

METHOD

PROTOTYPE TO TEST



WHY prototype to test

Prototyping to test is the iterative generation of low-resolution artifacts that probe different aspects of your design solution or design space. The fundamental way you test your prototypes is by letting users experience them and react to them. In creating prototypes to test with users you have the opportunity to examine your solution decisions as well as test your perception of your users and their needs.

HOW to prototype to test

Think about what you are trying to learn with your prototypes, and create low-resolution objects and scenarios which probe those questions. Staying low-res allows you to pursue many different ideas you generated without committing to a direction too early on. The objective is not simply to create a mock-up or scale model of your solution concept; it is to create experiences to which users can react. Bring resolution to the aspects that are important for what you are trying to test, and spend less effort on other aspects. You also need to think about the context and testing scenario you will create to get meaningful feedback. It is not always the case that you can just hand an object to someone on the street and get real feedback. Test in the context that your solution would actually be used (or approximate the important parts of that context). For example, if you are creating a consumer food storage system, let users test it in their kitchens at home - some of the nuanced but important issues will only emerge there.

Some tips for prototyping to test:

Start building. Even if you aren't sure what you're doing, the act of picking up some materials (paper, tape, and found objects are a good way to start!) will be enough to get you going.

Don't spend too long on one prototype. Move on before you find yourself getting too emotionally attached to any one prototype.

Build with the user in mind. What do you hope to test with the user? What sorts of behavior do you expect? Answering these questions will help focus your prototyping and help you receive meaningful feedback in the testing phase.

ID a variable. Identify what's being tested with each prototype. A prototype should answer a particular question when tested.