

01 / START HERE

Your first design story

A practical starting point for a portfolio case study. Choose a small problem, make your thinking visible and decide what to find out next.

IN 30 MINUTES

Leave with a project outline and a next action.

A finished case study needs real research, making, testing and revision.

CHOOSE ONE STARTING BRIEF

EVERYDAY DESIGN

Make a small shared desk easier to use.

Explore how a learner finds, sets up and packs away creative materials. Start with paper, card or items you already have.

SPACE & PLACE

Make a small learning corner work better.

Explore how people move, reach materials and reset a shared space. Start with a sketch, plan or paper model.

SET A TIMER. KEEP THE FIRST VERSION SMALL.

5 min **Choose.** Pick a brief and a specific user. See page 2.

10 min **Frame.** Describe the difficulty and separate facts from guesses.

10 min **Outline.** Use page 4. Mark gaps as planned or not yet tested.

5 min **Commit.** Choose one evidence-gathering action. See pages 3 and 6.

PROJECT / YOUR NAME

Print and write, or type in the boxes and save a copy. Use a PDF reader if your browser does not save form entries.

02 / FRAME THE CHALLENGE

Find a problem worth exploring

Start with a person and a situation. Write what you know; label what you are guessing. Do not choose the final solution yet.

Who is affected?

A specific person or group.

Where does it happen?

A place, moment or situation.

What is difficult, and why does it matter?

Describe the delay, confusion, effort or exclusion. What does it prevent?

Your open design question

How might we help [user] do [important thing] when [constraint]?

What are you assuming?

List at least three guesses to check. For example: space, habits, access or materials.

Quick check: could several different solutions answer your question? If it already names a product, open it up. "Make a box" becomes "Help someone find their tools."

03 / REPLACE GUESSES WITH EVIDENCE

Plan one small investigation

A useful observation beats a confident guess. Ask permission before recording, photographing or quoting anyone; keep private details out of your portfolio.

Ask about a real recent experience

Try: "Show me how you did this last time." Then ask: "What was hardest?" and "What did you do to get around it?" Record what happened before interpreting why.

What have you actually seen or heard?

Add date + source. If you have no evidence yet, write "not yet gathered".

What is your next evidence-gathering action?

What will you learn, from whom, how and by when? Keep it achievable.

WHEN YOU HAVE AN IDEA: TRY A SIMPLE TEST

Use a sketch, paper model or rough arrangement. Let someone try a clear task. Record difficulty as well as success; change one thing and try again.

The task

What will the person try?

What you will observe

What would count as improvement?

Save the first version, notes and revised version. Label tests honestly: planned, attempted or completed. Never substitute example results for your own evidence.

04 / OUTLINE YOUR CASE STUDY

Eight parts. One clear story.

Write a sentence or a few bullets in each box. Empty stages are useful: mark them "planned" and name the evidence you still need.

01 Title + summary

What are you exploring, and for whom?

02 The problem

Who struggles, in what setting, and why?

03 Research

What did you find? Name the source.

04 Ideas

What options did you consider? Why choose one?

05 Prototype + testing

What did you make and what did testing reveal?

06 Iteration

What changed because of the evidence?

07 Outcome

What exists now? State what remains untested.

08 Reflection

What did you learn and what would you do next?

Build the final story in slides, a document or a web page. Use one or two purposeful visuals per stage, each with a caption explaining what it shows and why it mattered.

05 / AN EXAMPLE TO LEARN FROM

A shared-desk setup

Fictional example for illustration only. This is an early project outline, not a student result or a completed, tested design.

01 Title + summary

Exploring a quicker start to creative work on a shared kitchen table.

02 The problem

Imagined user: a learner who must clear their materials away before meals. Starting again interrupts short work sessions.

03 Research

Not yet gathered. Plan: ask a learner to show a recent setup and pack-away routine, then note interruptions and misplaced items.

04 Ideas

Possible directions: a tray, a roll-up mat or a divided pouch. Compare space, cost and ease of carrying before choosing.

05 Prototype + testing

Planned: make one rough card version. Ask a learner to set out three tools and pack them away. Watch for awkward steps.

06 Iteration

Pending evidence. Keep the first prototype so later changes can be explained with a before-and-after comparison.

07 Outcome

At this stage: a brief and a test plan. There is no finished product and no measured improvement to report.

08 Reflection

Next question: is the biggest difficulty storage, finding tools or having space? The first observation should help narrow the brief.

Your evidence will change the story.

That is the point. Keep observations, interpretations and future plans distinct.

06 / KEEP GOING

Make the next step concrete

You do not need every box finished today. Keep this kit beside your project and update it as you learn.

EVIDENCE CHECKLIST

- ☐ My user, setting and design question are specific.
- ☐ I distinguish observations, assumptions and planned work.
- ☐ My notes and images have dates, sources and permission where needed.
- ☐ I keep more than one idea and explain why I choose a direction.
- ☐ I save a prototype, test notes and changes made after testing.
- ☐ Each selected image has a caption: what it shows and why it matters.
- ☐ I describe the actual outcome and any limits or untested claims.
- ☐ My reflection names a lesson and a practical next step.

My next action

BY WHEN

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE STRUCTURE

Explore BOX3EDUCATION courses

Review current programme information and ask which route suits your project.

box3education.co.uk/courses.html

Interested in a future practical workshop? Email your project idea to info@box3education.co.uk. This is an enquiry; dates and availability are not confirmed here.

Adapted from BOX3EDUCATION course resources: Portfolio Guide, Portfolio Layout Template, Project 1 Brief and Problem Framing Sheet. Version 1.0 | October 2026.