

Student-Centered Design: The Empathy Mapping Toolkit

The Empathy Map Framework

A collaborative visualization used to articulate what we know about a specific student persona. It is non-chronological and holistic.

SAYS

Direct quotes and verbatim statements from research, surveys, or interviews.
What are they saying out loud?

DOES

Observable actions, behaviors, and physical steps they are taking in their environment.



THINKS

Internal thoughts, underlying beliefs, and cognitive load. What matters to them that they might not vocalize?

FEELS

Emotional states, worries, excitements, and frustrations.

The Foundation for the Journey

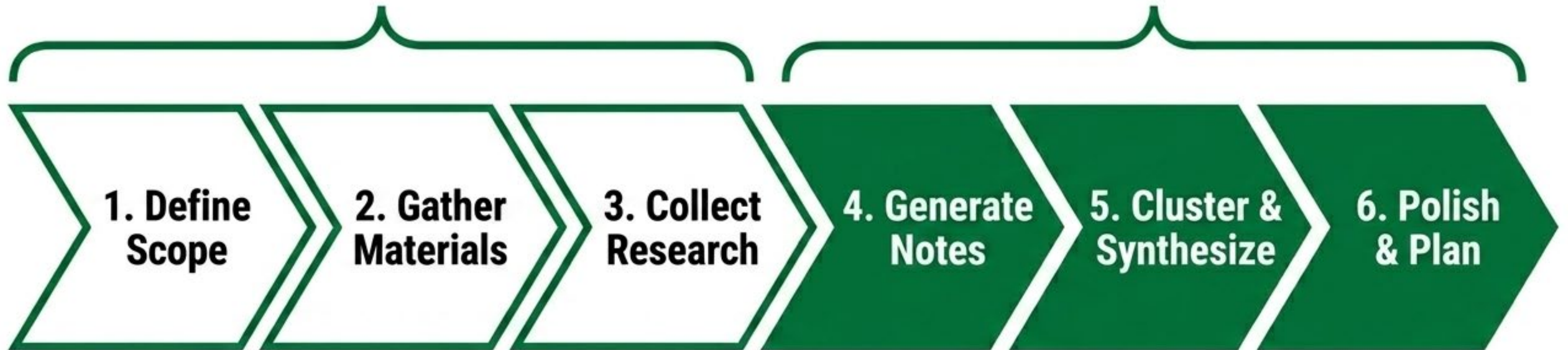
	Empathy Mapping	Journey Mapping
Focus	Captures Mindsets & Attitudes (internal state)	Captures Interactions & Touchpoints (external chronology)
Structure	Thematic (4 Quadrants)	Sequential (Over time)
Timing in Process	The Prerequisite Step: Gets participants into the student mindset.	The Diagnostic Step: Identifies systemic gaps and barriers.

Empathy mapping is a **mandatory diagnostic step** for getting participants into the student mindset before chronological journey mapping begins.

The 6-Step Mapping Process

Phase 1: Solo Preparation

Phase 2: Collaborative Synthesis



1. Define Scope

2. Gather Materials

3. Collect Research

4. Generate Notes

5. Cluster & Synthesize

6. Polish & Plan

1:1 mapping. 1 persona per map. Define primary purpose.

Secure large whiteboard, sticky notes, markers.

Gather interviews, surveys, student voice data.

Individually digest data; write single observations on stickies.

Group similar notes to find themes. Discover knowledge gaps.

Vocalize findings, note outliers, digitize as source of truth.

Persona Spotlight: Taylor



**Doctoral Student | Chemistry
PhD | First-Generation**

Background: 25 years old from Atlanta. Moved to Denton for an in-person, research-focused Ph.D. Has a teaching assistantship. Navigating academia without family higher-ed experience.



Goals: Secure an R1 research faculty position; publish papers; achieve financial stability without graduate loans.



Concerns: Pressure to succeed without a built-in support system; translating academic success into a stable career; burnout.

Mapping Taylor's Experience

SAYS

"I haven't had a weekend off in three months. Is this what burnout feels like?"

"I left a good job for this. I hope it was the right decision."

THINKS

How do I translate my academic success into the job I want?

I must achieve financial stability without taking out loans.

DOES

Acts as a Teaching Assistant.

Pursues full-time, rigorous Chemistry research.

Navigates complex adult life and academia alone.

FEELS

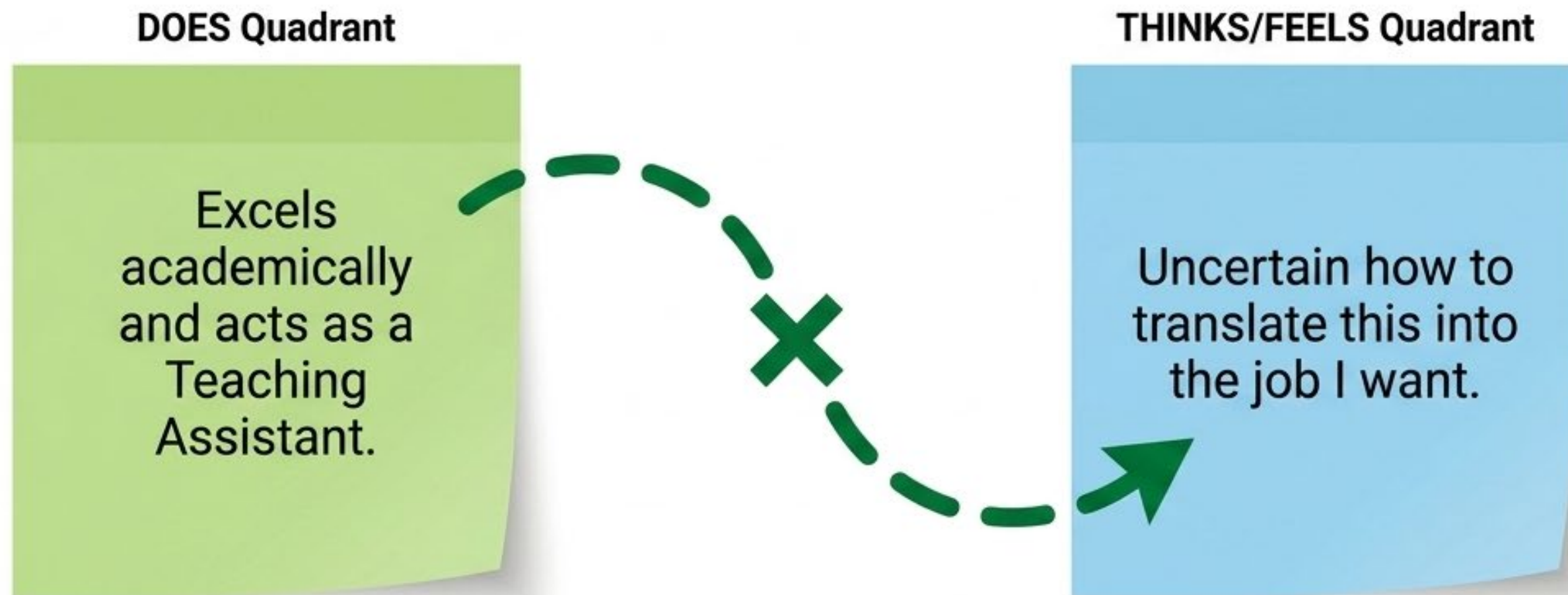
Overwhelmed by schedule.

Uncertain about the professional launch phase.

Passionate about research but isolated.

Finding the Insight: The Treasure Map

Look for inconsistencies or juxtapositions between quadrants to uncover hidden user needs.



THE INSIGHT: Taylor doesn't need academic tutoring; she needs career translation mentorship. The gap between her high academic performance and her career anxiety reveals a critical touchpoint opportunity for UNT's holistic care initiatives.

UNT Empathy Map Template

Persona Name: _____

Mapping Team/Dept: _____

Date: _____

SAYS

What are direct quotes from the student?

THINKS

What are their underlying beliefs or cognitive loads?

DOES

What observable actions are they taking?

FEELS

What are their emotional states or frustrations?