

User Research Examples: Patterns, Strengths, and Pitfalls



Read cases analytically, not anecdotally:
judge the evidence, don't just retell the story



Three lenses per example:
recurring patterns, genuine strengths,
common failure points



Why now:
69% of researchers use AI; more non-
researchers run studies (Maze 2026)



Audience:
researchers and designers diagnose design;
PMs and students extract decisions;
teachers reuse cases



Structure:
case anatomy, method examples, pattern
extraction, pitfall taxonomy, hands-on critique



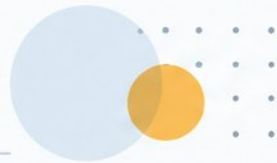
How to Read a Research Example: Anatomy of a Case

FROM METHOD TO MEANING



-  Every case follows one structure: context, question, method, sample, execution, findings, decisions
-  Separate evidence (what was observed) from interpretation (what it might mean) and recommendation
-  Three questions: Was the question answerable? Did the method fit? Did the sample support the claim?
-  Watch the language: findings often read as observations while actually being conclusions
-  Key terms: sample size, saturation, leading question, task success

Patterns Across Methods: Generative Interview Examples



A generative interview in practice



Interviewer

Behavioral warm-up

"Can you tell me about the last time you faced this situation?"



Participant

I was trying to get it done before a deadline, and it didn't go as planned. I ended up reaching out to a colleague for help ...



Interviewer

Critical incident probing

"What happened next? What made that moment especially challenging?"



Interviewer

Leading question (avoid)

"Wouldn't you say this feature is really useful?"

Key Takeaways



Patterns

- Strong interviews move from behavior to motivation, not opinion to preference



Strengths

- Strengths: open-ended warm-up, critical incident probing, no solution talk early



Pitfalls

- Pitfalls: leading questions, convenience sampling, one vivid quote as a finding



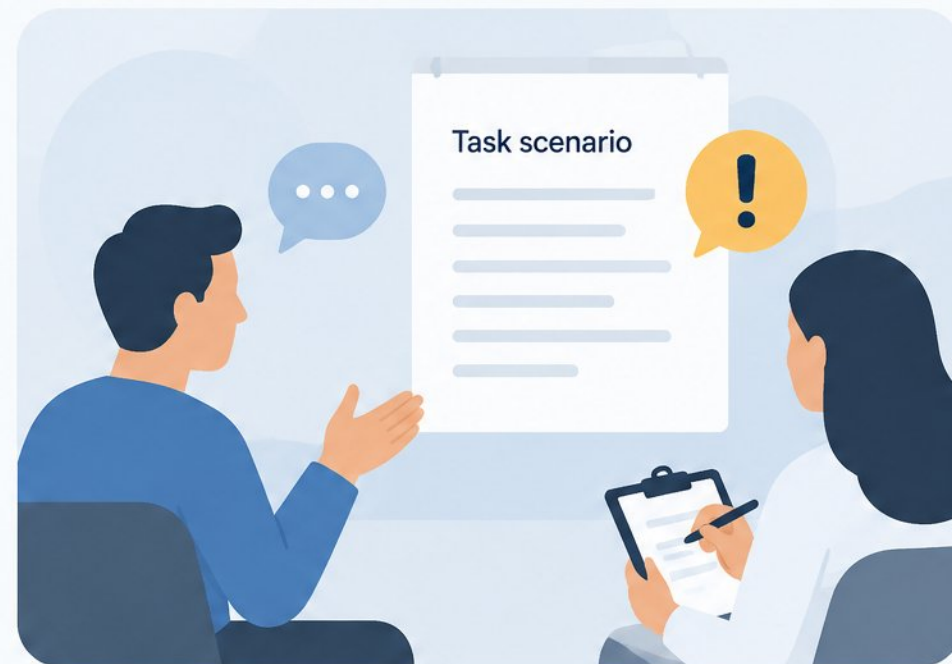
Interviews stay the most used method — and the most over-used (Hearsay, MockFlow 2026)



PM lesson: write the research question before the discussion guide

Patterns Across Methods: Usability Test Examples

- **Pattern:** one clear goal per scenario; measure behavior, not satisfaction alone
- **Strengths:** realistic scenarios, think-aloud facilitation, severity-coded issues
- **Pitfalls:** generalizing from five users, helping mid-task, testing what is easy
- **Sample size follows the goal:** 5–20 discovery, 30–300 estimation, 40–400 comparison (MeasuringU, 2025)
- **Moderated** suits diagnosis and early prototypes (5–10); unmoderated suits benchmarking (30–40)
- Connect findings to prioritized design changes, not an unstructured issue list



Sample size follows the goal



Method fit

Moderated

suits diagnosis and early prototypes (5–10)



Unmoderated

suits benchmarking (30–40)



From findings to impact



Findings



Prioritized design changes

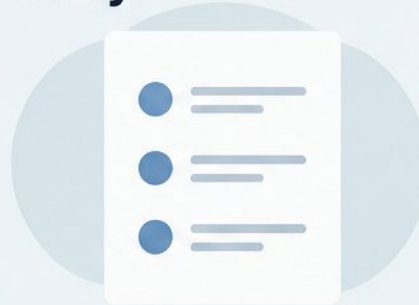
Patterns Across Methods: Diary, Survey, and Field Examples

Diary



Diary: captures in-context behavior over time; strong longitudinal insight, weak on drop-off

Survey



Survey: scales insight via careful question design; strong for prevalence, weak when scales lead

Field study



Field study: observes workarounds in real settings; strong for unmet needs, weak on observer effects



Method selection rule: match the method to the question, then triangulate to offset blind spots



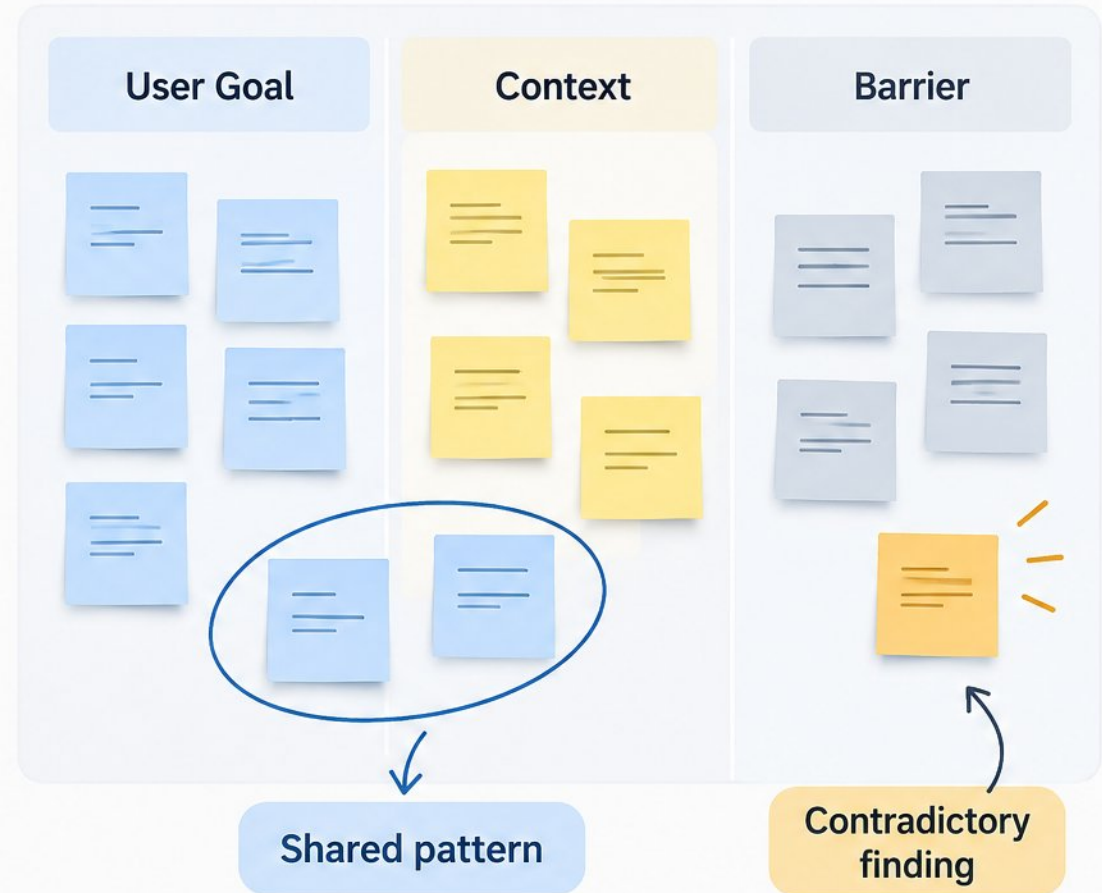
Warning from practice: the biggest predictor of study quality is still recruitment quality



RIGHT
QUESTIONS
BRIGHTER INSIGHTS

Extracting Reusable Patterns from Cases

- Cluster findings by user goal, context, and barrier — not by project or date
- Use pattern languages: jobs-to-be-done, journey friction points, mental model gaps
- Exercise: from three case summaries, name one shared and one divergent finding
- Guardrail: seek contradictory evidence before naming any pattern
- Run synthesis with pre-defined frameworks and cross-functional partners (Revue, 2026)



Strengths That Hold Up: What Makes an Example Convincing



Strong cases share three traits:
precise question, method-question fit,
transparent limitations



Traceability: findings link to evidence,
decisions link to findings, insights
link to source



Stakeholder involvement and timing
drive action, not deck polish



**A strong case preempts "we already
knew that"** by showing the evidence
that changed the decision



Reusable strength checklist:
apply it to any case you read, write,
or inherit



Pitfalls Taxonomy: Where Research Examples Go Wrong



Design pitfalls

- Design pitfalls: wrong method, vague question, biased script, unsupported sample



Execution pitfalls

- Execution pitfalls: leading facilitation, inconsistent notes, uncalibrated coding
- Single note-taker means zero inter-rater reliability; missed observations stay invisible



Synthesis pitfalls

- Synthesis pitfalls: cherry-picking quotes, ignoring disconfirming evidence, treating frequency as importance
- Treating directional data as definitive, not directional (UX Planet)



Impact pitfalls

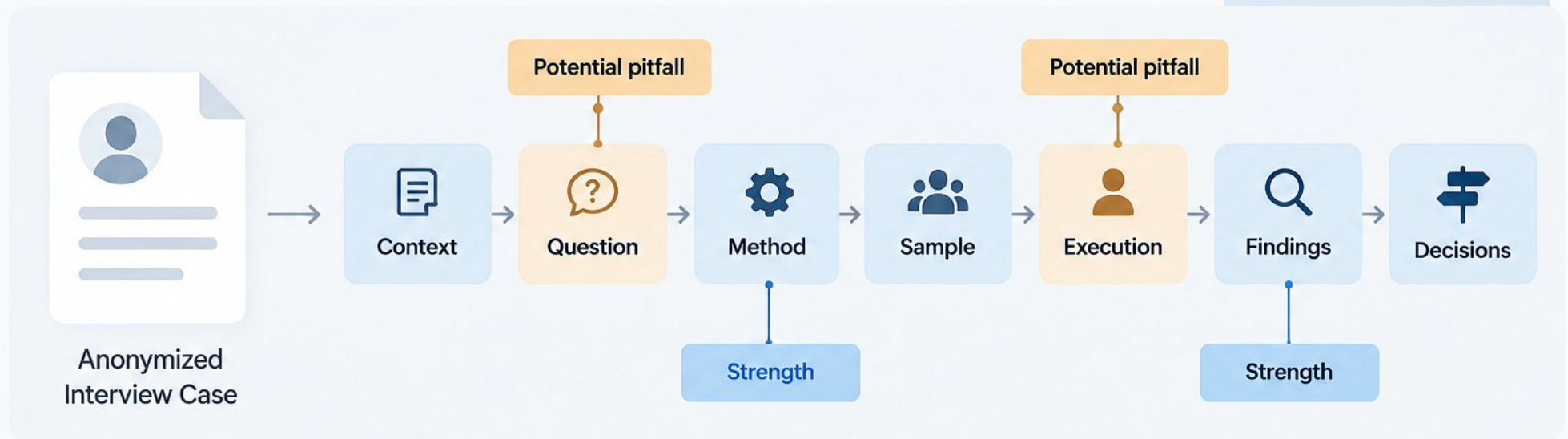
- Impact pitfalls: late delivery, findings without implications, reports with no action items



Prevention: pre-study plan plus a post-study limitations section

Case Clinic A: Diagnosing a Generative Interview Study

- Anonymized interview case read against the anatomy template
- Check sample quality and moderator skill before touching findings
- Whole-room diagnosis: which pitfalls, which strengths survive?
- Verdict: evidence for a decision, hypothesis, or only a story?
- Earliest defects usually hide in the research question, not the data

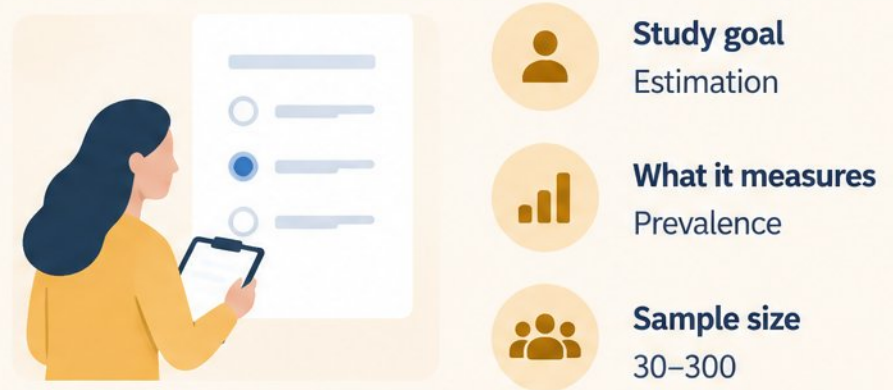


Case Clinic B: Diagnosing a Usability Test and a Survey Case

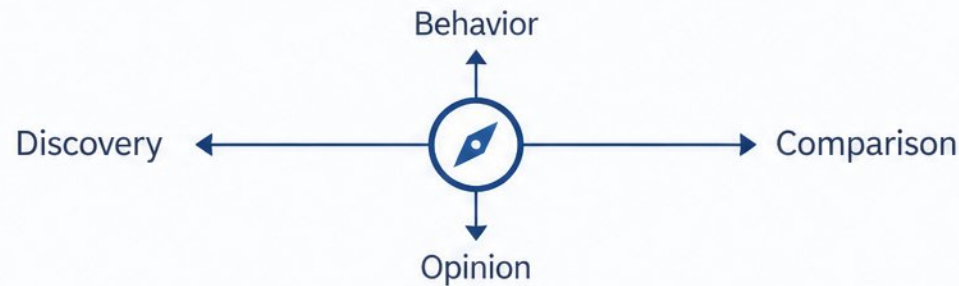
Case 1: Moderated Usability Test



Case 2: Scaled Survey



Method-Selection Compass



- Two short cases: a moderated usability test and a scaled survey, compared side by side
- Sample size follows the goal: discovery 5–20, estimation 30–300, comparison 40–400 (MeasuringU, 2025)
- Moderated tests diagnose behavior; surveys estimate prevalence — check each case matches its claim
- Which case is safe to act on now, and which needs triangulation first?
- Debrief: the same method can be a strength in one context and a pitfall in another

Practical Workshop: Critique a Case, Avoid the Pitfalls



Hands-on: critique a short case with the anatomy template, strengths checklist, and pitfalls taxonomy



Role prompts: researchers and designers focus on method and bias



PMs focus on decision traceability; students and teachers on the critique write-up



Debrief rule: name one strength and one risk, cite the evidence for each



Personal action plan: one pitfall to avoid in your next study or read

Case Critique Worksheet



Anatomy Template



Strengths Checklist

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____



Pitfalls Taxonomy

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Role-Specific Prompts

Researchers



• _____

• _____

• _____

Designers



• _____

• _____

• _____

PMs



• _____

• _____

• _____

Students and Teachers



• _____

• _____

• _____



Patterns



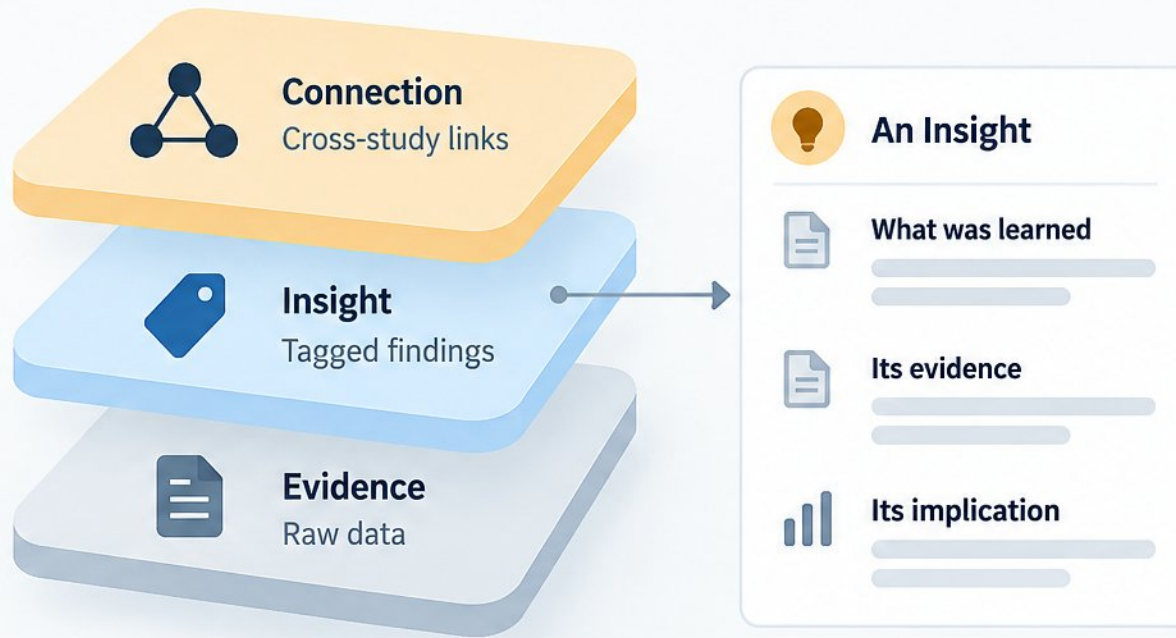
Strengths



Pitfalls

A clearer,
more rigorous
way to learn

Making Examples Travel: Repositories, Evidence Layers, and Review

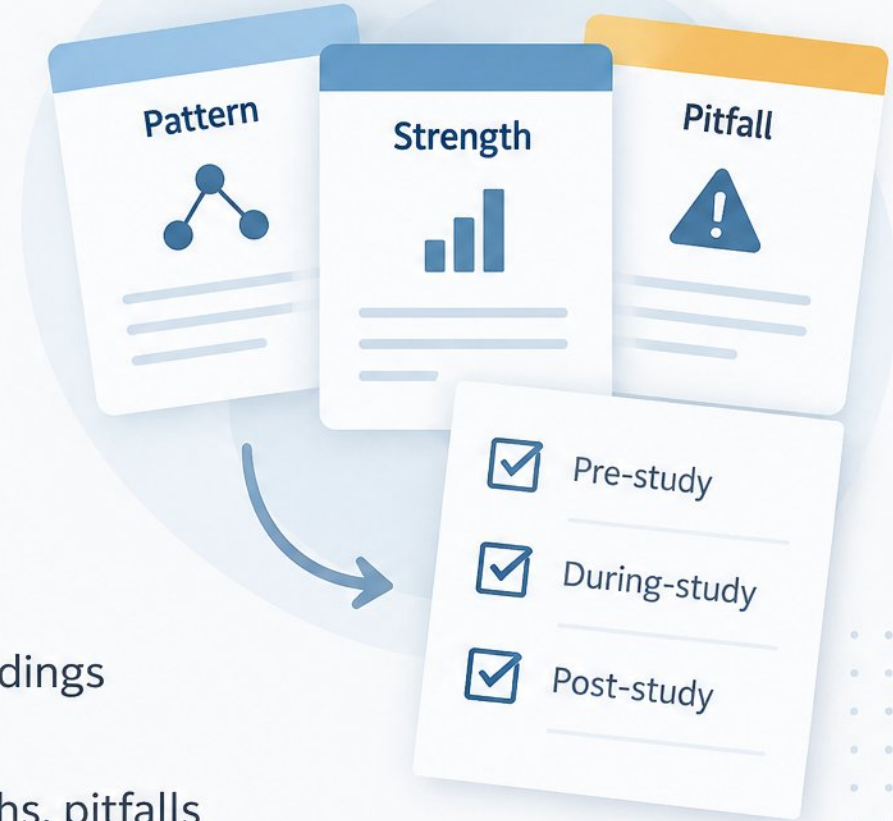


- Three-layer repository: evidence (raw data), insight (tagged findings), connection (cross-study links)
- Taxonomy discipline: three broad dimensions — product area, user segment, research type
- Governance standard: every insight names what was learned, its evidence, its implication
- Adoption: answer a live stakeholder question from the repository in their meeting
- Traceability is the difference between a finding and an opinion
- AI helps triage and search, but read transcripts before changing a roadmap



Bringing It Back: Transferring Patterns to Your Own Practice

-  Build a personal case library by pattern, strength, and pitfall
-  Use pre-, during-, and post-study checklists to catch pitfalls early
-  Go deeper: public research libraries, open datasets, case retrospectives
-  Human edge in an AI-assisted field: sharper questions, nuance, defending findings
-  Recap the three lenses: patterns, strengths, pitfalls



CASE ANATOMY

Context

Question

Method

Sample

Execution

Findings

Decisions

Assessment: Spot the Strength, Name the Pitfall

- Quiz: four short case snippets — find one strength and one pitfall in each
- Extended task: five-line critique using the anatomy template
- Rate your case from exploratory to decision-grade confidence
- Reflection: which lens is weakest in your own practice?
- Every answer needs an evidence citation and a bounded claim

Three-Lens Frame



Case 1

A new initiative shows promising early feedback from a small group of users.

Strength:

Pitfall:

Case 2

A well-established approach delivers consistent results across contexts.

Strength:

Pitfall:

Case 3

Conflicting data from two recent studies leads to an unclear conclusion.

Strength:

Pitfall:

Case 4

A stakeholder requests a quick recommendation with limited information available.

Strength:

Pitfall:

Extended Task

Five-line critique using the anatomy template.



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Confidence Rating

Rate your case from exploratory to decision-grade confidence.



Reflection: which lens is weakest in your own practice?

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