

How might we...

“How Might We” Questions

When you've defined your design challenge in a problem statement which is also known as Point Of View (POV), you can start opening up for ideas to solve your design challenge by asking “How Might We”. Instead of saying, we need to design X or Y, the “How Might We” method in Design Thinking explores new ideas and solutions to a specific design challenge.

Why and When to Ask “How Might We”

The “How Might We” question purposely maintains a level of ambiguity and opens up the exploration space to a range of possibilities. It's a re-wording of the core **users, their needs and your insights** about them, which you have uncovered through a deeper interrogation of the problem in your research phase, the Empathize mode in Design Thinking – and synthesized in the Define mode in Design Thinking. You're now moving on to the third mode – Ideation.

- **“How”** suggests that we do not yet have the answer. “How” helps us set aside prescriptive briefs. “How” helps us explore a variety of endeavors instead of merely executing on what we “think” the solution should be.
- **“Might”** emphasizes that our responses may only be possible solutions, not the only solution. “Might” also allows for exploration of multiple possible solutions, not settling for the first that comes to mind.

- **“We”** immediately brings in the element of a collaborative effort. “We” suggests that the idea for the solution lies in our collective teamwork.

“How Might We” (HMW) questions are the best way to open up Brainstorm and other Ideation sessions. HMW opens up to Ideation sessions where you explore ideas that can help you solve your design challenge. By framing your challenge as a How Might We question, you’ll prepare yourself for an innovative solution in the third Design Thinking phase, the Ideation phase. The “How Might We” method is constructed in such a way that it opens the field for new ideas, admits that we do not currently know the answer, and encourages a collaborative approach to solving it.

For example, if your POV is: “Teenage girls need... to eat nutritious food... in order to thrive and grow in a healthy way.”

The HMW question may go as follows:

- How Might We make healthy eating appealing to young females?
- How Might We inspire teenage girls towards healthier eating options?
- How Might We make healthy eating something, which teenage girls aspire towards?
- How Might We make nutritious food more affordable?

These are simple examples, all with their own subtle nuances that may influence slightly different approaches in the ideation phases. Your HMW questions will ensure that your upcoming creative ideation and design activities are informed with one of more HMW questions, which spark your imagination and aligns well with the core insights and user needs that you’ve uncovered.

Best Practice Guide to Asking “How Might We”

- 1 Without a statement of a clear vision or goal in a well-framed Point Of View, “How Might We” is obviously meaningless. Your Point Of View which is neither too narrow so as to make it overly restrictive, nor too broad so as to leave you wandering forever in infinite possibilities.
- 2 Begin with your Point of View (POV) or problem statement. Start by rephrasing and framing your Point Of View as several questions by adding “How Might We” at the beginning.
- 3 Break that larger POV challenge up into smaller actionable and meaningful questions. Five to ten “How Might We” questions for one POV is a good starting point.
- 4 It is often helpful to brainstorm the HMW questions before the solutions brainstorm.
- 5 Look at your “How Might We” questions and ask yourself if they allow for a variety of solutions. If they don’t, broaden them. Your “How Might We” questions should generate a number of possible answers and will become a launch pad for your Ideation Sessions, such as Brainstorms.
- 6 If your “How Might We” questions are too broad, narrow them down. You should aim for a narrow enough frame to let you know where to start your Brainstorm, but at the same time you should also aim for enough breadth to give you room to explore wild ideas.