Define: Creating a Design Question

The first step in any design challenge is to frame the problem or opportunity that you want to address. At this stage, the goal is not to decide what you will make or design (e.g. "an air conditioner"), but rather to clearly articulate the problem you want to solve, and the impact you want to have (e.g. "make a room feel cooler"). That is, the function of your design.

In order to avoid jumping to conclusions about what you will design it can be helpful to state the challenge as a question that begins with, "How might we…?"

Your design question should also include context, or the "operating parameters" of the design. Contexts include, but are not limited to: climatic conditions (wet, dry, hot, cold, etc.), resource availability (energy, materials, information, etc.), temporal conditions (cyclic processes, growth, etc.), and interactions or relationships. Without context a design challenge is often too broad to be meaningfully addressed with one design.

On the other hand, be careful not to define the context too narrowly. Applying too many constraints before beginning the design process can limit the number and variety of potential solutions. **A good design question is neither too broad nor too narrow.**

	Too Broad	Too Narrow	Just Right
EXAMPLE	How might we end hunger?	How might we design an app to help food pantries get more donations?	How might we connect institutional food surpluses to those in need?
REASON	*Hunger is a huge multi-faceted problem and this statement doesn't target a specific area of intervention.*	*This statement assumes too many details about the solution (an app) and doesn't leave enough room for discovery and innovation.*	*This statement provides enough specificity while remaining open to a variety of possible solutions.*
EXAMPLE	How might we make cycling safer?	How might we make better safety lights for cyclists?	How might we make urban cyclists more visible to drivers at night?
REASON	*What aspects of cycling? This statement doesn't target a specific area of intervention.*	*How do we know lights are the best solution? This statement doesn't leave room for creative problem solving*	*This statement provides enough specificity (urban, night time) while remaining open to a variety of possible solutions.*