Examples of probes planning

1) Tuning in:
   - deciding why to use probes
   - doing literature review
   - understanding one’s own experiences
   - brainstorming preliminary directions for design
   - opening the phenomena in focus groups
     or in expert interviews

2) Probing
   - deciding who to study
   - designing probes kits and logistics

Who are your users?
- Define the number and characteristics of users according to the aims of the study.
- Few is enough in small qualitative studies early in design.

Tuning in
- Create an individual understanding about the design field or study topic
- Read
- Study your own experiences
- Ask experts or focus groups
- Make early guesses about the design opportunities.
- Think about the questions and issues to be studied

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Planning your probes kit

How is your kit concept and content?

Consider also the material logistics

Probing everyday topics with diaries

- Design should be communicative, visual and motivating and appropriate for the topic and the users
- It can reflect designer’s view about the research and design issues.
Diaries for reporting everyday thoughts and activities

- People are asked to document their feelings and activities to diaries during a certain period.
- Often about processes.
- To gather several observations and contextual data.
- Rich data, challenging to analyse, requires resources.
- Moodcharts, workbooks...

Diaries, in general

- Camera tasks for visualising context
  - Document general and detail information of people and their context.
  - Content and framing is a subjective choice.
  - Photos can help express and remember abstract things such as ideas, attitudes, values, and emotions.
  - Brown et al 2000: Diary study for information capture in working life (CHI2000) and
  - Carter & Mancoff 2005: When participants do the capturing: the role of media in diary studies. (CHI2005)

Workbooks (for industrial designers)

- A. Lucero

Camera tasks for visualising context

- For example: my home, place where I exercise, my fridge, What is in the mirror, something nice, something unpleasant, something I hate, my favourite tool.
Self photography

- Documenting general and detail information of people and physical context.
- Content and framing of the picture is a subjective choice.

Open questions for stimulating stories

Illustrations can help in understanding the questions and stimulate emotional responses to attitude and value questions.

Projective pictures and objects

- The use of strong, ambiguous and contradicting images and objects to elicit opinions and stories about attitudes and experiences.

Collages

Other probes items

- reminders
- sensitizers
- mapping tasks
- collages
- amulets
- Key holders
- Camera phones
- SMS

“It is a BIG job” Reduce the demands on participants

Lack of time and energy during work ->
- Low time-consuming probes tasks
- Alternative to diaries should be considered
- The balance of activating, sensitising, interfering and remembering at work is delicate
“This is so nice”
Participants’ motivation

The aesthetic and inspiring tasks and especially tailored probes kits aim at
* motivating the participants and
* creating an empathic and friendly interactions between the researcher (/designer) and the user

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* probes should be a pleasurable extra for the work i.e have playful and inspirational character
* the filling-in of the probes tasks should allow various strategies
* support users’ designerly, change oriented thinking to be able to reflect their experiences but also express their ideas, needs and dreams
* with customized material the participants are expected to go beyond the official roles and express their personalities and subjective experiences

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“A pleasurable extra for work”: probing as an obligation

Practical design of the probes kits and tasks ->
* Playful, enjoyable design and tasks
* stickers, easy to access illustrations
* words and pictures to stimulate associations

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Understanding the specific work domain

When planning the study the nature and the context of the work should be considered->
* Placement and the size of the kit
* Management concerns
* The use of wording and topics for the environment

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Different strategies to use the probes material

e.g. the probes diaries were filled in
1) as they work,
2) at the end of the tasks,
3) whenever they remember
4) at the end of the day

The design of the probes should be flexible enough to allow and encourage the use of different strategies to work with them.

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Peter Shultz The women who play
http://people.artcenter.edu/~shultz/thesis/rs.htm
Example: ACCD Living profiles probes  http://livingprofiles.net/