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D – Describe objectively what you learned

The most significant learning this semester stemmed from building my personal website and completing three progressive projects. Through web development and project design, I gained invaluable insights into balancing visual aesthetics with user experience, particularly recognising the importance of user-centred design. At the start of the semester, I encountered an almost entirely unfamiliar field of web development. Tackling both the technical aspects and the design practice simultaneously posed a substantial challenge.

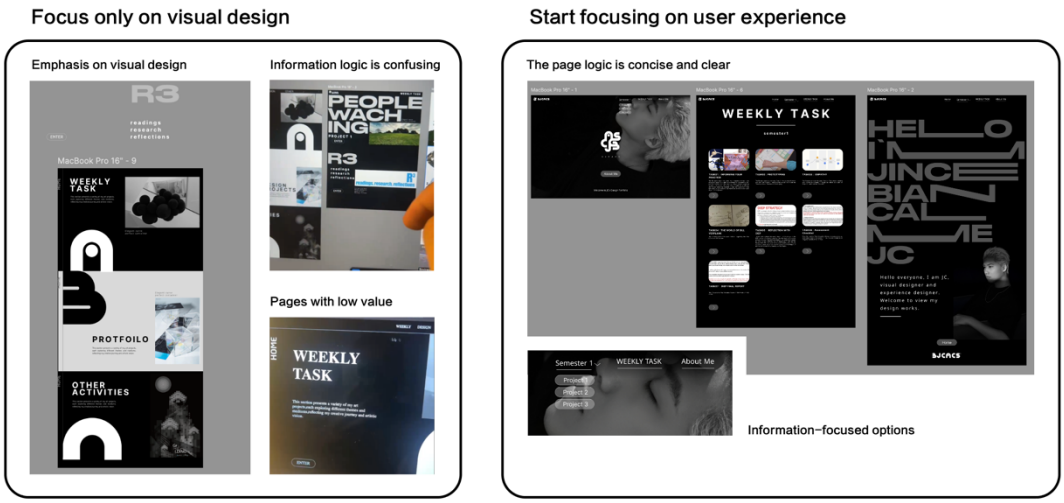
Initially, I devoted considerable effort to creating eye-catching interfaces, aiming to demonstrate my design prowess through polished visual elements. However, I neglected to give sufficient attention to user needs and usage processes. Reflecting on my previous design experience, I tended to prioritise visual effects, believing that was where my strengths lay. This inclination was especially clear in my first project, where the focus on visual appeal overshadowed user research. Only through continuous iteration and practice did I gradually realise that, however striking an interface may be, it cannot provide an excellent user experience without a deep understanding of actual user needs.

Consequently, I began integrating user research into subsequent projects, collecting feedback on functional requirements, usage habits, and pain points through interviews and questionnaires, while striving for a more balanced approach between visual appeal and functionality. This change rendered my designs more practical and helped me appreciate the importance of empathy: only by consistently thinking from the user's perspective can we create designs that truly address problems and pain points. These projects broadened my design outlook, enabling a pivotal shift from focusing on 'aesthetics' to emphasising 'experience' and granting me a deeper understanding of user-centred design principles. This evolution prompted me to pay closer attention to feasibility and sustainability in my solutions, ultimately creating more enduring value for users.

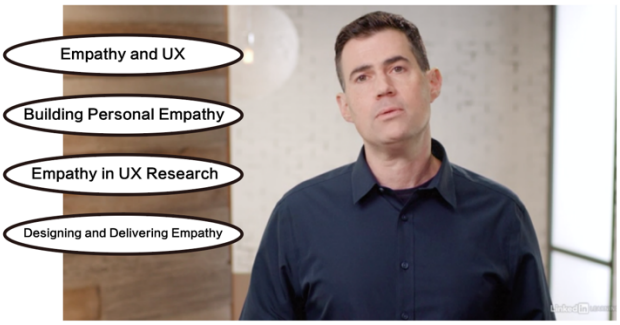
I – Interpret the insight (in one or more paragraphs)

This understanding is highly significant, as it implies that effective design requires a fundamental shift in thinking. Transitioning from visually driven design to user-centred design demands that we reconsider how each design decision influences the user experience, rather

than focusing solely on its visual appeal. This shift challenges traditional design thinking and reminds us that the value of design lies not in surface-level aesthetics but in its ability to genuinely address user needs.

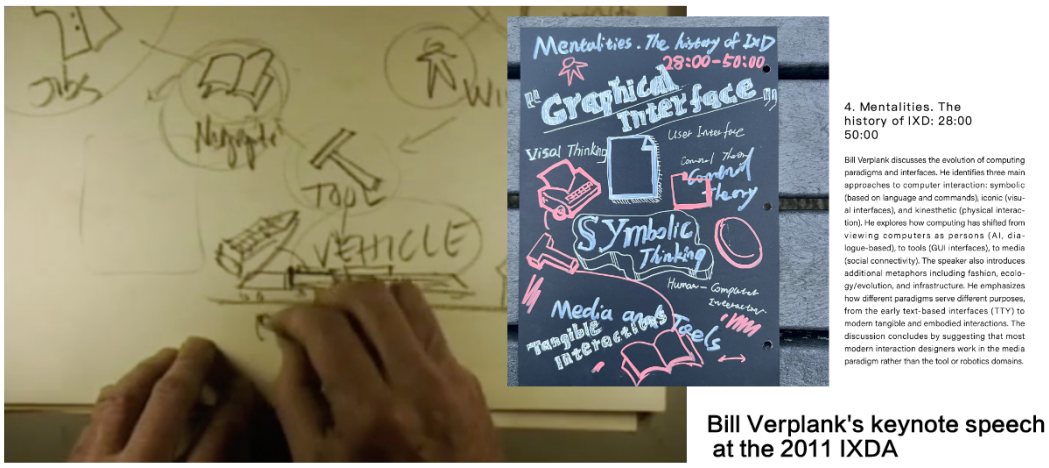


One key takeaway from this new understanding is that technical implementation and visual design should serve user needs, rather than merely displaying the designer's skill. In my portfolio website, I initially used complex animations and sophisticated visuals, but user testing revealed these features slowed loading times, confused navigation, and made information harder to find. By simplifying the design and removing unnecessary effects, the site became more effective, proving the "keep it simple" principle: excessive complexity often hurts, rather than helps, the user experience. This shift in perspective led me to ensure each design element serves a clear purpose—whether simplifying navigation structures or highlighting essential information—so users can achieve their goals easily and naturally.



Based on Cory Lebson's "Empathy in UX Design" course outline, which covers essential aspects from foundational empathy concepts to practical application in UX research and design, my understanding of user-centered design was significantly enhanced. The course's structure, progressing from basic empathy principles through to its implementation in UX research and design delivery, provided me with a comprehensive framework for incorporating empathy into my design practice. This directly influenced my approach to both user research and design decisions, helping me better understand not just what users do, but why they do

it, ultimately leading to more effective and user-centered design solutions.



4. Mentalities. The history of IXD: 28:00 50:00

Bill Verplank discusses the evolution of computing paradigms and interfaces. He identifies three main approaches to computer interaction: symbolic (based on language and commands), iconic (visual interfaces), and kinesthetic (physical interaction). He explores how computing has shifted from viewing computers as persons (AI, dialogue-based), to tools (GUI interfaces), to media (social connectivity). The speaker also introduces additional metaphors including fashion, ecology/evolution, and infrastructure. He emphasizes how different paradigms serve different purposes, from the early text-based interfaces (TTY) to modern tangible and embodied interactions. The discussion concludes by suggesting that most modern interaction designers work in the media paradigm rather than the tool or robotics domains.

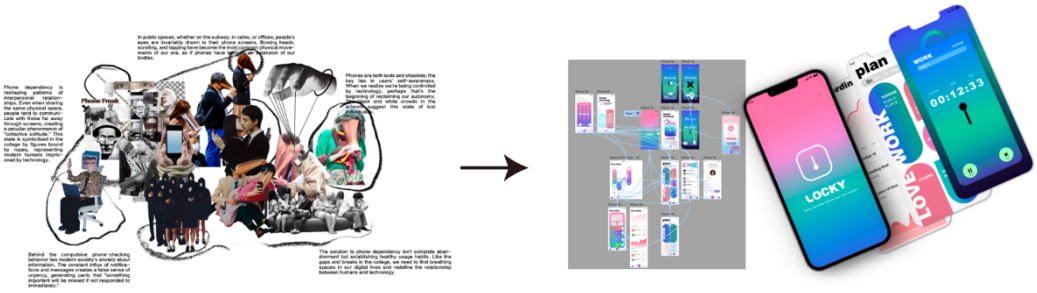
Bill Verplank's keynote speech at the 2011 IXDA

Furthermore, Bill Verplank's keynote speech at the 2011 IXDA conference provided me with crucial insights into interaction design principles. His interpretation of the relationship between design and human behavior helped me understand that the fundamental purpose of technical implementation and visual design is to serve user needs rather than showcase a designer's capabilities. As my design experience grew, my design philosophy gradually shifted from emphasizing visual effects to focusing more on practical user experience. The "keep it simple" principle made me realize that excessive complexity often weakens rather than enhances user experience. This understanding has helped me consistently prioritize user needs in the design process, striving to find the optimal balance between visual appeal and practical functionality.

I believe this realization has a profound impact on my design practice. It not only changes my methodology, but more importantly, shifts my mindset. It reminds me that good design should be invisible: users shouldn't feel the presence of the design as they use it, yet they can naturally achieve their goals. This user-centered design philosophy is redefining the standards for digital product design.

E – Evaluate what you have learned (in one or more paragraphs)

This understanding has demonstrated its importance in multiple respects. Firstly, it fundamentally changed the way I approach design projects, as clearly shown in the two core projects I completed this semester. This shift affected not only my design methods but, more critically, my mindset, granting me deeper insights into user experience design.



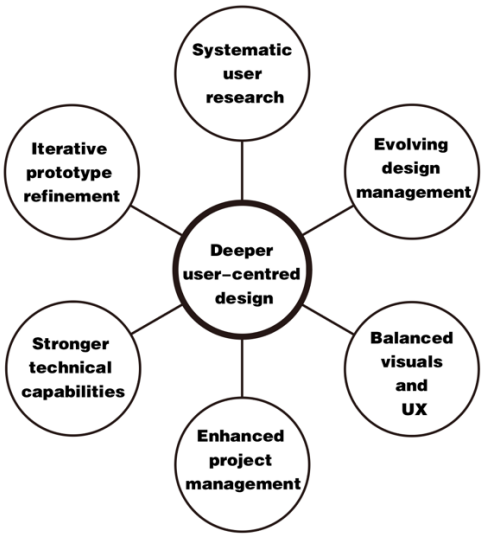
The LOCKY project (mobile usage management app) marked my first attempt at user-centered design. Although I conducted user research at the beginning of the project, this approach remained relatively superficial. This practice in user research proved valuable, revealing that understanding user problems requires deeper insights. For example, while users reported excessive phone usage, the root causes might lie in the addictive nature of app design or a lack of self-management awareness. This understanding resonates with user research theories, indicating that surface problems often mask deeper user needs. In the later stages of the project, I began to realize that effective design solutions must be built upon a thorough understanding of user behavior patterns and motivations. This realization significantly influenced my subsequent design approach.

In the Chillet project (a smart refrigerator management application), my progress in design understanding became noticeably evident. Realising the importance of in-depth user research, I adopted a more systematic approach that included questionnaires and in-depth interviews. This refined methodology yielded more valuable insights: the questionnaires revealed widespread food waste issues among international students, while the in-depth interviews uncovered specific challenges such as language barriers in reading food labels and disorganised storage practices. These improvements proved especially beneficial when developing targeted solutions like food label recognition and expiry reminders. Notably, user feedback was integrated throughout the entire design process, rather than only at the beginning or end, and this ongoing user involvement greatly enhanced the final product's practicality.

Transitioning from LOCKY to Chillet broadened my design perspective and highlighted my growth in user research. While LOCKY primarily addressed surface-level concerns like phone usage time, Chillet delved into deeper challenges facing international students, such as busy

academic schedules and the lack of efficient fridge management tools. Building on these root causes, I designed features including smart categorisation, meal suggestions, and storage-space management, taking into account scenarios like shared refrigerators, academic pressure, and worry over expired food. This comprehensive approach not only increased the product's value but also further reinforced my user-centred design mindset.While recognizing these improvements, I also remain keenly aware of my shortcomings. Although my user research methods have advanced, I still need a more systematic research framework.

P – Plan how this learning will be applied in practice



Building on these insights and experiences, I plan to enhance my professional competences across multiple perspectives in my forthcoming studies and work. With regard to user research methods, I will establish a more systematic framework that includes an in-depth study of specialised tools such as user journey maps and personas, the creation of more standardised user interview protocols, and the development of more comprehensive feedback-collection systems. Simultaneously, I will iteratively refine prototypes, steadily deepening my understanding of the prototyping process to ensure each design phase remains user-focused. I will also continue to cultivate and apply empathy, using a more nuanced emotional lens to identify user pain points and thereby improve the rationale and precision of design decisions. Furthermore, I intend to expand my technical capabilities—particularly by enhancing the quality and efficiency of my web development code—acquiring additional skills in interaction design, and exploring new design tools to ensure that proposed solutions are implemented effectively. Finally, by integrating a "user-centred" philosophy into every project, consistently seeking the optimal balance between visual design and user experience, and embracing interdisciplinary thinking, I aim to incorporate knowledge from various fields into my design practice.

In addition, I will be strengthening my project management skills by establishing more robust

timelines to ensure adequate user research and testing at each stage, and by refining documentation practices to improve collaboration with development teams. These strategies will not only make me a more proficient designer but will also help me develop my design management skills. I am also contemplating whether I could become a qualified design project manager; therefore, as I progress in my career, I will continue learning and remain open to new design possibilities.