Method

Diary study

Participants record their activities, experiences or emotions over a period at the moment they happen, using text, photos or audio.



In Spanish

Estudio de diario

Origin

Psychology (review by Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli, 2003); in human-computer interaction, Rieman (1993)

Output

Records of activities and emotions noted in the moment

What it's for

It captures what happens over time and in places where you can't be, without relying on memory.

Key elements

Close to the moment

It is recorded when it happens, not at the end of the day.

Over time

Days or weeks, to see changes and patterns.

Easy to record

Few questions, in a medium the person already uses.

How it's done

1

Give the instructions. What to record, when and with what.

2

Follow along. Reminders and review of what comes in each day.

3

Close with an interview. Talk with each person about their diary.

Applications in design

When to use it

For habits, long processes or infrequent moments.

Avoid

Asking for too much each day: people stop writing.

Don't fall for it

Review entries while the study runs, so you can fix unclear instructions in time.

Connections

Used by

- UX design

Related to

- In-depth interview
- Ethnography
- Cultural probes

Authors and works

1993	**John Rieman**	Used it to learn about real work with computers and to guide lab testing.
2003	**Niall Bolger, Angelina Davis and Eshkol Rafaeli**	Reviewed diary methods as a way to capture life as it is lived.

Sources

Original sources

- Rieman, J. (1993). The diary study: A workplace-oriented research tool to guide laboratory efforts. In Proceedings of the INTERACT '93 and CHI '93 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 321–326). ACM. View source (https://doi.org/10.1145/169059.169255)

Academic reviews

- Bolger, N., Davis, A., & Rafaeli, E. (2003). Diary methods: Capturing life as it is lived. Annual Review of Psychology, 54, 579–616. View source (https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145030)

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