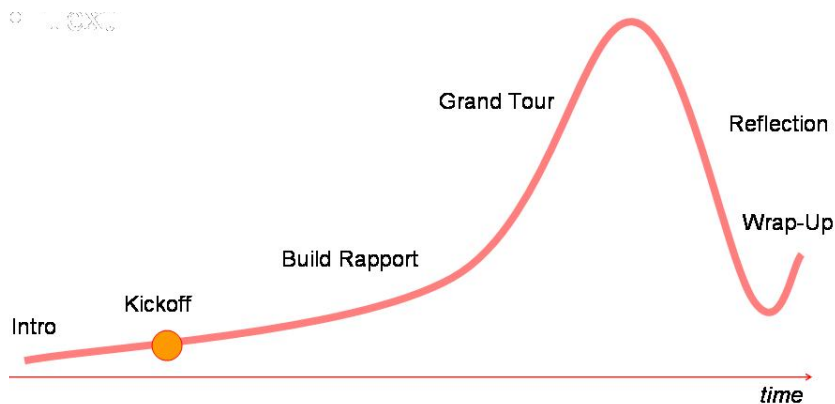


Interviewing Crib Sheet



Engaging with people directly reveals a tremendous amount about the way they think and the values they hold. Sometimes these thoughts and values are not even obvious to the people who hold them, and a good engagement can surprise both the designer and the subject by the unanticipated insights that are revealed. The stories that people tell and the things that people say they do—even if they are different from what they actually do—are a strong indicator of their deeply held beliefs about the way the world is. Good designs are built on a solid understanding of these kinds of beliefs and values.

Visually, the interview process might look like this:



(Thanks to Michael Barry for this model)

- **Prepare yourself:** Forget about the project. Care about the people. People will tell you amazing things if they sense you're really listening. Being listened to is cathartic.
- **Introduction:** Make the person feel comfortable, and let them know that their knowledge is important.
- **Kickoff:** Shift the focus to them. Get them talking. Ask them to tell stories, and ask lots of follow-up questions.
- **Build Trust:** Let them know you're really interested. Most of the time spent in an interview is spent building trust. Patiently draw them out.
- **Grand Tour:** Explore the depths of their world. Ask about all the minute details, including things you think you already understand.
- **Climax:** Ask the big questions about meaning and worldview.
- **Reflection:** Test your discoveries and insights with them. Get their feedback. Have them help you determine where to go from here.
- **Wrap-Up:** Signal that the interview is over (thanking them is a good way), but keep your ears open! Many great insights happen on your way out the door.

Here are some extremely truncated examples of questions for each stage, from a project on coffee:

- **Introduction:** "Hi, I'm a Stanford student doing a project on understanding people's experiences with coffee and the places they drink it. There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear what you have to say."
- **Kick-off:** "Do you drink coffee?"
- **Build rapport:** "Did you have a coffee today? How was it? Do you have a favorite coffee?"
- **Grand Tour:** "Can you describe your most memorable coffee experience? Why was it so unique? What happened?"
- **Reflection:** "If you were designing the ultimate coffee shop, based on your ideal experience"

WORKING AS A TEAM

By having two interviewers you can be observers in action. Listen to what your partner is asking and think about where the interviewee is leading. Step in with your own question if things bog down (but don't forget that often you get the best responses by letting a silence go on longer than feels comfortable). When your partner is focusing on the interviewee, you become the primary note taker.

Review the interview together afterwards while it is fresh in mind, and make more notes of what you recall. Having the other person's memory and observations to bounce off of will let you capture much more.

ADVICE FOR ENGAGING

- **Ask why.** Even when you think you know the answer, ask people why they do or say things. The answers will sometimes surprise you.
- **Encourage stories.** Whether or not the stories people tell are true, they reveal how they think about the world. Ask questions that get people telling stories.
- **Look for inconsistencies.** Sometimes what people say and what they do are different. These inconsistencies often hide interesting insights.

- **Listen to nonverbal cues.** Be aware of body language and emotions.
- **Don't be afraid of silence.** Interviewers often feel the need to ask another question when there is a pause. Sometimes if you allow there to be silence, a person will reflect on what they've just said and say something deeper.
- **Don't suggest answers to your questions.** Even if they pause before answering, don't help them by suggesting an answer. This can unintentionally get people to say things that agree with your expectations.
- **Ask questions neutrally.** "What do you think about this idea?" is a better question than "Don't you think this idea is great?" because the first question doesn't imply that there is a right answer.