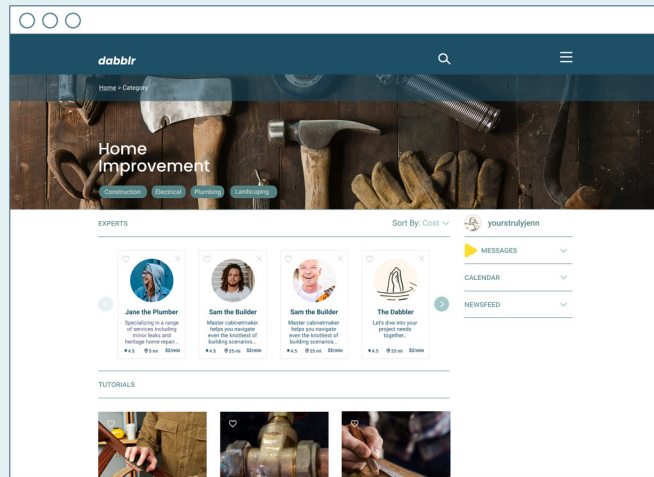
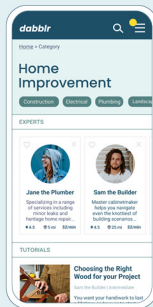
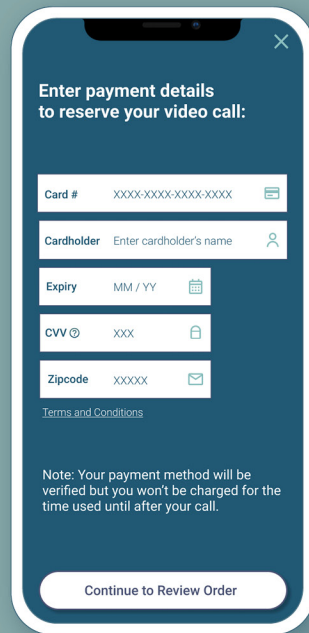
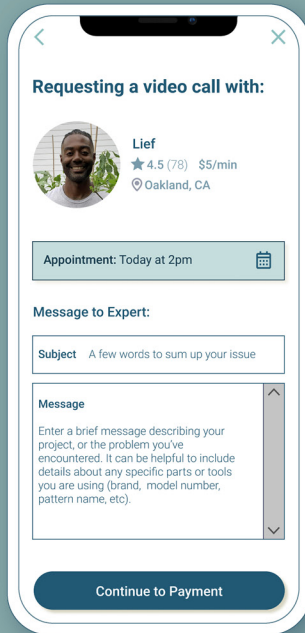
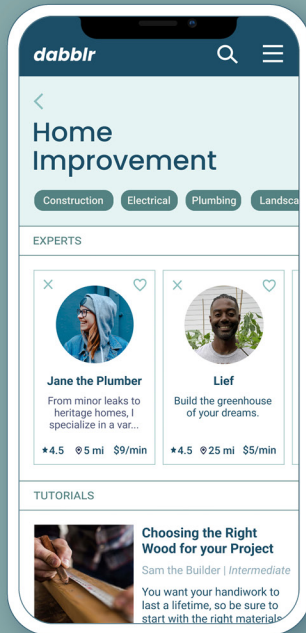
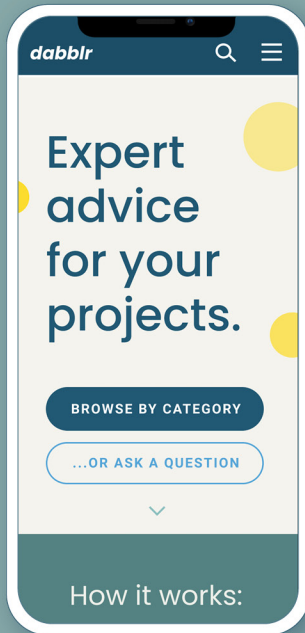


# Real-time advice for your hobbies.

## A CASE STUDY





## Overview

*Role: UX Designer and Researcher   Client: CareerFoundry   Duration: 6 months*

Searching for advice is frustrating and time-consuming but we all need help sometimes and how-to videos don't always cut it. With people practicing hobbies at home now more than ever, they need an intuitive way to connect with an expert to get informed and troubleshoot their projects.

Dabblr is a responsive web app connecting hobbyists with seasoned pros to get advice in an accessible on-demand format. I envisioned Dabblr as a way for DIY enthusiasts to bridge the knowledge gap between their personal skills and project aspirations to finish more projects with confidence.

**This was a student project with a few goals in mind:**

- demonstrate my abilities in UX research methodologies
- gain familiarity with mobile-first responsive design
- build and iterate towards a high-fidelity prototype.

# process

## **Discover**

- problem statements
- competitor analysis
- business requirements
- user research

## **Define**

- persona development
- hypotheses
- user stories
- mental model
- journey mapping
- user flows
- card sort
- sitemap

## **Ideate**

- sketching
- low- to high-fidelity prototypes
- user testing
- UI/visual design

## **Document**

- design system
- asset export for hand-off

discover

# Competitive Analysis

I created a series of SWOT and UX Analyses to understand the problem I was tackling, consider some solutions proposed by existing apps, and spot opportunities to carve out a unique audience niche.

At this stage I was most interested in learning:

- how advice is found (search vs. AI concierge);
- how advice is paid for (subscriptions vs. transactional);
- how advice is delivered (text vs. video);
- and, of course, how experiences look and feel to use.

I was also curious where else I could look for patterns to inspire me (ex. social media, vacation rentals, ride-share matching, etc).

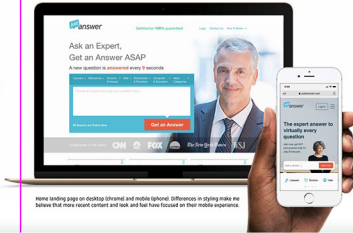
### COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS: UX

**COMPATIBILITY**

- Tested responsiveness and app is compatible across Safari and Chrome
- Mobile apps available for iOS and Android

**USABILITY**

- Clear first step (as first time user from homepage a large fillable field prompts you to type a question)
- Low transparency, totally unable to browse functionality of the platform without signing up for an account / paying for a week's trial membership



Home landing page on desktop (laptop) and mobile (iphone). Differences in styling make me believe that more recent content and look and feel have focused on their mobile experience.

### COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS: SWOT

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• simple value proposition</li><li>• reasonably fast to get started / signed up</li><li>• low cost entry point / low commitment</li><li>• diverse experts / topics (something for everyone, something for every problem)</li><li>• AI concierge helps match you to the right expert and collect basic preliminary info about your problem</li><li>• verified experts + satisfaction guarantee ensures high quality advice &amp; trust</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MUCH faster response times (waited hours...response finally came next morning - consumer affairs claims 6 minutes)</li><li>• geo-located matching options (to convert online users into clients IRL)</li><li>• broader marketing strategy</li><li>• video-first options</li><li>• more personality (current brand is very "generic corporate")</li><li>• niche focusing (seems to be lots of spaces between "all advice to all people" and "only advice for business or health or legal /etc")</li><li>• teaser content (expose people to experts and content without an account to be able to preview power of the site)</li></ul>
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• lack of focus might make it harder to recruit particular types of experts who would prefer to be grouped with peers / within industry-specific product (ex. mental health)</li><li>• AI concierge is not particularly sophisticated (easily tripped up, sent me to a lawyer in error first, and makes for very impersonal first contact)</li><li>• non-transparent: cannot browse app content functionality or fees without an account</li><li>• cancellation is difficult and time-consuming</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• niche advice sites (particularly for telehealth, therapy, legal advice, business consultancy)</li><li>• freelancing sites (experts could choose to focus here instead of find clients)</li><li>• major search engines and social forums (youtube, reddit, google, facebook groups) where most people currently default to looking for help and advice using problem-specific keywords and questions</li></ul>

just answer

## Takeaways

- **Promised advice in minutes but waited for hours**  
I wondered how to set clearer timing expectations for users (ex. advance scheduling and “online now” features).
- **Credit card to get past the homepage and dark patterned “free trials”**  
I became committed to the idea of making my product more accessible and delaying account creation as long as possible.
- **Text and voice still the prevailing advice formats**  
I recognized an opportunity to use video calls to solve problems in real-time.
- **Generic interfaces catering mainly to business, law and medical niches**  
There wasn't a strong competitor in the Hobby/DIY space and a more visual interface would be attractive to a creative crowd.



## User Research

Upfront I had to make a decision about which user to design for first: the advice-seeker vs. the expert (I opted for the former).

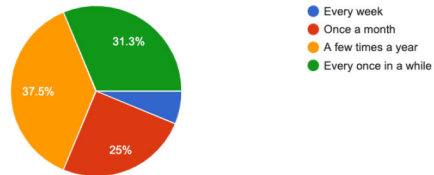
I decided to use a combination of user surveys and interviews to balance the breadth and depth of responses. Before writing my script, I developed some goals to help guide my line inquiry.

1. **Observe user behaviour** specific to troubleshooting craft and DIY projects.
2. **Determine the tasks** users would like to complete using an advice app.
3. **Document pain-points** with existing apps on the market.
4. **Understand the context** the advice app would be used.

## Surveys

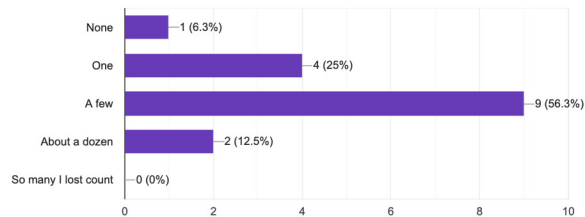
By delivering my survey in advance I had the chance to finesse my interview script to garner more valuable insights.

Notably, among my 16 respondents, only half could envision themselves using an advice service for their hobbies. During my interviews, I then sought to understand sources of friction preventing users from seeking advice and what features would make the product most compelling to try.



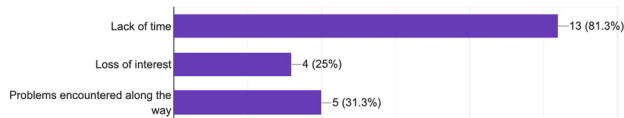
Approximately how many hobby/DIY projects did you start but not complete last year?

16 responses



Why did you abandon these projects?

16 responses



MOTIVATORS		
researching project ideas and techniques seems to be at least as important as actually doing the project and when done right may even be a key part of the enjoyment based on Katherine's answers	"I might starting something new on a regular basis"	likes connecting with her friends and family either by doing crafts together or giving her creations to them
things get needed to on or as needed when it's easy to be inspired to usually feel that what really needs to be done	the past few years have spent more time researching after hours than during the house	I have enjoyed the social aspect of doing things but don't really have a way to do that currently
I generally don't look to for expert I like to craft for other people I make stuff to give it away	For Allyn a big part of the enjoyment of crafting is taking what she makes with others, rather than keeping it for herself	Chris enjoys doing more social hobbies and connecting with others in person - and this was a clearly a key benefit to motivation for pursuing certain hobbies. Meeting up with people from time to time was lovely
I think hobbies fall into the two different categories. The ones you actually like doing so that the end product almost doesn't matter and the ones you don't enjoy but the end product is so satisfying it makes up for it."	I need something to do to keep my hands busy	Allyn would be excited about having actual live instruction for an upcoming class, rather than self-directed learning
		Allyn would be more likely to write a message and would be happy if she got an expert answer within a day

DETRACTORS		
rather not have to speak to someone in person to figure out a problem	written articles and videos where the prompts is both long and not about the problem at hand (just get to your point)	it has to be easy to use - crafting is awkward into my day. I don't have time or patience to be messing around
I abandon projects when I don't know how to proceed	I probably would never call somebody or do like a video chat	can't that a video that deals with my specific quilting problem but it's such a pain
quality control on youtube - poor video quality - videos where people who don't know how to get to their point	it's hard to access projects that are short - she needs because business people to be forced for the job	there are so many projects that are short - she needs because business people to be forced for the job
I'm not really motivated to go out and meet people while doing something new	frustrated by people positioning themselves as an expert but not having the expertise to be advising others	I start at least one project every week. Because I have a short attention span
		long or complex project often get put on hold as it's difficult to maintain motivation when there is little progress or you hit stumbling blocks

BROWSE EXPERTS	SEARCH	CONSULT W/ EXPERTS	RATING / REVIEWS
starts with a broad general searches and then focus in from there	search functions could be better - currently trying means good content gets lost or remains undecipherable	rather not have to speak to someone in person to figure out a problem	strong community of user contributors - people post about their projects, describe materials, and offer words of advice to others
can't find a video that does with my specific quilting problem but it's such a specific moment in my project	the fact that you can find anything on YouTube is a huge plus - I don't know how it is any of my projects without it	quality control on youtube - poor video quality - videos where people who don't know how to get to their point	a feedback model is appealing but you feel like you're contributing in a way and improving and improving the info
the stuff on Pinterest looks pretty but isn't well tested. It's good for getting inspired but I look for quality instructions elsewhere	it's hard to access the kind of advice she needs because business people to be forced for the job	frustrated by people positioning themselves as an expert but not having the expertise to be advising others	Allyn would be more likely to write a message and would be happy if she got an expert answer within a day
I appreciate very visual hints and high-quality media attached to them	search results with thumbnails of images or videos are included because that helps me see it's something worth clicking and parsing	Katherine gets trust of videos by topography who try to teach others but don't have any qualifications	when looking for recipes Katherine goes to the comment section first
researching project ideas and techniques seems to be at least as important as actually doing the project and when done right may even be a key part of the enjoyment based on Katherine's answers	breadth of topics is key	Katherine gets trust of videos by topography who try to teach others but don't have any qualifications	Allyn also pays attention to who is commented and follows experts she knows
	Katherine trusts professionals with training	video is #1 - actually being able to see how something is done is so helpful even still images and a description	there's times where I wish I could ask someone but I just don't have the appropriate resources or an answer that I trust

# User Interviews

I conducted three interviews with prolific hobbyists with different skill levels and areas of interest.

I then distilled each interview into key quotes, behaviors, needs/ goals, and pain points then used **affinity mapping** to distill the results into themes I could design around.

## Key Insights

- **introversion vs. extroversion:** shyness proved to be a major detractor for seeking advice, aim to offer multiple communication methods to meet user preference.
- **connect browsing and searching:** users moved fluidly between broad browsing and detailed search parameters when planning and executing projects.
- **allow for varying urgency:** home improvement projects, in particular, presented immediate needs, possible “online now” feature.
- **prioritize peer review mechanisms:** the comments section was called out repeatedly as the place to go to determine the value and trustworthiness of a source or tutorial.
- **research can spark joy:** beyond a means to an end, the research part of a project can be a big part of the enjoyment and visual aids are key.

define

## USER PERSONA #2



Max,  
*The Seasoned Crafter*

41 years old  
American  
living in Seattle, WA  
married with young kids  
full-time college professor  
very busy  
advanced multi-media crafter  
introvert

There's something super satisfying about sharing the things that I make, and having people exclaim, "wow you made that?!"

I hate talking on the phone and avoid it at all costs. I prefer to figure stuff out myself even if it means I may not be doing it "the right way."

### GOALS / NEEDS

- research techniques in text-based tutorials and how-to videos
- reference finished products by other users to get inspired for their next project

### BEHAVIOURS

- spends as much time collecting ideas as completing projects
- starts many projects, finishes some
- has a lot of general knowledge from wide range

## USER PERSONA #1



Dom,  
*The DIY Newbie*

- 33 years old
- Canadian
- living in Montreal, QC
- Marketing Professional
- married
- works full-time
- beginner level DIY home improvements
- enjoys the social aspects of hobbying
- an extrovert

I think hobbies fall into two categories: The ones you actually like doing, and the ones you don't enjoy but the end product is so satisfying it makes up for it.

As a first time home owner, this is all new to me. I just want someone to look at what I'm doing and be able to answer my specific questions.

### GOALS / NEEDS

- browse through how-tos and experts visually because they lack more specialized jargon to help with their searches
- talk to an expert online immediately if, for example, they just sprung a leak in their new bathtub installation projects and need a fix right now!
- to set their language preferences because they are an English-speaker in a French community so getting advice in their native language can be tricky

### FRUSTRATIONS

- People presenting themselves as experts on YouTube without the necessary qualifications
- Paying for something you could have done better yourself
- Poor quality video; presenters who don't cut to the case

### BEHAVIOURS

- calls their dad when they get stuck on a project
- typically has a couple big projects on the go at a time since they frequently get stuck in the middle of a complex problem
- only works on their projects on the weekend so they can dedicate their full attention to the task
- works on their projects at home so uses a combination of desktop and mobile tools

### PREFERENCES

- Be able to relish in the long-term enjoyment of their effort and projects by investing time in improving their home
- Save money by doing the work themselves
- To speak to an expert face-to-face ASAP so they can get help with their specific problem and avoid getting stuck

# Personas

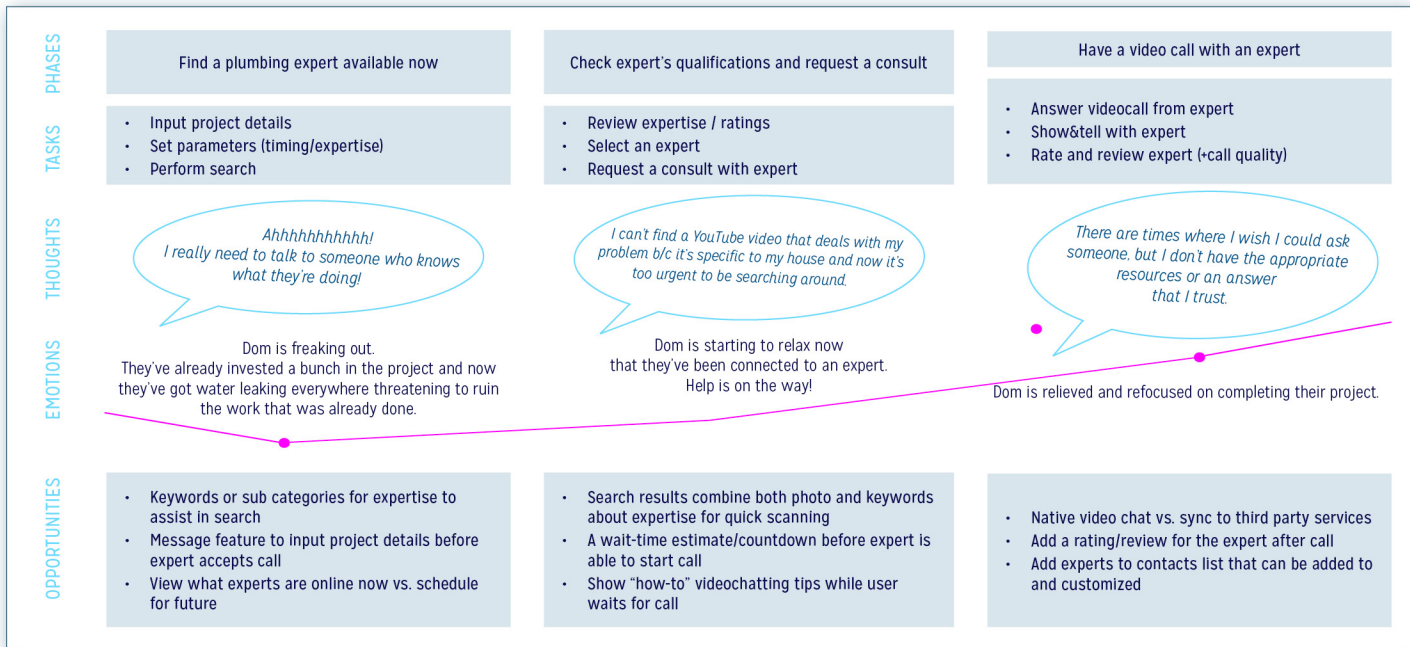
Based on the results of my user interviews, I developed two personas to guide explorations of tasks from different perspectives. Despite having identified video calls as a key differentiator and income driver of the app, having both introverted and extroverted personas helped me keep their differing needs in mind while designing.

## User Journey

With the context and motivation of these personas in mind, I crafted a series of touchstones to refer back to throughout the design process:

- **journey maps** to visualize the steps to accomplishing goals and how to simplify them;
- **a mental model** to explore the impacts of the user's perception on the process;
- **user stories** to keep me goal-focused during ideation.

The user journeys were particularly helpful in identifying breaking points in my user's path to accomplishing their project goals and brainstorming features that could simplify access to the right advice at these critical moments.

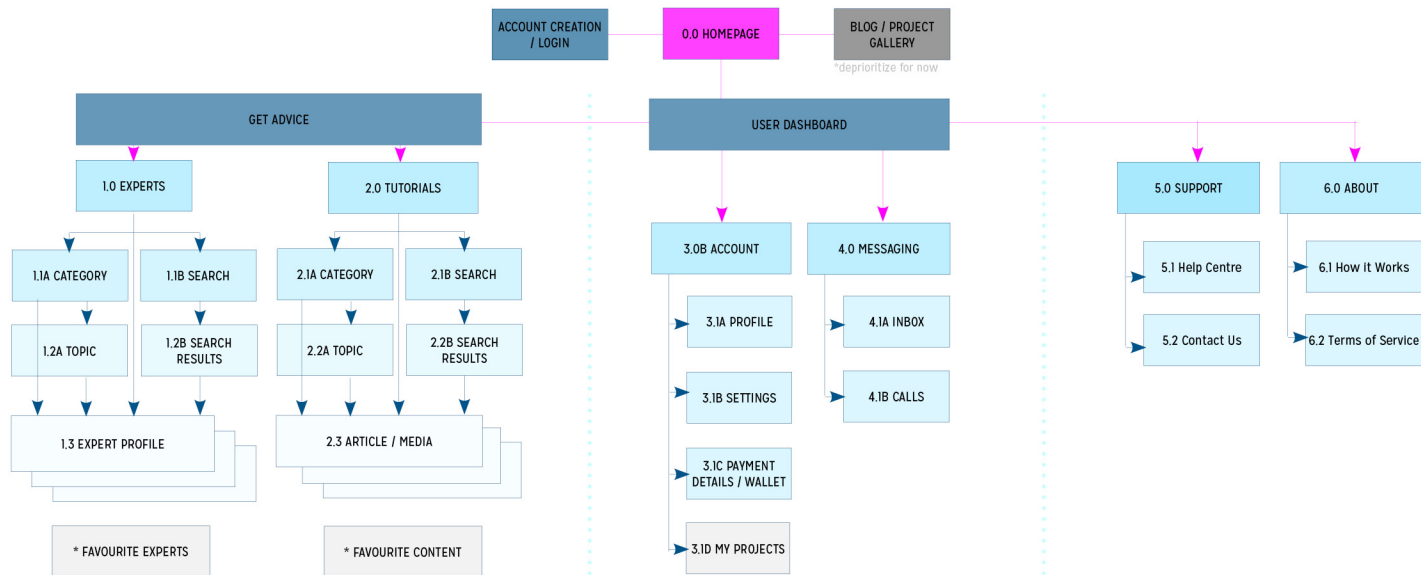


## Card Sorting

To create a sitemap, I used a variety of techniques to visualize how features would be ordered and grouped to create an intuitive interface:

- **task analysis** to match user actions to features I need to create
- **user flows** which outlined all the steps to accomplishing key tasks
- **card sorting** to understand my users' mental models

By executing a card sort with 8 participants, I realized there was a major disconnect between my users' mental model and the emerging information architecture of my site. I revised my sitemap to bring Experts and Tutorial content together to support my users' desire to compare and move fluidly between these two advice formats.

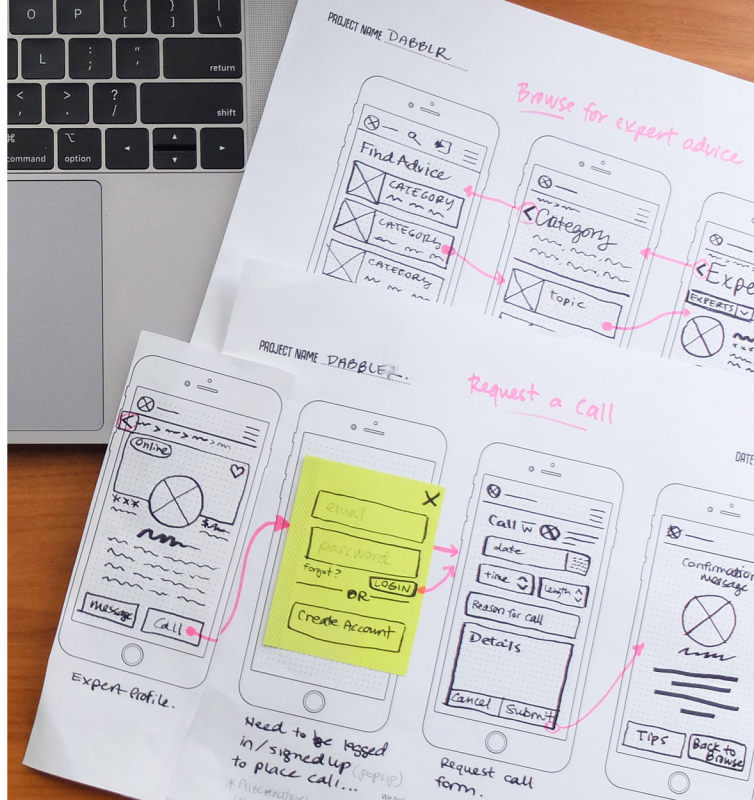


# Rapid Prototyping

Sketching screens first with pen and paper helps me:

- brainstorm and experiment with features quickly
- think differently by shifting to a more tactile medium off-screen
- keep track of early ideas (no delete button on paper)
- gets me into a playful mindset where I'm most creative

Working off my initial drawings, I then create digital wireframes in Figma, progressing from low- to high-fidelity. These rough-and-ready prototypes are essential to verify good ideas as well as eliminate bad ones, and move on to testing with users efficiently.



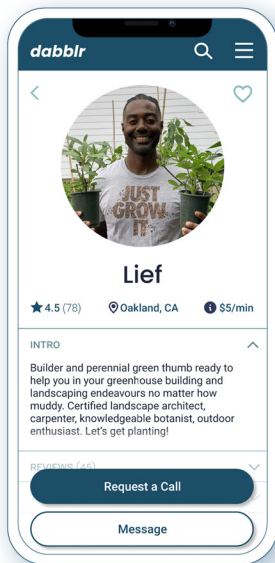
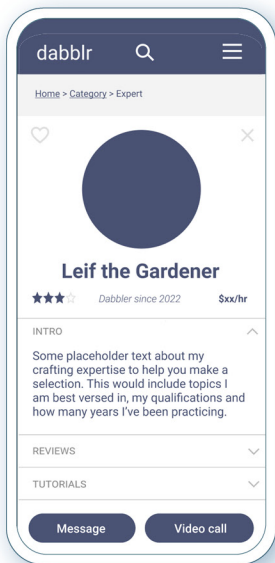
iterate

## User Testing

It was time to reconnect with potential users to test my mid-fidelity prototype. I recruited five participants from my core demographic of active millennial hobbyists with one edge case to diversify perspectives (higher age bracket + lower tech savvy).

My goal at this phase was to observe whether users understood the project, its value, and how to complete basic functions such as searching/browsing for advice, setting up a call with an expert, and creating an account.

Analyzing the results, I identified areas of friction to revise.



## Usability Error #1

### What happens next?

**Suggested Change:** Edit button text to be more descriptive

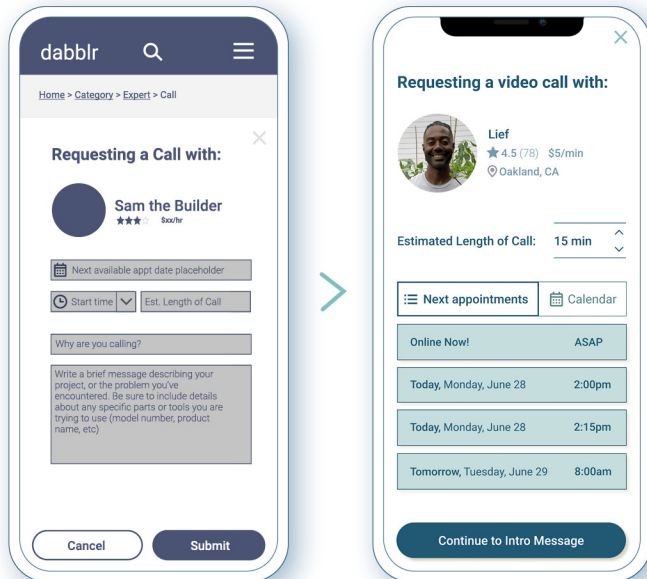
*Users may be more prone to bail out if they are unsure what they are committing to in each step. **Preference testing** this edit revealed “Request a Call” verbiage helped put users at ease that there would be another step before talking to a stranger.*

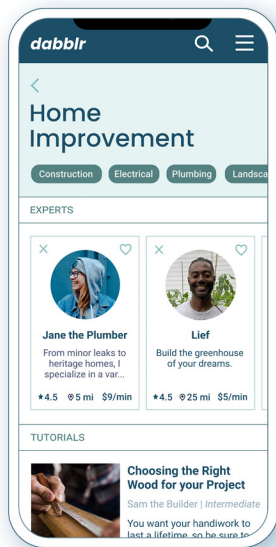
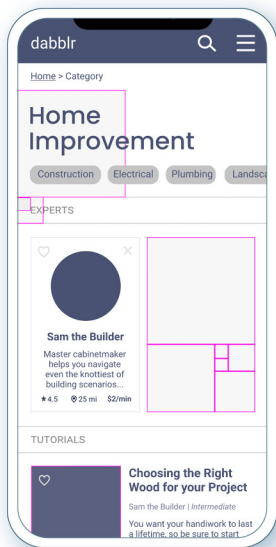
## Usability Error #2

### When do I create an account?

**Suggested Change:** Clearer confirmation page, insert additional screen(s) to divide up user decisions and lower mental load

*Testers were intrigued by the “check out as guest” experience but because it wasn’t what they expected it also seemed to cause some anxiety that they had missed something.*



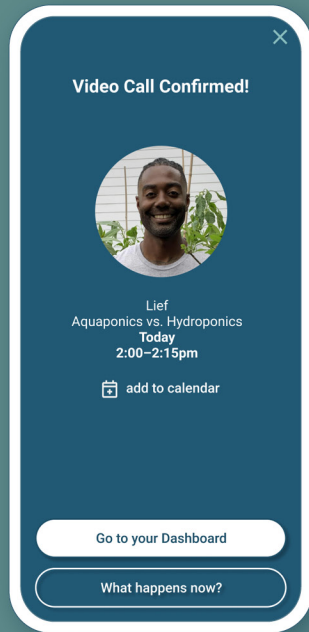
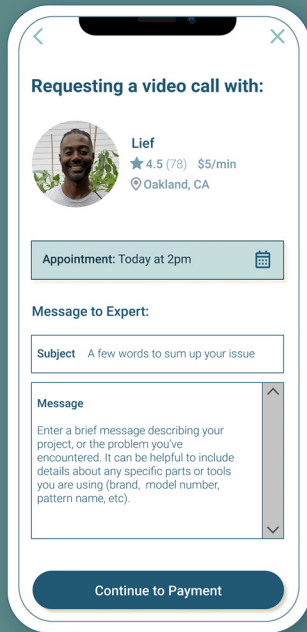
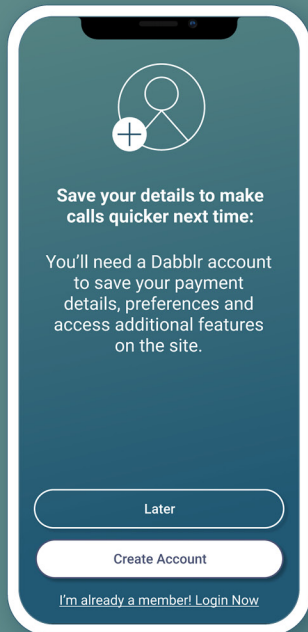
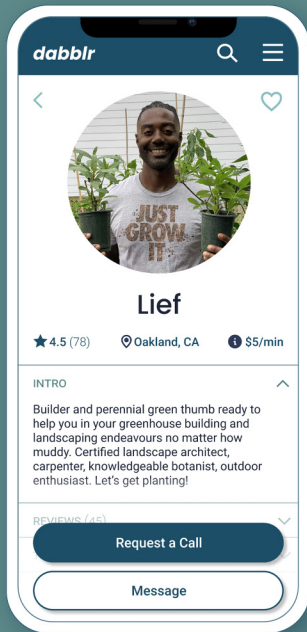


## Refining the UI

Following user testing, further refinements were driven by other forms of evaluation to ensure my decision-making remained in-line with my users' needs:

- accessibility tests revealed areas where contrast was insufficient to meet AAA standards
- peer review feedback led to addition field titles and empty state to meet forms best practices

I also worked to refine the visual design referring to both Human Interface Guidelines and Material Design to strike a balance of compatibility across platforms. Using Gestalt principles and grids I developed components and frameworks designed to scale using progressive enhancement.



document

## **Design System**

Teal is the design system I created to document and explain Dabblr's visual identity. Part of the goal was to create a library of guides and components to allow other designers to reuse assets and help engineers build in a consistent way. The system covers everything from color and typography, to accessibility and tone of voice.

I prototyped Teal as a web-app to emulate a living resource better suited to scaling with a team than a static document.

# Color

Teal is dabblr's core brand color (and a type of dabbling duck). Serene and reliable, the core blue-greens are complemented by a playful yellow accent limited to alerts and illustrations. Earthy tones round out the set for functional and background elements, as a warmer alternative to blacks, greys, and pure whites while offering a near-monochromatic experience so that faces and artwork can remain the hero.

205873

548282

A6CACA

D2E4E4

core

FDD030

accent

1E2537

8B859F

F1EFE1

FFBF4

background

# UI Elements & Style

UI components are minimalist in construction with subtle shadows to assist the user in identifying interactive elements. Forms are based on primary shapes and simple line work, with rounded corners and terminuses wherever possible to reinforce a friendly, simple visual character.

taba

SECTION TITLE

expert card

Jane the Plumber

Specializing in a range of services including minor leaks and heritage home repair...

★ 4.5 @ 5 mi \$2/hour

large button stack (vertical) organized either on the vertical or horizontal; it is possible to emphasize one option over the other(s) in a stack. The top button also incorporates an arrow filter.

Button

Button

# Typography

Poppins is an approachable yet trustworthy sans serif. Its friendly rounded forms are given a more serious bent by the straight-edged terminuses. This is who to turn to with your best ideas but also trust with your toughest problems. It is used in the wordmark and for headings.

Roboto is a hard worker and much like Poppins it has a dual nature. At once serious in its geometric forms, it also features friendly, open curves. Clean and legible, Roboto is used for body text and buttons to provide clarity and ease.

H1 / Advice

Poppins, Light, 48pt

H2 / Expertise

Poppins, Medium, 36pt

H3 / Large Button

Poppins, Medium, 24pt

H4 / Small Button

Roboto, Medium, 18pt

Body text

Roboto, Regular, 16pt

Fine print and secondary nav elements

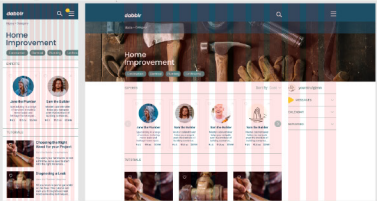
Roboto, Regular, 14pt

Subtext and Captions

Roboto, Light Italic, 14pt

# Grids/Layout

Screens layouts are built around a 12-column grid with 20px margin and 10px gutters for mobile and scaling to a maximum of 40px columns with 20px gutters for larger screens, with excess space being taken up by the margin to reduce breakpoints while maintaining consistency in design experience. A 10px overall grid keeps vertical spacing consistent. And individual components draw on the Golden Ratio for their design (see example: expert card).



# Language

Dabblr is precise and knowledgeable. Attention to spelling, grammar and syntax is a given. Every effort is extended to write in clear, plain language to remain accessible, optimize for localization, and avoid jargon.

Dabblr is inclusive. Inclusive language and pronouns are standard in our written copy, and clear and present options in user/expert profiles. Dabblr will not tolerate discriminatory language or practices by its contributors or users.

Only our brand, dabblr, is consistently presented in lowercase. In all other functions, sentence case is standard.

# Accessibility

Our users are diverse in age, ability and location. Designers must consider a wide frame of experience when building new products. Users may be deaf and hard of hearing, have motor or cognitive impairments, or use screen readers. At dabblr, we understand that making accessible design decisions actually means improving the experience for all users.

As a starting point, dabblr's colour scheme is simple yet high contrast to reduce visual noise while increasing visual clarity.

# Iconography

Icons are linear and monochromatic. Icons appear in Deep Teal on light coloured backgrounds, or reversed white on teal. Unless indicated by the library, icons have only a single state. (example: the heart to favourite or save experts and content has an active and inactive state)

rating

location

message

videocall

find advice

payment

appointment calendar

add to calendar

menu

favourite - inactive

favourite - active

close

## **Retrospective**

With a functioning high-fidelity prototype in place and supported by a design system guide future iteration and growth, Dabblr had reached an ending. But this would only be the beginning for bringing such a product to market.

**Next steps for Dabblr?** There are some obvious features that are missing from an MVP. I would follow the same iterative process to flesh out new features – like in-app videocalls and menus – going from low-fi drawings and to high-fidelity by getting feedback from users along the way with a combination of formal testing and informal peer reviews.

**100s**

Revisions

**5**

User Tests

**10**

Iterations

**100**

Cups of Coffee