Method

Personas

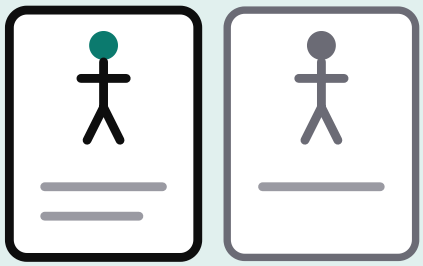
A method for summarizing research in a few fictional characters, with a name, goals and context, who represent groups of users.

Origin

Cooper (1999); developed at Microsoft by Pruitt and Grudin (2003)

Output

A few fictional characters, with a name, goals and context



What it's for

Helps the team design for specific people rather than a generic user whom everyone imagines differently.

Key elements

Based on research

Each character comes from what was observed, not from assumptions.

Few

A handful of personas, each with different goals and context.

Useful for deciding

They only include details that help make design decisions.

An example

Two ways of talking about users in a meeting.

The generic user



"the users"

"Users want it to be fast." Each person on the team imagines someone different. **Anything goes.**

Personas



Three characters based on interviews, each with their own goals and context. **Decisions with a name.**

Personas give the team a shared reference for who they are designing for.

How it's done

1 **Research** with real users.

2 **Group** similar goals and behaviors.

3 **Each group** becomes a character.

Applications in design

When to use it

When the team has many design decisions to make and needs to keep real people in mind in each of them.

Avoid

Making them up in an afternoon or filling them with stereotypes and details that don't help decide.

Don't fall for it

Remember they are a summary: they don't replace talking to real people.

Connections

Builds on

- False consensus effect

Used by

- Content design
- Interaction design
- Packaging design
- Design for policy
- Service design
- Learning design
- Inclusive design
- Social design
- UX design

- Food design
- Design research
- UX research

Related to

- User stories
- Jobs to be done
- Journey map
- Value Proposition Canvas
- Empathy map
- Storyboard
- Extremes and mainstreams

Authors and works

1999	**Alan Cooper**	Popularized personas in The Inmates Are Running the Asylum.
2003	**John Pruitt and Jonathan Grudin**	Showed how to use them in large teams, based on their work at Microsoft.
2006	**Christopher Chapman and Russell Milham**	Argued that two teams with the same data would not arrive at the same personas, and that there is no way to check whether they represent anyone real.

Sources

Original sources

- Cooper, A. (1999). The inmates are running the asylum. Sams.
- Pruitt, J., & Grudin, J. (2003). Personas: Practice and theory. In Proceedings of the 2003 Conference on Designing for User Experiences (DUX). ACM. View source (https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/publication/personas-practice-theory/)

Academic reviews

- Chapman, C. N., & Milham, R. P. (2006). The personas' new clothes: Methodological and practical arguments against a popular method. Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting, 50(5), 634–636. View source (https://doi.org/10.1177/154193120605000503)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.