

# Extremes and mainstreams

Researching with both typical people in the audience and people at its extremes, to discover needs and uses the average user doesn't show.

In Spanish

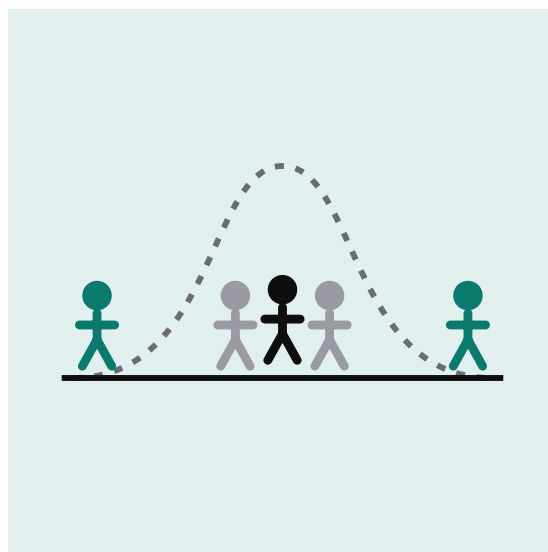
*Usuarios extremos*

Origin

IDEO practice, documented in IDEO.org (2015)

Output

Needs, unexpected uses, and workarounds people invent, beyond the average user



## What it's for

It keeps the design from forgetting those who need it most and those who use it in ways nobody imagined.

## Key elements

### Both ends of the spectrum

Choose people who vary in what matters, such as age or household size.

### The extremes teach

Their tricks and homemade solutions open up new ideas.

### The middle too

Talk with typical people so you don't design only for the rare cases.

## How it's done

1



**Define** the axes along which the audience varies.

2



**Talk** with people at the extremes and in the middle.

3



**Compare** their needs and their workarounds.

# Applications in design

|                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <b>When to use it</b><br>When choosing whom to interview or observe at the start of a project. |  <b>Avoid</b><br>Turning the extremes into a curiosity; they are also people you design for. |  <b>Don't fall for it</b><br>Take care with people who are usually left out of these conversations: explain why their input matters. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Connections

Related to

|                                                                                                    |                                                                                                      |                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Inclusive design |  In-depth interview |  Personas |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Authors and works

|      |            |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2015 | IDEO.org   | Includes it as “extremes and mainstreams” in its human-centered design guide, with the idea that what works for an extreme user usually works for everyone else too. |
| 2018 | Kat Holmes | Argues for designing with the people who are left out so the result works for more people.                                                                           |

## Sources

### Original sources

- Holmes, K. (2018). Mismatch: How inclusion shapes design. MIT Press.

### Secondary sources

- IDEO.org (2015). The field guide to human-centered design. IDEO.org.

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026