It’s important to understand the contexts within which users will interact with your product. It’s critical — particularly when designing with or for a group vastly different from yourself in culture or ability. This is part of a larger conversation around design ethics: taking time to talk to and test your designs with a diverse group of users is a great first step.

We had some fun making this flowchart. In no way is this an exhaustive guide, but we hope it’s a helpful way to think about including ethnographic research in your practice.

1. WARNING! You are not the user. It’s easy to make assumptions about users. It’s much harder to recover from decisions based on poor assumptions. Never get too comfortable with your understanding of the user: keep researching!

2. Do you have firsthand insight into the users’ environments?

   - Yes: Lucky you! You may be creating your dream project.
   - No: Let’s talk users. Who are they?

   - Yes (Are the users a lot like you?): Good on you! Keep researching.
   - No: I need to learn more about them.

3. Sounds like you could use some in-context ethnographic research!

   - Yes: You may be creating your dream project. Are the users sitting at a computer all day? Sounds like there’s a lot more to learn. Observing users’ work in context is a great way to get started.
   - No: Mostly offline. Is facilitating communication a feature of your tool? Yes: Mostly online. I’m not sure.

   - Yes: Remote interviews and screen sharing might cut it in your case!
   - No: Mostly online. How do users interact with each other?

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