

Equity in Research

Conducting accessible, inclusive &
ethical research

Agenda

Intros: U.org and learning & think differences

What is Equity in research?

Getting on the same page

Accessible

Design for those who LTD

Inclusive

Participatory & Strengths-based approaches

Considerations for each research phase

Follow up materials

Quant, Qual & UX best practices

Creating accessible presentations

Understood is shaping the world for difference.

We are dedicated to shaping a world where the millions of people with ADHD, dyslexia, and other learning and thinking differences can thrive.



What are learning & thinking differences?

Research shows **20% of people have a learning and thinking difference**
- that's **70 million in the United States**

Brain-based

Learning and thinking differences are natural variations in how our brains develop and process information.

Unique

We're all wired differently. These variations can affect reading, writing, math, focus, and executive functioning.

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Life-long

They are life-long conditions, with the most commonly known ones being ADHD and dyslexia.

But society (and research!) isn't set up to unlock their full potential

What is *Equity in Research*?

Accessible

Everyone can access in a way that allows for the best individual experience & results outcome...for all!

Inclusive

Ensures representation of marginalized voices

Ethical

Code of conduct on acceptable behavior in research, considering the moral principles that guide research projects



Accessibility

Ensuring a better experience for all

Designing research for those who learn & think differently ensures a positive research experience for everyone

Designing research for those who learn and think differently can reveal your **biggest pain points** and **hardest use cases**

...and if you solve for them, **you'll solve for all**

It's called '**universal design**' and it's proven to work

Universal design is proven to work in business – and applies to research!

- ✓ Accessibility and user improvements bring back **\$100 for every \$1 invested**
- ✓ Considering accessibility from the beginning reduces development cycles by **40-60%**





Inclusive Research

2 approaches we can borrow from academia

**2 core tenets
to research,
particularly
among
marginalized
communities**



Participatory Research



Strengths Based Approach



Participatory Methods

Definition

Actively involving the community or stakeholders being studied in the research process, often to create real-world action

Underlying Theory

No one knows the needs of the community better than the people themselves

(Freire, 1969)

Participatory Methods - Commercial application

Engage consumers who learn & think differently throughout your research process

Better understand unmet needs

Because nothing is built for them, they're already "hacking" your category with solutions that can work for all

Ensure quality of your research

Do survey takers interpret your questions correctly?

Are your answer choices clear & distinct

Example: EOS survey



Challenge: 350K students surveyed annually
Is our survey accessible?

Do students interpret the questions correctly?

Solution in 2 phases

U.org accessibility experts reviewed survey

U.org researchers conducted 1:1 interviews with teens (including those who LTD) for feedback

Strengths Based Approach

Definition

Research focuses on discovering and utilizing strengths within individuals, communities, and systems

Underlying Theory

Solutions are best developed by focusing on assets rather than deficits (Weick, 1989)

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Gained traction within the disabled community, with focus shifting from examining deficits to identifying strengths and abilities of individuals with disabilities

Thinking differently leads to innovation



Companies already know this from a hiring perspective...
but very few are applying this to research

Our hypothesis: Those who learn and think differently are the unlock to innovation

People
who learn and think
differently can reveal
your category's biggest
pain points
and hardest use cases

...and if you solve for them,
**you'll solve
for all**

Considerations for each phase

Planning

Recruiting

Set-up

Conducting

Research Planning Phase

Brief Vendors

On accessibility guidelines & expectations

Choose someone with accessibility built-in

Accommodate

Ask what they need early in the process (ie closed captions)

Consider new perspectives

Could including the voices of a marginalized group bring new ideas to the table?

Who is your brand best suited to serve?



Inclusive Recruiting

The **SCREENER** is so important. Lengthy screeners lead to poor engagement & data quality.

Some basics

Avoid weighting (match Census)

Intersectional lens: address why specific perspectives could not be accounted for

How, when & where

Explain what sensitive information will be used for & allow for opt-out

Only ask what you **NEED** to know & will act on

Recruit where they are (ie online communities) & build partnerships with community organizations



Research Build / Set Up

Make it engaging

Use simple, straightforward language. Check accessibility [here](#)

Limit length

For each question ask, 'what will I do when I have the answer?'

Pre-test



Gut-check your survey/guide & tech with those who learn & think differently

Conducting Research

Obtain consent & ensure confidentiality

Be Transparent

Honestly describe the subject matter & inform if study is about a sensitive topic

Give option to decline


Participatory



Ask about their experience as a participant

Via rating scale & open-end

Why consider including those with learning & thinking differences in your research?



More engaging research...

Streamlined & easily understood materials make research better for all respondents

Cleaner data...

Garbage in, garbage out!

Better insights...

New perspectives can fuel innovation!

Bonus...

Shape a world where all individuals can thrive

Getting started: The Top 10

1. Make it participatory at all phases.
 2. Use a strengths-based approach. Lean into the good!
 3. Only ask about what you'll action on. Cut down ruthlessly.
 4. Context=empathy: for the study & for why you're asking for personal info
 5. Consider intersectionality. Don't assume one identity is their primary identity
 6. Ask about and offer accommodations
-
7. Ask about their disabilities (as appropriate)
 8. Quant: avoid matrix questions! And cut, cut, cut
 9. Qual: use Zoom, it's most accessible
 10. Create your presentation/report using accessible guidelines

In no particular order...

start where it's easiest today!

**Reach out to learn
more or to partner
on your next
challenge**

jbassman@understood.org

Follow up materials

Quantitative Research best practices

The main principles of quant

General rules to abide by

- Rethink survey intros to feel more welcoming & inclusive
- Provide ability to start and stop, and save where they were
- Keep survey & question length brief
- Guiding rule: “doing justice to how people would normally talk about things in everyday language”
- Set expectations with # of questions in survey (timing is relative)

Build assuming screen reader used

- Add alternative text to images
- Only necessary items on the screen
- Fewer non-text items (i.e. submit vs. green check box)
- Fewer pop ups & expandable content (as few clicks as possible)

Accessibility boosts engagement

Flow

Outline a structure & writing plan before drafting questions
Surveys should follow a natural flow, reflecting a train of thought, a logical conversation, or an implied chronology of events

Writing Style

Consider: how to bring empathy from qual into quant questions
Convey meaning with words, not typeface or punctuation
Avoid boredom: use variety of question forms, including open-ends

Question Types

Avoid matrix questions (biggest, most common offender!). If must use, options need to be minimal.

Use only question types that are WCAG 2.0 AA compliant

Qualitative & UX

Online interviews are more accessible



- Respondents use their own equipment in a space they're comfortable in
- Avoid distractions & movement in background
- Most critical accommodation: Closed captions
 - Offer option for on/off
 - Tend to work best only for transcribing standard accents. If necessary, consider live captioner

Other considerations for successful qual

Bulletin Boards

Allows for more creativity at their own pace

Diads with a friend

Increases comfort level

Timing

Limit 1:1 to 1 hour

Breaks every 30 mins

Pre-read

Consider sending details ahead of time to all participants to prep

Actual questions & stimulus or a video detailing what to expect

Techniques for marginalized groups & sensitive topics

Have you participated in research before?

Are there any identity categories that are important to you? I'm asking because...

Build rapport

Could you please repeat what you just said?

Listen attentively


How can we make this experience more comfortable for you?

Be aware

If you realize something after this, you can reach us @_____

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Invite follow up



Creating accessible research presentations

What is an accessible deck?

Accessible decks help people process information by:



Previewing what will be covered and setting expectations for learning



Presenting information in manageable chunks



Reviewing key details to help people remember and put into action



Using visuals to engage but not distract

The goal of accessible decks

Make
your information
easy to understand.



Don't make
your audience
work too hard.

Key guidelines

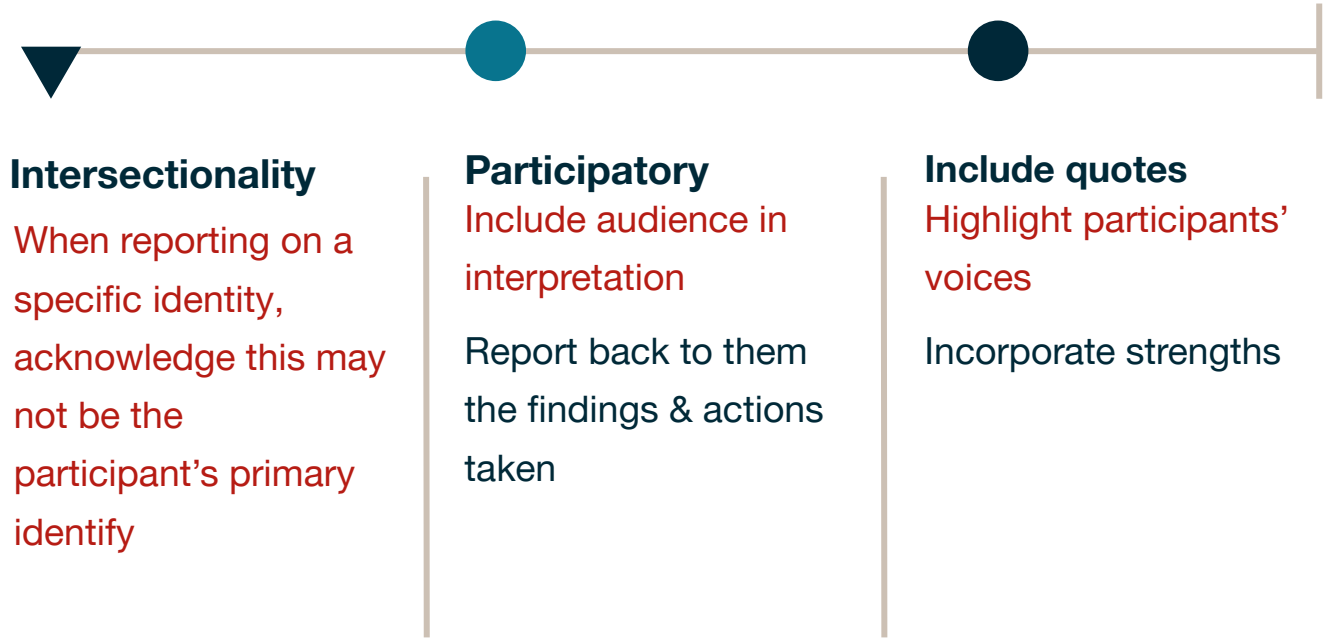
✗ Don't

- ✗ Don't present all info at once.
- ✗ Don't assume.
- ✗ Don't place important info at bottom of slide.
- ✗ Don't add distractions.
- ✗ Don't overcrowd slides.
- ✗ Don't make your slides hard to read.
- ✗ Don't use long sentences or paragraphs.

✓ Do

- ✓ Use animation to help people focus.
- ✓ Explain jargon and provide helpful links.
- ✓ Leave room for captions, use a main idea slide.
- ✓ Only use engaging images — not GIFs.
- ✓ Use white space and standard text size/spacing.
- ✓ Pay attention to bold, color, and contrast.
- ✓ Use short blocks of texts or lists.

Specific to Research



Appendix

What's next: Disability Question sets

Multi-phased, expert-led research-on research to build a best-in-class approach to asking about disabilities

Phase 1

Stakeholder engagement

Non-profit, for-profit,
Insights Association,
leading academic experts

Phase 2

Research!

Desk research, question
set development,
participatory qual & quant
(multiple rounds)

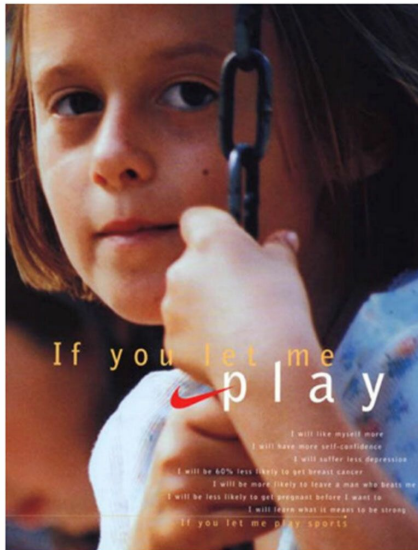
Output: Question sets

How, when & why to ask
about disability

Rolled out via Insights
Association with potential
impact on the Hill

Strengths Based - Commercial examples

Consider leaning into your brand's & consumers' strengths...how might you refocus messaging, replicate successes, reposition?



- CTA has evolved
 - 1995: imagine a new world for girls & embrace the positive outcomes
 - 2000: for women to embrace athleticism and self-expression
 - 2019: pushed girls and women to dream bigger

● headspace®

- meditation is not a skill you need to learn, but a strength you already possess
- mindfulness is achievable for everyone, regardless of experience