Conversation Design: Principles, Strategies, and Practical Application

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of digital assistants, chatbots, and other conversational interfaces, there's a huge demand for detail and instruction for Conversation Design. This course provides a focused walkthrough of the principles, strategies, and process of Conversation Design. Topics include understanding users, defining persona, analyzing conversation components, dialog writing strategies, and the detailed process of creating natural dialog. Interactive components at each stage engage participants with individual worksheets, small group exercises and reviews, and a team project.

Participants will gain an understanding of the complexity and challenges of Conversation Design, and learn about resources and tools for doing it well.

1 WHAT IS CONVERSATION DESIGN?

1.1 Interactive Components: Worksheets with individual work to share and review; small group exercises after some sections

Background & Definitions: Setting the scene with a review of the nature of spoken language, conversation, and Conversation Design as a discipline.

Principles of Conversation: This section will review core principles such as Grice's Cooperative Principle and maxims, why cognitive load drives design, and what role context and grounding play in conversation.

Components of Dialog: Discussion and review of the building blocks of conversation, including cohesion devices (e.g. acknowledgement and discourse markers), information structure, prosody, and how the concept of 'consistency' should be applied.

2 HOW DO YOU CREATE CONVERSATION DESIGNS?

2.1 Interactive Components: Practice and correction sets for individual work; small group exercises for review

Writing Strategies: These are the tools for the nitty-gritty details of Conversation Design - what words you write and why. This includes sections on written vs spoken formalisms, syntax and terminology, different strategies for 'happy path' and recovery prompt design, and how to write for text-to-speech voices.

Designing across Modalities: Presents the underlying principles of working with and across multiple modalities. This section also compares and contrasts writing for chatbots and voice assistants.

Practical Conversation Design: This section walks through the details of preparing for CxD, including scoping your features, knowing your users and their needs, defining persona, and building user relationships.

3 TEAM DESIGN WORKSHOP

3.1 Part 3 is highly interactive: Small teams (3-4) work through the creation of use cases, personas, and sample dialogs for projects they decide on (samples also provided). Teams review each other's work in detail, followed by design iteration and group presentations.

Process of Design: This presents the steps to follow in good design, with information around defining and using context, creating sample dialogs to drive the structure of the design, validating designs and prompts through all levels of testing, and presenting/communicating designs to partners and stakeholders.

Building a CxD Discipline: This follow-up reviews the overall process of Conversation Design and how to build a formal discipline in your team.

Caveats, Myths, and Challenges: Here we address some of the other issues for Conversation Design, including internationalization, limitations on technology and availability, tools, and the evolving role of AI in Conversation Design.

Final Discussion / Q&A