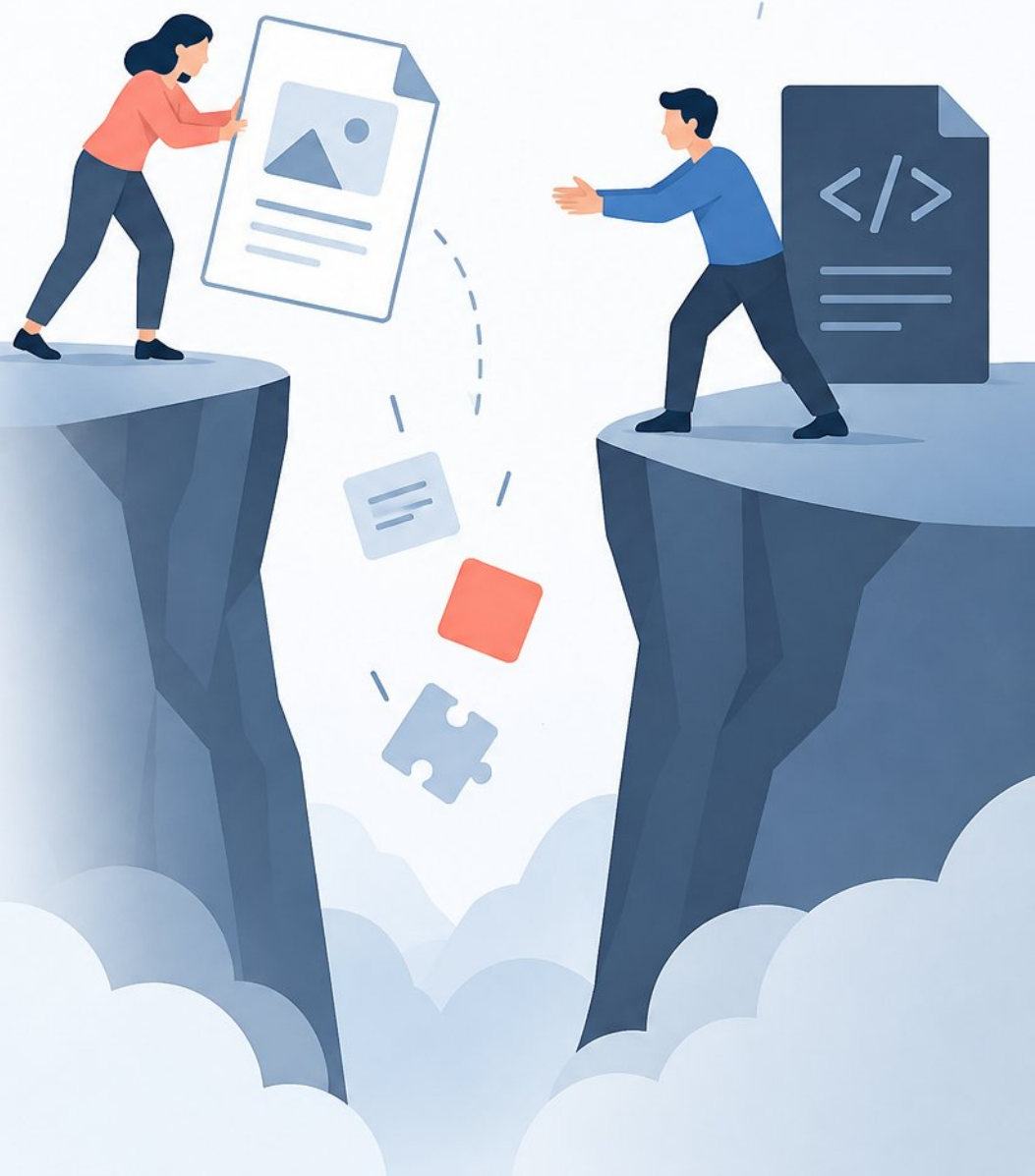
UX Design Roles, Responsibilities, and Handoffs

- Clear ownership means fewer dropped tasks, faster handoffs, less rework.
- Three audiences, three questions: junior UX designers, PMs, developers.
- Roadmap: role landscape, lifecycle ownership, handoff artifacts, rituals, failure diagnosis, practice.
- Running scenario: a mid-size team shipping a new account-settings flow.



Why Unclear Roles Cost Teams Time

- Fuzzy ownership shows up late: gaps, change requests, vague specs, QA design debt
- Two gaps behind broken handoffs: missing intent (context) and missing build info (artifacts)
- "Handoff mentality": design throws work over the wall, engineering guesses
- Shared goals beat sequential transfers between roles
- Core vocabulary: discovery, definition, delivery, measurement; accountable vs. consulted



The UX Role Landscape

- Adjacent specialties: researcher, interaction, UI, content, design systems, accessibility, service design
- Research owns evidence; design owns interaction decisions; visuall polish never overrides usability
- 2026 signal: product designer is the default hire
- UI and UX specialists increasingly join at scale stage
- Small teams wear many hats; solo full-stack designer carries risk





PEOPLE IDEAS BETTER EXPERIENCES

Hybrid and Emerging Roles in 2026

- Design engineer: prototypes in real components, flags feasibility early
- New titles — designer engineer, builder, AI imagineer, design crafter
- AI drafts fast; taste, accessibility, and accountability stay with you
- Critique AI output like a junior's work — never ship it unchecked



Responsibilities Across the Product Lifecycle

Discover	Define	Design	Deliver	Learn
Lead function **Researcher**	Lead function **Product Manager**	Lead function **Designer**	Lead function **Developer**	Lead function **Everyone**
Output **Evidence synthesis**	Output **Scope**	Output **Interaction specs**	Output **Feasibility review**	Output **Insights**

- Five stages: Discover, Define, Design, Deliver, Learn — each with a lead function and outputs
- Researcher synthesizes evidence; PM decides scope; dev reviews feasibility
- Designer owns interaction specs; designer + QA run accessibility review
- Backlog owner decides what and when; designer decides how it works and looks
- Anti-patterns: pixel-factory designers, PM-written UI specs, late dev interaction calls



Who Does What: Role Cards and RACI

- **Role cards:** one-line ownership and one-line non-ownership per role
- **R:** completes the work; multiple R's are allowed
- **A:** final sign-off — exactly one accountable person per row
- C is expensive two-way input; I means informed, not consulted
- Review RACI at planning; disagreement over a cell is the real signal

Role	Plan	Design	Build	Review	Launch
Junior Designer	I	R	I	C	I
PM	A	C	C	R	R
Developer	I	C	R	C	I
Design Lead	C	A	C	C	I
Researcher	C	R	I	C	I

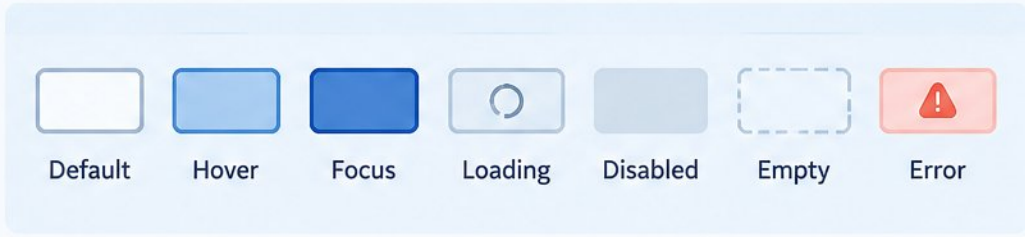
R: completes the work · A: final sign-off · C: expensive two-way input · I: informed, not consulted



What a Good Handoff Actually Contains

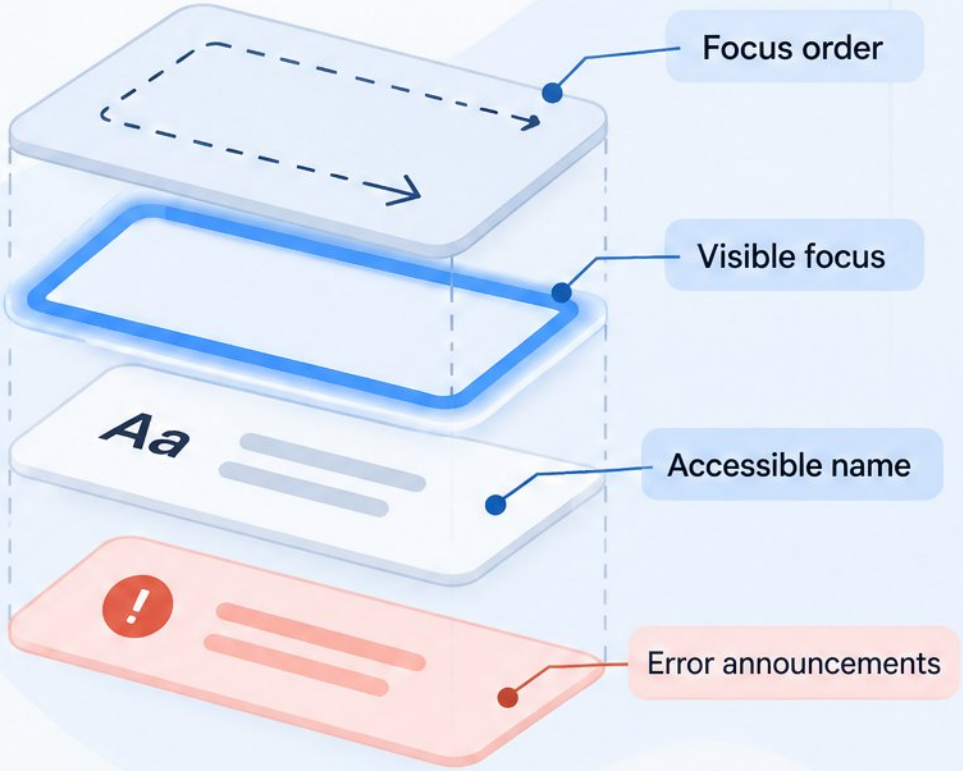
- Numbered user flow, one frame per screen or state
- Every interactive state: default, hover, focus, loading, disabled, empty, error
- Edge cases with real content — long text, zero data, failed images
- Tokens and component names that match the codebase
- Acceptance criteria co-owned by PM, design, and engineering





Accessibility Belongs in the Handoff

- Target WCAG 2.2 AA; automated tools catch roughly a third of failures
- Keyboard and screen reader checks are part of the spec, not a final audit
- Annotate focus order, visible focus, accessible names, and error announcements
- Design-time gaps to catch early: contrast, small touch targets, hover-only affordances
- Split ownership: PM sets target, design documents behavior, dev builds semantics, QA verifies





PM sets target → Design documents behavior → Dev builds semantics → QA verifies



From Design to Development:
A Repeatable Handoff Process

Design sign-off → Spec walkthrough → bounded dev-questions window → build review → QA pass



Sequence:
design sign-off → spec walkthrough → bounded dev-questions window → build review → QA pass

Dev Mode ready:
published components, tokens bound to variables, auto layout, legible layer names, marked Ready for dev

Async for copy tweaks and token-checked specs;
sync walkthroughs for new flows and complex states

Mid-build changes:
Figma comments for small edits; updated handoff plus 15-minute walkthrough for new states — note why

CLEAR DESIGNS. STRONGER TOGETHER.

Rituals That Keep Roles Aligned

- Weekly design critique, design–dev pairing, PM–design sync, design-led QA
- Critique: presenter names the problem and feedback type; work is evaluated, not the author
- Speaker decides what to act on; critique format stays flexible and is reviewed
- Definition of ready and done include design items: accessibility check, design sign-off
- Document working agreements and onboard new members into the rituals



When Handoffs Go Wrong

PEOPLE / PROCESS / BETTER OUTCOMES

Symptoms

- invented states
- token drift
- one-off components
- breakpoint misses

Root causes

Root causes are process gaps: skipped reviews, undocumented decisions, late engineering involvement

Better outcomes

Stronger handoffs

- **Diagnose by symptom:** invented states, token drift, one-off components, breakpoint misses
- **Root causes are process gaps:** skipped reviews, undocumented decisions, late engineering involvement
- **Recovery:** triage and decision log now, then a blameless retro on the handoff
- **Case discussion:** a broken empty state shipped — trace who owned what



Building a Handoff the Team Will Still Use



- Top-down checklists fail: a standard built without engineers in the room goes unused
- Two checkpoints, not more docs: pre-build review of naming, props, feasibility
- Post-build design QA closes the loop and catches what engineering QA misses
- Turf problems are usually a communication vacuum filled with ungenerous assumptions
- Start small: trial on one team, then measure the questions each handoff generated

Practice: Run a Handoff

- Mixed designer/PM/dev teams run the account-settings scenario in 45–60 minutes
- Each team builds a one-page packet: numbered flow, empty and error states, annotations, accessibility notes, acceptance criteria, open questions
- Peer review against a handoff quality checklist: completeness, clarity, accessibility, edge cases
- Debrief: where role ambiguity surfaced, which questions blocked build, who should have answered earlier



Takeaways and First Steps

- One accountable owner per decision; handoffs carry intent, not just artifacts
- Rituals beat documents — adopt one cadence this week
- Action plan: adopt one ritual, improve one artifact, book one PM or dev conversation
- Score your team on eight post-build handoff questions
- Grab templates: Figma handoff checklist, lightweight RACI, role cards
- Recheck in 30 days: what actually changed?



Discover → Define → Design → Deliver → Learn

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