



You Don't Need to Be a Designer to Design: Fixing UX in Open Source

Archita Gorle
UX Designer, Canonical

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FOSDEM



**Open Source
Design**



Why are there fewer UX designers contributing to Open source projects compared to commercial tech?



Important work is already happening

- Advocating for design in OSS
- Improving contribution process
- Lowering barriers for designers



We don't need to debate this anymore

UX matters in open source

Having a product designer as member of the team is a dream. But it's so very, very rare. So while I could write up a bunch of issues specifically for designers, the sad reality is there's a high



nobody will ever read those and nobody will ever work on those issues.

I used to write up "needs design" issues. But they would sit there for extended amounts of time until I realized nobody but me was ever going to work on them. So I do them. And if I do them, that means there are no design tasks left for actual designers to do. So when a designer does go looking, it looks like there's nothing to do.

I created and maintain a popular open-source project, which is mainly a desktop application requiring frequent design updates and good UX. I mostly go with my gut feelings and feedback from the users but I've never been contacted by designers.

As a developer, it's also complicated to identify the required UI/UX changes to be able to label them properly. Bigger projects probably have this, but for the regular OSS out there I think it's not even a topic.



1



Reply



Award



Share



How to find designers for open-source project

Our open-source Android Launcher ([Focus Launcher](#)) is in desperate need of a redesign. I've had a hard time finding any designers who are willing to make some prototypes/mockups for us. Does anyone have any advice on how to find a good mobile designer willing to help?

Is it easy to attract designers to participate in open source projects?

No. Often times it is easier to find open source developers who also have design experience.

The best place to look for a UX/UI designer

My project struggles to find any contributors, even devs and I'm thinking about improving UX/UI since I'm introducing my first paid features soon. Is there any good place to look for UX/UI designers for the open source projects, or should I just hire a person on a regular freelance platform?



3



4



Share



Report

[Open Source Design](#)

Reddit: https://www.reddit.com/r/opensource/comments/pp6tx9/how_to_find_designers_for_opensource_project/

https://www.reddit.com/r/web_design/comments/1cxm7x9/where_can_i_contribute_to_open_source_ux/

https://www.reddit.com/r/opensource/comments/1jdr700/the_best_place_to_look_for_a_uxui_designer/

<https://opensource.com/life/15/9/ato-interview-garth-braithwaite>



Reality check

The **ideal**: every project has a designer.
The **reality**: most don't, yet!

Good UX shouldn't depend on whether a designer is available.



Every project having dedicated UX support won't happen overnight

the ideal situation takes time



UX issues don't pause

- Users get stuck
- Docs confuse
- Features go unused



Have you ever thought...

"I see the problem, but I'm not a designer"



Why believe me?

I'm a **UX Designer**.

I'm also an **Engineer**.



Engineering taught me **how** to solve problems.
But, UX taught me to understand **who** I'm solving
them for, and **why**.



What if developers (and non-designers) could surface and improve UX issues progressively and intentionally *when* no designer is around?



UX is a Shared Responsibility

UX is not owned by designers.
It's improved by everyone.

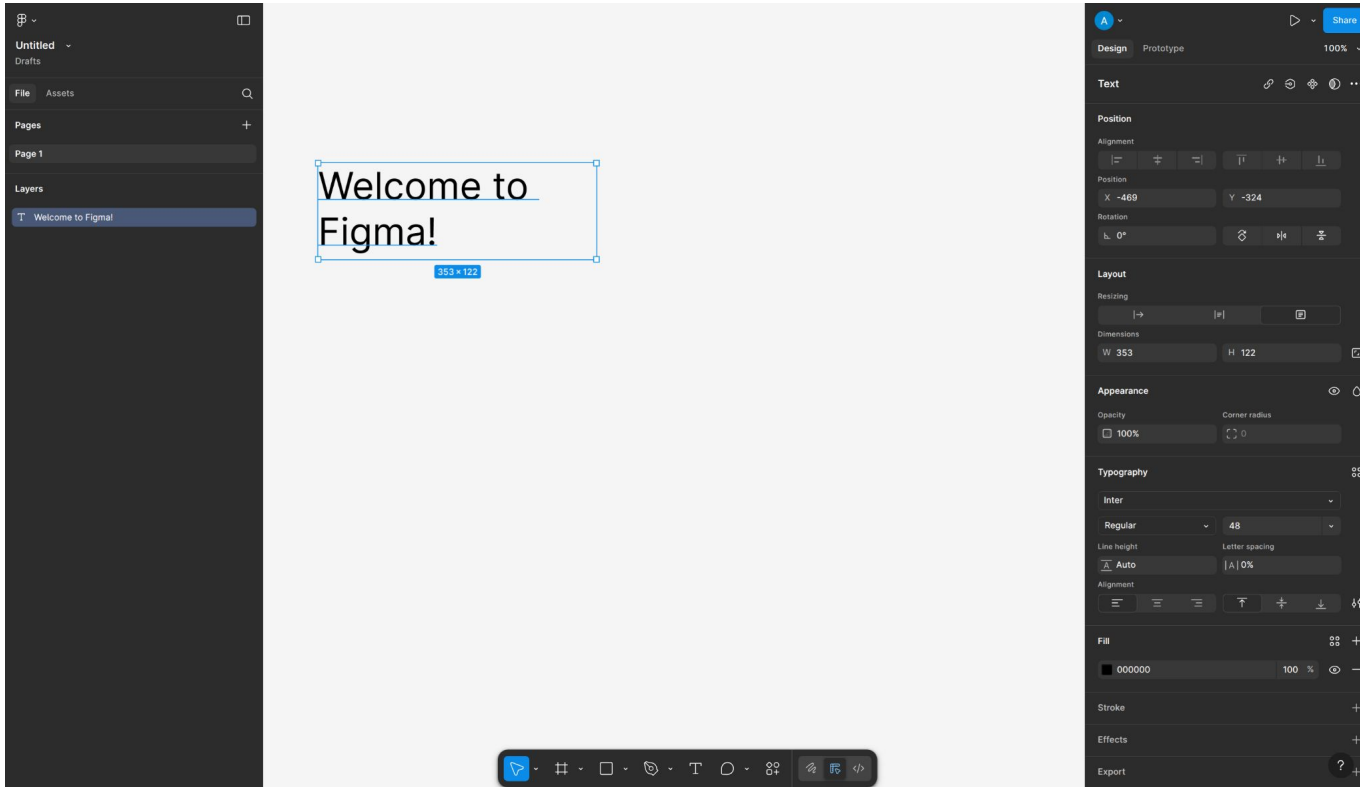
Designers still bring deep expertise.
Developers bring context, constraints, and real-world signals.



UX Design is not just a role

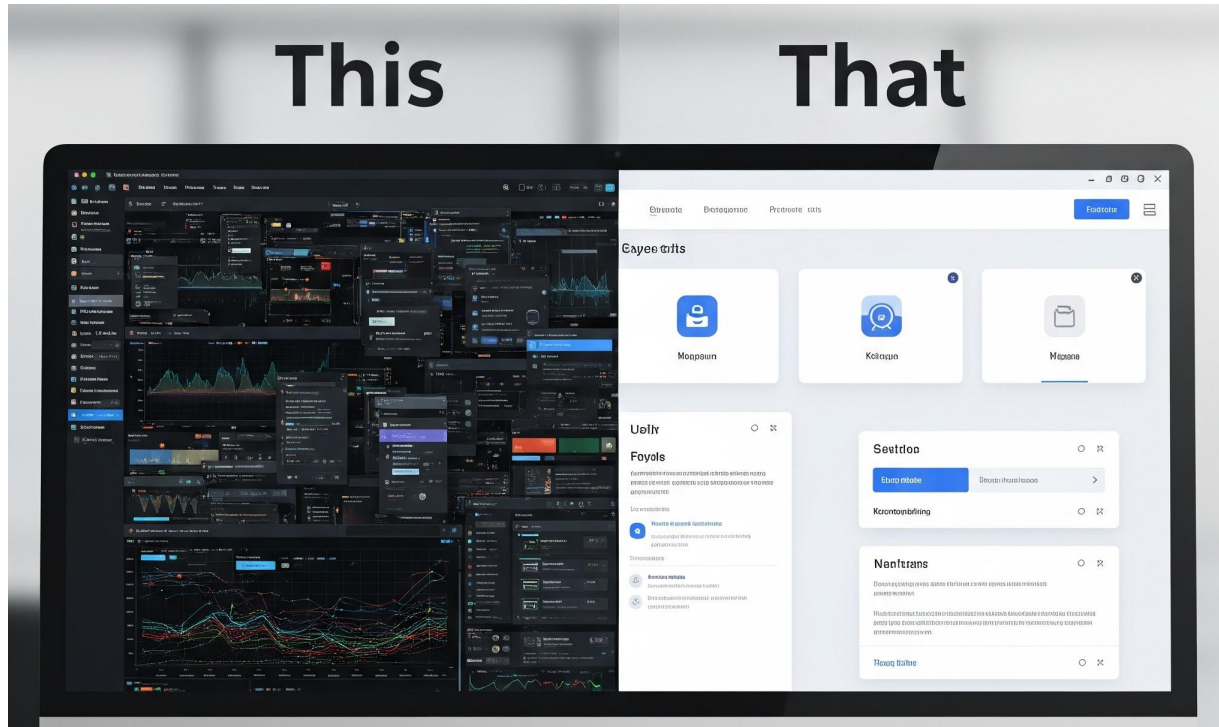


UX Design ≠ *igma



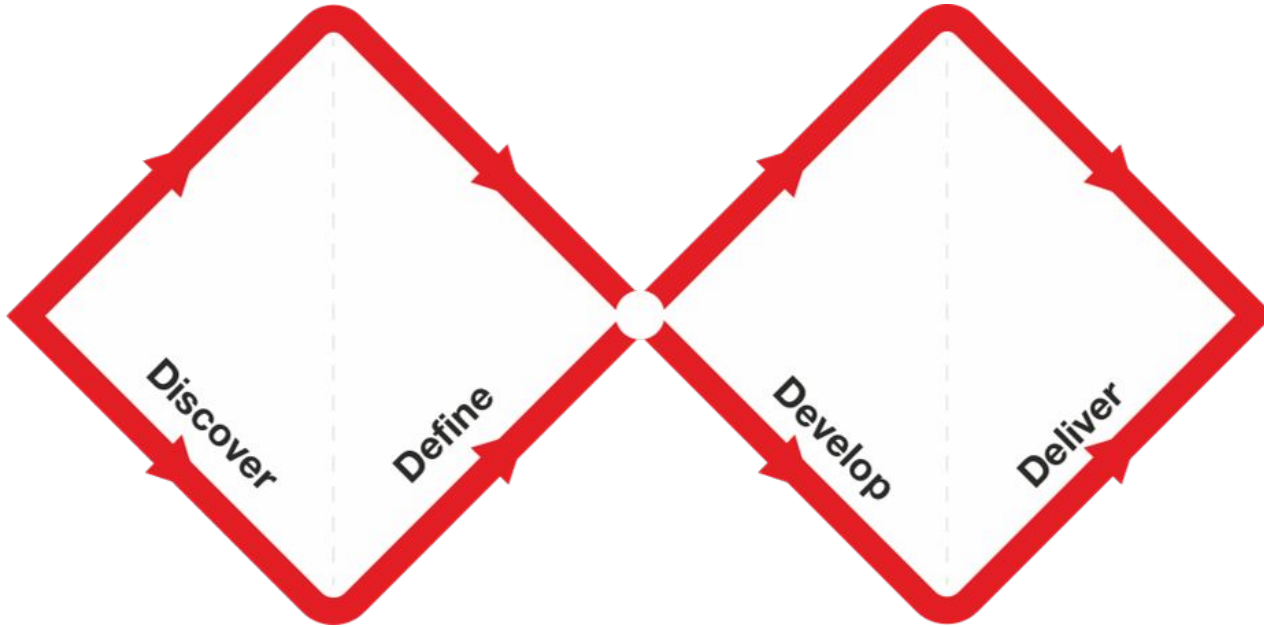


UX Design \neq Making things pretty





UX Design \neq Fancy frameworks



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UX Design is...

understanding what people are trying to do, and **improving** how they do it.



I. Understand the Problem



1. Observe



Watch someone new try your project.



Read GitHub / forum threads.



Keep a list of “UX Bugs.”

Even 10 minutes watching one person is worth more than 10 hours of guessing!



2. Ask WHY? (Until It Hurts)



Quick Method: Ask “Why?” 3–5 times to find the real problem.

Example:

“ Users fail at setup → **why?** → they skip step 2 → **why?** → it’s buried in long text → **why?** → docs lack structure.”



3. Talk to (a few) users

Quick method: Ask just these 3 questions:

- What are you trying to do?
- What's easy or hard?
- When did you last get frustrated?

“ Even 5–7 users can reveal ~80% of key usability issues.

Jakob Nielsen,
Nielsen Norman Group



4. Define clearly

A good UX problem statement looks like:

“New users can’t complete setup because the instructions are long and unclear.”

A bad UX problem statement looks like:

“We need a new installer.”

Quick method: Use the format

“**Who** is struggling, with **what**, and **why**?”



II. **Improve** the Solution



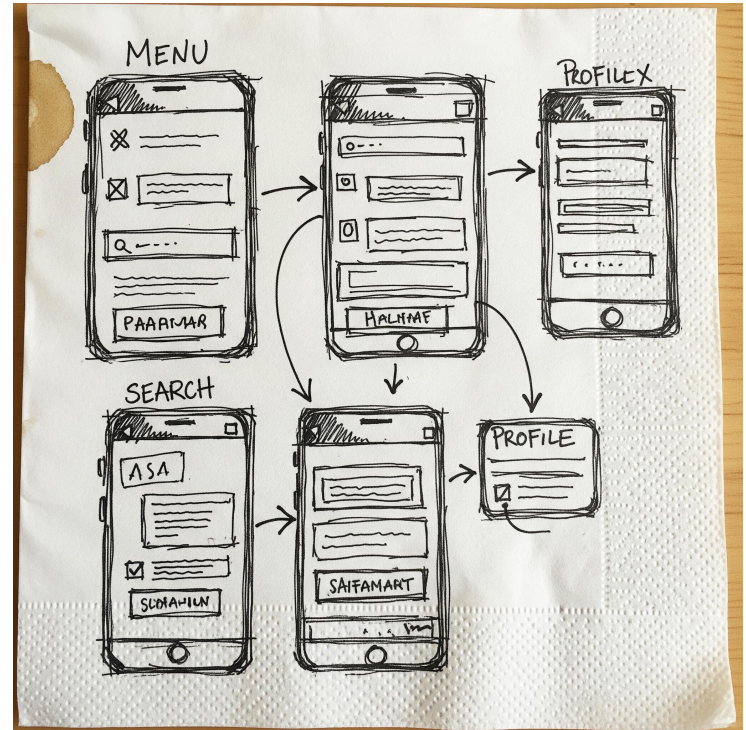
Draw

You don't need Figma. Just draw.

Boxes. Arrows. Labels.

Share it in the issue. Start the conversation.

Quick method: Pen & Paper





The Crazy 8s

8 Minutes

8 Ideas





Share & Test

You don't always need a prototype to test.

You just need an idea people can react to.



The 1-Minute Usability Test





Who is a 'Real' user?

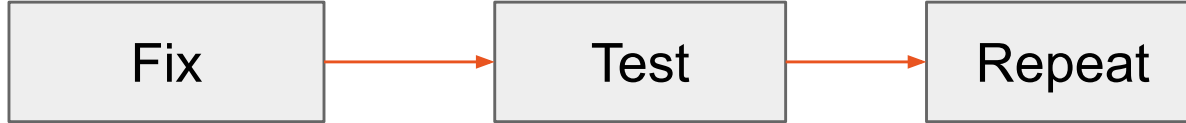
Look for people who:

- Use or want to use your project
- Match the skill level of your target audience
- Have fresh eyes

New users are gold!



Iterate



| Progress > Perfection



Document the Why → Keep the Learning

Good UX work multiplies when shared.

Write down:

- **The problem you saw**
- **What you tried**
- **What changed**



UX toolkit

1. **Observe & Ask Why** → understand
2. **Define Clearly** → focus
3. **Sketch & Share** → propose and discuss
4. **Test & Document** → improve and spread



But here's the magic...

When developers and designers collaborate, impact multiplies!



Collaborate



What developers can do

When a designer is around, what helps designers help you:

1. Surface friction early
2. Add context, not solutions
3. Show constraints



What designers can do

How designers can multiply their impact in open source

1. Enable early signals- help contributors recognize UX issues earlier
2. Lower the bar to contribute - simple UX checklists
3. Turn dev insights into UX wins
4. Make “Design thinking” contagious



You don't need permission to improve UX

Start small.
Be intentional.
Improve together.



Thank you!

Questions? Let's talk.