How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Critique
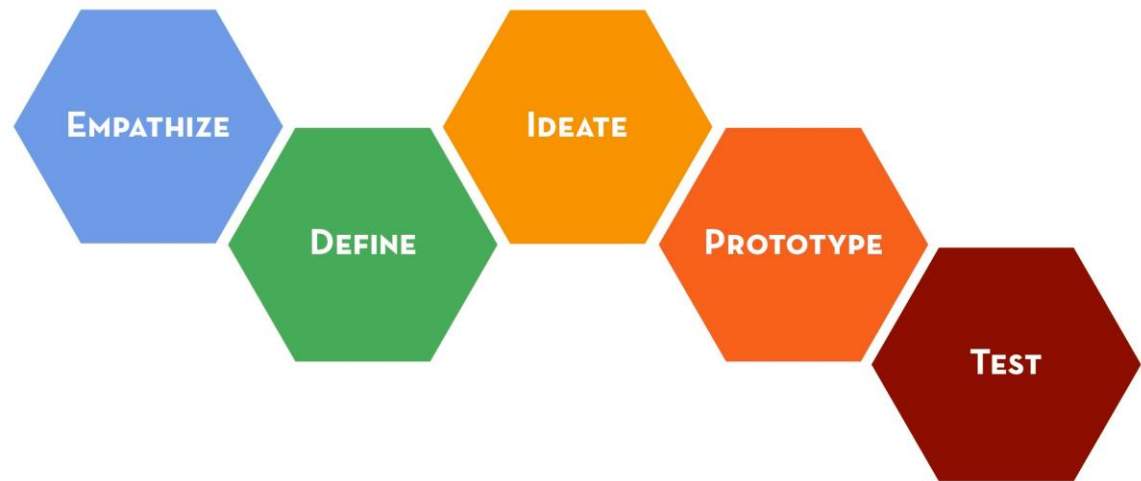
Rachel Ivy Clarke

Syracuse University School of Information Studies

rclark01@syr.edu

@archivy

The Design Thinking Cycle

EMPATHIZE

DEFINE

IDEATE

PROTOTYPE

TEST

What is critique?

What critique is

- Based on experience
- Based on established repertoire
- Based on rationale
- Based on connection to problem framing, user needs

What critique is not

- Arbitrary or subjective
- Personal attack
- Defense/justification of a design
- Reassurance
- An opportunity to attack someone because you don't like their work
- A value judgement

The "crit" session

Stages of a crit session

1. Presentation
   - The designer tells the attendees about their design and its context and goals

2. Feedback
   - Participants offer comments and questions
   - Can be from experts and/or intended users

3. Reflection
   - Designer may respond to questions or comments during the session
   - Designer may also reflect after the session prior to or during iteration based on feedback

Rules of critique

1. Talk about the design, not the person
2. Be honest, but be kind
3. No one needs to defend a position

How to give?

- Avoid value judgments
  - NOT: "I like/I don't like"; "this is good/bad"
  - INSTEAD: "What's working, what's not working, what could be different?"

- Connect to problem framing
  - Speak in terms of the user's POV and the project goals

- Empathize with the presenter

- Avoid problem solving and design decisions

- When in doubt, ask a question
  - "Why did you…?"

How to receive?

- Start early
  - Don't wait until your design is "finished"

- Provide context
  - State goals & scope
  - Share design goals & rationale for them

- Don't take it personally!
  - It's about the artifact, not you.
  - The critique is NOT a defense

- Gets lots of critique
  - The more you do it, the easier it gets

Let's try it!

Step 1: Create (5 minutes)

- Imagine you are planning for next year's conference
- Using the materials provided, sketch an idea for a **new conference nametag**
- Work quickly to capture your ideas
- Don't worry about being perfect!

Step 2: Critique
(30 minutes)

1. Designer has **1 minute** to present their design to the table

2. Going around the table, each person offers 1 critique statement or question
   - During this time, designers are not allowed to speak!

3. Designer has **1 minute** to ask and/or answer questions

4. Lather, rinse, repeat!

Good critique...

- Takes time

- Draws on repertory knowledge
  - The more you design, the better you get at critique
  - The more you participate in critique (giving and receiving) the better you get at it

- Harnesses rationale rather than judgement
  - Explicates why design decisions were made
  - Always connects back to the problem and the users

- Incorporates elements of design beyond the simple "design thinking" model

Thanks!

rclark01@syr.edu

http://archvy.net