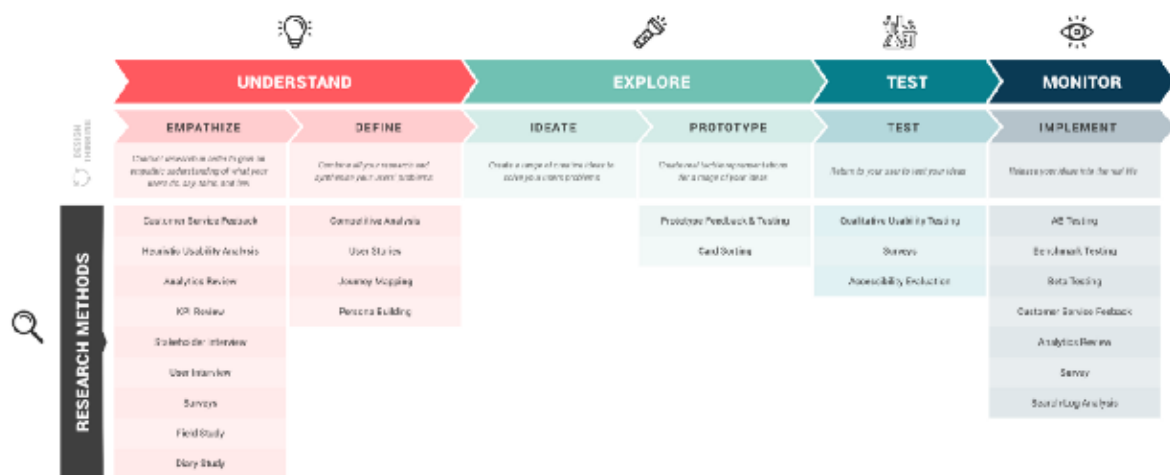



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away but can demand technical support (e.g. tracking, AB testing). Also, this is not a list of things you **MUST** do, it is a toolbox from which you can pick the tools that are most relevant for you and the environment you are working in.

The overview consists of 3 connected levels:

- Research phases
- Design Thinking phases
- Appropriate research methods



UX Research Cheat Sheet
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Phase 1 — Understand



UNDERSTAND

EMPATHIZE

DEFINE



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EMPATHIZE

Conduct research in order to gain an empathic understanding of what your users do, say, think, and feel

1st step of the Design Thinking Process

In the first step, “Empathize”, we, therefore, want to be able to better put ourselves in the users’ shoes, experience what they say, think, feel and hence understand their basic needs and desires. This also includes a better understanding of our company and its underlying business needs. The following research methods are suitable for this:

Customer Service Feedback — Speak to your Customer Service, they have one of the closest relationships to your users and know a lot about them and their problems.

Usability heuristics — Jakob Nielsen’s 10 general principles for good interaction design. Always a good start for evaluating a product.

Analytics & KPI Review — Quantitative tracking of user behaviour (e.g. Google Analytics) like click-flows, time spent on-site, where your users enter your system and where they leave.

Stakeholder Interviews — By talking to your stakeholders you can collect and understand business needs and constraints.

User Interviews — Conversations with current or potential customers to better understand what people think about a certain topic.

Surveys — A very powerful tool to quickly collect quantitative and/or qualitative data about topics of interest. Specific scientifically proven surveys foster specific topics. E.g. **SUS** validates the usability of a system, **KANO** evaluates what features are potentially most valuable for your customers.



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of time in their natural environment.

DEFINE

*Combine all your research and
synthesise your users' problems*

2nd step of the Design Thinking Process

Next, we want to define the uncovered problems as well as our users more precisely. When and where do problems occur inside of our product? Who exactly are our user and how do they use our product. Appropriate research methods for this are:

Competitive Testing — You do not need to reinvent the wheel. Get inspiration from your competition they very likely have to face similar problems as you do.

User Stories [Link 2](#) — A compact and easy way to describe parts of a functionality from the users' point of view.

User Journey — A visualization of an individual's relationships with a product over time and across different channels.

User Personas — Fictional users of your product, created based on previous research to represent different user types. These can help to better focus on real user needs during the next phase.

Phase 2 — Explore



EXPLORE



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In the explore phase plenty of potential ideas (hypotheses) get created to satisfy the needs of our users. These ideas are then put on a first test bench to be validated.

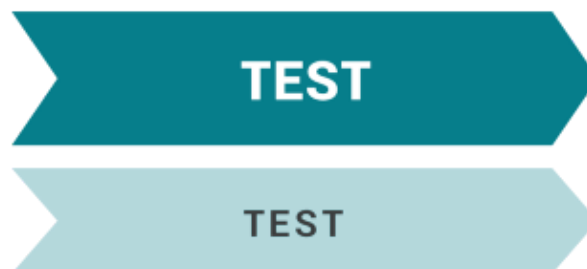
Appropriate research methods for this are:

Card Sorting — A tool to build and evaluate the information architecture of a system. Participants organize cards labelled with topics into categories that make sense to them. E.g. “Football”, “Basketball” and “Tennisball” belong to the category “Ball” while “Football, Basketball and Tennis” could fit into “Sports”.

Paper prototypes — Simple prototypes scribbled on paper to conduct early user testing.

Interactive prototypes — High fidelity prototypes that come close to the final product, but are still based rather on designs than on code.

Phase 3— Test



5th step of the Design Thinking Process

During the testing phase, we validate our final designs with potential users.

Appropriate research methods for this are:

Qualitative Usability Testing — Observe real users performing different tasks using your product to identify weaknesses in its usability.

Moderated Remote Usability Studies — Usability tests conducted with the use of



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SUS validates the usability of a system, **KANO** evaluates what features are potentially most valuable for your customers.

Accessibility Evaluation — Test if your system is accessible for a broad range of people. People with disabilities, elderly people or even situational disabilities like a distracted driver, strong sunlight or loud noises.

Phase 4— Monitor



6th step of the Design Thinking Process

After a product is released, the research does not stop. While we have done a lot to satisfy the needs of our users in the best possible way, we shouldn't stop iterating and always have an open ear for what users say about our product. Therefore this phase is closely linked to the first phase of this cycle. This is also reflected in the existence of some of the same research methods as in the “Discover” phase. Appropriate research methods are:

AB Testing (related to *multivariate testing*) — Test different version of a product randomly on your users and see which version performs better in regards to an intended goal.

Benchmark Testing — Tracking the progress of certain indicators over a longer period of time to validate the success of a new design or feature. This could be e.g. number of purchases, retention rate, user engagement etc.



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closest relationships to your customers and know a lot about them and their problems.

Analytics & KPI Review — Quantitative tracking of user behaviour (e.g. Google Analytics) like click-flows, time spent on-site, where your user enters your system and where they leave.

Surveys — A very powerful tool to quickly collect quantitative and qualitative data about topics of interest. Specific scientifically proven surveys foster specific topics. E.g. **SUS** validates the usability of a system, **KANO** evaluates what features are potentially most valuable for your customers.

Search Log Analysis — Analyze your users search terms. What are people looking for and how do they call things when they do.

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Thanks for reading!

Did I forget anything? Put something in the wrong column? Added a wrong link? Let me know! :)

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This article would not have been possible without the great work from the people at **Nielsen Norman Group**. Probably the best collection of UX related articles in the world. I was inspired by their version of a **UX Cheat Sheet** — this article and especially the visualisation is an iteration of their work. I wanted to add an extra layer by combining the research methods with the common Design Thinking Circle and create an overall more compact version.





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