

journey maps

**how to create effective, dynamic
journey maps to superpower your
research and user experiences**

a civilla learning series booklet

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1 maps as symbolic systems

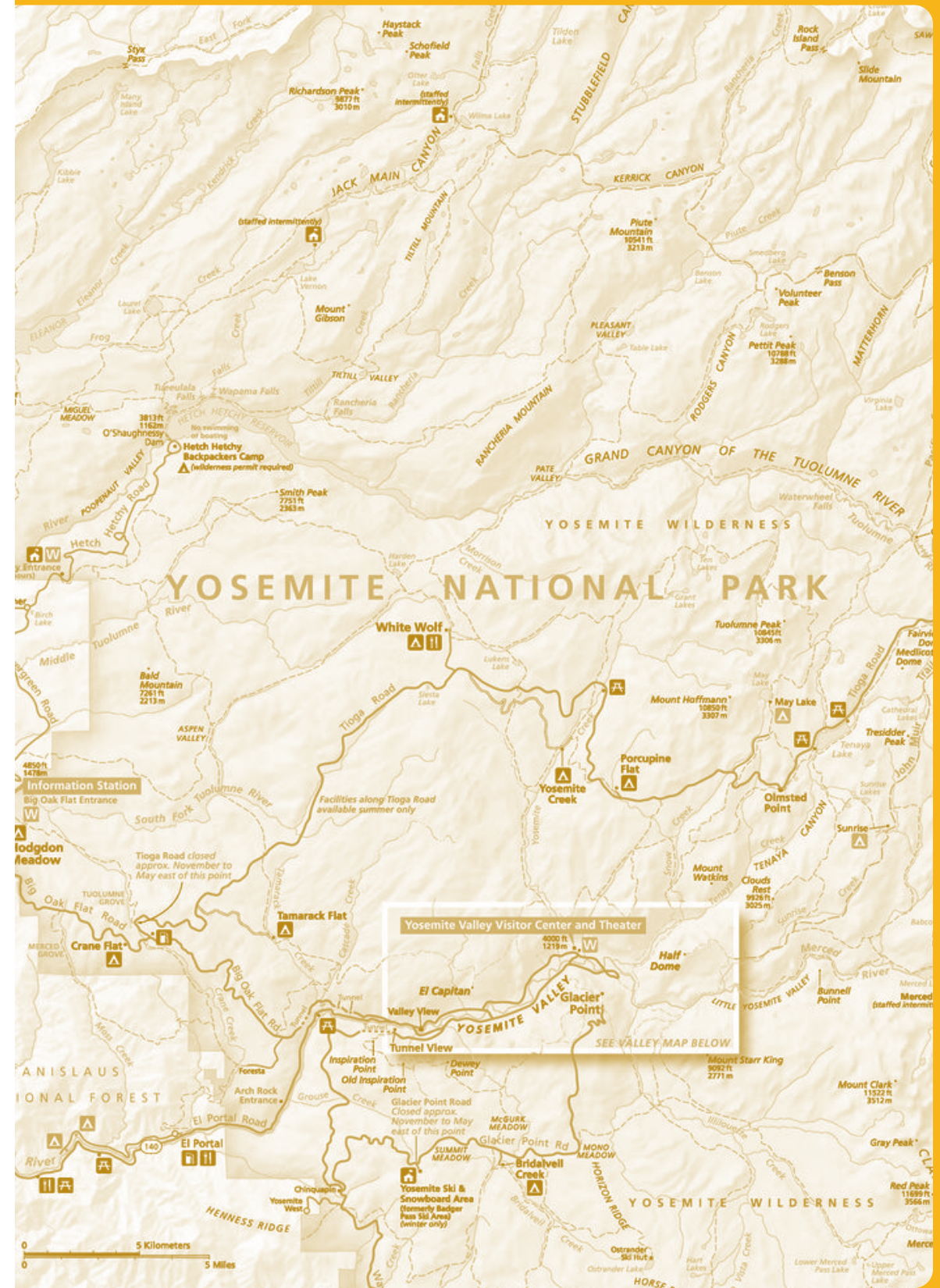
the map is not the territory

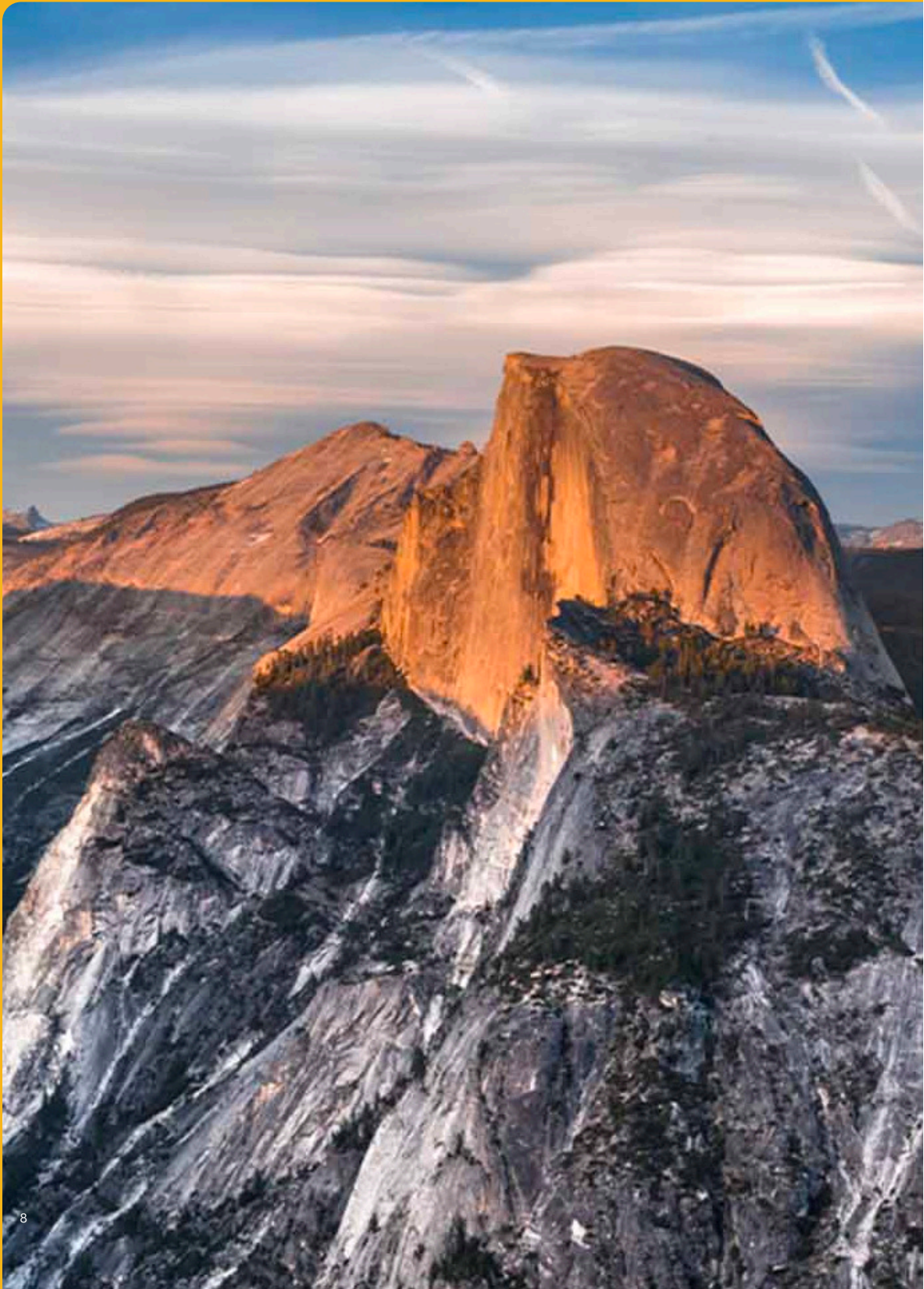
The phrase “the map is not the territory” was coined by the Polish-American philosopher and engineer Alfred Korzybski. It gets at a seemingly obvious truth — that maps are not the actual physical landscape they depict, but a symbolic interpretation of it.

Journey maps might look nothing like this map, but the two are based on the same principle: they're both symbolic representations of a territory.

When you think “map,” what comes to mind is probably the kind used for physical navigation, like this. → This map uses symbols to represent the physical territory of Yosemite National Park.

A journey map uses symbols to represent the “territory” of a complex journey lived by one person. It's up to the mapmaker to decide how to represent the territory. This usually depends on the mapmaker's relationship to the territory, and how their map will be used.





making information useful

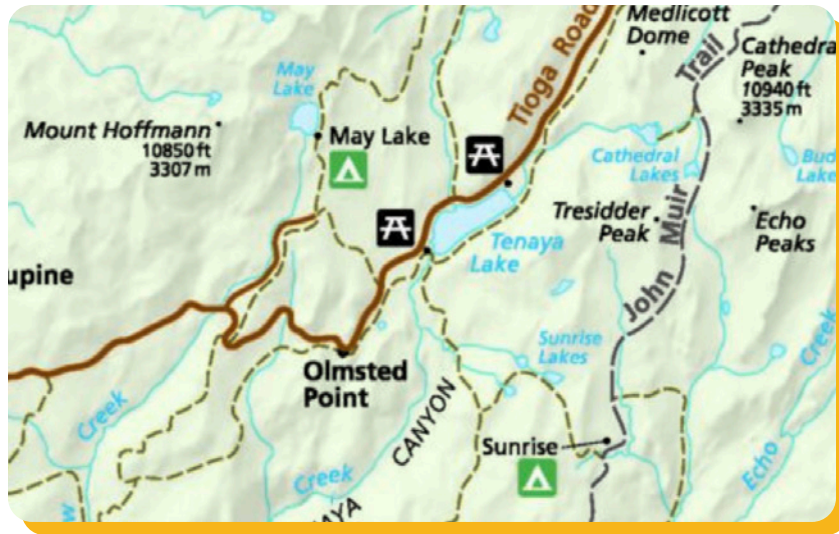
←

Here is a literal, visual interpretation of Yosemite. While it captures the beauty and splendor of the park, it won't help you find your way through it. The map on the prior page reinterprets this landscape symbolically—it doesn't inspire awe, but it does make a good tool for way-finding.

Maps of all kinds—whether representing a geographic region, a journey to a doctor's appointment, an airport layout, or a company hierarchy—do something similar. They use symbols to organize and communicate complex information so it's usable for viewers.

When we say "symbols," we just mean things that represent or stand for something else. Shapes, colors, textures, text—these are all symbols often employed to represent different features and relationships on a map.

On this map, tents in profile symbolize campsites.



The map of Yosemite National Park has symbols for specific park features, like gas stations and campsites. Colors indicate different types of areas, such as forests and bodies of water. Textures provide information about topography, and scale indicates distances in kilometers and miles. Text, in the form of place names, adds further meaning to the map.

The thing about symbolic systems is: they only work if symbols are understood equally by both mapmaker and map user.

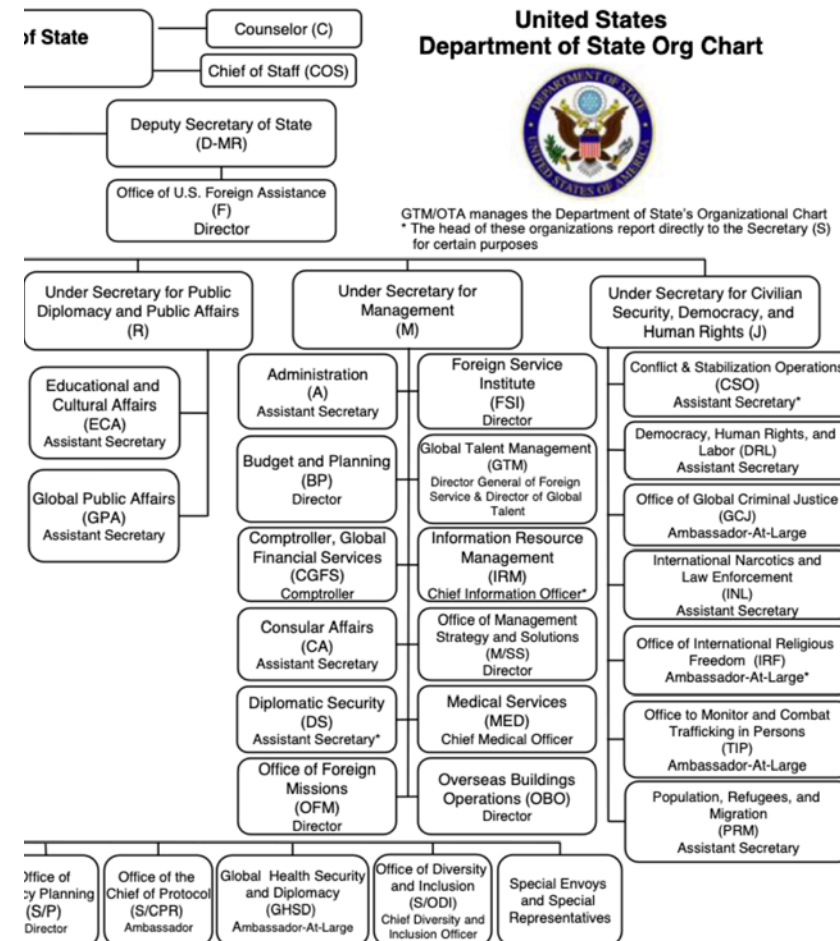
(Yes, the alphabet is a symbolic system, too.)

The thing about symbolic systems is: they only work if symbols are understood equally by both mapmaker and map user. Comprehending the

Yosemite map symbols with a quick glance is essential for any park visitor. (For someone who's never seen a picnic table before, the symbol for campsite won't offer much information.)

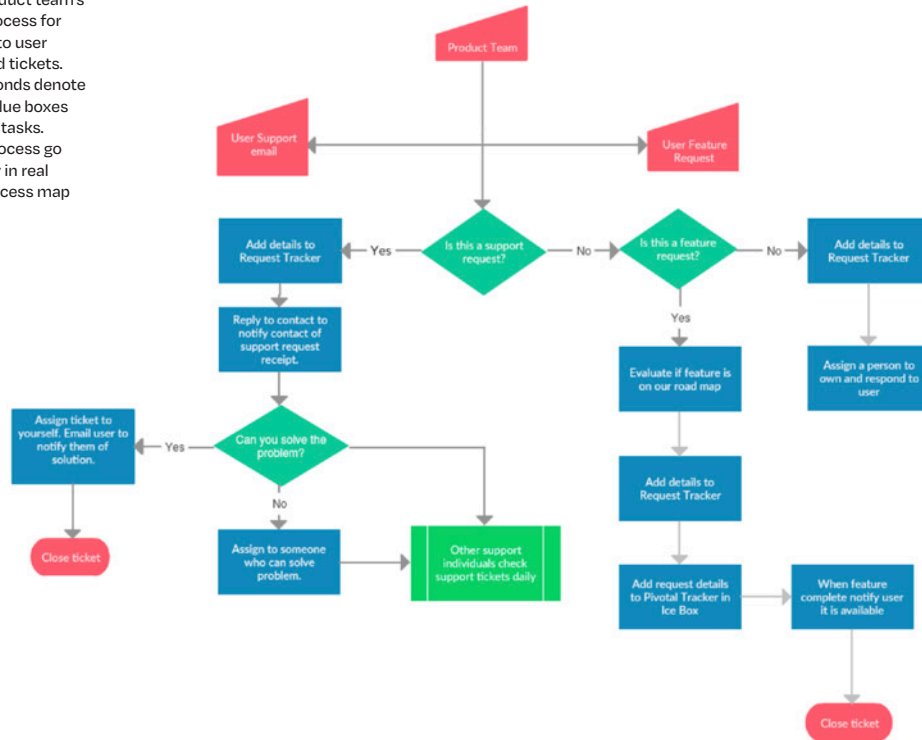
The map at left guides us through physical territory, whereas **diagrammatic maps**, like organizational charts and flow charts, guide us through conceptual "territory!"

These more explicitly symbolic maps are often used by organizations to illustrate relationships between people or business areas. They're good at communicating lots of information, quickly.



This organizational chart uses lines, boxes, and text to show the multilayered hierarchies and relationships between employees.

This process map shows a product team's standard process for responding to user requests and tickets. Green diamonds denote questions, blue boxes denote user tasks. Does this process go so smoothly in real life? The process map doesn't say.



Flow charts and process maps use color, text, and shapes, like arrows and diamonds, to signify specific relationships or interactions.

These maps are usually created by the entity that controls the "territory" (For example, the US Department of State created the org chart above to show the official hierarchy within the Secretary of State office.) As such, they're a representation of what that entity wants to be true—a kind of institutional blueprint. This means they don't always match up with reality.

Journey maps, another type of diagrammatic map, are the antidote to process maps. They chronicle and visualize the many nooks and crannies of one person's real experience, using symbols of course. Instead of using a limited set of shapes and colors to represent predictable and standardized actions, journey maps use a diverse set of symbols, often including illustrations, to communicate the nuances and variability of real life.



A journey map in progress, made up of text and illustrations.

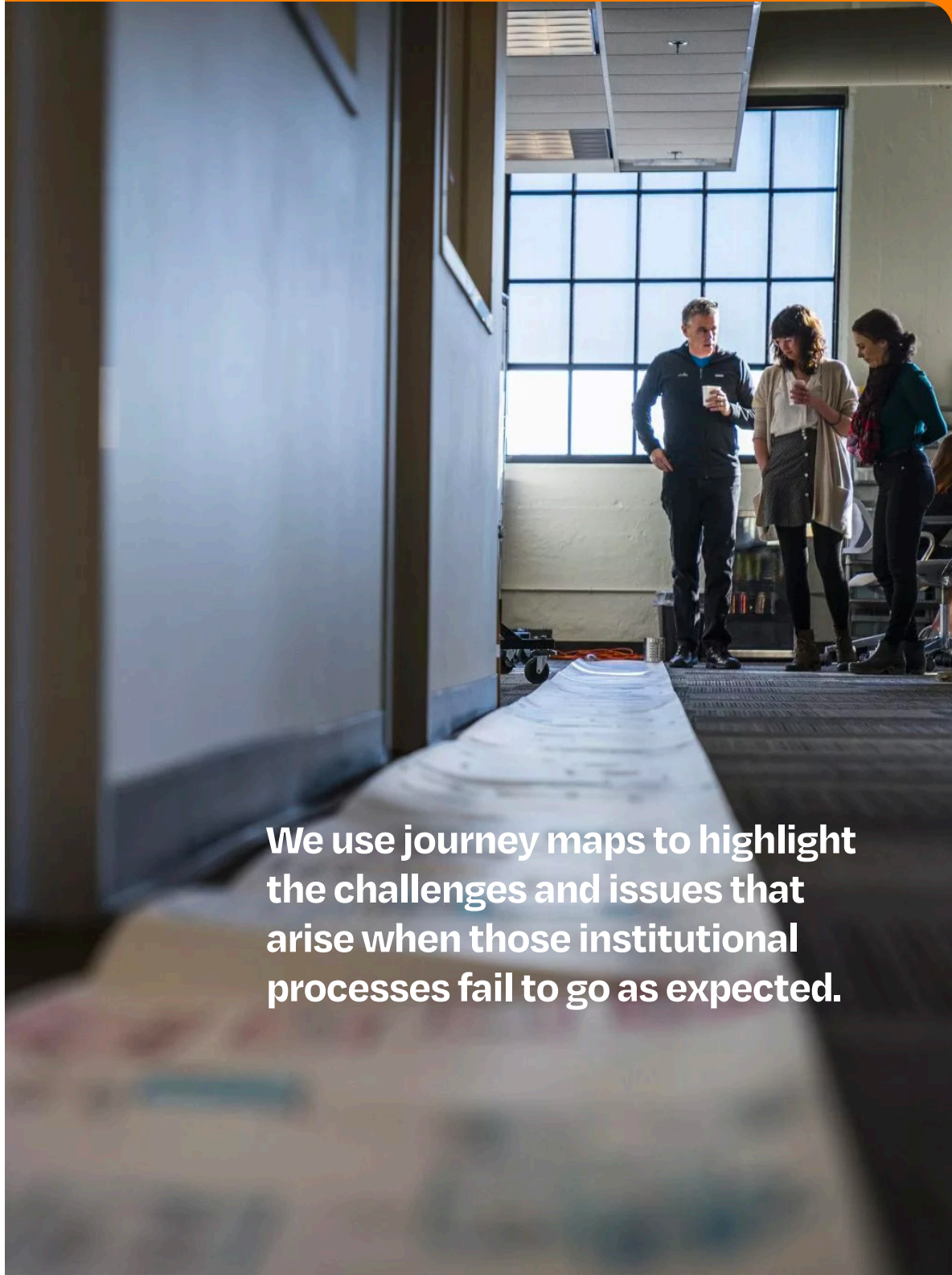
Why use a map to do this? We could conceivably tell the "real story" with a written narrative, or a short film, both of which allow for deep description. Journey maps, however, let us get a lot across, with much less content—and you don't need to be a writer or filmmaker to make one. Just like physical maps, org charts, and process maps, journey maps serve as guides through big, messy collections of data. But unlike other maps, they use the power of storytelling to convey a complicated narrative that's compelling, digestible, and honest.

2 journey maps

tools for advocating change

At Civilla, we love journey maps because they're an excellent storytelling tool, and quite different from how institutions usually present information. Institutions tend to prize process maps. These blueprints offer a sense of calm and control. It's as if they say: here it is, this is the way it goes; it is immutable, and works every time.

By contrast, journey maps concentrate on real-life experiences—a very different approach. For example, when the process that's supposed to take 1-2 days actually takes 30. This makes journey maps a great tool for advocating for change. They can show how a service is actually delivered, including the things that go to plan and the unexpected conflicts. Journey maps also capture things that are outside of the institution's control, but affect the experience of their service anyway—important context that's often left out of institutional assessments of service delivery.



We use journey maps to highlight the challenges and issues that arise when those institutional processes fail to go as expected.

example: want coffee → drink coffee



Let's look at an example. Specifically, the experience of getting coffee. Great, we chose a nice simple scenario. This map will be, what, 3-4 steps max, right? Not quite!

In reality, even *getting coffee* is a complex process made up of many different steps, any of which can induce frustration, delight, or something in between. Breaking down this process into substeps can help us identify what takes place when, why, between whom, and opportunities to improve the experience.

Let's start at the beginning: Our coffee drinker wants coffee. What happens next? (This is our journey mapping refrain. After every step, we'll ask "What happens next?")

Step 1 Want Coffee

The journey begins because our coffee drinker has a desire—they want coffee.

Step 2 Consider options and decide where to go

In many cases, coffee drinkers have more than one coffee shop to choose from. Our coffee drinker considers the options, and picks a shop they've gone to a few times before.

Step 3 Get to coffee shop

Transportation and parking is an important step in the journey of getting coffee, even though it happens outside the coffee shop. Driving in traffic or struggling to find parking can ruin an otherwise delightful coffee run, just like a rude barista, too-loud music, or poor selection of baked goods.

Step 4 Enter coffee shop

Get inside the shop—seems simple. But what if the entry is hard to find? Or not accessible?

Step 5 Wait in line

Any coffee drinker is hoping for a short or non-existent line. A long line, particularly one that's poorly organized or has a poor view of the menu, can be a real pain point.

Step 6 Look at menu

Ideally, the menu will be easy to read, and, of course, contain items the coffee drinker is interested in.

Step 7 Select item and interact with staff

This is often a definitive moment in the journey (and one of the reasons smart businesses invest so much in customer service training). Interactions with other people can quickly turn a good journey bad or a bad journey good.

Step 8 Pay

Is the credit card machine broken? Do they not take cash? Or does everything go smoothly?

Step 9 Wait for order

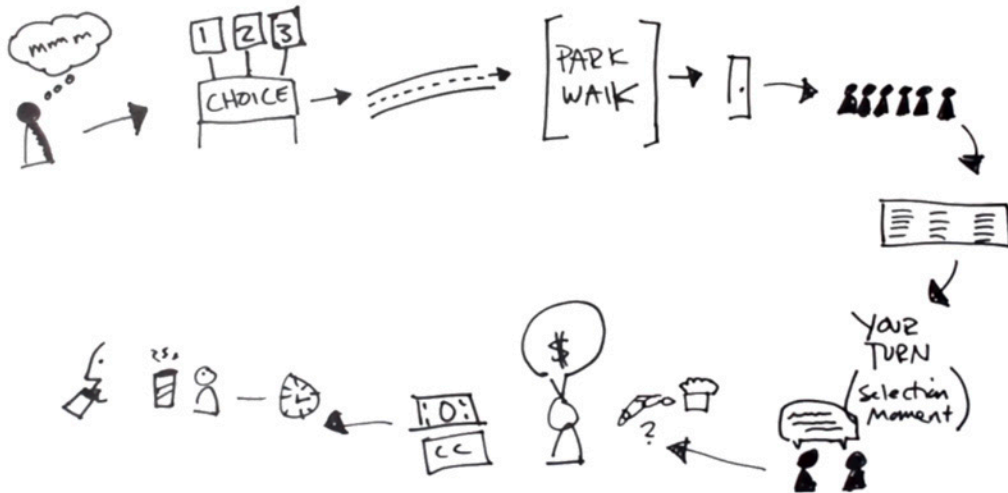
Another opportunity for things to go all right, or all wrong. If the wait is too long, the previous successes—easy parking, good prices, charming barista—can be undone.

Step 10 Receive and drink coffee

The moment of truth. How does it taste? Is it a consumable temperature? Is the cup too hot or leaking? (Is it, god forbid, not what you ordered?) Was the journey worth it? turn a good journey bad or a bad journey good.

**So, what happens next?
Or is this the end of the journey?**

We made a very quick, low-tech, messy journey map showing this experience. (Yes, your journey map can be all those things, and still do its job.)



What does this show us? Even the journey of getting coffee is an extensive series of interactions with people, places, and things. Together, these cohere into a lived experience complete with highs, lows, successes, and occasional failures—and that experience is only as strong as its weakest link.

Those weak links are where designers will ultimately want to place their attention.

Prompt:

Got five minutes? Pull out a pen and paper and make a quick journey map chronicling your most recent visit to a coffee shop or other eatery. Messy is good.

the value of journey maps

At Civilla, we think of journey maps as having two primary uses: **analysis** and **communication**.

When it comes to analysis, journey mapping allows you to ask detailed questions to analyze different aspects of the journey. For example:

- Where do people interact?
- Where do people feel good and bad?
- What technical systems are being used, and how do they intersect?
- What are the different environments people interact with?
- What are the tasks people must do?
- What risks are involved?
- What costs are involved?
- How long do things take?
- What are people's energy levels?
- How engaged are they?

In terms of communication (or to put it another way: building influence with an audience), journey mapping allows you to move away from the idealized process and instead focus on the actual experiences people have, which is much more compelling. Doing so lets you clearly and simply illustrate pain points, make a strong argument for change, and present both sides of a story effectively.

A journey map that will move people should be:

User-focused

Focus on one story, and own it. The map shouldn't claim to represent a universal experience. When you talk about one person, the story becomes real.

Deliberately crafted

But it is a *story*. It's crafted and edited. It's subjective. *You*, as the designer, decide what to focus on, what details to leave out, whose story you *don't* tell. It might feel uncomfortable to make these decisions, but it's a requirement.

Embodied

It's not just what you share but how you share it. Ideally, you'll have people physically walk down the length of the map, or otherwise engage with it in an embodied way. As you do, bring it to life through narration—emphasize things, take pauses, look people in the eye. Use your words and body language to add nuance to the story. (See *additional tips for narration in the Appendix.*)

Reliably narrated

Position yourself as a neutral reporter or storyteller, not an advocate.

Head and heart

Your map should stimulate an emotional and an intellectual reaction. Aim for a balance between heart strings and that logical part of the brain that wants to know *how* and *why*.

case study: applying for benefits in michigan



Let's look at an example of a map that can be used for analysis and communication.

The map below follows one person (referred to as "the client") as they try to apply for benefits in the state of Michigan. This is a well-worn map at Civilla—it laid the groundwork for Project Re:Form, Civilla's partnership with Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to redesign the longest public benefit application in America. We still present it to visitors regularly at the studio.

(Think of the text that follows as verbal narration that might accompany a live presentation of the journey map.)

1



This journey starts when the client's grandson moves in. It quickly becomes clear that the household's current income won't support its new size. They need help. Friends and family recommend going to the Department of Health

and Human Services. So what does the client do? They locate the nearest branch, and arrange childcare for the day in preparation for their visit.

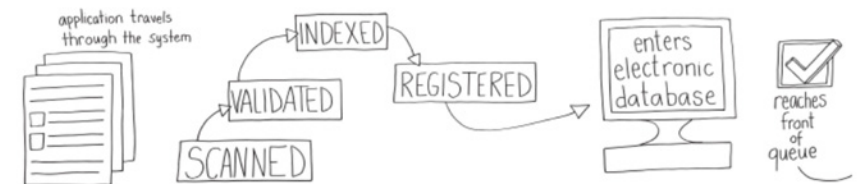
2



The day arrives, and the client heads to the branch office. A staff member tells them to grab a paper application. Quickly overwhelmed by its length and complexity and fearful of making a mistake, the client decides to get help. After finding someone in the lobby to assist, the

client turns in the application, feeling they did the best job they could. Unfortunately, this is the longest public benefit application in America, and filling it out perfectly on the first go is far from the norm. The client returns home.

3



Meanwhile, the application begins to make its way through the system. It gets scanned and validated, indexed and registered, so it can join

the electronic database and be assigned to a caseworker. Eventually it reaches the front of the queue.

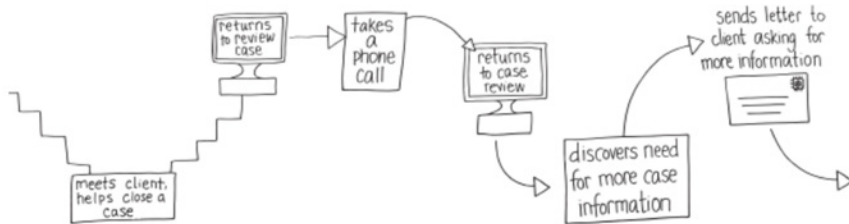
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An administrator checks the case information and assigns the application to a caseworker. Eventually that caseworker selects the case from a long list of cases in MI Bridges—Michigan's case management system—and begins

a review. Just as they're getting in the zone, the phone rings. By the time they finish their call, their computer has timed out. They sign back in and promptly receive an email saying a client is waiting for them downstairs.

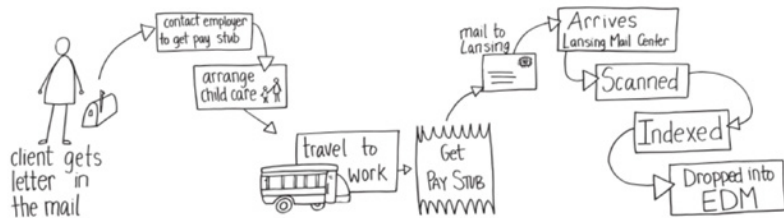
5



The caseworker heads downstairs to close out the separate case. A little while later, they return to their computer for the case review. The phone rings again. They take the call. After-

wards, they finally shift their focus back to the case review, only to discover the application is missing information. They send a letter to the client telling them they left out a pay stub.

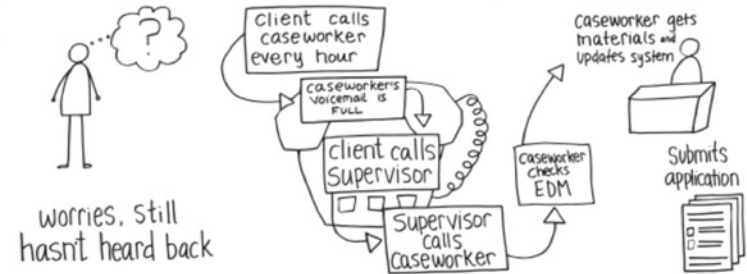
6



A few days later, the client receives the letter in the mail and immediately sets to work to fix the problem, contacting their employer to request a pay stub. They must travel to their workplace to pick it up, so they arrange for a

neighbor to watch their grandson while they're out. They pick up the pay stub, find an envelope and a stamp, and mail it to the office in Lansing, where it's scanned, indexed, and dropped into their electronic system.

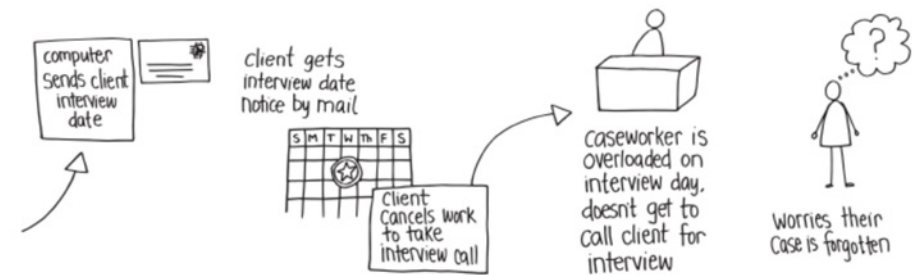
7



The client is starting to get worried. It's been a few days since they put that important document into the mail, but not a peep from their caseworker. They don't know if they're anywhere closer to getting assistance. Friends and family had mentioned that the only way to get through at MDHHS is to call every hour on the hour. So that's what they do. But their casework-

er doesn't answer, and their voicemail is full. They decide to call the caseworker's supervisor. After hanging up with the anxious client, the supervisor calls the caseworker. "I'm getting hounded by this client," they say. "Can you please handle it?" This moves the caseworker to action. They hop on their computer, get the materials updated, and submit the application.

8



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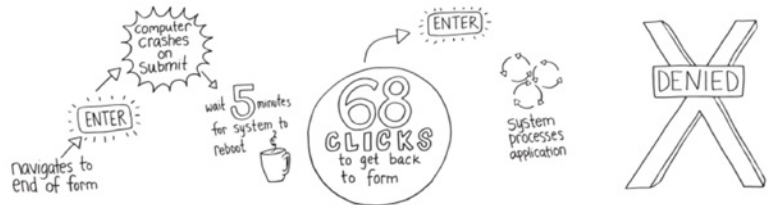
9



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the electronic database and be assigned to a caseworker. Eventually it reaches the front of the queue.

10



When the interview is over, the caseworker navigates to the end of the form and clicks Enter. Not for the first time, the computer crashes while working to submit the application. The

caseworker waits five minutes for the system to reboot. It takes them 68 clicks to get back to the Submit page. Finally, the system processes the application and... it's denied.

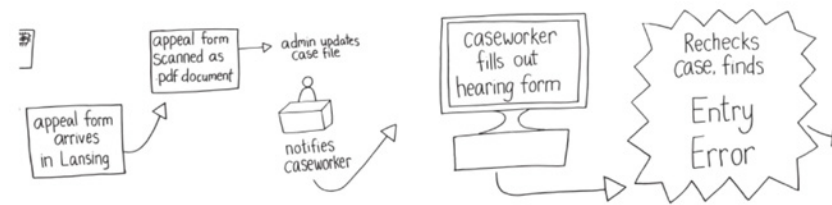
11



The mail center prepares and sends another letter to the client, explaining the denial. When the client receives the letter, they think "This must be a mistake." They're relieved to read that they can appeal, but there are no instructions for how to do so. So they start to gather what

they imagine to be the necessary documents, and call the department once again to ask for guidance. Once they reach someone who can instruct them on what to mail and where, they find another envelope, another stamp, and send off their information.

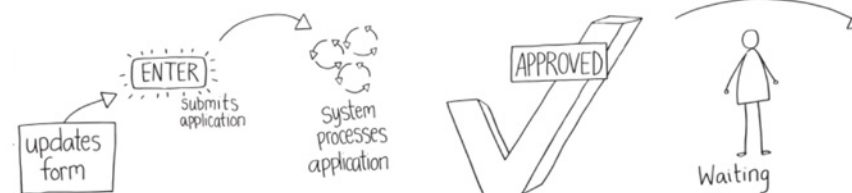
12



Eventually, the client's documentation arrives in Lansing and is scanned into the system as a PDF. The administration clerk updates the case file and notifies the caseworker about the

new information. The caseworker fills out the Appeals Hearing form, rechecks the case and—whoops—finds a data entry error in the original case submission.

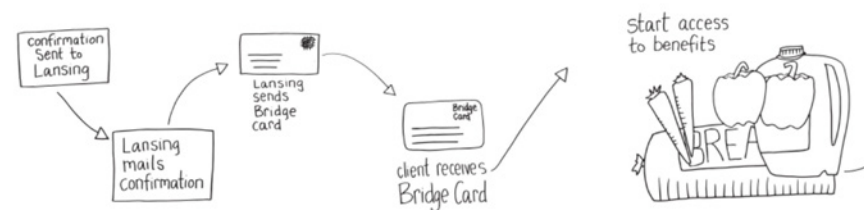
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They fix the error, click Enter to submit the application, and voila, the application is approved! But, meanwhile, the client is waiting at home,

unaware of the update to their case status for days.

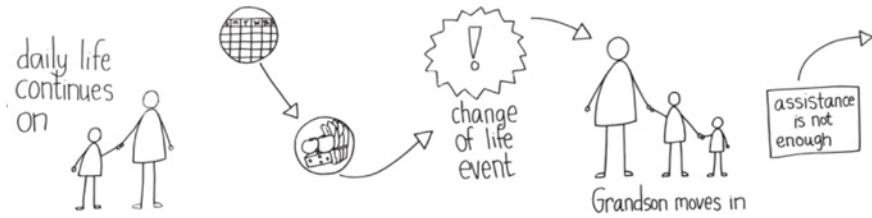
14



Eventually, Lansing sends the client a confirmation notice. With that notice is a Bridge Card,

which the client can use to buy groceries. Finally, the client is able to start using their benefits.

15



Daily life goes on, and the memory of their application ordeal recedes into the background. The client is busy thinking about their family, which is undergoing even more changes.

Another grandson moves in. Now, the client has to support three people with their benefits, and they're dismayed to realize that the current amount won't cover it.

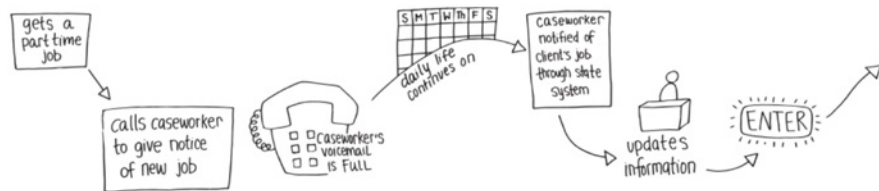
18



A couple days later, the client gets the denial notice in the mail. Unsure what to do, they go on with life, doing their best to make ends meet. Some time later, they lose their job—they know

they have no choice but to start the process all over again. The client heads back to the DHHS office, picks up a new application, and starts again...

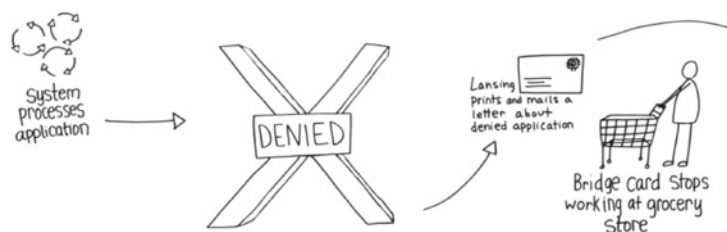
16



Luckily, the client knows of a local business that's hiring, so they get a part-time job to help with the bills. Following protocol, they call their caseworker to let them know about their new employment status. But guess what? The caseworker's voicemail is still full. The client hangs

up, and goes on with their day. Eventually, a state system notifies the caseworker about the client's new job. They enter the information into the system, re-process the application and...

17



... with the client's new income, they no longer qualify for benefits. Their updated application is denied. As Lansing is processing a new denial notice, the client is doing their weekly grocery

shopping. At the checkout with a full cart, the cashier tells them their Bridge Card won't scan. They put the groceries back on the shelf, embarrassed, anxious, and confused.

Questions to chew on:

How does this differ from the way stories about institutional or business processes are typically told?

What value does this format have as a tool for analysis?

What about as a tool for communication and influence?

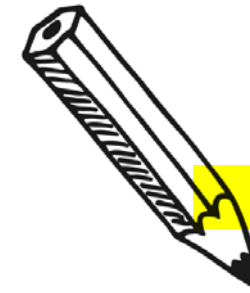
3 making a map

map making: who's involved?

So you're bought in and ready to map. Who should you call for help? At Civilla, we have three roles involved in making journey maps.

1. Story Crafters (Researchers)

These folks are the ones who've conducted interviews, observations, and synthesis — they deeply understand the story at hand and play a crucial role in unraveling and comprehending the narrative behind the journey.



2. Designer, Artist, or Illustrator

This person helps create the visual character of the journey map, including the layout and icons. They may have design skills themselves, or may use an existing library of icons or visual elements to bring the map to life.

3. Feedbackers

These individuals contribute valuable input during the journey map creation process. They can be part of the project leadership team, design team, or even the individuals whose story is being depicted (such as caseworkers and residents for Civilla's maps). Feedbackers' insights help ensure the map's accuracy and completeness. At Civilla, we might show a map to a caseworker and ask "Does this feel right? What are we missing?" Their feedback helps us fine tune, address any gaps, and ensure alignment with the actual experiences of the individuals involved.



how to do it: journey mapping a journey map

So you may be wondering how to actually make one of these things. What better way to show you than... a journey map? Things are about to get meta.

The map below follows a Civilla team journey mapping the experience of navigating the child welfare system in Michigan. We'll start at the beginning.



1.

Set purpose

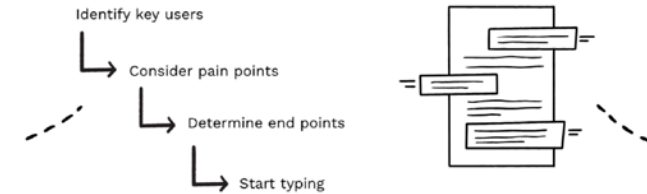


Design review is a month away!

Design team: what are the goals?

2.

Craft the Story



Researcher begins to craft a story

Gets feedback

The Child Welfare team's design review is four weeks away. They decide a journey map will be a really powerful way to tell the story they've uncovered through their research. First they have to answer a few questions: *Why a journey map? What impact are we hoping to have? What angle do we want to pursue?* (For example, do we tell a story that emphasizes the termination of parental rights? One that dives into technological failures? A story of a sovereign tribe interacting with a state agency?)

The team decides to tell the story of a mother whose child has been removed from her care, and the child welfare staff she interacts with in her effort to regain parental rights.

To craft the story, they need to:



a. Identify key users



b. Consider pain points



c. Determine story end points



d. Start typing

2.

Craft the Story



a. Identify key users

The team discusses whose story is most important or strategic to share, asking:

Is this a typical case that helps demonstrate a widespread phenomenon?

Is this an edge case that helps demonstrate the intensity of what outliers experience?

Do we use a story that comes from a specific person we met? (This allows you to ground the journey map in near-journalistic reporting.) Or do we create an amalgamation of several stories we heard? (This allows you to focus on the specific details most relevant to your work.)

The team decides to use details from a few people they met during research.

2.

Craft the Story



b. Consider pain points

They think about all the pain points encountered during research that they want to lift up, and decide to focus on the most significant, burdensome, or emotional experiences. These include events that happen outside the child welfare agency's sphere of influence or control.

(Remember how the coffee journey started with selecting a coffee shop, driving, parking, and getting through the front door? All of those steps illuminate how many external factors can set the stage for a user's experience.)

They also decide to focus on the pain points relating directly to the research insights and potential solutions they're working on.

2.

Craft the Story



c. Determine end points of the story

The team knows that a user's journey often starts before they engage with an institution. They want their journey map to demonstrate this reality to leaders, so they decide to start the journey when the mother gets sick—an event outside the control and purview of the institution, but central to the user journey.

The map will end with adoptive parents pulling out of the adoption process and the child moving into a new foster household. This is not a "happy" ending, but a realistic one, showing how difficult it really is for children to get out of the system.

2.

Craft the Story



d. Start typing

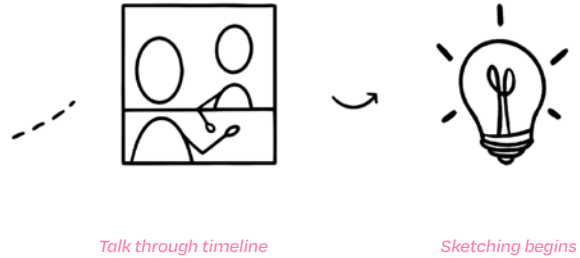
One researcher opens a blank document, and starts outlining the steps in bullet points. Eventually, they'll get down to 2-5 words per step in the process.

—————>
DESIGN TIP

As with any design process, you want to get feedback early and often. So don't be afraid to start now, by asking others to review your outline. This could include individuals who are familiar with the system ("Did I use the right acronym? Is this sequence of steps accurate?") or people with less familiarity ("What emotions did you feel? When were you most engaged? When did your eyes glaze over?").

3.

Start Sketching



The researchers meet with the journey map designer (this can be anyone responsible for the map's layout) to help them really understand the story.

The designer starts sketching with pencil and paper. (You can also pull in illustrations from an existing icon library, like the [Noun Project](#) or the [Civillians Vector Library](#), developed under the creative leadership of Scott Everett.)

DESIGN TIP

Remember, symbolic systems only work if their symbols' meanings can be understood on sight, without further explanation—so don't get too abstract with your illustrations.

The researchers and designer ideate and collaborate, using the story outline as a guide. They ask:

- What about this?
- How about this illustration?
- Do we break it into chapters?
- Do we include details about time?

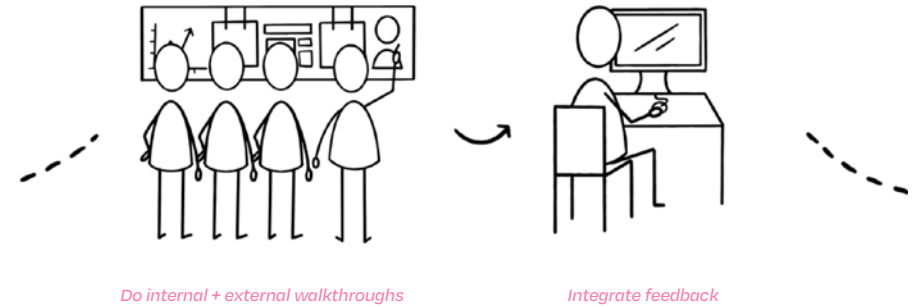
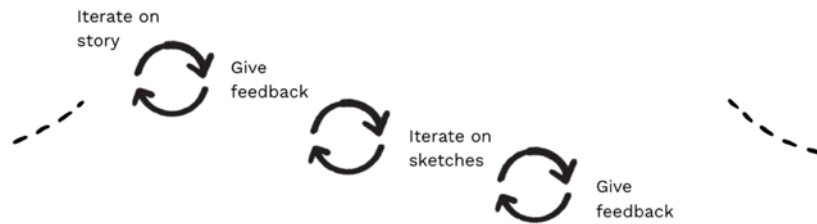
Eventually, the team decides to include details on time when it helps communicate frustrations around the length of the process (e.g., "it typically takes 30 days to receive a reply").

DESIGN TIP

Audiences often want to know how long each part of a journey takes. But you don't have to note the duration of every step. Include only the references to time that are particularly relevant to the experience of the journey.

4.

Iterate & Engage Others



As the team makes changes, they make sure to engage people with different perspectives, walking them through the in-process journey map and getting more feedback.

The team iterates on the story and gets feedback, and iterates on the sketches and gets feedback.

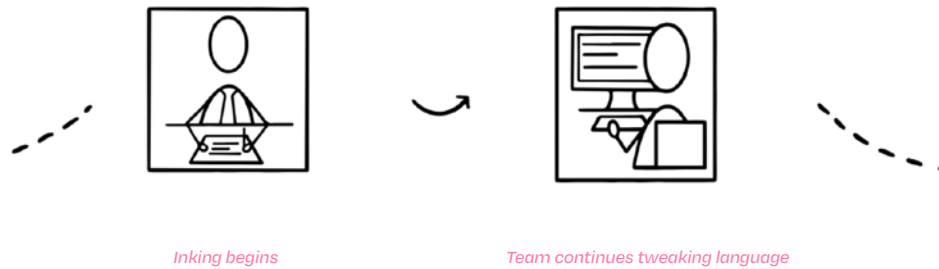
DESIGN TIP

Reference your characters consistently across the whole journey map. For example, if you introduce a character as “Mom,” don’t refer to her later as the “mother,” “Susan,” or “the mom.” Amidst a lot of information, consistent character names can help decrease cognitive load for an audience. This applies to your verbal narration of the map as well.

DESIGN TIP

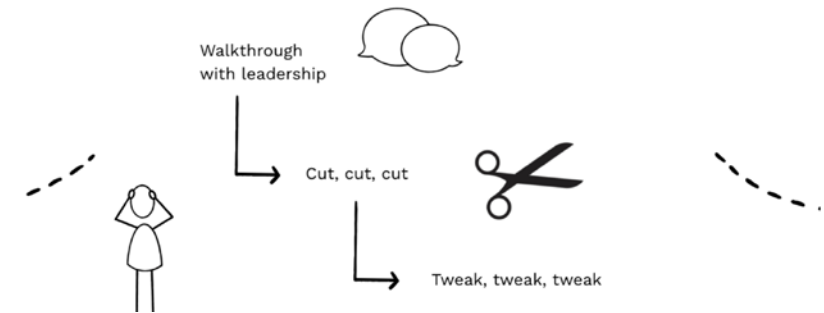
When it comes to visuals, icons should be as simple as possible while still getting the message across. The same goes for words—use as few as possible. Words and images that command too much attention can distract from your narrative.

5. Lay It Out



The team integrates feedback and starts formalizing the layout digitally, still tweaking the language as they go.

6. Walkthroughs



The team invites lots of folks to walk through their map—other internal members of Civilla's child welfare team, Civilla teammates on other teams, and even a few people from the child welfare agency. Each walkthrough offers the team another opportunity to refine their narration, with the goal of achieving a deliberate tone of voice, pace, and wording to accentuate the story's peaks and valleys. After each walkthrough, they listen to their audience's critiques, and cut and tweak the map. In particular, they remove details that distract or confuse, rather than add value.

DESIGN TIP

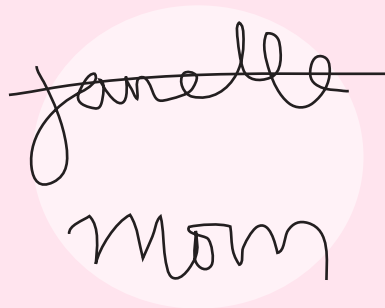
Use any medium that works for you—that might be a digital document or slide deck, a long roll of paper, or a series of 8.5x11" pages.

6.

Walkthroughs

For example: While the team had initially included names on their map, they eventually decide to just use “mom” and “investigator.” They also remove some granular story details. As one team member put it: “The original story is the synthesis of hundreds of hours of interviews. And it’s a real story, which makes it really hard to get away from the details.

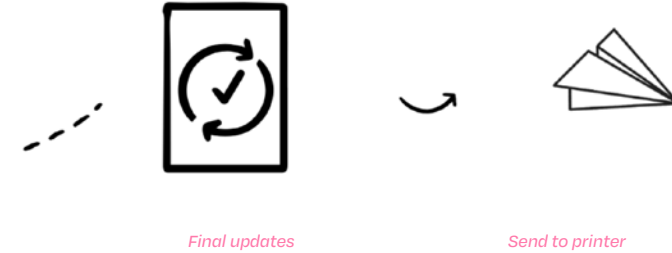
But you have to ask ‘Why is that detail actually important to the story we’re trying to tell?’ And sometimes the answer is: it’s not.”



Janelle
mom

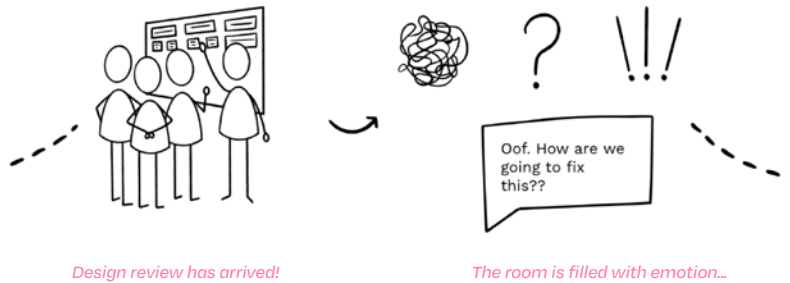
7.

Finalize



With walkthroughs and tweaks complete, the map is too. The designer formats the file for production and sends it to the professional printer, accounting for at least one week of lead time. (If you’re not using a professional printer, this step might consist of laying out your drawings on clean sheets of paper.)

8. Impact



It's finally time for Civilla's child welfare team to present the map to their partners at the child welfare agency, frontline staff, and participants in the child welfare system. They invite them to the studio, and a team member physically walks them down the length of the map, narrating the story as they go. (*Find tips for narrating journey maps in the Appendix.*)

When presenting to staff and community members, the team hears validating responses, like, "Yep, this is exactly how it feels."

For leadership who are seeing the workings and consequences of their services in a harsh new light, this is an emotional experience. One leader says, "How are we gonna fix this? There are so many problems." Another says, "I've been here for 30 years and I've never seen it this way!"



Having expected such responses, the team is prepared to shift the room into action mode by emphasizing the possibilities. While they don't want to suggest that they already have all the solutions, they also don't want the audience to leave feeling hopeless.

First, the team highlights the areas they believe are most pressing, and suggests a project scope that addresses these areas—in this case, addressing the licensing and intake processes. They also outline some concrete next steps, including starting interviews with relevant families and staff.

The leadership team leaves with a new appreciation for the lived experience of their services, a renewed trust in Civilla's research process, and a clear sense of how to start addressing key challenges.

DESIGN TIP

The process outlined above is just one (very labor-intensive) way to make a journey map. Your journey map can be a long series of post-it notes stuck to a wall, or a row of drawings on an 8.5 x 11" piece of paper—especially if you're just using the map primarily for analysis, rather than for communication.

4 lessons

journey map takeaways

Like any journey, the process of making a journey map is really just a series of decisions: Where should I start? What should I include? How specific should I get? What format should I use? There are a million answers to each of these, and none of them are the single “right” one. That said, let’s look at a few standard do’s and don’ts to keep in mind as you build your map.

be sure to:

1.

Craft a story with purpose.

Reflect on why you’re making a journey map—is it for analysis? Communication and influence? Both? In light of your answer, consider what you heard and saw in your research. What is the most important story to map right now?

3.

Get into the weeds, when appropriate.

While too many nitty-gritty details can be distracting, specificity is what makes a story compelling. That means it’s good to get into the weeds sometimes. The important thing is to be intentional.

2.

Get feedback early and often.

Bring others into the process, even at the rough draft stage. As with any design process, early feedback can help you catch potential issues and challenges before they become deeply ingrained.

4.

Let the visuals do the talking.

Many of us inherently assume words are the easiest way to get information across. But for journey maps, visuals are your friend. They can convey a lot, fast. In fact, research has shown that we process visuals 60,000 times faster than text!

be sure to:

5.

Leave folks in limbo.

The classic story structure has a tidy ending that leaves everyone satisfied. But real life doesn't wrap up like that. In the journey you're mapping, the ending might find your user right back at the beginning. Or they might be left in the dark, filled with questions. Be honest about these findings, no matter how unsatisfying they may be.

6.

Remember: the medium is not always the message.

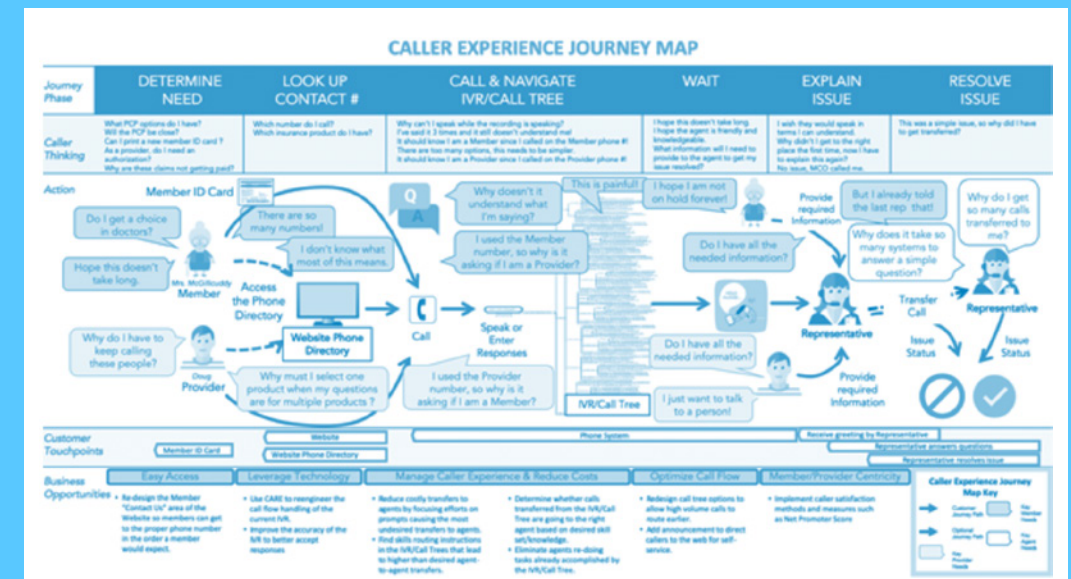
Journey maps don't have to be fancy to be effective. When creating a journey map, consider its purpose, intended audience, time constraints, and available resources. A simple, low-tech journey map can always serve as a functional prototype, paving the way for a more elaborate version in the future.

beware of:

1.

Information overload.

Your initial instinct may be to include every detail and granular step, to be true to the real story. But by doing so, you run the risk of overwhelming any sense of story with information—your map will fail to be a guide. If you find your map getting so dense with detail that you can't hold onto the larger narrative, eliminate the details that don't add insight into the experience.

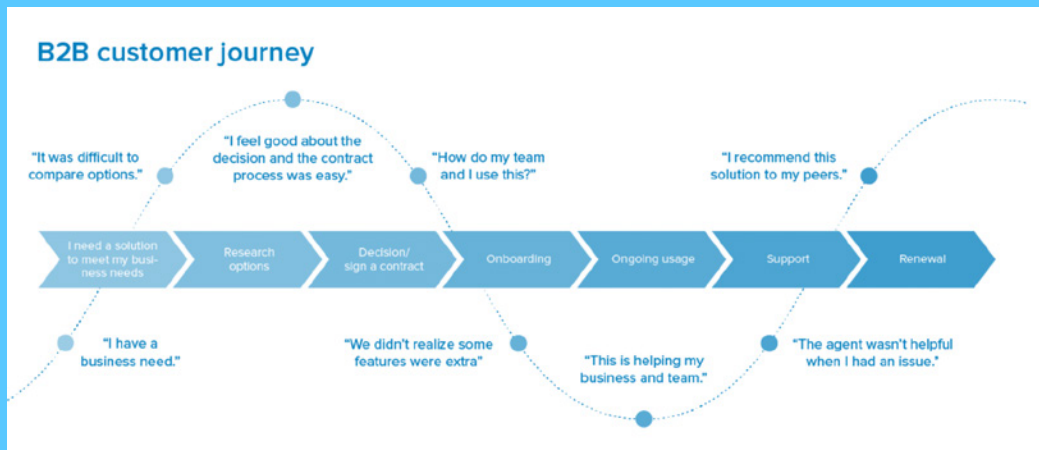


beware of:

2.

Shallow analysis.

Journey maps are tools for deep analysis. They should feel like robust research outputs, not a logical outline of what happens when you move from step one, to step two, three, and so on. If your map only skims the surface, keeping you at a shallow level of understanding, it's not doing its job.



3.

The disappearing user.

Your map might cover all the steps of a process in great detail, but if it isn't focused on a user, it will fail to be a story. It will also fail to teach you or your audience anything about the lived experience of the process you mapped in such great detail.

Product	Pricing	Lead / Opportunity	Configure Price, Quote	Order	Fulfill	Licensing/ Entitlement	Billing/ Invoicing	Rev Mgmt. & Reporting	Support Services
New Product Innovation	Organization & Governance	Opportunity Management	Select	Subscription Creation	Service Provisioning	Customer Definition	Consolidated Billing/Invoicing	Rev Rec. & VSOE	Software Updates
Product Development	Analytics & Price Setting	Forecast / Pipeline Mgmt.	Configure	Subscription Configuration	Access Issuance	Rights Management	Credit Management	Report Revenue	Project Mgmt./Acct
Product Go-to-Market	Pricing Strategy	SW Try and Buy	Price	Order Management	Cloud / Service Brokering	Access to Support & Updates	Consumption Metering	Forecast Revenue	Training
Ongoing Product Mgmt.	Pricing Execution	Lead Generation	Structure	Credit Management	License Key Generation	Entitlement Reporting	Manage Receivables		Labor Tracking
Product Retirement	Technology & Data	Lead/Territory Management	Approve	Order Cancellation	Electronic SW Delivery	Compliance Monitoring	Collections & Disputes		Deliver support
		Partner Management	Generate Output	Renewals/ Terminations	Registration & Activation	SW Tagging / Deployment Tracking			
		Customer Engagement	Convert	Order Integration	Cloud Service Management				
					3rd Party Fulfillment				

Processes in boxes are significant customer touchpoints

So, there you have it. Journey maps are so much more than just chronological outlines or visual aids—they're powerful tools for creating empathy and understanding. By inviting you into someone's day, week, or month—complete with all the highlights, lowlights, and liminal states—journey maps turn second-hand experiences into stories you can hold onto, relate to, interrogate, and share. Whether you're using them to uncover hidden insights or simply to communicate with your team, once you start mapping, you probably won't quit.

And while journey maps are a team favorite at Civilla, there will be times when other types of maps—organizational charts, business process maps—will be of great use in making sense of the big, messy systems you're working in, particularly if you want to map out the institutional blueprint (the way things are "supposed" to go). So don't count them out! The same goes for non-symbolic outputs, like written case studies or short films, which can be incredible mediums for sharing the story of a completed project.

Finally, remember: there's no right way to do it. At Civilla, we've been evolving our journey mapping process since day one. While we've learned so much along the way, we plan to keep evolving. We hope you do too.



narrating a journey map

If you plan to share your journey map with an audience, how you present matters almost as much as what you present. The narration tips below will invite your audience to experience the story, instead of just passively consuming it.

These tips assume the journey map is presented on the floor, rolled out on a long scroll of paper. But you can use the same general advice whether you've laid out sheets of paper on a long table, put post-its on a wall, or worked up some other layout.

Set the stage.

Give your audience some context about the journey map before you start. How was it produced? What does it consist of? How should they receive it? Explain that there will be time at the end of the narration to discuss the content.

Introduce the characters.

If your map has a number of characters, consider introducing the vital main ones, sharing a bit about their identities, aspirations, and intentions. This can help the audience anticipate the full range of relevant people so they don't struggle to hold on to a wide array of characters.

Direct eye contact.

Gesture to the place on the journey map you want the audience to look at, then return to eye contact. Isolate their focus on the section you're speaking to by blocking the rest of the map with your body.

Call out smaller story arcs.

Note when you move between larger structural sections of the story (e.g., Preparing the Application, The Waiting Game, etc.), as well as smaller narrative arcs that rise and fall within each section (e.g., the several steps it takes to complete a digital task, the many interactions required to complete an administrative requirement, etc.).

Connecting the dots.

While moving between journey map steps, be mindful of how you use words like "then" and "next." Most of the time, you can simply state what happens next, without

relying on a bridge word. These can get distracting or tedious if you hear them too many times.

Be bold.

Lean into clean, strong language. Instead of “slightly anxious,” go all in and say “anxious.” This helps the audience understand how they’re supposed to interpret what they’re seeing and hearing.

Show, don’t tell.

It can be off-putting if your tone stays exactly the same when moving between high points and low points in a story. When discussing things like grief, anger, or confusion, don’t be afraid to change your pitch, volume, or body language to demonstrate the feeling.

Lean into contrast.

Add drama to the narration by switching things up. Go fast to get slow. Be loud to get quiet. Get frenetic to get calm. Stories should be a rollercoaster ride of rises and falls. Otherwise, you might lose your audience.

Flag upcoming sequences. Calling out certain sections before they happen can help your audience internalize them better. For example:

- Before a sequence, you might say: “Several things happen here.” This helps the audience make a connection between an upcoming series of steps.
- Say things like, “What really happens here is...” or “Behind the scenes...”—these statements position

you as an insider giving your audience privileged or little-known information.

- Underscore the value of your research and design, stating, “This is an area where our research can really be helpful,” or, if appropriate, “This is an area our design work is focused on improving.”
- Zoom out occasionally, and preface what’s about to happen. Say, for example, “We’re now in a bad place for everybody involved,” before introducing a predicament involving all the characters.

Check-in.

When you’re about two-thirds of the way through the journey map, consider checking in with the audience. Make sure they’re still traveling with you. You can also acknowledge that you’re “almost there” and thank them for hanging in on what can be a long and bumpy ride.

Clarify.

If you need to reference acronyms or jargon, introduce the full term and its meaning along with the acronym. For example, “the Initial Service Plan—also referred to as the ISP—is a strategy developed to help parents recover their parental rights.” Now you can refer to “ISP” for the remainder of the narration.

Reference time.

When referencing durations connected to certain activities or events, it can be hard for an audience to do the math on the full duration of time elapsed since your map

began. If the map reads, “two months later;” you can clarify with language like, “It’s now been four months since we started this journey!” As stated earlier, reference time only when it’s relevant to the story you’re telling.

Ask questions.

Occasionally, you may want to ask an obvious question out loud, and then answer it right away. This is a gentle reminder to the audience that their mind should be asking similar questions, and they’ll feel relief when you immediately share the answer.

Get quiet.

Pause at key moments of emphasis to let a message or feeling sink in.

Prompt reflection:

At the end of the journey map, there will likely be a moment of silence. Audience members have just taken in a lot of information and may be experiencing a rush of thoughts and emotions. Be deliberate in how you shape this moment. You can ask a general question such as, “Would anyone like to share what they’re thinking?” Or you might offer a more structured prompt, such as, “What did you understand to be the biggest pain points for each user?” or “What areas of the journey are most familiar or most unknown to you?” This helps the audience start to make sense of the experience together, and helps you segue into your recommendations.

