

What is a user task flow?

A User Task Flow, sometimes known as an Interaction Flow or Workflow Analysis, is a diagram showing the various steps a user follows in order to complete a particular task. It establishes the starting point and ending point for that task and can also show alternative paths based on explicit decision points.

How does it help the team?

- Task flows interject the user into the project at an early stage, giving the team the opportunity to determine if their conceptual model agrees with the user's conceptual model, i.e., does the way a user steps through a task match up with the proposed system.
- Since they give the team an opportunity to focus on the sequence of the proposed functionality from a user's point of view, they help to uncover any gaps in requirements and find ways a task flow can be optimized — both from a usability and a programmatic point of view. All of this before any code is even written.
- Because a flow diagram details the overall view any given task, it's perfect for showing how and where a development task ties in to the overall feature. It's no longer one story in isolation, but rather a relationship of that one story with entry and exit points that define the sequential flow.
- They identify the sequence of activities that need to be programmed into a repeatable activity.

How does it help a project?

- **Improved usability:** Because task flows are done prior to development, usability becomes a seamless part of a finished product that behaves in accordance with the users' expectations. Said usability can translate into reduced calls to the support desk, a quicker adoption rate, and having future releases truly be about enhancements and not fixes.
- **Saves on development costs:** Making changes after a product is released is much more costly than identifying issues up front and solving the problem before coding begins.
- **Helps with data modeling:** Creating task flows diagramming end-to-end tasks throughout the system generates a picture of how the software will be used and how the user will interact with the data.
- **Aids in writing test plans:** Flows show the end-to-end sequence of a task, along with any decision points and subtasks. This information is invaluable in helping QA get a jump start on writing their test scripts by showing them the ideal sequence, alternative flow(s) and error handling before they've even seen a screen.
- **Explains the application:** Because these diagrams are created in a visual format, at a glance they can give the project team and client stakeholders a basic understanding of both the overall application and the available features. This is especially beneficial as new people are integrated into the team and need to be brought up-to-speed quickly,

