The new city experience
An Introduction to Design Thinking

Facilitator’s Guide:
Script, talking points, takeaways, and setup considerations inside.
A little background on the project

The New City Experience Project is an immersive activity meant to give participants a full cycle through the design thinking process—trying out a number of new designerly behaviors—in a short session. The project itself gives facilitators the opportunity to touch on the fundamental values of the d.school—human-centered design, a bias towards action, inferring deeper human meaning, rapid prototyping—without attempting to communicate all of the methods and activities that the term “design thinking” encompasses.

This project is unique in that it does not start with a problem to solve. The opportunity for which to design is discovered by each person during the project. The topic of the new city experience was chosen to elicit juicy stories (good to gain empathy for another person).

Why project-based, team-facilitated learning?

Having created learning experiences for students of all cultures, ages, disciplines, and industries, we have found that engaging in projects provides a much richer learning experience than listening to a “talking head” does. As such, our bias is to provide limited scaffolding to allow participants to do, and then to facilitate a reflection that invites the participants themselves to extract the meaningful learning opportunities from the experience.

We teach in teams at the d.school because we have found that this approach tends to create a conversation in the classroom, as opposed to the one-way communication that often transpires in more lecture-driven formats. We relish the diversity of perspectives that emerge when faculty from diverse backgrounds instruct, and even disagree in front of, a class. One great way to run the activity with two people, is for one to take lead (concentrating on communicating the instructions, logistics, and timing), and the other person to provide color (communicating the nuances, offering encouragement, and providing helpful tips).
How to set up and kickoff the project

Set up the room so that participants are in an active posture (sitting upright), with access to a horizontal space (table) for note taking and building.

Participants should be **grouped in sets of four**. Space should be configured to allow for participants to engage with each other, first as a pair, and later in the project as a four-some.

You need an even number of students for the activity (though does not need to be a multiple of four). It is good to have one person available that can step into a 'student' role if needed for the activity.

Cocktail style—small, standing height—tables are nice to have.

**Play upbeat music during all steps while participants work, and turn it down to give instruction.**

Make sure you have supplies on hand for prototyping (we recommend paper, pens, popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners, scissors, duct tape, and the like).

Print the participant worksheet on single-sided 11x17 (A3) paper (one per "student").

Print this facilitator's guide on double-sided 8.5x11 (A4) paper (one per facilitator).

Find a fun way to announce "Time's up!" (we use a gong at the d.school). You will have to interrupt people and get their attention again.

**Be assertive about keeping the timing tight.**

Have a partner or team of coaches who are familiar with the project share the responsibility for facilitating the learning experience.

The kick-off:

“Instead of just telling you about design thinking, we want to immediately have you jump right in and experience it for yourself. We are going to do a design project for about the next 90 minutes. Ready? Let’s go!”

“This is going to feel rushed; that’s okay. We ask you to roll up your sleeves and get ready to lean into the project, and then we will make sense of it after.”

Have participants partner up in pairs. It helps to refer to ‘Partner A’ and ‘Partner B’.
Create a quick interview guide
(with open-ended questions!)

A. Be human: build rapport.
   Introduce yourself. “How are you today?”
   “Nice to meet you. Tell me about where you’re from.”

B. Seek stories.
   “Could you tell me story about a time you . . .
   ([... travelled by yourself to a new place?]
   ([... had an unexpected adventure in a new city?] . . .)
   ?”

   “What would I find surprising about how you . . .
   ([... pack for a long trip?] .
   ([... navigate a new city?])
   ?”

   “[write more of your own]
   ”

C. Talk about feelings. Dig deeper by following up.
   “How did you feel at that moment, when . . . happened?”

   “[write more of your own]
   ”

Interview your partner
(just have a conversation!)

Interview notes:

Go deeper into one story: remember to ask “Why?”

2 min

4 min each

3 min each

Now pair up
Hear a good story.

How to facilitate these steps

1—Create a quick interview guide

“A fundamental part of design thinking is to be human-centered — to understand the beliefs and feelings of the people you are designing for. We call this empathy. One way to do this is to have a good conversation.”

“In a minute you are going to interview your partner.”

“Your singular goal during that conversation is to hear a juicy story.”

Demo a good interview: Show open-ended questions, following up, and conversational tone.

One facilitator be the interviewer and the other be the interviewee (keep your roles throughout the project).
Ask and answer questions that get to stories: “Could you tell me about a time you had an adventure in a new city?” “Tell me more about that . . .”

“Now to start, take a couple minutes to jot some open-ended questions that could elicit stories.”

2—Interview your partner

“Now you have a chance to talk to your partner. Just have a conversation. Don’t worry too much about your interview guide. Just let conversation flow.”

“Remember, your goal is to hear a good story — one you’d want to retell to a friend.”
Tell them to write a few notes of things they find interesting or surprising. “Let’s begin!”
After 4 minutes tell them to switch.

3—Dig deeper

After the first set of interviews, tell them to go deeper into one particular story. “Don’t shy away from personal or emotional topics; go into that territory.”

“Dig into a story that intrigued you from the first interview. You want to get to what the person was thinking and feeling at that time as a way to understand them better. To do that ask ‘WHY?’ often.”

Demo digging into a story: Show “why?”, “how did you feel when . . .?” questions.

Pick up the story that was started in the first interview demo. Focus on one story (a particular experience). Ask: “You mentioned X . . . walk me through how that happened?” . . . “And what were you feeling then?” . . . “Oh, why did you . . . (do, say) . . . that?”

“Okay, now have another conversation to dig deeper into one story. Partner A start. We will give you three minutes.”
Imagine the meaning
(notice something, then infer what the meaning might be)

Imagine possibilities for the following statements:
It’s interesting/surprising/telling that s/he . . .

_______________________________________________________________

One thing that seems to be important to him/her is . . .

_______________________________________________________________

I wonder if this means . . .
[WRITE A COUPLE HUNCHES]

_______________________________________________________________

Create a brainstorming topic
(turn your insight into a question)

First select the **one** hunch (“I wonder if this means . . .”) that gives you the most unique and exciting perspective. Write it below.

How might ______________________ act on my hunch that ______________________?

(This question should help you imagine products/services/experiences in this context that capitalizes on your unique hunch)

Then choose a context from below. Pick **one** that might best be able to take advantage of the hunch you chose. Write it above.

- A MUSEUM
- A LOCAL RESTAURANT
- A TRAVEL OR TOUR AGENCY
- THE TOURISM BOARD
- A NEIGHBORHOOD PARK
- A LOCAL UNIVERSITY
- A CHARITY

- A SHOPPING DISTRICT OR STORE
- A HOTEL
- A PUB OR BAR
- A SPORTS TEAM
- THE TRANSIT SYSTEM
- A HOST, FRIEND, OR GUIDE
- A FESTIVAL ORGANIZER
What does it mean?

How to facilitate these steps

3—Imagine the meaning

“We want to move beyond what was said (the explicit) to the meaning behind it (the implicit).

“Start by noticing something telling or surprising in the story you heard. Then imagine what’s behind that by asking yourself ‘I wonder if this means . . .’

Show inferring: Put an example (based on interview demo) in the scaffold of Step 3.

Based on the interview of the previous demos fill out Step 3. This will likely require a little bit of pre-planning to work out an illustrative example.

It doesn’t have to be fancy. Your goal is just to show that one can imagine (infer) new perspectives that were not explicitly said by the interviewee.

“You’re taking a guess at the meaning. There is no right answer. You are just playing with possibilities.”

“Now do it. Individually take four minutes to move down the page from ‘noticing’ to ‘I wonder if this means . . .’

4—Create a brainstorming topic

“You are now going to use what you learned—the meaning you inferred—to pose a question you will ask to generate new-to-the-world ideas.”

“To do this select one inference—one insight—you think is compelling and move it to over to the right. Then choose a context (a museum, a hotel, the transit system . . .) that you think could uniquely benefit from this new insight. Put those two together to ask a brainstorming question.”

Show creating a brainstorm topic: Put an example in Step 4.

This is simple: Choose one insight (“I wonder if this means . . .”) and one context. You might have to change the wording a little bit to make the question make sense, but don’t lose what’s interesting by making it more generic.

“The idea is you turn your insight into a provocative question. Do this now. 3 minutes.”
New ideas!

Generate a diverse set of concepts in response to your brainstorming questions.
Your goal is to build on the ideas of others.

5 Share your work, then brainstorm as a team
(recap one story, share one inference and your brainstorm question — then lead a brainstorm)

2 min share,
3 min brainstorm, each
5—Share and brainstorm

The participants will now work as a team of four (two pairs).
(If you have one remaining team with only two students the facilitator(s) can join that team for this step.)

“Now you are going to generate new ideas in response to the brainstorming question you created.”

Demo brainstorming:

Take your example brainstorming question and demonstrate brainstorming using post-its.
Be sure to show building on each others ideas, headlining (using short phrases), and positive energy.

“Each person in the group of four will have five minutes to share what you heard and discovered, and then facilitate a brainstorm with the group.
Share what you noticed in the story, what you inferred, and the brainstorming question you created. Then start brainstorming.
“Have fun with it. Imagine concepts and build on others’ ideas.”

“This is time for idea generation, not critique—you can evaluate the ideas later.”

“Just get all your ideas out there, and go for quantity.”
“Start now with the first person. We will tell you in five minutes when to switch.”
Have everyone stand for the brainstorm.

... “One minute left! Get 6 more ideas out!”

... “Now the second person share and lead a brainstorm.” ...
Choose one idea and flesh it out into a product or service
(what is it? how does one use it?)
Sketch it out.

How to facilitate this step

6—Choose one idea and flesh it out

Clarity is clear here: "That's the end of brainstorming. Great job!"
Each of you individually take a look at the ideas that were generated during the brainstorm you facilitated.
Each person is going to select one idea to take forward and flesh it out.
You have a headline of the idea on a post-it.

“Now, take that start of the concept and develop it.”
“Sketch out the idea visually and add some details to the idea.”
“Stay in a generative mode as you explore the ideas within the concept.”
“Take the idea headline and flesh it out in a product or service. What is it? How does one use it?”
“Do this individually. I want to see sketches! Limit yourself to ten written words on the page. Take three minutes now . . . start now.”
Let’s get physical, physical

Let me hear your body talk.

Your goal is to develop and test your solution by physically trying it out.

Bring your solution to life
(use improvisation to create an imaginary world where your solution already exists)

Consider these aspects of the imaginary world you are creating:

- **SCENE**: The context of experience
- **ROLES**: People involved in experience (you may want to play one yourself)
- **PROPS**: Simple tangible things in experience

Test with your partner
(invite your partner into that imaginary world)

- **What’s working?**
- **What could be improved?**

4 min each

What’s working?

What could be improved?

New questions

New ideas

7 min
Build and test.

How to facilitate these steps

7—Bring your solution to life

Tell participants to use what they just sketched as a blueprint for a tangible manifestation of their solution.

“Use improvisation to bring the idea to life.”

Explain that they should not simply make a scale model of their idea to explain the idea. They should create an experience that their partner can physically try out and react to.

“Think about it like a skit. Consider the scene (where your concept happens), props (the physical things), and the roles (people in the experience).”

“Develop an experience that your partner can engage and interact with.”

“Create a scenario that allows your partner to experience this innovation.”

“Use whatever materials are available to you—including space and yourself as an actor in the prototype!”

Provide some urgency and excitement in your voice—you want to get them building immediately.

“Be scrappy and quick—you only have seven minutes!!”

8—Test with your partner

Explain that they will have four minutes each to have their partner experience their prototype, and then they will switch so the other partner can share.

“Now you’re going to have the opportunity to have your partner experience your concept.”

“Invite your partner into the imaginary world where your concept already exists.”

“Play through it in the present tense, not in a hypothetical future tense.”

Meaning: ‘You’re walking down the street and you come across . . .’ NOT ‘Here’s what would happen. If someone entered the bank . . .’

“Don’t defend your prototype; instead, observe what they do and listen to the feedback.”

“Then, as you did before, ask open-ended questions so you can learn more.”

Tell them to jot down things their partner liked and didn’t like about the idea, as well as questions that emerged and new ideas that came up.
Reflection and takeaways.

How to facilitate this step

9—Group gather and debrief

This step is important! A well-facilitated reflection has the power to turn this exercise from simply a fun activity to a meaningful experience that could impact the way participants approach innovation in the future.

If you are a small group, circle up and ask everyone to bring their prototype.

“Who had a partner who created something that you imagine yourself actually using?”

“Can someone share what their partner made for them?”

Let some folks share what was made for them and for each ask the person who created the prototype to also speak.

“What story or insight lead you in this direction?” “Where did the idea come from?”

Respect and honor the work.

Have a few pairs share, then move the conversation from project to process.

**The key to leading this conversation is to relate the activity to the big takeaways you want to illustrate.**

Discussion question:

“How did it feel to show unfinished work?”

“What was it like to start by hearing a story?”

Mindset:

- **Experimentation and prototyping:** Prototyping is not simply a way to validate your idea; it is an integral part of your innovation process. We build to think and learn.

- **Human-centered design:** Empathy for the person or people you are designing for, and feedback from users, is fundamental to good design.