

Personae & Scenarios



Category	Focus	Activity	Why?	Prep Time	Activity Time
Thinking about users	Imagined or future space	Personae and Scenarios	Considers the multitude of user needs within healthcare spaces, when time/resources do not allow for direct consultation.	4-6 hours	1-2 hours

Personae and scenarios offer a tool with which to explore possible use by theoretical future users. They are particularly useful during planning stages, if a design project is in progress but direct consultation with user groups is not possible. To do this, well-rounded user profiles with descriptions of realistic use-scenarios are developed, which can facilitate design that considers a multitude of different needs.

Materials and resources

- Optional: The character design template.
- Personae for all participants to access individually (in print or on devices). See below for advice on developing these. It is best to use a full set, to ensure diversity.
- Writing materials such as sticky notes, sheets of paper and pens, printed design/architectural plans sufficiently large to consider interactions in interior spaces, with furniture etc.

Step-by-step Instructions

1. Source or create personae. This takes time and so you will develop these as a facilitator as part of the preparation for a workshop. Creating the personae and developing them so that they include sufficiently relevant and rich (detailed, explicit, vivid, sketchy, ...) representations of use-situations, without falling into harmful stereotypes, is a significant time commitment. This depends on a number of factors, including:

- Access to and selection of (qualitative) research relevant to the proposed design project, including asking people with relevant knowledge.
- Resources and skills to compile a set of 'well-rounded' user profiles and scenario descriptions based on the selected research.
- Resources and skills to pull together information in a layout that is understandable and appeals to different types of people involved (e.g., architects, engineers, doctors, nurses, patients, etc).

For example, to create a set of personae for a design project where a new oncological outpatient centre is being developed, you could consult research on the following:

- A study on experiences of hospital waiting rooms;

- Patients' and nurses' experiences of an oncological outpatient centre; and

- Mappings of outpatient journeys through academic medical centres.

Develop a set of six or seven profiles, bringing together insights from relevant research. This could also be based on experiences from within your department but make sure the different personae represent specific (user) groups of the space or building you are focused on (e.g., doctors, nurses, patients, family members, children). Alongside the personal characteristics of a persona, it is important to highlight different aspects of their interactions with the built environment, for example due to disability and/or neurodivergence. Give each character a name. Including a picture can further help people to relate to the persona, but you may consider an avatar to maintain a certain abstraction.

The 'character design template' below shows you how to design personae, and all the different issues that you should consider. Draw on your research to answer these questions, and perhaps speak to some people who are more familiar with the type of space you are designing or working in. This might be specific to a local area and its demographics as well, so it is worth thinking beyond your desk research. You may want to search online to gather some ideas for your personae. Be aware that

pre-made persona sets are often used in product or human-computer interaction design and may not highlight the sensory design or healthcare dimension that you are most interested in. This guide shares some personae from a healthcare-specific research project, which you may wish to adapt, but it is important to bear in mind the specifics of your design or architecture project/challenge and the user(s). Generic persona sets are typically less useful than ones that are carefully designed for a specific project and population.

2. Design your scenario: This involves putting your personae into the place or scenario that you are working to design or improve. You might want to consider how they experience arrival at a healthcare building, what their experience of a specific service or ward might be, what waiting feels like to them, and so on.

3. Working with personae and scenarios. Once you have your personae and scenarios, you can facilitate workshops, for example with designers, architects, or healthcare staff:

- Give people time to read through the personae and scenario descriptions

- Each try free writing from the perspective of a different persona – how does the scenario feel to the persona? This should be a very quick exercise where people write to a timer and try not to over-think the exercise. At the end of this activity, everyone should list the things they feel confident about, and where they felt uncertain. Talk about your uncertainties – is there expertise in the group, or do you need to do some more research? Keep a list of any questions that remain unresolved.

- Generate 'ideal use scenarios' for each persona – formulate good sensory situations for them. How would the scenario be improved? This should include explicit mention of activity (what?), place (where?) and feeling (how?). Again, you can add to the list of questions: what do you know, and what don't you know?

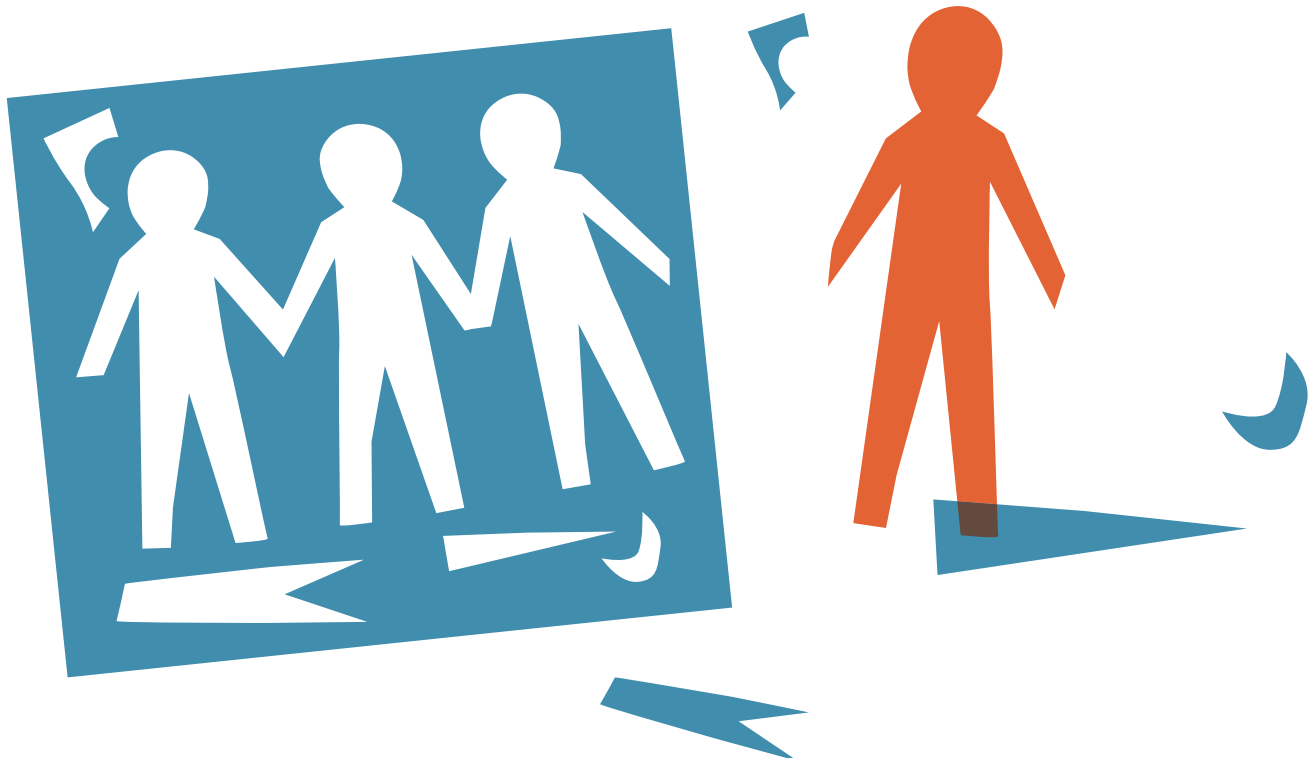
- A day-in-the-life exercise can be done with each person separately on the architectural plan (of an existing site, or when available for a new site). Highlight what works and what does not from the perspective of each different persona. Include issues and opportunities. This exercise needs a significant amount of time to go through daytime/nighttime, mealtimes etc. You might even wish to combine this with the site visit activity to go through a real location (or a mock-up) from an imagined perspective.

- Bring together your learnings about the different personae, particularly where they may have aligning or conflicting sensory preferences. Issues raised here should be taken forward for further discussion.

- By the end, you should have two lists:

What are the shared needs of different user groups, and where do needs conflict? How can you recognise conflicting needs?

What do you still not understand about these personae, and how can you find out? This might lead to more research, or to targeted workshops with specific user groups.



Character Design Template

Depending on your goals, emphasise or adapt areas of this template. Some sections might be used for background information, and others will inform a richer written narrative about a character. You can integrate this information with your scenarios – see ‘method in use’ for an example of how this can be done. Although ‘sensory needs’ is a specific section, for the purposes of sensory design you will want to think about how each section affects your characters’ sensory experiences.

Bio		Name	
Demographics	Based on classic demographic survey questions, this information helps designers to better understand the background of each fictional character, creating a scaffold on which to hang more personal identifiers in the next section.	Gender	
		Age	
		Ethnicity	
		Household	
		Education level	
		Employment	
		Disability	
		Income	
Background	Who is this character? Why have they entered the hospital space?	Hints: inpatient, outpatient, visitor, carer, family member, friend, nurse, doctor, hospital staff	
Sensory aspects	Does this person have any specific sensory needs? How do they experience space in sensory terms?	Hint: this is not just about sensory impairment. Consider whether this character might also have sensory sensitivities e.g. linked to neurodivergence. What physical, social, personal, and cultural factors affect this?	
Physiological aspects	How is this character feeling today? Did they miss their breakfast or need to go to the bathroom? Are they in pain? Do they need assistance?	Hint: consider the journey of the character, how they got to the healthcare space and what the rest of their day might look like.	
Care or safety aspects	What care does the character need? How safe do they feel, physically and emotionally? How does the environment support or inhibit their care?	Hint: is this character healthy or sick? Are they awaiting a diagnosis? Are they worried about their safety? Do they have financial concerns? Are they scared?	
Belonging and connection aspects	Does this character feel alone? Are they accompanied? Do they feel welcomed? Do they trust the space and those within it? Do they feel listened to?	Hint: consider the character’s past interactions with healthcare spaces and those within them.	
Esteem aspects	Does this character feel respected? Do they feel confident, or independent? Do they feel that they have dignity?	Hint: consider how the previous sections may affect the character’s sense of self within the space.	
Self-actualising aspects	What cognitive needs do they have: curiosity, creativity? What aesthetics does this character prioritise? What goals do they have in their visit? What meaning do they seek to derive from the space?	Hint: consider what might stimulate the character. What might they appreciate? What might they be offended by or find frivolous or unnecessary? What might they remain indifferent to?	

Method in Use:

Persona set developed to support designing hospital waiting rooms.

This method draws on work done by Research[x]Design, Department of Architecture, KU Leuven. The persona set was developed by Pleuntje Jellema and Valerie van der Linden under the supervision of Ann Heylighen. The QR code provides a link to the PDF for the full set, including detailed profiles for each person.

