

Case studies for Design Informatics 1

Tutorial 5: Designing a Cultural Probe Pack

In this tutorial, we will explore the design of a Cultural Probe pack with you. This tutorial builds on the readings and presentations for Week 9, where you were invited to read the original Cultural Probe paper by Gaver et al. and discussed a variety of examples of “Probes” being used in design research.

As always, the session will start by taking attendance. The Tutor will then ask you a question: Can you tell us three potential “components” for a Cultural Probe kit? Think about the content of the Probe lecture and the examples Susan explained. If you do not know any, just say “I don’t know”.

The Tutor will discuss these with you, with reference to the original Gaver paper and the types of activities they gave participants in their first Cultural Probe kits. The tutor will give a short presentation about Probes giving examples of what Probe kits can look like. This will take 10-15 minutes.

Then we will work through some small group activities. For these activities, and all those that follow, we would like you all to use this [Miro canvas](#). For these activities, work in your project groups.

For this session, work in groups and choose a “case study” topic to focus on

For the purposes of the activities below, we would like you to work in the same groups as in previous weeks and decide together the case study (in other words, a technology and application domain) you want to focus on for this tutorial. Ideally, choose a case study that you have used in previous tutorials or one that is connected to one of your coursework assignments – e.g., choose a case study from one of your CW1.2 assignments (which should be progressing now) or your initial ideas for what you will do for CW2.1.

In this tutorial, we want you to imagine you are creating a Cultural Probe kit to engage participants in a fictional future project related to the case study you select. You are trying to find out something about them, about their lives, about what they do, or about their feelings in relation to specific issues.

Activity 1: Choosing your case study (10 minutes)

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.

Activity 2: Constructing the main contents of your Cultural Probe kit (20 minutes)

Go to your [Miro canvas](#).

For this first activity, we would like you to start to construct the contents of your Cultural Probe kit. As a starting point, you will see we have already given you the first key component – a disposable camera! However, we would like you to add a further THREE main components to your kit.

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 peoples 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?

Always keep in mind, Cultural Probe kits are meant to creatively explore with participants open-ended and ambiguous questions in relation to their lives! It is NOT an interview or survey!

Construct your kits with a combination of images (from the internet) and post-it notes to explain what the components are.

If you are struggling, consider the different types of activities Gaver et al. talked about in their paper.

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. This could be the Camera that was already in the kit, or it could be one of the other components you have just added.

We'd like you to now discuss in your groups what you would ask participants to do with this activity. For example, if 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? If you have chosen an activity which involves them completing a simple diary, what would you ask them to track, and why? Consider what it is you think you will learn about or get insight into, in relation to the issue your project is focused on.

In the Miro board, write down the instructions you would give the participants for the activity. Add these as post it notes to your section of the canvas, or as some lines of text.

Your tutor will give you tips and advice if you get stuck during this activity. They will also very quickly discuss some examples from your groups at the end of the activity.

Make sure you document as much as possible (via images, text, post-its) as you will be getting feedback from another group for the final activity.

Activity 3: Swapping with another group (15 minutes)

Having done these two activities, you will have hopefully learned a little about what it means to construct and design a Cultural Probe kit.

To close the tutorial, we will swap our planned kit and the activity with another group.

Read what the other group has put together – does it make sense? Would you understand what they are trying to ask you to do? How could you improve the activity they have given you – can you make it clearer, easier to understand, or more playful?!