

Design Sprint

A **Design Sprint** is a structured, time-bound process that empowers students to solve real problems collaboratively, creatively and quickly. Originally developed by **Google Ventures** (Knapp et al., 2016), and rooted in **IDEO's Human-Centred Design** and the **Design Council's Double Diamond**, this approach promotes empathy, ideation, rapid prototyping and testing.

Competency Development

- **Creativity:** Generate new ideas to respond to challenges
- **Working with Others:** Collaborate and co-create with diverse perspectives
- **Planning and Management:** Prioritise, organise and take initiative
- **Taking the Initiative:** Actively engage in the problem-solving process
- **Learning Through Experience:** Reflect and adapt based on feedback
- **Coping with Uncertainty:** Navigate complex problems and unknown outcomes

SDGs

- SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing
- SDG 4 – Quality Education
- SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

This guide adapts the Design Sprint process for higher education, focusing on inclusive, action-based learning that develops graduate attributes such as creativity, problem solving, and risk-taking.



1 Understand and Emphasise

The sprint begins by helping students step into the shoes of the user. They explore the brief, surface key issues, and use tools such as **Empathy Mapping**, the **5 Whys**, and **Affinity Clustering** to identify root causes. This aligns with the **'Discover'** phase of the Double Diamond and the first stage of design thinking. Initial work is done silently to ensure all voices are heard before sharing ideas. Students learn to analyse problems deeply before jumping to solutions, grounding their thinking in real-world user needs.

Tip: Create fictional personas or user profiles to spark discussion.



2 Define and Frame

In this stage, students convert insights into **"How Might We"** (HMW) questions. These open-ended prompts focus creative thinking on real problems. Students generate several HMWs and use dot voting to prioritise the most compelling. This phase transitions from exploration to action, narrowing the problem space without losing creativity. It draws on the **'Define'** phase of the Double Diamond and is central to the Google Sprint model. A well-crafted HMW guides the rest of the sprint and ensures teams work with focus and purpose.

Tip: Encourage students to combine, reword, or reframe HMWs after group discussion.



3 Ideate and Create

This is the creative heart of the sprint. Using the **Crazy 8s** method, students sketch eight ideas in eight minutes to encourage rapid thinking. Teams then share, group, and merge ideas, voting on those with the strongest potential. This process encourages **divergent-convergent** thinking, key to innovation. Students learn that quantity leads to quality and that even wild ideas can spark great solutions. This stage builds confidence in creative problem solving and supports risk-taking in a low-pressure environment.

Tip: Remind students there are no bad ideas — ideas evolve through collaboration.



4 Prototype and Refine

Students build a quick, low-fidelity version of their solution. This could be a **model, storyboard, diagram, or short role-play**. The goal is not polish but clarity, enough to gather feedback. Based on **IDEO's "Build to Think"** philosophy and Google's Sprint model, this phase develops adaptability and experimentation. Students learn that prototyping is a form of thinking, not just presenting. The process helps develop an agile mindset and prepares students to accept feedback and iterate.

Tip: Use a timer to emphasise speed over perfection, rough is often enough.



5 Test and Pitch

Students share their prototype with a peer group, a panel, or the wider class, aiming to gather feedback rather than approval. This mimics **user testing** in design practice. Reflection follows, students note what worked, what didn't, and what they would change. They can also create a **LinkedIn post or reflection log** to evidence learning and showcase their ideas. This stage supports communication, confidence and reflective thinking while linking to enterprise and employability outcomes.

Tip: Use structured peer feedback forms to guide discussion and keep it constructive.