**Observation**

Observation is an incredibly powerful tool for design thinking. It is a process of taking a normal everyday objects, scenarios, situations or problems and breaking them down into its components. This helps to understand why some things are the way they are. These are some useful tips for making a good observation.

**Making an Observation**

Observing is a skill. A skill where you can only get better at by practicing as much as possible. Try to make a habit out of it, by making an observation at least once a day.

Start by asking some questions about an object or a scene?

- Why is that there?
- What is that for?
- Why is that there?
- What is happening in the scene?
- What actions are people taking?
- Who is there?
- What time of the day is it?

It is important to capture the context as part of the observation. Take note of the details and write them down. Include a sketch in order to make your observation more detailed and descriptive. This will help you to understand how things work and to see where they could improve.

**Example: A Pencil Sharpener**

![A Pencil Sharpener Sketch](image)

**Notes**

This may be just a rough sketch of a pencil sharpener sitting on a desk but there is a quite a lot of information that can be observed from this.

- The “small overhanging lip” seems to be for someone to get a grip on the “clear plastic shield” to lift up over, using the “small hinge”, in order to put a pencil in.
- The “blue clear plastic container” allows the user to catch the pencil shavings coming off the pencil. It also allows you to see inside the container to know when to empty it.
- The “button for removing lid” is in place so the lid is not constantly slipping from the plastic container below.
- Notice the ‘actual sharpener’ on the inside of the container that actually completes the task you are using the object for.

*Source: Paul McKone, Observation as a Tool of Design Thinking*