Glossary: Introduction to UX/UI and Design Thinking

Estimated reading time: 10 minutes

Welcome! This alphabetized glossary contains many terms used in this module. Understanding these terms is essential when working in the industry, participating in user groups, and completing other certificate programs.

Common Mistakes and Their Impact

Term	Definition	Role in UX/UI
Auto-playing media	A video or audio element that starts without user input.	Often precludes user control and may distract or irritate if used without caution.
Bounce rate	A metric showing the percentage of users who leave after viewing only one page.	Indicates poor engagement and guides areas for usability improvements.
Friction	Any element that slows down or complicates the user's flow.	Indicates barriers to conversion and guides interface simplification.
Pop-ups / modals	The UI elements that interrupt the user flow to display information.	Often precludes smooth user flow if overused or poorly timed.
Error prevention	A method of designing to reduce user mistakes.	Allows smoother task completion and improves user confidence.
Error recovery	A feature that helps users fix mistakes (for example, "Undo Send").	Allows flexibility, reduces anxiety, and prevents user loss.
Support tickets / Feedback logs	The logged user complaints or issues submitted via customer service.	Guides detection of repeated usability problems needing resolution.

Usability in UX

Term	Definition	Role in UX/UI
Accessibility (a11y)	An inclusive design approach that supports users with disabilities through features like screen readers and proper contrast.	Guides the creation of interfaces that accommodate all users and comply with accessibility standards.

Alt text	A descriptive phrase for images that screen readers can interpret.	Allows users with visual impairments to understand image content and supports SEO.
Analytics	A toolset that collects behavioral data like clicks, time on page, and drop-offs.	Allows developers to measure user behavior and detect design flaws.
Color contrast	A difference between foreground and background elements for readability.	Allows better visibility and supports accessibility for all users.
Cognitive load	A mental effort required to understand or use a product interface.	Guides simplification of UI elements to improve user comfort and performance.
Efficiency	A measure of how quickly and easily users can complete their tasks.	Allows streamlined task flows and minimizes frustration or abandonment.
Effectiveness	A measure of how successfully users can achieve their goals.	Allows validation of whether the interface supports key user tasks
Heatmaps	A tool that visualizes where users click or scroll.	Guides interface improvements by showing where user attention is strongest or weakest.
Heuristic evaluation	An expert analysis based on usability principles like Nielsen's heuristics.	Allows fast identification of obvious UI issues before user testing.
Load time/Performance	A speed at which a page or action completes.	Guides interface and code optimization to maintain engagement.
Memorability	A user's ability to return and use a product without relearning.	Allows easier repeat usage and promotes long-term retention.
Mobile usability	A measure of how well a product performs on mobile.	Guides design of responsive, touch-friendly interfaces that meet mobile users' needs.
Performance and loading speed	A measure of how fast a product responds.	Guides optimization efforts that maintain trust and user attention
Real-time validation	A feature that gives immediate feedback on user input.	Allows prevention of errors and improves form clarity.
Satisfaction	A user's emotional reaction to using a product.	Allows measurement of loyalty and repeat usage likelihood.
Usability	A measure of how easily users can interact with a product.	Guides all aspects of UX strategy and affects satisfaction and retention.
UX heuristics	A set of usability principles like consistency and user control.	Guides expert reviews and ensures intuitive interface behavior.

Visual feedback	A UI response after user interaction (for example, loading spinner).	Allows users to understand system status and reinforces trust.

Core UX/UI Design Principles

Term	Definition	Role in UX/UI
A/B testing	A method of comparing two versions of a design to measure performance differences.	Allows data-backed decisions on design choices like layout, CTAs, and labels.
Affordance	A visual clue that suggests how an element should be used (for example, a button looks clickable).	Guides users toward intended interactions and minimizes confusion.
Clarity and simplicity	A design principle that promotes minimal, clean, and easily understood interfaces.	Allows users to complete tasks faster and reduces confusion.
CTA (Call to action)	A visual prompt (for example, "Buy Now") that encourages user engagement.	Guides users toward important actions and improves conversion when clear.
Design consistency	A practice of using uniform elements like typography, icons, and layout patterns.	Allows users to learn faster and feel more confident navigating.
Design language	A system of cohesive visual elements, tone, and interaction patterns.	Guides brand consistency and maintains a unified experience across screens.
Emotional design	A design approach that adds personality through visuals, animations, and tone.	Guides emotional connection with the user and improves satisfaction
Form simplification	A process of reducing unnecessary form fields or steps.	Allows faster completion rates and lowers drop-offs.
Hamburger icon	A three-line icon used to reveal hidden menus.	Allows compact navigation but may hide important features if overused.
Mobile-first design	A design strategy that begins with mobile layouts before scaling up.	Guides prioritization of essential content and performance for mobile users.
Mobile optimization	A process of designing for smooth functionality on phones and tablets.	Allows better usability and search performance on mobile devices.
Navigation design	A structure that organizes content and lets users move through the product.	Guides users to find features quickly and reduces drop-off rates.
Nielsen's heuristics	A list of 10 usability rules like error prevention, visibility, and user control.	Guides designers in evaluating interfaces based on established best practices.

Responsive design	A layout strategy that adapts across screen sizes and devices.	Guides creation of seamless user experiences on all platforms.
Responsive layout	A layout technique using flexible grids and queries.	Allows consistent experiences regardless of screen dimensions.
Signifiers	A visual cue indicating an action (for example, underlined link).	Guides user understanding of interface functionality.
Visual hierarchy	A structure that arranges elements by importance using size, color, or placement	Guides user attention to key areas and supports effective navigation.

Building User Personas

Term	Definition	Role in UX/UI
Behavioral grouping	A process of clustering users based on similar habits, goals, or frustrations.	Allows segmentation for targeted design solutions and personalized experiences.
Customer interviews	A method of talking directly with users to understand their behaviors and challenges.	Allows deep exploration of user context and informs early design choices.
Empathy	An ability to understand and share the feelings of users.	Guides user-centered design and creates intuitive, human-focused experiences.
Feature prioritization	A process of aligning product features with user goals and frustrations.	Guides development efforts to what matters most to users.
Persona	A fictional, research-based profile representing a key user type.	Guides design decisions by grounding them in real user needs.
Persona maintenance	A regular process of updating personas based on new research.	Allows personas to stay relevant as users evolve.
Persona profile elements	The key parts of a persona, such as name, goals, frustrations, and device usage.	Allows cross-team clarity and effective empathy during design.
Persona quote	A fictional or real statement summarizing a user sentiment.	Guides emotional connection and design justification with stakeholders.
Sample persona	An example profile used to represent a user segment.	Guides realistic design scenarios and stakeholder alignment.
Technology habits	A record of devices and apps users regularly use.	Guides cross-platform design and prioritization for developers.
User-centered design	A design approach based on actual user needs and feedback.	Guides decisions that prioritize empathy and real-world usefulness.

| User interviews | A method involving direct user conversations to uncover needs. | Allows in-depth understanding of goals, pain points, and behaviors. |
| User persona | A fictional profile based on user research. | Guides team alignment on user motivations and design priorities. |

Mapping User Journeys

Term	Definition	Role in UX/UI
Actions	A set of steps taken by users during their interaction with a product.	Guides the mapping of key user events and triggers in the journey.
Awareness stage	A user journey phase where the user first discovers the product.	Guides marketing design and onboarding UX strategies.
Card sorting	An activity where users group information into categories that make sense to them.	Guides intuitive navigation design based on user expectations.
Consideration stage	A phase where users evaluate whether the product meets their needs.	Guides content strategy and interface clarity for effective decision-making.
Conversion rate	A percentage of users who complete a desired action, like a purchase or signup.	Indicates product effectiveness and guides interface improvements to increase success.
Decision stage	The moment when a user commits to an action, like purchasing.	Guides frictionless interface design that enables successful conversions.
Diary studies	A long-term user research method where participants log interactions and thoughts.	Allows discovery of long-term engagement patterns and emotional reactions.
Emotion mapping	A visualization of users' emotional states during their journey.	Guides design focus on high-frustration or delight moments.
Field studies (Contextual inquiry)	A research method of observing users in their natural environment.	Allows real-world context to shape product decisions.
Feedback	A response given after user actions (for example, success message).	Allows users to stay informed and confident about their interactions.
Open-ended questions	Prompts used in interviews to gather rich, detailed insights.	Allows discovery of unexpected insights and deeper understanding.
Opportunities	A set of insights on how to improve a user experience.	Guides ideation of new features or UX enhancements.

Participant activities	A record of what users are doing at each journey step.	Allows designers to contextualize interactions and support user goals.
Pain points	The specific moments of user frustration, confusion, or drop-off.	Guides UX fixes and highlights where improvements are needed most.
Scroll behavior	A method of navigating content vertically or horizontally.	Guides UX choices that align with user expectations and ease of use.
Speak-aloud protocol	A usability method where users verbalize thoughts during tasks.	Allows understanding of user mental models and friction points.
Stages of user journey	The defined phases users move through during a product experience.	Guides end-to-end optimization of user flows.
Surveys and questionnaires	A structured method to collect large-scale feedback.	Allows validation of design assumptions and discovery of user trends.
Thoughts	What users are thinking during each stage of their journey.	Guides messaging and tooltip design to align with user mindset.
User journey map	A diagram that shows steps users take to accomplish a goal.	Guides insight into pain points, opportunities, and key interactions.
User research	A process of gathering qualitative and quantitative data to understand users.	Guides all UX decisions with evidence from real users.
User scenarios/Testing use cases	A narrative used to simulate how a persona uses a feature.	Guides realistic testing and design validation.
Visual hierarchy in journey maps	A way to visually organize user data (for example, swimlanes).	Guides stakeholder understanding and highlights key experience phases.