LANDING YOUR FIRST UX JOB

Panelists

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Skills and Responsibilities

UX Skills

UX is a very broad field. While it's probably not be necessary to have a thorough understanding of every UX skill, it's always helpful to have a general knowledge of the basics:

• Research
• Information architecture (hierarchy, organization)
• Flow charts
• Journey maps
• Wireframing
• Interface design
• Prototyping/User testing
• Analytics

Responsibilities

A "UX design" role can look very different from company to company depending on the size and scope of the team and product. Some roles will require you to have a general knowledge of UX, while other roles may be more specific: web, interface design, research, or user testing, etc.

• Generalist: a small company or startup may require many responsibilities
• Specialist: in a large company, UX roles will be much more specific

Cross-Industry Experience

There are many valuable skills from other jobs/industries that transfer to the UX field. These experiences are useful when transitioning into a UX role.

Examples:

• Developers may have experience with flow charts and analytics
• Web designers likely understand sitemaps or user flows
• Psychologists may have a grasp on user behaviors

Portfolio

What Employers Look For

Employers want to see your skills and your design process. Use your portfolio to tell a story about yourself, your process, and your projects.

• Critical thinking and problem solving

• Your design process and process work

• How your design process led to the final design

• Flowcharts, workflows, sitemaps, research, etc.

• How you tell the story

• How your final design solves the problem you were confronting

• How your work is solution-focused and user-focused

• If your project failed or didn't turn out as hoped, explain why and what you learned from it

Pitch Your Work

• What problem were you trying to solve?

• Why is your design a good solution?

• What makes your final design successful?

• How does your final design meet the needs it was created for?

What if You Don't Have UX Experience?

• Redesign an existing app or create a new app and show your process and final product in your portfolio.

• Apply UX principles to the ways your present work in your portfolio (even if projects aren't UX-specific)

  • Example: for a branding project, explain how you optimized for audience and business needs

  • Example: for a 3D/industrial design project, demonstrate how you took ergonomics into consideration

  • Example: for a web project, use analytics to show improvements or differences in audience engagement

• Show your design process with flowcharts, workflows, sitemaps, research, quality assurance, user testing, website and website analytics. All of these things can be presented to demonstrate your attention to user needs and problem solving.

Networking

Take Initiative

• Reach out to senior designers, managers, etc.

• Invite to meet over coffee

• Ask questions

• Ask to shadow a designer

• Find a professional mentor

• Be persistent, follow up

• Ask hiring managers, senior designers, etc. to review your portfolio and/or
  resume or perform a mock interview

Groups and Events

• Attend portfolio reviews

• Attend local events

• Get involved in local professional/networking groups

    • AIGA

    • UXPA

    • LinkedIn Groups

Software Tools

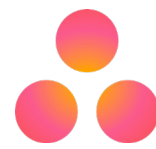## Design

Figma	Sketch	Adobe XD	InVision	Axure

Collaboration

Trello	Basecamp	Slack	Google Drive	Asana

Whiteboarding

Miro	FigJam

Prototyping

Figma	Framer	Overflow	ProtoPie	FB Origami

Q&A

What distinguishes UX design from graphic design?

Graphic Design tends to be *craft-focused*. Graphic design deals with, visualization, product or service promotion, communication, layouts, etc.

UX Design is *solution-focused*. UX Design focuses on the user. It's about research, process, iteration, validation, etc. UX always recognizes that the user comes first – UX is meant to be used and experienced by others and that should always be at the forefront of a UX designer's thinking.

How does UX differ from web design or UI design?

These positions can be very similar. The UX industry is still a relatively new and emerging field, so titles, responsibilities, and roles are still being ironed out. As a result, reading descriptions for job postings can sometimes be pretty tedious. "Product design," "UI/UX," etc. are all terms that are emerging to describe various UX design roles.

"Web design" is more specific than broader "UX design," which can relate to nearly any aspect of a user's interaction with a product or company. If you can focus in on an area of UX that gives you more of a specialty, go for it.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your early UX self?

Cross platform design is important. Think about how a singular idea can be applied across multiple platforms: web, apps, watch face, in vehicle, etc.

In addition, there's a lot of focus with hiring managers and recruiters on *iterative design*. Show your crappy sketches or wireframes that didn't work, show new iterations that led to improved and more finalized designs. This is how real world projects work.

Impact is important to demonstrate. What impact did your design have? Why was it an appropriate solution? If it failed, talk about that and what you learned from the failure.

A lot of jobs ask for 3+ years of experience. What do I do?

This often varies from company to company. Find ways to execute projects: hackathons, graduate study work, volunteer for nonprofit organizations, etc.

As far as hard work experience, internships and apprenticeships and really anything you can get your hands out of the gate can help gain that experience. You can also seek out a mentoring relationship and ask them for project ideas they have that may help.

Q&A

What advice do you have for someone transitioning from graphic design to UX design?

Unfortunately, there's no particular script. But it can be easier than you think. If you're interested in research, data, and solutions, you're probably interested in user experience. Figure out what skills you already have and use in your current role or as a student that transfer to UX.

Look at what other companies are doing: Material Design, Lyft Design, IBM Design. Look at how they're taking creative models and transferring it to a screen. If this kind of work resonates with you, the switch to UX is probably easier than what you may be thinking. UX designers come from all sorts of backgrounds. If there's something you're interested in, go for it!

Look at educational materials. Stay current with UX by listening to podcasts, reading blogs and articles, etc. Indoctrinating yourself with what's happening and the terminology will help your transition process.

How do you advocate for UX?

You can and should always be an advocate for UX in your teams. In fact, it's part of your job description. Advocating for UX doesn't always mean it will be implemented in an ideal way. These decisions may come down to budget, development time, managers not seeing the importance, etc. Even if you have to walk around the office and ask people to interact with something, it may feel scrappy, but it's still getting valuable feedback.

The way you advocate for how UX is implemented into products and practices will depend on the scale and investment of the organization.

Being customer-centered is the goal of most companies. Because of that, you can make a case for UX as it will improve the customer experience. User research is the most influential thing you can use to influence design decisions. It brings user insight directly into the process.

Tag design changes as what they're for: usability, accessibility, business goals and/or risks, etc. This will help teams and companies prioritize changes.

UX isn't only about the end user; it's also about your team and your company. Even if you create the absolute optimal end-user experience, but your company doesn't have the manpower, the timeline, or the budget to implement, it isn't the ideal solution. You have to take those things into consideration and work within those constraints. Understand that UX is an iterative process and may take time.

Q&A

How do roles and responsibilities look different based on the size of team you're on?

It will depend on the team, where you work and the company model. Sometimes teams are distributed around the world. There is a wide variety of roles in larger teams: designers, content, copywriters, front-end engineering, research, etc.

On larger teams, you may be involved in design for multiple products rather than just one single product. When you have your hands on multiple products, it's helpful to have a solid design system and focus on how all the products interact with each other – a more high level approach.

Even on small teams, or if you're the only UX designer, you are never a party of one. You will always need to interact, collaborate, and communicate with project managers, company leadership, stakeholders, clients/users, developers, etc.

How does someone new to UX determine their place?

What are you passionate about in design? For example, if you are interested in craft and details, you may be more interested in interfaces and visuals.

A potential perk of being hired at a larger company is the opportunity to move into different roles as you grow and hone in on your individual passions and skills. At companies that don't have these opportunities, you can move to another company.

Since UX is still evolving, and as a new designer, it's okay to not know exactly where your place is right off. As you gain experience and grow, you will move into roles and responsibilities that fit your skills and personality.

What do you look for in interviewing and hiring?

Most companies have a structure for interviewing. Some companies use the "STAR" method: Situation, Task, Action, Results. Do some research about interviewing formats so you're prepared.

In the way you interact, be attentive and respectful to everyone in the interview process: interviewers, recruiters, front desk people, etc.

Do some research about the company, company structure, the products they're working on, etc. Be prepared for interviewers to ask questions about your knowledge and impression of the company and/or their products. Have questions prepared to ask your interviewer.

Don't take yourself too seriously. Check your ego.

Q&A

What are companies looking for in UX designers and portfolios?

"UX" your own portfolio. With LinkedIn and professional organizations and networking today, you have so much access to people who are willing to chat and lend a helping hand. Put your portfolio in front of hiring managers and run it like a usability test. Figure out where things are successful, where they're confused, etc.

In addition, you can even ask for mock interviews to practice and improve your presentation.

When putting projects in your portfolio, consider how you can tell a story that says, "I thought about this," even if the project isn't UX-specific. Even if you show a branding project you worked on, demonstrate how you can transfer it to multi-platform experiences. Show and explain the critical thinking and process skills that demonstrate the value you bring to the UX field. Demonstrate that you're able to assess the end user – the person who is going to interact with your project.

Come up with your own projects. For example redesign a website or app you use often. Think about what's good about it, what can be improved? "UX" it; design it from scratch, or come up with your own application. Hiring managers will be really interested in the work you do on your own time as it demonstrates your initiative and passion for user experience.

Take a look at Behance, Figma Community, etc. to explore content and see what they're doing and figure out how you can put your own spin on it.

Realize that hiring managers know that many people aren't going to have a UX degree or professional UX experience.

How many projects should go in a portfolio?

You can include multiple projects, but make sure they're really strong projects that you're passionate about. You can include projects that aren't UX-specific if they show your process. Your portfolio should be about how you solve problems and create solutions and how you tell that story.

Instead of focusing on volume, focus on quality. Even if it's only 2 to 3 projects.

It can be hard to part with projects that we're attached to, but remember that your portfolio exists to find you the job you want. If you have projects that don't align with that goal, it's better to archive them.

Q&A

What programs do you use the most?

Figma. While some companies use Sketch, Axure, InVision and others, many companies are transitioning to Figma. The great thing about Figma is that it allows for live collaboration and multiple people can be inside the same file working together. Figma is also great about listening to user feedback and is constantly improving and implementing new features as a result.

Also lots of people make their portfolios available in the Figma community. So you can take a look at them and use those insights to make your portfolio even better.

It's a good idea to have a basic understanding of the pros and cons of different UX software programs. But at the end of day, software is quickly evolving and there are always new things coming out. So if you're familiar with one, it's pretty simple to transition and there are always online tutorials you can check out to get more familiar with features.

Any final words of wisdom?

Ashton: "Remember that it only takes roughly 3 clicks to put your product away." When you're showing process, you don't have to show a complete app; it could be a user flow or something engaging. Just make it intuitive.

Kendell: Give yourself some grace. Sometimes you'll submit multiple applications and hear from no one, sometimes recruiters won't follow up. It's happens to everyone! Don't run yourself into the ground. Take a break. Relax, meditate, work out, go for walks, take time for yourself. Make sure to foster self care and mental well-being. It will help you have a better mindset and maintain focus as you continue your job search.

Interview Questions

About You
• Tell us about yourself.

• What things do you enjoy doing other than design?

• How did you get into the field? What led you here?

• Where do you see yourself in five years?

UX Comprehension
• How do you define UX and/or UI design?

• What do you think will be the next innovation in UX design?

• Where do you go for inspiration?

• Who are some designers or sources you look up to and follow?

• What's an app you use often? What is successful about it? What could be improved?

Your Work (Provide examples for answers you give)
• Tell us about your most recent UX design product.

• Tell us about the project you're most proud of and why.

• What did you learn from [example] project?

• Explain your process/workflow.

• How do you design for the user at all times?

• What part(s) of the design process do you excel at? What parts are you weakest at?

• In the design process from research to interface design, where do you see yourself fitting?

Previous Experiences (Provide examples for answers you give)
• Do you have experience working with other designers and developers?

• How do you communicate with designers/developers/managers/clients/etc.?

• Why are you leaving your previous role?

• How do you respond when a client or manager disagrees with a design decision you make?

• How do you take criticism?

Interview Questions

Company Specific

• If you've seen our product, how would you improve it?

• Why do you want to work for us?

• What value/skill set would you bring to our team?

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

• Tell me about your team's workflow.

• How does your UX team collaborate between designers/developers/others?

• Where does your team determine new products or features to create/improve?

• How does your company – not just your team – implement UX?

• Does your company understand and appreciate UX and the work you're doing?

• What is your company culture like?

• How well do you like your job?

Resources

Podcasts
• User Defenders – userdefenders.com

• UX Podcast – uxpodcast.com

• UI breakfast – uibreakfast.com

• Revision Path – revisionpath.com

• 99 Percent Invisible – 99percentinvisible.org

• ShopTalk – shoptalkshow.com

• Wireframe – xd.adobe.com/ideas/perspectives/wireframe-podcast

Books
• Don't Make Me Think, *Steve Krug*

• Design of Everyday Things, *Don Norman*

• Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products, *Nir Eyal*

• Thinking, Fast and Slow, *Daniel Kahneman*

• Build Better Products, *Laura Klein*

• UX Bites – Small bites of information about User Experience Design, *Gabriel Kirmaier*

Blogs, Articles and Research
• UX Collective – uxdesign.cc

• Nielsen Norman Group – nngroup.com

• UX Matters – uxmatters.com

• Journal of Usability Studies – uxpajournal.org

• Koos Looijesteijn – kooslooijesteijn.net

Email Subscriptions
• Case Study Club – casestudy.club

• Growth.Design – growth.design

Additional Resources
• Apple Human Interface Guidelines – developer.apple.com/design/human-interface-guidelines

• Material Design – material.io/resources/get-started