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Description

Throughout this learning phase, my work has focused on understanding empathy not only as an emotional capacity, but as a foundational method within user experience (UX) and design practice. This exploration was shaped by a combination of theoretical input, design exercises, reflective writing, and personal narrative. Central to this process was the Empathy in UX Design course, which framed empathy as a skill that can be intentionally developed and applied across research, design, and communication.

The course introduced empathy as both the ability to feel what others feel and the experience of emotionally resonating with another person's situation. It distinguished empathy from compassion, emphasizing that while compassion involves the desire to reduce suffering, empathy requires first understanding and experiencing that suffering. This distinction positioned empathy as a prerequisite for meaningful UX design.

Empathy in UX Design

1. What Is Empathy?
 - ① Experiencing others' feeling
 - ② Feeling what others feel
 - ③ Ability + Experience
 - ④ Empathy is not certainty → It is an informed, emotional best guess
 - ⑤ Difference from Compassion
 - Empathy: feeling others' pain
 - Compassion: tendency to relieve pain
2. Empathy and UX
 - ① UX = understand + reduce pain
 - ② Research → Design
 - ③ Filter bias
 - ④ Design for joy, success
 - ⑤ Empathy drives better products
3. Building Empathy
 - ① Can be developed
 - ② Observe emotions
 - ③ Body language and tone
 - ④ Intentional practice
 - ⑤ Everyday and professional use

4. Empathy in Research

- ① Qualitative > Quantitative
- ② Interviews
- ③ Usability testing
- ④ Ethnography
- ⑤ Stories > data points

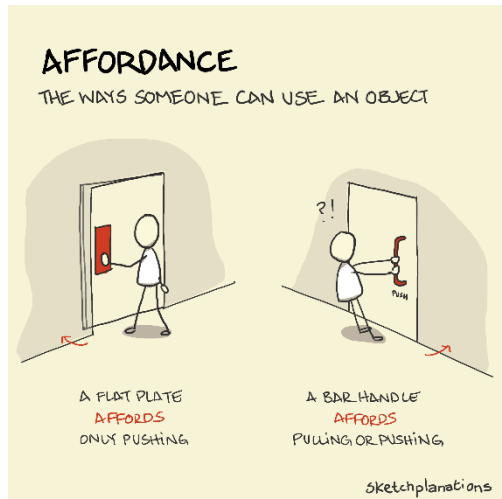
5. Sharing Empathy

- ① Storytelling
- ② Quotes and video
- ③ Stakeholder involvement
- ④ Personas
- ⑤ Journey maps

6. Challenges and Responsibility

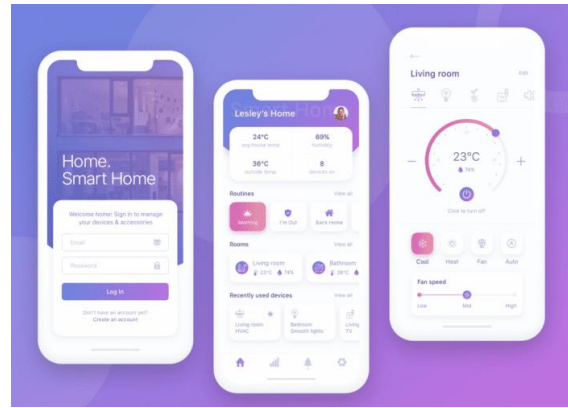
- ① Emotional pain
- ② Flexibility in research
- ③ Neutrality
- ④ All supports, not replaces empathy
- ⑤ Use empathy intentionally

Alongside the video content, I engaged with readings and discussions around affordance and signifiers, particularly through examples such as the “Norman Door.” These concepts highlighted how everyday design can create confusion, frustration, and emotional discomfort when users are expected to adapt to poorly communicated systems. Rather than viewing these moments as user failure, the theory reframed them as failures of design communication.



In practice, I undertook several prototyping exercises, progressing from low-fidelity sketches to digital wireframes and more interactive prototypes. This iterative process required me to repeatedly anticipate how users might interpret and emotionally respond to design decisions. I also explored storytelling as a design and research tool, learning how emotional narratives can convey insight more effectively than data alone.





Further reflection emerged through the Manifesto and Conditional Design workshop, where design was approached as a system of rules, constraints, and values rather than solutions. This challenged my assumptions about design as inherently problem-solving and encouraged critical thinking about authorship, power, and inclusion.

As this learning phase unfolded, my understanding of empathy did not develop all at once, but gradually through repeated exposure and application. At the beginning, empathy felt like a familiar yet vague concept, something assumed to be intuitive rather than actively practiced. Early course materials helped establish a conceptual foundation, but it was only through engaging with multiple formats over time that empathy began to take on clearer shape.

Each activity contributed differently to this process. Video lectures provided language and structure, while prototyping exercises translated abstract ideas into concrete decision-making. Reflective writing slowed the pace of learning, allowing insights to surface that were not immediately visible during fast-paced design tasks. Over time, these modes reinforced one another, turning empathy from a topic I was learning *about* into something I was learning *through*.

Finally, my reflective writing project Letter to My Son allowed me to situate design within a deeply personal and future-oriented context. Writing to an imagined future child forced me to confront questions of responsibility, uncertainty, technology, and care extending empathy beyond immediate users to future generations.

Interpretation

Taking them together, these experiences reshaped my understanding of empathy as a central connective force in design practice. Rather than being

confined to the research phase, empathy emerged as something that must flow continuously through ideation, prototyping, storytelling, and stakeholder communication.

The Empathy in UX Design course made clear that UX professionals are hired not simply to identify usability issues, but to represent users who are not present in the room. This requires designers to actively filter their own assumptions and biases while imagining both the success and failure of others interacting with a product. Empathy, in this sense, becomes a way of temporarily decentering oneself.

This interpretation aligned strongly with affordance theory. When a product fails to communicate how it should be used, the emotional burden is placed on the user. Confusion, embarrassment, and frustration are not accidental by-products; they are emotional consequences of design decisions. Understanding this reframed my approach to design critique: rather than asking whether something “works,” I began asking how it feels to fail.

Prototyping reinforced this perspective. Each iteration represented a hypothesis not only about functionality, but about user emotion. Low-fidelity sketches allowed me to explore conceptual clarity, while higher-fidelity prototypes exposed where assumptions broke down. The act of prototyping frustrating an empathetic exercise and attempt to anticipate misunderstanding before it becomes frustration.

Storytelling further deepened this interpretation. Research findings expressed as charts or bullet points often lack urgency, whereas stories preserve emotional context. By integrating direct quotes, narrative structure, and even moments of silence or hesitation, storytelling helps stakeholders feel the user’s experience rather than simply understand it intellectually. This echoed my personal writing practice, where emotional truth proved more impactful than factual completeness.

The Manifesto and Conditional Design exercises expanded empathy into an ethical dimension. Designing through conditions and rules made visible the values embedded in systems. It became clear that every design decision privilege certain user while excluding others. Empathy, therefore, is not neutral, it demands awareness of whose voices are amplified and whose are marginalized.

Writing Letter to My Son brought this realization into a temporal dimension. Empathy extended beyond current users to future individuals who will inherit the consequences of today’s design decisions. This shifted my understanding of empathy from a situational skill to a long-term responsibility.

My interpretation of empathy evolved alongside my growing awareness of my own assumptions. Initially, I interpreted empathy primarily as a mindset applied during user research. However, as the course progressed, I noticed moments where empathy or the lack of it shaped my reactions during ideation, critique, and even documentation.

This shift occurred gradually. Early prototypes revealed gaps between intention and perception, prompting reflection rather than immediate correction. Through iteration, I learned to pause and ask not only what was misunderstood, but why that misunderstanding mattered emotionally. This learning process transformed empathy from a conceptual lens into a habitual way of interpreting design outcomes and decisions.

Evaluation

Across the six tasks, I developed a more integrated understanding of communication design as a process shaped by structure, empathy, experimentation, and reflection. Through the Manifesto and Conditional Design workshop, I learned how rules and constraints can generate diverse outcomes through collaboration, while also recognizing the limitations of participatory approaches when time pressure or ambiguity affect openness. This experience informed my personal design manifesto, which balances modernist clarity with contemporary values of uncertainty and process.

My understanding of user-centered design was further strengthened through the study of affordances, where I came to see design as a form of communication that enables intuitive use rather than requiring conscious effort. By analyzing everyday digital devices, I applied theory to real contexts and reinforced the importance of perception, feedback, and reducing cognitive load. The storytelling and writing tasks deepened my awareness of narrative, tone, and empathy, demonstrating how meaning can be communicated through personal perspective, everyday moments, and sensory detail rather than dramatic events alone.

The prototyping task introduced a clear iterative framework, helping me understand prototyping as a learning tool rather than the pursuit of visual perfection. Finally, the empathy task consolidated these insights by positioning empathy as a core design competency, closely linked to UX research methods and ethical responsibility. Overall, these tasks demonstrate my ability to integrate theory with practice and reflect critically on my design process, while highlighting my intention to further translate conceptual understanding into clear design decisions and outcomes.

Plan

Moving forward, I intend to integrate empathy more deliberately and sustainably into my design practice. In user research, I will prioritize emotional context by allowing conversations to unfold naturally, preserving original language, and resisting the urge to over-summarize human experience into neat conclusions. I will use storytelling quotes, narratives, and where appropriate, video to communicate insight more responsibly and effectively.

In design and prototyping, I will continue to apply affordance and signifier theory as a lens for emotional clarity. Rather than assuming user adaptation, I will treat confusion as a design failure and a signal for iteration. When decisions are based on assumptions rather than evidence, I will document them explicitly and plan for validation.

At a broader level, I will approach empathy as an ongoing practice rather than a mastered skill. This includes caring for my own emotional capacity, seeking feedback, and remaining attentive to power dynamics within design systems. Writing, reflection, and manifesto-building will remain tools for examining my values and responsibilities as a designer.

Ultimately, this learning phase has reframed empathy as my most critical design capability not because it is soft or intuitive, but because it demands continuous effort, ethical awareness, and humility. As the course concluded, empathy is a form of “superpower,” but only when it is used consciously, responsibly, and in service of others. My goal of moving forward is not simply to design usable products, but to contribute to experiences that make people feel understood, respected, and considered now and in the future.

Summary

This learning phase helped me understand empathy as a core design practice rather than an intuitive or emotional instinct. Through theory, prototyping, storytelling, and reflection, I learned how empathy informs user research, design decisions, and ethical responsibility. These activities showed me that empathy requires continuous effort, self-awareness, and care, and plays a key role in creating clear, meaningful, and human-centered design. Moving

forward, empathy will remain central to how I think, design, and communicate as a designer.