Case Studies in Design Informatics 1 - INFR11094
Tutorial 5

Cultural Probes

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Warm-Up Question

What are three potential components of a probe kit?

What makes a good Probe task?

"The best Probe tasks balance empirical encounters with playfulness and surprise. For participants, they undermine ideas about research to encourage informal intimacy and creativity. For researchers, they produce observable evidence with enough uncertainty to leave room for the imagination."
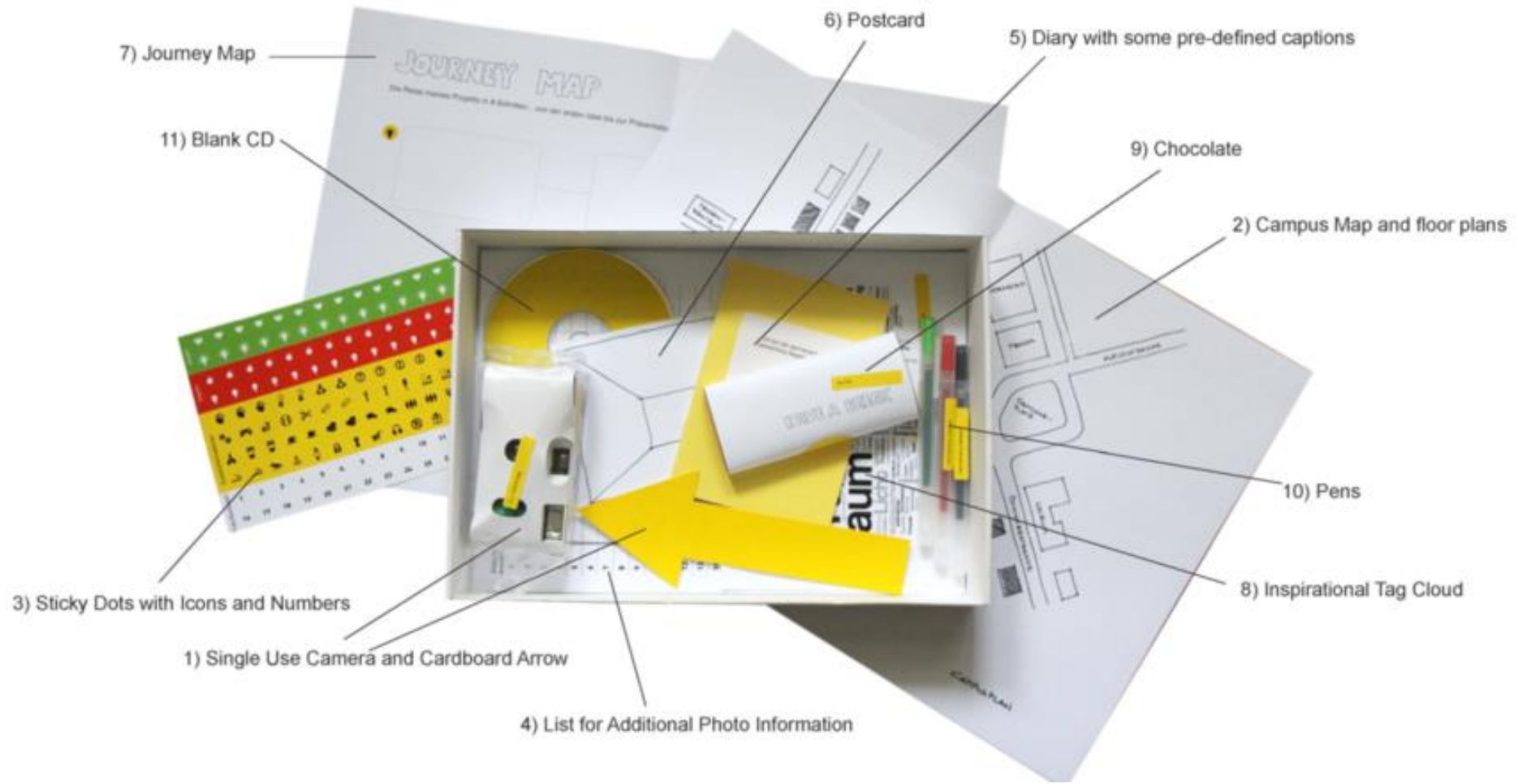
Interaction Research Studio, 2020

What is in a Probe kit?

Thoring et al. 2013
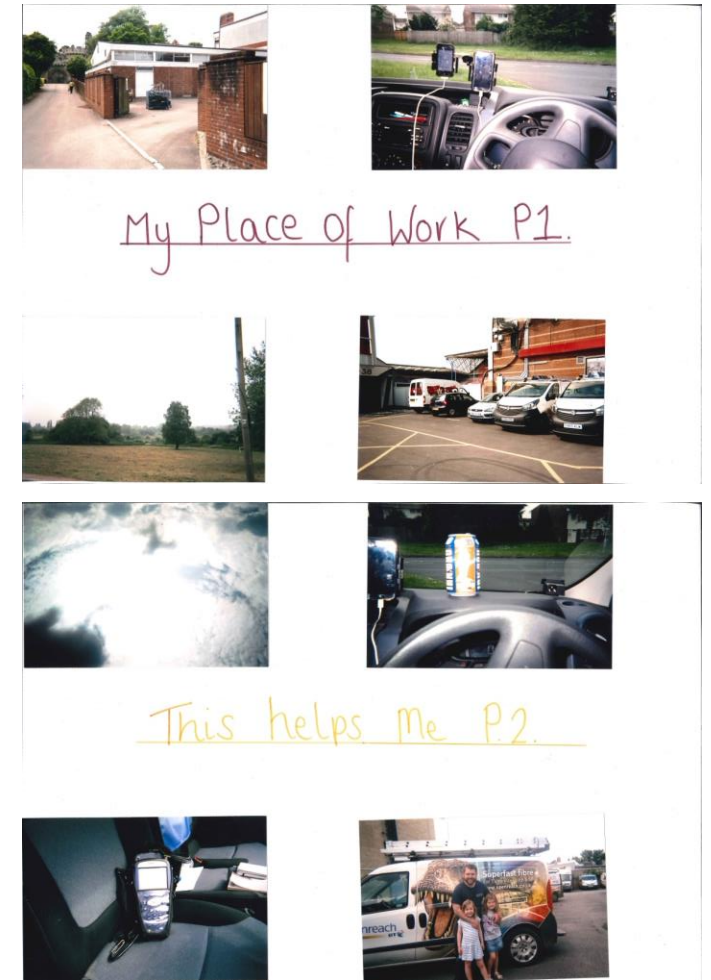Example: Using cultural probes to explore creative spaces with students

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Examples of Probe tasks – photo tasks

My Place Of Work P1.

This helps Me P2.

Gaver et al. 1999 / Vines et al. 2016
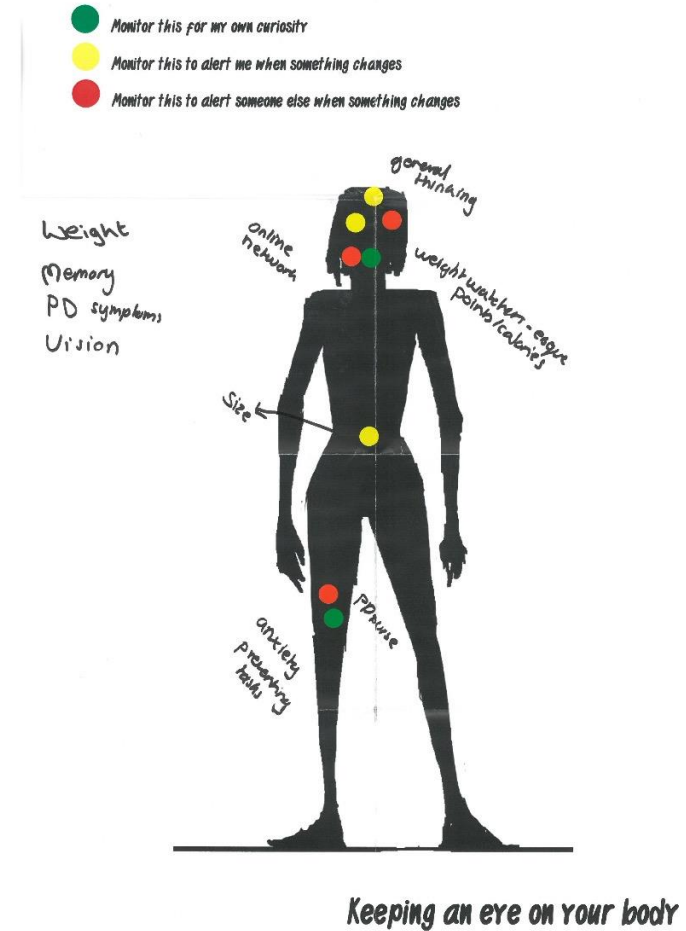
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Examples of Probe tasks – mapping tasks
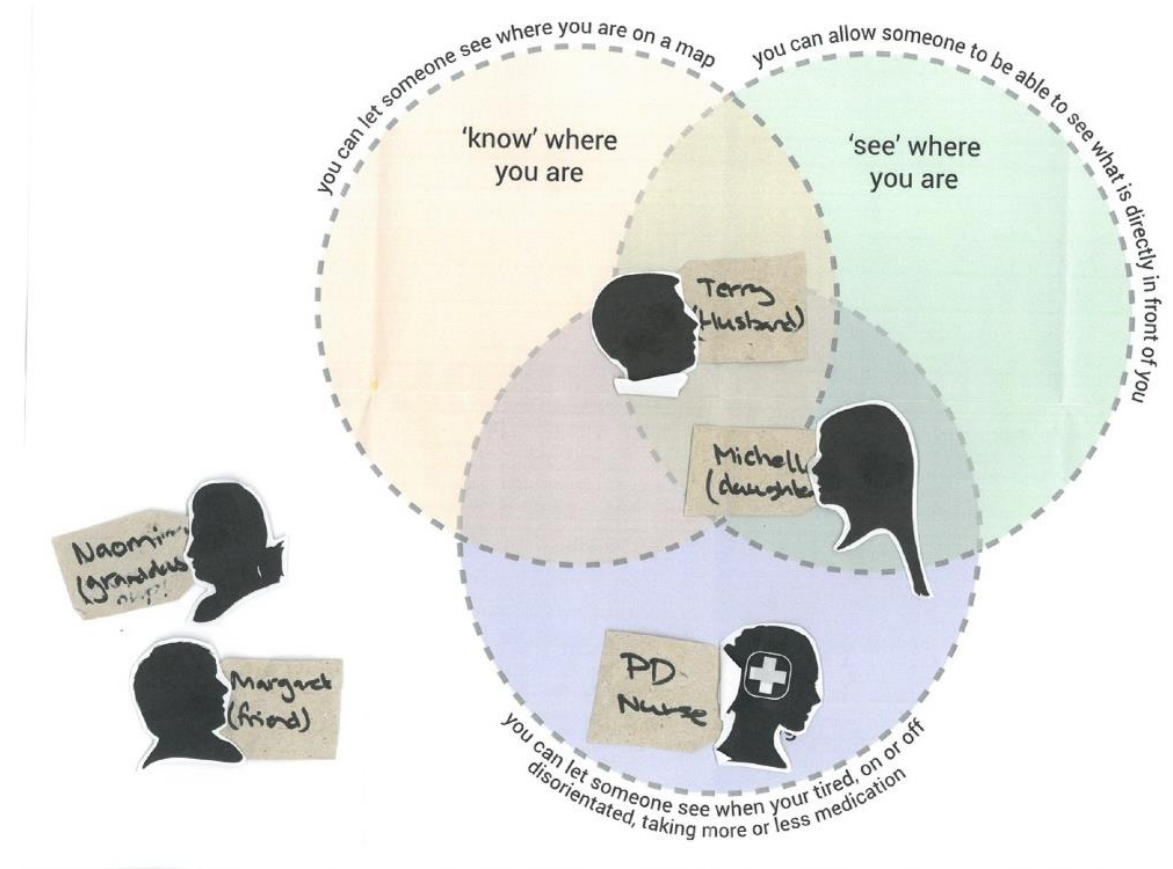

Wood et al. 2018 / Vines et al. 2013

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Examples of Probe tasks – relational tasks

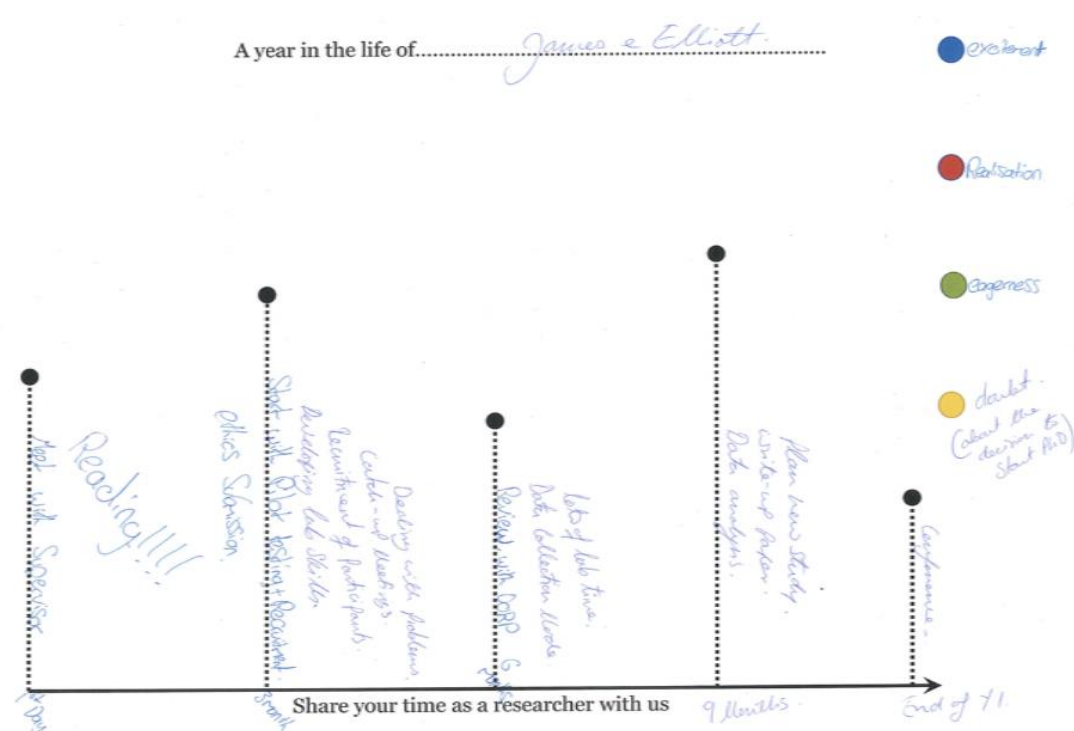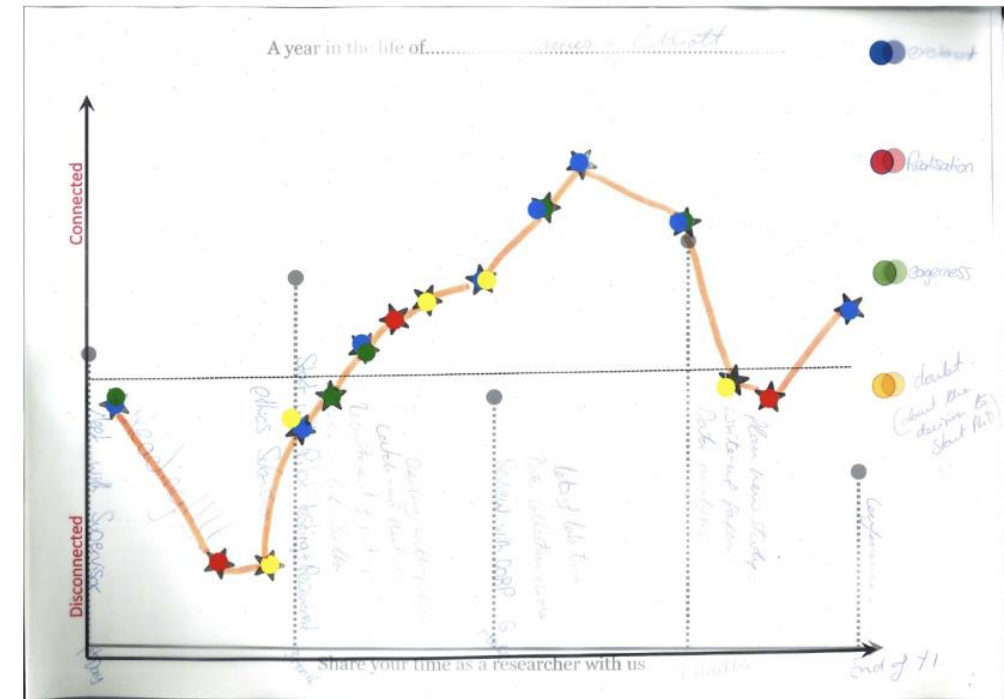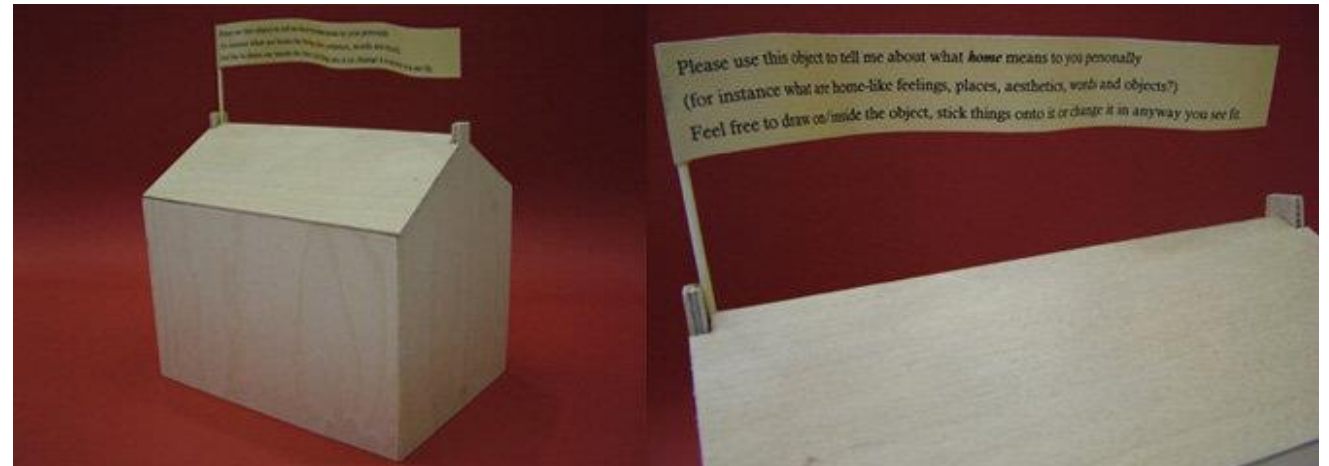Wallace et al. 2013 / Vines et al. 2013

Examples of Probe tasks – diagramming tasks

Examples of Probe tasks – metaphorical tasks

What makes a good Probe task?

"Tasks may focus on particular issues, but not like questionnaire items that produce predictable answers. Good probe tasks are almost flirtatious, allowing innocent replies while opening the door to more intimate responses. Thus playful, open, or even absurd requests are more rewarding for participants and surprising to researchers than straightforward ones….

… Rather than simply asking 'what do you use the internet for', try indirect ways to approach the issue:

- Use analogies. For instance, 'what sort of vacation spot would the internet be?'
- Ask obliquely-related questions. For example, 'how do you gossip with friends?'
- Try general questions. E.g., 'computers: blessing or curse?'
- Try indexical requests: 'What did you use the internet for last Tuesday?'"

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ProbeTools

Home   **Make Your Own**   **TaskCam Shield**   **Development Library**   **Designing Probes**   **Study**   **Shop**   **Contact**

ProbeTools are unconventional cameras and audio devices for Cultural Probes studies. TaskCam, VisionCam, Interviewer – each offers a unique and engaging way for people to tell you about themselves and their everyday lives. Make them, configure them, and lend them to participants to use independently. When they return the ProbeTools to you, the pictures and recordings they've made will offer glimpses into other worlds.

https://probetools.net/

https://probetools.net/probes

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Warm-up activity: Choosing your case study

First, spend 10 minutes talking to each other in your group about your ideas and plans for CW1.2 and CW2.1.

Discuss:
- What technology are you focusing on in these assignments?
- What application domain are you interested in?
- Are you choosing different case studies for CW1.2 and CW2.1, or keeping them the same or similar?

After discussing these for a few minutes, choose one of your case study technologies and application domains to focus on more for the rest of the tutorial. Make a note of your selection in the Miro board.

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Let's go to Miro…

https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJs1g-oo=/?share_link_id=736165019699

Activity 1: Constructing the main contents of your Cultural Probe kit (20 minutes)

Think about what types of activities could be interesting for potential participants to complete for you, which will give you some insight into their experiences, opinions, ideas, lives etc in relation to your case study technology and application domain.

To help you think about this, consider:
- ☐ Who do you imagine your participants to be? – where do they live, what do they do, how old are they, why are you focusing on them?
- ☐ What would you like to find out about people's lives?
- ☐ What are the novel functions and qualities of the technology that might be interesting to explore with participants?
- ☐ Why is the application domain interesting or relevant to your imagined participants?
- ☐ What questions might you have for them in relation to the application domain?

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Activity 2: Adding detail to one of the components (20 minutes)

Continuing to work in your groups, now we'd like you to focus on **one** of the components and activities in your Cultural Probe kit.

We'd like you to now discuss in your groups what you would ask participants to do with this activity. Consider what it is you think you will learn about or get insight into, in relation to the issue your project is focused on.

- o For example, **i**f you are focusing on the camera activity, what would you ask them to do with the camera? What type of prompts would you give them to respond to with the camera?
- o If you have chosen an activity which involves them completing a simple diary, what would you ask them to track, and why?

In the Miro board, write down the instructions you would give the participants for the activity.

Activity 3: Swapping with another group (15 minutes)

Read what the other group has put together and provide them with feedback.
o   Does it make sense?
o   Would you understand what they are trying to ask you to do?
o   How could you improve the activity they have given you – can you make it clearer, easier to understand, or more playful?