

TC Talk Ep 18 Transcript

B	Hi, I'm Benton.
A	I'm Abi. And this is TC talk. That's TC as in tech comm. That is the area I specialize in. I'm an academic
B	and I'm not.
A	And yet we have an awful lot to chat about,
B	boy, do we. All right, so what are we talking about today?
A	You'll remember last episode. I kind of introduced the series I'm doing on user experience. What do you remember about our last episode?
B	So if I remember correctly, usability is kind of an evaluation that happens towards the end of a design process. And user experience is more of a full design process perspective.
A	Yes. And that accounts for more than just whether a thing is easy to use.
B	So you're saying that something could be very usable but very frustrating as well?
A	Yeah. I mean, maybe it's an easy process, but it's still a pain.
B	Like gas pumps, they're very usable.
A	I disagree because they're not designed, wait were you being sarcastic?
B	Not at all.
A	I hate getting gas because they're all different. And some of them have that little thing you have to flick up and some of them don't.
B	Aww.
A	shut up.
B	I'm sorry.
A	And it's always when I'm in a rush. It's like my brain has a harder time figuring out which buttons to press. Not to mention. There's always three options. And I don't entirely know the difference between them. I always go with the cheapest one. But sometimes there's like
B	premium, mid grade
A	well sometimes there's what do you call it, that stuff made with corn?
B	E85?

A	Yes. And I'm like, is this the kind of thing that's going to blow up my car if I use it.
B	Yeah. E85. PSA here, is only for use in flex fuel vehicles.
A	And do I know if I have a flex fuel vehicle? No, I don't.
B	You do not have a flex fuel vehicle.
A	Here's a good UX study. I mean, it wouldn't pass IRB in a million years, but take the surveillance video of people at the gas pump and track how frustrated they are. You know, I'm jealous of you folks that live in Oregon
B	What?
A	Isn't it? The law that you can't pump your own gas?
B	Jeez, I don't know. So I'm teasing you because it's a mechanical minded thing.
A	And that's not me,
B	and that's not you.
A	So gas pump designers are catering to you, not me. Although I would not want to see is gas pumps for women. Gas pumps for English majors. What would a guess pump for English majors look like?
B	It would have all of the instructions would be in Elizabethan English. Methinks thou must lifteth the lever. Anyway, you completely hijacked what I was trying to say. For the mechanically inclined, a gas pump is very usable. That does not mean it is a joy to use. They freaking stink. They make you think about your carbon footprint.
A	You're paying money. A lot, recently. What about the little video screens?
B	Ugh I hate them. At least they put in a mute button.
A	Do they? See I didn't even notice that
B	the KwikTrip ones, the ones that that yak at you.
A	But it's not the default. As soon as the gas starts running, that video comes at you telling you about the bananas on sale inside the store
B	or cheddar TV, whatever. I don't even know what the, how they make the decision of what to put on those stupid things. But
A	is it just for, do they have like a news show just for gas pumps?
B	GSTV.
A	That's what it's called?
B	GSTV, gas station TV.

A	Are you kidding? You're lying.
B	It is not an actual TV Station.
A	You are pulling my leg.
B	No. I am not pulling your leg. Gs TV is a thing. And I think that it's really just like a five-minute loop or something like that, that plays over and over and maybe they do a new one for every day. I don't know.
A	Oh, and we didn't even get to the part about payment. Here's the thing. I will not get gas anymore at a gas station that requires me to go into the store. Because the only thing worse than struggling with a machine is talking to another human being.
B	That's another difference between us.
A	I don't mind humans. I just, in fact, I avoid them when possible. And you're going to hate me for this, but I don't even use our rewards card because there's not a way to apply the rewards at the pump. You have to go in and pay.
B	Yeah.
A	And there's also, so you put your card in so you have to figure out, do you swipe it? Do you put the chip end in? What is the orientation of the card?
B	Yes.
A	how long do you leave it in and to their credit.
B	I see what you did there.
A	I didn't mean to make that joke. I should pretend like I meant it. To their credit. They did design it such that it will beep loudly at you to remind you to take the card out when you're done with it. And you know that that was a design feature built-in because of all the people who forgot their cards stuck in a gas pump. Yeah. I mean, I think even though this was a bit of an odyssey, we have demonstrated that usability is not a universal thing.
B	Yeah,
A	what's usable for you is not usable for me. And that does not make me any lesser of a human being. Just because I prefer Elizabethan texts rather than octane numbers. No, just kidding. Friends, Romans, countrymen. Lend me your ears. I come not to praise gas but to pump it. Okay.
B	Well said.
A	We also know via this discussion that something being usable doesn't mean it's an enjoyable experience. And there's a lot of reasons for that. People need gas. Of course, there's not going to be incentive to make it more pleasurable because it's not like people have a choice.

B	You can't really do anything about the way it reeks.
A	Plus there are financial incentives on the part of the gas station. I heard once that gas stations get their profit from selling snacks,
B	right,
A	versus actually selling the gas. And so they're going to blast that commercial at you to make you go, oh I really want a banana right now or what else do they sell?
B	yeah. Have you gone into the KwikTrip lately?
A	No.
B	I know that they did change the store so that instead of walking in the door and straight to the counter, You gotta walk around like a hot food thing.
A	Wow. Additionally, they are motivated to potentially confuse customers with the pricing. They always add the teeny tiny nine, which is so pointless.
B	Yeah.
A	But at any rate, I'm going to be motivated to choose the more expensive gas if I'm not sure if the cheaper gas is going to blow up my car. See what I mean?
B	Yeah, but cheaper gas won't blow up your car. E85, you cannot use in your car.
A	What would happen?
B	The reason that you can't, like the gas tank has to be made out of stainless steel. Because ethanol, the 85% of E85, draws moisture in from the atmosphere. And you don't want your gas tank to corrode too early. The other difference is that instead of monitoring the amount of fuel and air going into the engine it monitors the amount of fuel going into the engine and the amount of oxygen in the exhaust. Because depending on what fuel you're using, you would need to add a different amount of air into the cylinder to get a good explosion. Because explosions are internal combustion engines work.
A	So it would make my car explode in a series of tiny functional explosions.
B	Yes.
A	Okay. I did not know I had that much to say about gas pumps,
B	Nor did I.
A	I had said last time that I want to approach the topic of UX in categories. Last week would have been the disciplinary category. What is UX and usability? This time, I want to focus on the practice of UX and usability. So in other words, what are practitioners actually doing when they conduct UX research or usability studies?
B	Okay.

A	To get a handle on this, I read a bunch of trade books, guides for practitioners, I guess. UX team of one by Leah Buley. Don't make me think by Steve Krug, Letting go of the words Ginny reddish, Nielsen's guide to web usability. And these books were basically a mix of, here's some generalizable principles gleaned from research about what makes for usable websites, and methods for conducting local research on how are users responding to our product. Or how do we research the audience for this product that we're going to design
B	Okay.
A	And I also read academic research about other academic research about UX and tech comm, interview studies of UX practitioners, surveys, analyses of job ads. So this gives a picture of the role itself. What's included in the day-to-day? What are the variations on this profession? So I'm going to touch on those couple categories today. Okay, let's start by talking about methods. When it comes to research methods, generally, whether pertaining to user experience or not I like to think of methods as less of a how-to and more of a when to. What I mean by that is there's no point in learning how to conduct an interview study if an interview study's not going to get you the information you need in the first place. In other words, I approach research methods as a set of choices you can make depending on what your needs are, what your research question is.
B	Okay?
A	There is, of course, this ideal vision of a perfectly designed study that has all limitations accounted for, but that's impossible. And even if it were possible, it wouldn't necessarily be worth it. You know what I mean?
B	Yeah,
A	because research is really a set of trade-offs. Maybe you give up some rigor in favor of more urgency and
B	Okay.
F	Meow.
B	Get out of there, Get out of there.
A	UX folks are working within time constraints, budget constraints. That doesn't mean they can't advocate for greater attention to detail or rigor when it is needed. Okay. And so in part, their role might involve kind of evangelizing others to the value of this kind of work.
B	Hm.
A	Basic starting point is, what is it that you want to learn or research or test?
B	It does seem like an important place to start.
A	It's not as simple as it sounds though. Because you can say, I want to test a website. But what do you want to know about the website? How people can complete a specific

	task? Do you want to study like a layer of the website, like focus on the visuals or the navigation throughout the entire site?
B	okay, what do you want to know here? I want to know if my website is good. Oh boy. What is good? Good how?
A	For whom?
B	for whom, ask for what they want.
A	And then maybe you are starting from the ground up. You don't have something to test because you need to learn about your audience first. When you know what you want to learn, then you know what stage in the project do you need to learn it? The earlier, the better generally. One thing UX practitioners should be acquainted with is the UX process. I shouldn't call it the process because there are multiple models that I've in fact printed out for you to take a look at
B	Oh boy.
A	So I've printed off three. Take a moment to look them over. What do you see that's kind of similar among them?
B	Circles. There are lots of circles in all of them,
A	some of the circles are standalone. Others have smaller circles emanating out from them. Others of them have overlapping circles. What do you see in terms of similarities in the state, like the main stages.
B	So it looks like define and prototype. I'm seeing in of them. Also ideate.
A	Ideate?
B	Ideate.
A	An Ideate's Guide to UX.
B	Stanford design thinking process looks very basic and very, this looks approachable. So empathize seems like an interesting way to say, get to know. Whereas other charts show discover.
A	What about the, the latter steps? Are those essentially the same, maybe go by different names?
B	Experience design, tests, measure, and all seems like, you know, the quantitative step at the end. Evaluative.
A	Yeah, and I think this part is important too on this model where there's like a little cycle in the middle,
B	the Kobar model where it gets into the ideate test and prototype cycle. Which is good because that's the process of revision.

A	And the last step here is measure with an arrow back to that cycle.
B	Ah yes.
A	That might be an additional step depending on the results of your testing.
B	Mm-hmm.
A	To simplify things, let's think of UX methods in two major categories. This is what Lanius, Weber, and Robinson did in their 2021 study on UX methods is divide it into research methods and evaluation the methods. So research, meaning maybe you're aiming for generalizable results or you are trying to learn, answer some of the big questions about who your audience is and the evaluation would represent you've got a product, now you're testing it. It's not a clean distinction really because you could use certain methods for either a research or exploratory stage versus an evaluative testing stage.
B	But aren't you missing something there? Sorry, podcast listeners, I'm showing a physical thing to Abi. So it sounds like this is the research methods and this is the measurement methods. What about the development methods?
A	Oh, design methods. You're right, maybe design methods could be its own category. An example of a research method might be an ethnography or an observation, observing people in their natural environment.
B	Yes,
A	because you want to design a gas pump for English majors. You observe people in their kitchen preparing breakfast. Because you want to design an, a, an appliance, or a type of toaster that better meets their needs. And then an evaluation method would be. Here's this Closer to final product. You want to get really specific local feedback about what aspects of it work. You've got a toaster, a prototype of a toaster. It's not going to change too much, but at least you can figure out, is it doing what you needed to do? Make a toaster strudel, and we'll watch how it goes.
B	Okay.
A	There's also the question of who, who was going to be involved in your research or testing. You can see I'm following a pattern here, right? What, when, who,
B	but why?
A	that's coming up. Actually, no, it's not. I feel like Huh. Last episode basically covered the why.
B	Okay.
A	So when it comes to who, ideally you are working with actual users. Again, one of the tradeoffs might be it's difficult to access users. So maybe you use a representative user or maybe you just grab someone in the cubicle next door and

B	provided that they consent to that.
A	Yes. You shouldn't use a colleague as your one and only opportunity to test. But maybe you're in that little cycle in the middle. And you want to make some headway before you test a more complete prototype on actual users.
B	Yeah, before you start talking to someone you've never met about something that's Never left your head.
A	Yeah, exactly. Another question is, How many people do you need to test?
B	Yes, that is an interesting question that whole fields of study look at.
A	And there's no magic number.
B	No,
A	The general rule is the more people, the more confident you can be in your conclusions. But again, maybe you don't need a lot of confidence. You just need immediate feedback that you can implement so that you can do more testing and maybe increase in rigor as time goes on. So let's say you have a pool of 30 people who are actual users of your product, What do you think would be better? Waiting till the product is nearly done and having all 30 test it. Or maybe split them up into groups of say, 10 and do three rounds of iteration.
B	Yeah, My first thought was like start with a small group of five and then you go to a group of 25 after you integrate the, what you learn from it. But three rounds is better.
A	I like no, I like your idea. And actually, there's this kind of rule of five from Jacob Nielsen that suggests that five users will catch about 80 percent of problems in your website. Now, this is debatable. But, it is encouraging to know that you can get a lot of really actionable data from Just a few good sessions.
B	Of course, if you're going to get good information from five people, they have to be very different people.
A	And let's say one out of five people really, really struggles with it. You don't know, does this mean 20% of our customers are going to struggle this way? Or is this person an extreme outlier that if we did a bunch more testing we would discover. And I would argue that even if they are an outlier, you shouldn't just dismiss their needs. You know what I mean? And I think that, that can be very easy to do as a designer.
B	Mm-hmm.
A	Blame it on the user, right? User error. It's not us, it's them.
B	it's definitely easy to take that approach in academia. Like but why wouldn't you cater to the outlier as well? Well, there's this thing called money and resources that Like it's, it's kind of a trade-off situation.
A	But if the point is, UX, practitioners should advocate for the user. There needs to be a voice in the mix. That's not just focusing on how do we make the most money out of

	this thing. And legally, in some cases, you need to make things, for instance, accessible to people with certain disabilities. Visual impairments, for instance. And
B	right,
A	And maybe that's a small percentage of your actual audience. But that's a really crappy experience for that small percentage because they can't access it at all. And you're potentially violating the law.
B	Yes, that's And what does definitely possible.
A	And what does that say about you as a company? “ It is not worth it for us to make this accessible to you.”
B	But, you know, if, if we're talking about like a non-profit sort of thing where the goal is to actually help people. They might have a situation where they need to look at the trade-off between. I can make sure that 90% of people that we want to help get a good experience now, or work towards a 100 percent. And hopefully we won't run out of budget. Or it might take longer
A	I see what you're saying. I think that something can be released without maybe being 100% accessible. But my concern is that people are going to shut the door on the project at that point and say we've done our job.
B	Yeah
A	when like even in the instance of a non-profit, the audience you're serving, the most marginalized members probably need your services the most. And if they are the 10 percent that can't access the website, then you're not accomplishing your mission anyway.
B	That's a, that's a very fair point. And so it might be that a UX person would say we have some accessibility issues here. We could we could launch version 1.0 with acknowledgment that we will be updating to include x, y, and z. We didn't want to make everyone wait.
A	And that's where advocacy can come into play. Then if you see a need then you can argue for the money needed to make it happen.
B	Yeah.
A	Yeah. Okay. Where will you do your testing? A lot of usability testing had been done in labs, computer labs where maybe there's a video camera to record somebody using a site. Maybe there's that one way glass so that you can observe somebody but they don't feel like you're necessarily there. I think more recently that's been moving out of popularity in favor of more realistic settings. You don't necessarily need a special lab to get good useful data.
B	Right.
A	I mean, maybe your goal is to learn something more generalizable and you need to kind of control outside factors, I don't know. But I think again, moving away from that

	quantitative mindset of we need X amount of confidence and instead thinking more in terms of how does this play out in the real world when someone's actually struggling with this gas pump or whatever, trying to make their breakfast bagel.
B	So going back to where you said that originally a lot of UX testing was done in a lab. And my my first thing that I wanted to say was, you know, did anyone think, well, is this a good use of resources? And I realized that that with, combined with the other things that I've said so far on this podcast kind of make me sound like a, an economist. Saying is this a good use of resources, I feel is actually more of an engineering mindset. Like, are you using a sledgehammer to kill a fly?
A	I'm actually really glad that you're bringing up these comments because that is what a UX practitioner will be dealing with. These people coming from different disciplines with a different set of criteria for what the product should do or, how resources should be allocated. And that's going to be part of the job, is negotiating amongst those potentially competing values.
B	Yeah. And to stretch my metaphor a little bit further, you know, if you're trying to use a sledgehammer to kill a fly, not only are you way overdoing it, You're not going to be able to hit the damn fly. Unless you're a freaking robot with unlimited hydraulic power, you aren't going to swing that thing fast enough to kill a fly. What I'm getting at is that taking someone into a lab out of their natural environment, Sure, you can control things. But not only are you making this synthetic environment, your results are also synthetic.
A	Yeah, it's absolutely a trade-off. And that happens with any research project. Like I tell my students, the goal is not to eliminate all possible flaws in your research design, but to be able to make thoughtful choices and explain those choices.
B	Okay.
A	Then decide how you want to conduct the research. And here I'm going to draw from this paper by Lanius et al. They did a lit review of methods in academic journals, along with a survey of UX professionals. From the lit review, they found that surveys were the most common method, followed by usability testing and then interviewing. And they also included things like bio-metric data.
B	Like what?
A	So things like eye tracking. And I've actually been able to see eye tracking software in use. One of my students worked for the campus usability lab and brought it to class for a demonstration and it was weird. Was it eye-catching? It was. like there was a student upfront kind of wearing the goggles or whatever. And I shot my hand up and like started waving it around and you could see like their eyes went directly to my hand. Don't get me wrong. It's it creeps me out too, like the whole idea of having somebody know exactly what I'm looking at at any given point. But it's a thing that might be useful in some contexts. Maybe you want to measure heart rate or something. I don't know. Some of this is probably a sledgehammer when what you need is a fly swatter, but it's there, there's been a small increase in those types of methods over the years. They also found that mixed methods studies were the most common. There's a common

	misconception that mixed methods just refers to using more than one type of method, but it refers to using quantitative methods plus qualitative methods.
B	Ah.
A	Quantitative of course, referring to the numerical, the countable, and qualitative, referring more to the descriptive. A survey would give you quantitative data. So it would allow you to see how widespread a certain preference or phenomenon is. But interviews, which is a more qualitative method, would help you get at the why behind those results. Then they turn to the results of the survey they did of professionals. Again, they split them into research and evaluation. And the top research methods were interviews and ethnography. Let's also talk about once you have completed some of that foundational user research, how do you convey the results of that research in a way that's useful and actionable. Couple ways, I've mentioned them before. Personas, where you might create a few, say, composites that represent different categories of your users. And some go so far as to add a picture and a name and invent a whole character. And use those as kind of guiding documents for the design team to think about. How would Tracy approach this web-page versus how would ambiguous user approach this web page?
B	It kind of sounds like that approach is to invent, representative diversity of users so that you can have them in mind?
A	Yes, because like I talked about before, if you don't have that specific image in your head, then it's very easy to default to someone like me.
B	Yeah, that's true
A	or white person, whatever.
B	Which is exactly why I said that gas pumps are very usable.
A	Right
B	Because who has trouble with a gas pump?
A	Me. I cannot be the only one.
B	I'm sure
A	Write in.
B	Please
A	If only to help me feel not alone in this world.
B	Yes.
A	Then again, you also run the risk of turning your persona's into stereotypes. The better the research informing the personas, the better the personas. Because they are less an invention of your mind. And the biases therein.

B	Right
A	We'll talk more about personas in the episode on social justice and UX. I think that's a good enough introduction for now. And then scenarios or situations that those personas might be put in. Tracy is not just a decontextualized person using a gas pump, but they are nearly late for a very important appointment. And you had mentioned maybe there should be a different category for design methods.
B	Mm-hmm
A	So that might include things like prototyping, wireframes. Are you familiar with those terms? Yeah. Tell me what what has prototyping meant to you in your world?
B	Prototyping means making a physical thing,
A	but not final.
B	Right a physical thing. So you can see, you can check fit, function.
A	And a wireframe might just be a precursor to that, something that's sketchier. You might think of it as a skeleton of a website
B	Oh okay, of a website.
A	or I mean, a mobile app, whatever it is you're making. The sketchier prototypes or wireframes would be more useful earlier in the process.
B	You just don't want to spend any more effort on a prototype and you need to.
A	Yeah, you've gotta do that cost-benefit analysis. Something does not need to be polished and perfect in order to get good basic feedback about it. And in fact, if something is too polished, too early in the process, people might feel hesitant to give the global feedback you really need.
B	Yeah.
A	At least if something's on paper they know this is not the final thing. And by on paper, I mean, literally, sometimes you can do a very low fidelity prototype where you have literal pieces of paper that represent screens on a website. some people have gone so far as to with people and say, okay, now which button would you click? And then they will physically take the screen that corresponds to the button they pressed and put it in front of them.
B	Cute.
A	Yeah.
B	So in your statement that if it's too polished, they might be hesitant to give global feedback. In a way I experienced this in my first job. There was a project where there was like an implantable into the eye device that would dispense medication. And one of the engineers that I was working with said, maybe we're looking at this thing the wrong way. Instead of trying to make this rice grain size thing by injection molding, which is

	what the company did. Maybe this is something that would be a lot better done blow molding, which is the way that, you know, pop bottles are made. It starts out looking like a test tube. You heat it up, fill it with air, and it expands into the mold.
A	So by the time it got to your company, it was too late?
B	Yes.
A	And that's not to say that blow molding would have been better. You don't know the decision-making along the way, but I see what you mean about there comes a point of no return and
B	Right. Yeah. And if blow molding was the right one, maybe the wrong decision was just working with this company because you've worked with them on something else and you like working with them, maybe you should have taken it to a blow molder.
A	And when you're talking about something that's going to go in someone's eye. You don't want to be taking risks.
B	Right? And
A	but it all turned out fine, right? Say yes
B	To, to intend to every pun I will intend this one. I didn't see how that one turned out. It was a new project. So the idea was that popping a little reservoir into the eye and having that dispense slowly was better than having injections into the eye on a regular basis, which I can't imagine would be pleasant in any way.
A	I mean, getting lasik surgery was one of the most horrifying experiences of my life. So I would also opt for non-regular injections.
B	Mm-hmm.
A	In the eye. I'm a wimp. I know it. The survey they did of professionals. The top evaluation methods were expert review, which I think could also be called a heuristic evaluation, and usability testing. So a heuristic evaluation, that wouldn't involve real users at all. That could simply be you as an expert in usability, going through a website with a checklist looking for very specific best practices.
B	Would that use a rubric?
A	It very well could. Yes.
B	It could.
A	And also, how much does each error affect the overall user experience? I mean, that's one of those challenges you have to work through is within our limited resources. Do we go after the low hanging fruit? Or do we go after the more serious stuff? Obviously the answer should be the more serious stuff, but sometimes there needs to be that blend. It's not an exact science. So a heuristic evaluation, you might be looking for things like, is the loading speed quick enough? Can you tell when a hyperlink has been clicked or not? Can you distinguish a hyperlink from the rest of the text? These are kind

	of basics that are so conventional that you don't necessarily need a user to tell you to fix those things. But again, you would not want to stop at this expert evaluation,
B	Right
A	Because as someone who's been working very closely with the product, there are blind spots to be sure. Usability testing. Let me ask you this. Wouldn't it be easier to just ask them what they think of it that have to actually sit and watch them use it?
B	Yeah, it would be easier. But are you after easy or are you after good?
A	People are very easily swayed by appearances. That's just the reality. And so someone might have a very positive evaluation of something because it looks really professional or flashy or whatever. That doesn't mean they can do the thing that they need to do. usability testing. You want to watch somebody use a product instead of just asking them about it. And there are a few things that can make this yield more useful data for you. Number 1, you are testing the product, not the person. And you need to make this very clear. Because people have a tendency to look internally when something goes wrong, like, Oh, I'm so bad with technology. It's like, maybe it's not your fault. Maybe it's a bad design.
B	I have a feeling that that is less the case with men.
A	I wouldn't be surprised.
B	I mean, myself, like if I encounter a thing and it doesn't work I'm like what a piece of shit. nothing wrong with me. This thing is broken.
A	yes. Whereas I encounter a thing and I'm like, I'm such an idiot, I put my credit card in the wrong way the first time.
B	It could be that having spent time doing design, I am quick to see this should've been designed different.
A	Another thing to keep in mind is you want to encourage your user to think aloud as they poke around on your website and complete the task. this helps you get at sort of the inner monologue. It helps you capture, again more than just the operations taking place. But why are they doing what they're doing? Are they feeling frustrated when they clicked this, but meant to click that or, that kind of thing. And that can be awkward for people if they're not used to narrating their thoughts out loud, maybe you can get pairs of people and have them kind of work together and then they have a natural audience that they are talking to that's not like creepy researcher sitting behind you with a clipboard kind of thing. And then this one is also hard. Don't help the user. Because you're going to want to,
B	Mm-hmm
A	especially if you created the thing and you have a vision in your head of exactly how it's supposed to work and somebody doesn't do it the way you wanted them to. You just want to jump in and be like No, no, no. Do this. Do this. Okay.

B	No, not like that.
A	They're not going to have you with them in a real context.
B	When they pull the thing out of the box,
A	they're not going to have a real live designer at the ready to walk them through it. And so you want to capture that authentic experience as much as possible. Of course, if they literally cannot proceed, then help them out. But like I tell my students, don't move on until you have either fixed the problem itself on the spot or thoroughly documented what happened and what change you're going to make. I have a surprise for you.
B	You do?
A	Yes. I'm gonna have you do a usability test.
B	Oh,
A	I'll be the observer. You be the user.
B	Okay.
A	And you are going to test the TC talk website because to my knowledge, you have never been to it or even looked at it. And so maybe I'll get some feedback.
B	How does this electric internet thing work here, huh? Just there? Pardon the fan.
A	The first thing I'm gonna do is called a 5 second test. What that means is you're going to look at the website for five seconds and then I'm going to take it away. I'm going to ask you some questions about what you remember, what stood out to you.
B	[Mumbles]
A	Okay. So based on that five seconds, what do you think the purpose of the website is?
B	It seems to be something about a podcast. So on that on that page without clicking any links, I saw that there was an entry for what must be the most recent episode. It had a, uh, a thing where you can just hit the play button and play it right there in that website. And there were sources and additional reading, stuff to support the wild and outlandish claims on this episode.
A	Okay. If you had to sum up your impression of the website in one word, what would it be?
B	Purple.
A	Really? There's a lot of purple, but there's even more turquoise.
B	That was a bit flippant of course, but
A	It's okay. Now you're going to actually do some tasks.

B	Tasks?
A	I'm going to have you think aloud as you're doing it.
B	You want to subscribe to TC Talk on Apple podcasts.
A	[Mumbles]
B	This is driving me nuts.
A	Is it?
B	You've had all of like 20 options for subscribing and you've scrolled past every single one.
A	Oh, it's on every one of these things. Okay. And where am I subscribing? Apple podcasts? Okay. Apple podcasts. Yeah.
B	I mean, you found what you needed to. Thanks for the five-star reviews, everyone. And by everyone, I mean, all two people.
A	Both of you.
B	Both of you.
A	Okay. Thank you. What was it like being test, being a, what was it like?
B	Being a pop-tart?
AB	[Sings] Have you ever put butter on a pop-tart, it's so freaking good.
A	How did it feel being a participant in usability, a usability test?
B	In a sense, it kind of felt like trying to figure out how to use a website just with someone watching and expressing their frustration.
A	I was a bad observer.
B	That is one thing we've learned.
A	Yeah. I can't keep my mouth shut.
B	You would need to have someone do it for you. And that's okay.
A	And then maybe you'd be more honest with them also. Because I'm kind of asking you like Benton, what do you think of this website that I have created with my bare hands and poured my identity into?
B	You need an easier way to identify how to subscribe. I'm sure it's all over the place but it's just text. You know, it isn't that icon.
A	Yeah, you're right. Dang.

B	You need buttons. My other thing was, oh yeah, number the episodes.
A	Oh, really?
B	Yes.
A	So last little piece is I wanted to touch on a couple more articles that describe sort of the day-to-day life of a UX professional.
B	Okay.
A	This does feed really logically into the pedagogy category because real workplace practices should inform what we are teaching students. That's not to say that industry should drive what happens in the classroom. But we don't want students to emerge from our program With, with no sense of where they're ending up
B	or with no sense.
A	Yes. Lauer and Blumberg are analyzed job postings and were looking for overlaps between technical communication roles and UX roles in the kinds of skills needed. And unsurprisingly, they found there are more similarities than differences. And so UX is a natural kind of outgrowth of technical communication work. They found kind of five categories of UX roles. Designer, developer, architect, manager, researcher. The developer would be more of the, the coding side of it. And so those roles kind of reflect where you'd come in at certain points in the project or what your contributions are going to be. But you might be hired as sort of a UX generalist who needs to know a little bit about every stage of the process versus coming in and doing solely research and never any design.
B	Okay.
A	Another piece was by Rose, Putnam and McDonald. And they interviewed 71 UX professionals about their current work, and the skills and dispositions needed to succeed in their role. Think of the times you've been on the job market.
B	Ugh.
A	What kinds of what kinds of skills or qualities tend to pop up the most? Like there's the classic communication skills,
B	Results Driven.
A	What the fuck does that mean?
B	Yeah. Sometimes they manage to get in there. Five years experience in this software or designing in this industry.
A	Do you think it's fair to say that there's a mix of technical skills and like more people skills,
B	Soft skills.

A	Yeah, these authors add the category of dispositions, which they say is “character traits that define a person's motivation for acting in certain ways.” I'll give some examples as we go. Some of the top technical skills that someone hiring in UX will look for were research, and that includes knowledge of multiple methods and when to use what methods. Design, sketching, wireframing, prototyping, and a knowledge of process thinking,
B	Okay.
A	Which we talked about at the start. The authors make an interesting note here. Have you ever heard the phrase T-shaped a person?
B	No.
A	So a T-shaped person is the idea that somebody has a breadth of knowledge in a bunch of different areas. But there's maybe one area that they have a depth of knowledge in as well. Candidates for these jobs ideally would know a little bit about each part of the process. But maybe they specialize in research or design or something.
B	Your jack of all trades.
A	Yeah, some might say that academics are, perhaps I-shaped people. They only know one thing, but they know a lot about that one thing.
B	Lowercase L?
A	Right. Employers meanwhile want everyone to be squares, know everything and also be really good at each one.
B	Yeah. Employers want people to be squares in more ways than one.
A	And they also emphasize that the human skills and dispositions, those are unsurprisingly highly valued and is something that we want to try to instill in our students as teachers. So human skills, the top ones were approaching problems, communication, collaboration. And I liked this one, storytelling. And they talk about storytelling in the context of describing a portfolio of work. Here's how I solved this problem beginning, middle, end. But it could also come into play with personas and thinking of creative ways to compile and report results of your research. And then the dispositions are independence, right? Especially in UX, there's not going to be a magic linear process for solving a problem. You're going to need to come in there and use your judgment in all these cases where those decision points come up. Flexibility and curiosity. So that's what the practice of UX tends to look like. That's just a tasting of methods that might be used.
B	A tasting? Does it taste like cheese? I'm sorry. We have nothing more to accomplish, so I'm just having fun.
A	Speaking of fun.
B	Fun with fungus.

A	Turn on your science teacher voice.
B	All right, students, students, settle down now. Okay, pop quiz. Are fungi more closely related to plants or animals?
A	I would say plants for sure. Because
B	They grow in the ground? They don't move?
A	Yes. And mushrooms are a vegetable, you know, at least
B	Culinarily.
A	Yes.
B	In fact, they are more closely related to animals than to plants.
A	Why? How?
B	First of all, like animals, they don't make their own food. They don't have cell walls like plants do. They are made out of chitin, which if you're familiar with a lot of biology, chitin is what
A	something you do on a windy day?
B	It is also that. But chitin is what insect exoskeletons are made out of. And I could be wrong about this, but I believe that chitin is what crustaceans' shells are made out of. Very closely related is keratin, which is what makes up your fingernails your hair.
A	Alright, mushrooms sound a lot less appetizing when you put it that way. But I get what you're saying. And the not creating their own food kind of thing. I hadn't thought of that either. And they are active decomposers, you know, in, in ways that plants are not.
B	Plants are creators.
A	So plants are creators. Mushrooms are cleaner-uppers?
B	Yeah. Fun fact about fungi is that it is estimated that we have identified maybe 5% of the species of fungi that exist. It's estimated that it's somewhere between 2.8 and 3.2 million species of fungi. Another pop quiz. How does that stack up to plants in terms of total species?
A	Like how many plant species exist, whether or not we know about them? Millions, I would have to guess.
B	No. Hundreds of thousands.
A	Okay.
B	In the estimation of scientists, there are roughly ten times as many species of fungi as there are of plants.

A	Then why do we not know about them?
B	They're shy.
A	Does nobody care?
B	One reason is that up until the invention of the microscope, the only way to know about fungi was either through the fruiting bodies of mushrooms or through their collective action, like brewing yeast or molding bread. Because they are so small. And yet in a healthy teaspoon of soil, there exists anywhere from 100 meters to ten kilometers of mycelia.
A	That's unbelievable.
B	Yes. It's amazing.