

Design Manifesto: Principles and Philosophy

Throughout this semester, my design journey has been a deep dive into understanding user needs, refining processes, and crafting solutions that address real-world challenges. This manifesto encapsulates the core principles and philosophies that emerged from my work, integrating insights from projects, readings, and practical experiences. It is a guide not only to the designs I've created but also to how I approach design problems in new contexts.

1. User-Centered Design as the Foundation

The driving force behind all my projects has been understanding and addressing the user's needs. This principle emphasizes that design is most impactful when grounded in empathy and real-world contexts.

Key Insights:

- Projects like the attendance verification system (Lab Design for Collaboration) and the redesigned car service website focused heavily on specific user groups, tailoring solutions for college students and staff who needed intuitive and efficient interactions.
- Insights from resources like "The Design of Everyday Things" reinforced the importance of creating intuitive systems by minimizing cognitive load and promoting usability.

Evidence in Action:

- Sketches and prototypes for systems like the algorithm transparency feature (Lab Designing for Different Dimensions & Others) prioritized user control and clear communication.

2. Iterative Design as a Path to Excellence

Design is never perfect on the first attempt. I've learned the value of testing, iterating, and refining ideas through multiple cycles of feedback.

Key Insights:

- Early paper prototypes taught me the importance of starting simple and gathering feedback before scaling up. Moving to tools like Figma helped translate concepts into interactive, testable designs.
- The iterative approach aligns with the "Design Methods" readings, emphasizing the necessity of moving through stages of understanding, ideation, and critique.

Evidence in Action:

- In the attendance system project, iterative feedback led to significant improvements, such as merging complex multi-page workflows into cohesive, single-page designs for easier navigation.

3. Balancing Aesthetic Minimalism and Functionality

While aesthetics enhances user engagement, they must serve functionality. My designs prioritize simplicity and clarity, ensuring that visuals support usability rather than overshadowing it.

Key Insights:

- Applying principles from “Learning to See” helped develop an eye for visual hierarchy and minimalism.
- Consistent design elements, such as color schemes and layout standards, fostered familiarity across interfaces, enhancing trust and usability.

Evidence in Action:

- The mobile-friendly car repair website redesign embodied this balance, focusing on clean, school-themed aesthetics while streamlining core functions like booking appointments.

4. Transparency and User Trust

Modern users value transparency, particularly in areas like data privacy and algorithmic design. Addressing these concerns builds trust and ensures ethical design practices.

Key Insights:

- Persona development exercises highlighted user frustrations with complex privacy agreements and opaque algorithms. The solution was clear, actionable communication about data usage.
- “Putting Personas to Work in UX Design” underscored the importance of aligning design decisions with user expectations and values.

Evidence in Action:

- Features like user-adjustable algorithms and short, clear privacy agreements in my projects addressed these trust issues effectively.

5. The Importance of Inclusive and Accessible Design

Great design is inclusive. It accounts for diverse user experiences, ensuring that systems are usable regardless of technical expertise or physical ability.

Key Insights:

- Accessibility principles learned through readings on heuristics and usability informed every design choice, such as error recovery and mobile compatibility.
- Projects like the attendance system showcased how inclusive design supports students with varying tech proficiency levels while maintaining simplicity for advanced users.

Evidence in Action:

- In the attendance system, flexible features like QR code alternatives and geolocation privacy ensured inclusivity while upholding functionality.

Reflection and Takeaways

This semester's work has shown me that good design is a combination of empathy, testing, and adaptability. While processes like user research and iterative testing are invaluable, limitations such as time and resources often force prioritization. In these moments, I learned to focus on core user needs and iterate later.

This manifesto is a testament to the skills and philosophies I've developed. Moving forward, these principles will guide me in creating impactful, user-focused designs across any scenario I encounter.