note cards

your pocket-sized tool + reference for 8 core design abilities

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note

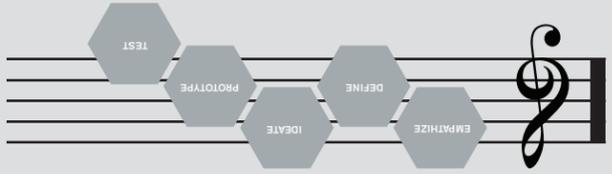### design abilities:

(open to find out)

What happens when you *learn the notes* behind the song?

You might have heard this popular "song" before as you've been exposed to design thinking:
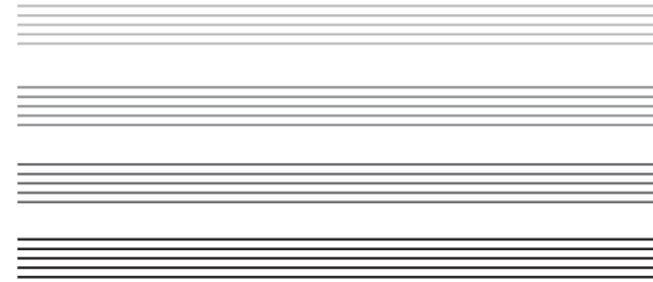
EMPATHIZE · DEFINE · IDEATE · PROTOTYPE · TEST

What else can you think of?

Here are a few ideas for ways to use your note cards:

- pair them with the "Sound Check" poster inside to reflect on yourself, your team, or your work
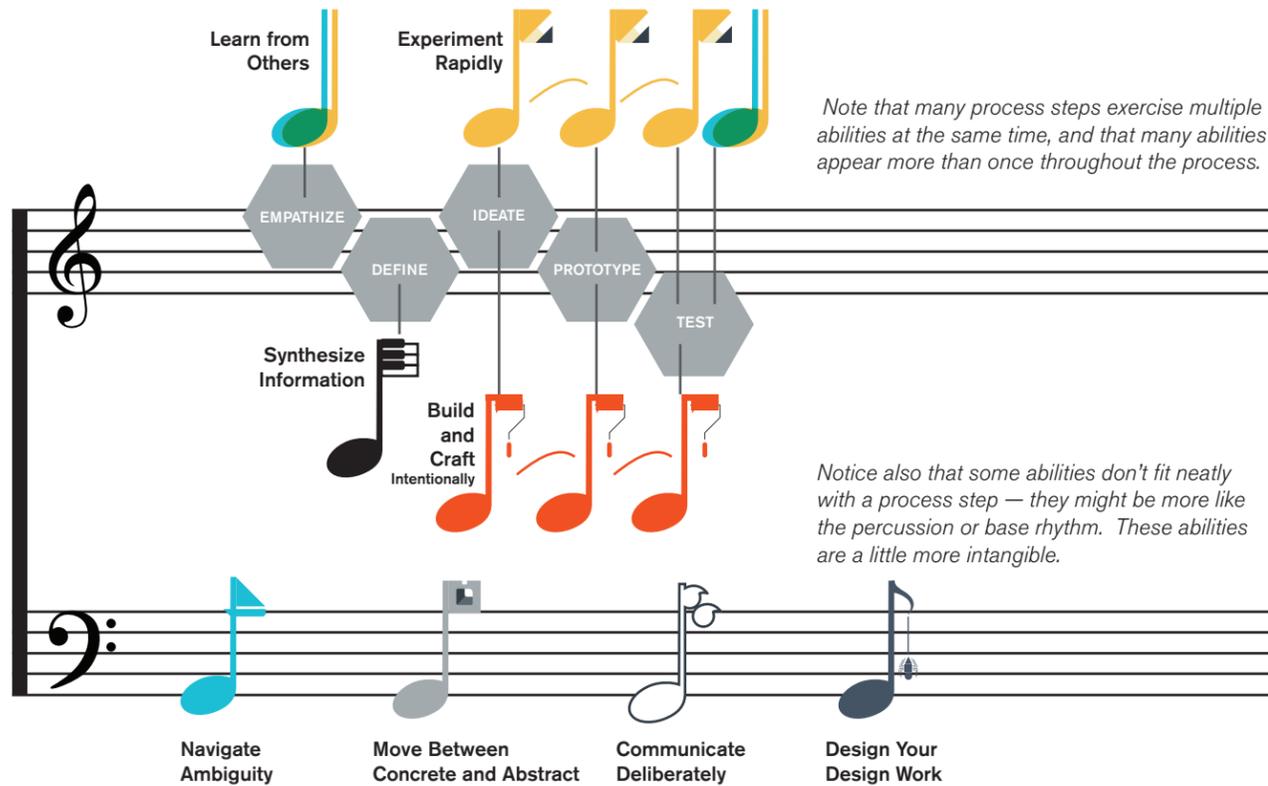- place them on your Range > Reach > Riff map to see how you're growing
- incorporate them into your team launch to get to know team members
- use them to spark your thinking around new "arrangements" when you begin project work

(keep your note cards safe in here)

The hexagons represent one example of what a design process might look like, but it is not the only way. If we look more closely at the actual abilities (the "music notes") that form this song, you see that woven into this song are *8 Core Design Abilities*:

Learn from Others

Experiment Rapidly

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Note that many process steps exercise multiple abilities at the same time, and that many abilities appear more than once throughout the process.

Synthesize Information

Build and Craft Intentionally

Notice also that some abilities don't fit neatly with a process step — they might be more like the percussion or base rhythm. These abilities are a little more intangible.

Navigate Ambiguity

Move Between Concrete and Abstract

Communicate Deliberately

Design Your Design Work

So what do you gain by learning the "notes," beyond learning how to play existing "songs"?

1. The power of 'Do Re Mi.'
From a common set of foundational abilities come an unlimited number of possibilities for ways to design and reach solutions.

Even though there are a fixed number of notes on the musical spectrum, there are an infinite number of songs, sounds, and other musical compositions that have been created throughout history.

2. The sensibility of a jazz musician.
Learning the foundational elements allows you to improvise your way through your work, adapting to what is needed in the moment.

Beginning musicians start by learning to play other people's music. Eventually, after years of practice, masters gain the ability to improvise – they have an intuition for what a piece needs, and expertly experiment their way forward.

3. The richness of layering.
Abilities can be used in parallel to give depth and nuance to your design work, both individually, and especially as a team.

As musicians mature, they learn how to make more interesting, beautiful, and layered sounds by collaborating with others. Other musicians bring different instruments, and even ways of making a different sound for the same note.
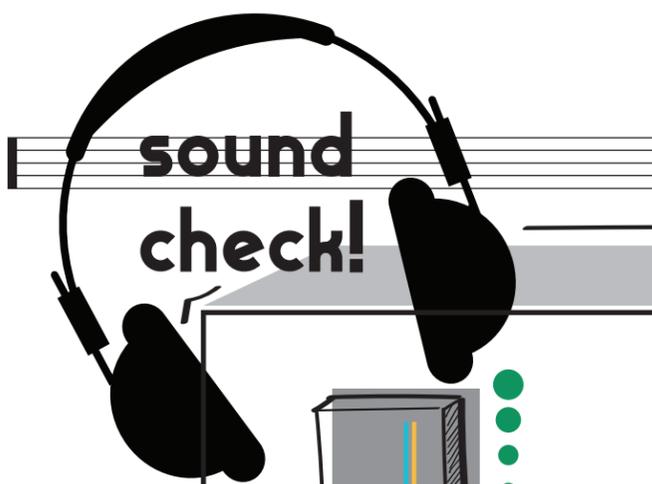
sound check!

Do a quick "sound check" to get a sense for where you are with your work and to identify where you might "balance" a mix of abilities to amplify your impact on the challenge you're tackling.

	learn from others *(people and contexts)*	synthesize information	experiment rapidly	build and craft intentionally	move between concrete and abstract	communicate deliberately	navigate ambiguity	design your design work
Time to Shift	Soaking in learnings without wondering "what does this mean?" Is your curiosity dwindling?	Focusing on getting to the "truth?" Afraid of inferring the wrong thing? Seeing patterns but no a-ha's?	Lots of ideas, but not enough early testing and learning? Have you fallen in love with your idea?	Building for someone else besides your user or audience. (Hint: you?)	Bouncing between solutions and implications to refine the "model," without testing anything with users.	It's been awhile since you've communciated your idea to a colleague, novice or user.	Going in circles without willingness to commit to pursue a small set of meaningful directions.	The project plan is perfect but you haven't begun the actual work.
Jam Zone *looks like...*	Photos, notes and active listening	Quiet reflection, clustering of data points, insights, ideas	Generating lots of early options, having scrappy conversations with fresh ideas	Making, building in multiple dimensions and in varying levels of resolution	Mapping and translating between the big picture and the details	Storyboarding and visualizing communication flows	Considering a mix of potential outcomes in parallel	A map of your project showing question(s), experiments, people involved, tools being used
sounds like...	I noticed...	I wonder if this means...	What if...?	How to...?	I see a connection...	Who cares....	Let's explore in parallel...	What the work needs now...
Jump In!	List out the people, places and experiences that could help you learn about your challenge AND help you think about your challenge in new ways.	Spread out your learnings – make them visual and start clustering and finding patterns.	Create lots of ideas and options, using varied materials and formats.	Take your experimental idea to a more resolved level, considering your medium and audience.	List out your specific solutions, informing insights and bigger themes.	Reflect with team and share out with stakeholders (users, managers, project champions, dissenters, etc.)	Name the opposing tensions and potential outcomes for your work	List out the (1) challenge / question your work is tackling, (2) people you might want to get help from, (3) ways you might work together

design abilities ‹ • • • • • • • • • • • **TANGIBLE** *INTANGIBLE* • • • • • • • • • • • ›