

Our design process at Intercom

Part of intercom.design



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Note that this process is elastic. You might need to expand or contract each stage based on the needs of your project, but you should still go through each stage. You might also need to go backwards as new insights arise.

Design stage	Goal
Intermission	Develop a sharp understanding and articulation of the problem we're trying to solve. Ensure we've asked enough questions and challenged assumptions.
Interconcept	Explore a broad range of ways to solve the problem in lowest possible fidelity that can give you sufficient confidence to decide on which direction to go.
Scope	Work with your team to figure what's the smallest coherent solution of your Interconcept that can be shipped and tested if it has solved the problem.
Detailed design	Figure out the necessary flow and interaction design details to enable engineers to start building the scoped solution.
Build	Work with engineers to finalize design, resolve edge cases, polish, QA and ship a solution.

Each stage has different activities you should and could do. Your Intermission has sliders which define how we want to innovate, how urgent a project is, and how much we're willing to invest. Based on these factors, you'll decide which things you'll do.

Intermission

Goal

Develop a sharp understanding and articulation of the problem we're trying to solve. Ensure we've asked enough questions and challenged assumptions. Consider how it impacts our customers, their end-users and our own business.

Activities you should do:

- Discuss the intermission or problem statement with your product manager
- Discuss how it impacts our customers, their end-users and our business
- Discuss what success looks like by defining success metrics
- Write down your open questions and figure out how you'll answer them
- Look at past research
- Create a plan of attack for how you'll approach the design work

Activities you could do:

- Challenge the intermission—is it the right problem, is it phrased the right way?
- Conduct new research (qualitative and/or quantitative)
- Research competitors
- Review existing customer conversations or message them
- Talk to other teams and business stakeholders (sales, support, marketing, etc.) to better understand the problem and how it impacts them
- Illustrate the current user journey, how the system works and problems with it

Output

Refined Intermission based on your feedback and findings. Research findings should be captured in a Basecamp post or a doc.

Interconcept

Goal

Explore a broad range of ways to solve the problem in lowest possible fidelity that can give you sufficient confidence to decide on which direction to go. Not everything needs to be figured out, but you should cross the threshold where you feel confident that this is the right solution and you're not missing out on opportunities.

Activities you should do

- Create concepts for solutions that solve the problem in different ways in lowest fidelity that can give you sufficient confidence:
 - Illustrate the proposed user journey and how the system works
 - Create simple wireframes that explain the core idea
 - Define implications and open questions
 - Evaluate concepts with pros and cons
 - Have a recommendation and rationale why
- Work with engineers to understand the technical constraints
- Work with engineers to understand technical implications of your concepts
- Gather feedback on your concepts from your product team and design manager
- Reach agreement with your team about which of the proposed approaches to move forward with

Activities you could do

- Workshop with your team and/or the design team
- Work with engineers to spike solutions
- Define principles for your project to help evaluate your solution
- If low fidelity doesn't give you sufficient confidence and interaction design is a key component in the concept decision, you might need to design high fidelity designs or prototypes
- Gather feedback on your concepts in a product forum
- Gather feedback on your concepts on Basecamp from other designers and stakeholders
- Test your concepts with customers to inform your decision
- Get clear on system model, core concepts and your approach to naming
- Work with your product marketing manager (PMM) to ensure the solution aligns with go to market (GTM) needs
- You might need multiple rounds of reviewing concepts before you can make a decision

Output

Decision on a concept you and your team believes is going to be the right solution for the problem. The Interconcept should be written either as a Basecamp post or a doc that can be shared and referenced later.

Scope

Goal

Work with your team to figure what's the smallest coherent solution of your Interconcept that can be shipped and tested if it has solved the problem.

Activities you should do

- Join a scoping session with your team
- Get alignment on the smallest solution that makes progress toward your interconcept

Activities you could do

- Expand on the interconcept to help partners understand its scope

Output

Scope set for the first solution that you'll design, ship and learn from.

Detailed design

Goal

Figure out the necessary flow and interaction design details to enable engineers to start building the scoped solution.

Activities you should do

- Design the flow in high fidelity
- Use our design system: try reusing, evolving or merging existing patterns before introducing new patterns—when in doubt, talk to the team
- Follow the [fundamentals of good interaction design](#)
- Use real content, avoid placeholders as much as possible
- Think about the system (including content and design) holistically—consider how the product changes if you make any changes within the system
- Discuss your proposal with other teams who might be impacted by it
- Don't just design the happy path, consider all states and edge cases
- Consider how users will experience your design and content for the first time
- Consider how it might impact mobile SDKs or our own mobile app

Activities you could do

- Create interactive prototypes:
 - Test the flow your users will go through (using Figma, Invision, Marvel, etc.)
 - Test detailed micro-interactions and transitions (using Framer, Principle, etc.)

- Write the content in the user experience based on the system concepts and content principles
- Contribute or give feedback on our design system
- Do usability testing on your designs and prototypes with real customers and iterate based on feedback
- Share your designs with the design team for feedback via Basecamp

Output

High fidelity designs/prototypes shared with engineers to start building.

Build

Goal

Work with engineers to finalize design, resolve edge cases, polish, QA and ship a solution.

Activities you should do

- Design the unhappy path: empty states, error and loading states, edge cases
- Polish the visuals—make it look beautiful and feel enjoyable
- Make sure the content follows our principles, is concise and easy to understand
- QA the built UI early and often, ensuring it's high quality and aligns with your design
- Ensure it's fast, low latency, and that its perceived performance is high
- Take ownership of what we will ship and fight for quality:
 - Push for the best possible experience
 - Look to cut scope (but not quality) and be okay with some [healthy tension](#)

Activities you could do

- Design meaningful micro-interactions and transitions
- Sit with engineers and work around tech challenges together
- Tweak your designs in the browser in response to technical challenges
- Write HTML/CSS yourself
- Create Github issues and ensure they are closed out before shipping
- Ensure our patterns and components are being used correctly or that you're feeding changes back into the design system
- Finalize the UI content and plan for translation where needed
- Create a detailed QA plan with the team

Output

Your design implemented in high quality and shipped.



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