

Template “Design Document”

0. Introduction

This document is intended to kickstart your design work. Get your initial thoughts, ideas and questions out of your head as fast as possible. Force yourself to articulate what’s in your mind by writing it down before you spend precious time in design tools.

Below you will find multiple sections with questions and examples—none of those are mandatory! You can fill out the document from top to bottom, but you are also free to skip, rearrange or completely remodel it. Not everything suggested in here will be suitable for the kind of thing you want to design, so feel free to mix it up.

If you want to share your document with others, you can use this section as an introduction.

1. Braindump

Write down everything in your head regarding the thing you want to design. Don’t waste time on structure or style, just jot down whatever is on your mind. The goal of this first step is to empty your head into the document. You can use this as a starting point for the following sections.

2. Context

Put the thing you are designing into context. What is it, why should it exist? What problem is it going to solve and for who? Below is a list of questions to help you.

- How are things currently?
- What’s the problem or how could things be better?
- Who is your customer?
- What problem are they trying to solve?
- How do they currently solve this problem?
- Why should they care about this new thing?
- How does this impact the business?

- How does it fit into the bigger picture?

Including customer quotes or stories can make the problem easier to feel. Try to make clear how this relates to the overall mission, vision and strategy. Is there a UX strategy or some other high-level artifact that this relates to?

3. Scope

Outline the scope of the thing you are designing. What is going to be part of it and what is (purposefully) left out? What is necessary for success?

3.1 Goals

What problem(s) are you solving for and why?

3.2 Non-goals

What problem(s) are you not solving for and why?

3.3 Definition of success

- What does success look like for your users? What is the main action that a user has to take to extract value from your product or feature? ⇒ Design Metrics
- What does success look like for your business? ⇒ Business KPIs

4. Research

What do you know about the thing you design and what do you want to find out? This is about data and facts, not assumptions and opinions!

1. What do you already know (analytics, support requests, etc.)?
2. What do you want to find out (data requests, user research)?

5. Requirements

What must the thing do to meet its goals? Be specific.

6. Design

Here's where you will actually design the first iteration of the thing—with words. How is it going to work? What is the desired look and feel of it?

6.1 Design ideas

How will this thing work? Spell out UX flow, UI states and edge cases. Later on, you can include links to designs and prototypes.

6.2 Alternatives considered

What other ideas have been discussed and why aren't you pursuing them?

6.3 How things could go wrong

- What are some extreme edge cases?
- Is this accessible and inclusive?
- How could this be abused?

6.4 Look and feel

How should the thing look and feel like? Is there an existing brand going to be associated with it?

7. How will you measure results?

What do you need in order to track the success or failure of this thing?

8. Notable discussions and decisions

Meeting notes, critique feedback, noteworthy email or chat discussions. Collect and record notable conversations and decisions that folks may have missed.