

The *Interactions* website (interactions.acm.org) hosts a stable of bloggers who share insights and observations on HCI, often challenging current practices. Each issue we'll publish selected posts from some of the leading and emerging voices in the field.

SketchBlog #1: The Rise and Rise of the Sketchnote

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If you've been to an HCI conference, workshop, or event recently, chances are you may have seen people sketchnoting—either as part of the main conference organization in the form of visual facilitation or simply as part of personal practice.

Some of you may be wondering: What is a sketchnote? When we take notes, we are saving interesting points and ideas from a talk, panel, workshop, experiment, or participant to return to later. When we take *sketchnotes*, we are adding sketched visual elements to those points and ideas, whether it is as simple as emphasizing text or adding icons and thematic references to the item being recorded (see Figure 1). Anyone can sketchnote—you don't have to be an artist or illustrator, or even be able to draw (see our feature article on teaching sketching at CHI 2018 on page 60). The important part is the ideas and thoughts you capture, and developing the style that works best for you.

Sketchnote practitioners often believe that recording information in a visual manner helps them encode data for better recall, and that the act of recording helps them concentrate on complex topics or within often lengthy knowledge-sharing or idea-generation sessions. There is also joy in sharing these sketchnotes after a conference, workshop, or event to promote or reach out to the speaker, attendees, and non-attendees—or simply to share part of your personal or professional practice. The sketchnote has a life after an event, unlike the vague scribbles that languish in the back of a little-used notebook in a desk drawer. Spending

time on your notes means you are more likely to return to them for reference, to reflect, or to use as a visual prompt to support discussion with others.

With this new series of blog articles for *Interactions*, we will share many examples of sketchnotes from CHI and other related events and conferences and also reflect on the practice of sketchnoting, sharing techniques on how to integrate it as an everyday practice. Here we begin with each coauthor describing their start with sketchnoting.

ON DISCOVERING SKETCHNOTING

Miriam Sturdee: During my M.Res. year, I was introduced to the sketchnote by a management science lecturer who was interested in alternative formats of recording and disseminating information. Eager to try out this visual form or notetaking, I read up on sketchnotes, grabbed two pens, and attempted the practice at the next research talk I attended. Results were mixed: The Sharpie I used was too fat in the nib, and the ink bled through the cheap cartridge paper I had dug up from my art box. The resulting images were chunky, and somehow in my haste I had chosen a brown color to contrast my line drawings. Nevertheless, I had two pages of passable notes and I still remember the talk by Emmanuel Tskleves. For my second attempt, I used a sketchbook with thicker pages and a lighter green color to contrast the imagery but also tried to record every element of Chris Speed's talk; the imagery was rushed, the words almost unreadable. I am happy to report, however, that I got steadily better, not least in part due to my

acquaintance with, and constant encouragement from, Makayla Lewis, my now longtime collaborator. I share my sketchnotes on my Twitter account @asmirry.

Makayla Lewis: Recently I was interviewed by the Adobe Blog on "The Power of Sketchnoting in UX Design" (<https://theblog.adobe.com/makayla-lewis-power-sketchnoting-ux-design/>), where I talked about how I use sketchnotes to brainstorm ideas, explore and understand new concepts, share user scenarios with colleagues, draw interviews to ensure a shared viewpoint with users, visualize interactions, and design futures to help users clearly and simply express and share their experiences. Since 2012, I have put pen to paper—to be specific, a UniPin 4.0 black pen and Copic marker (a pastel shade and C3 gray) to a large Moleskine sketchbook, and sometimes a Surface Pen to Microsoft Surface—when at events, conferences, interviews, workshops, and at my desk. As an HCI researcher with an interest in user experience, human factors of cyber security, and accessibility, I have created a back catalog of 500-plus sketchnotes, of which 343 can be viewed publicly (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/makaylalewis/albums/72157633090981769>). Low-fidelity sketches often help to express experiences and complex content. They allow HCI researchers to better communicate and express their ideas, and to share designs with colleagues, users, and stakeholders. Sketchnotes can enhance these sketches; the inclusion of simple connectors, containers, and separators with consideration of structure and style

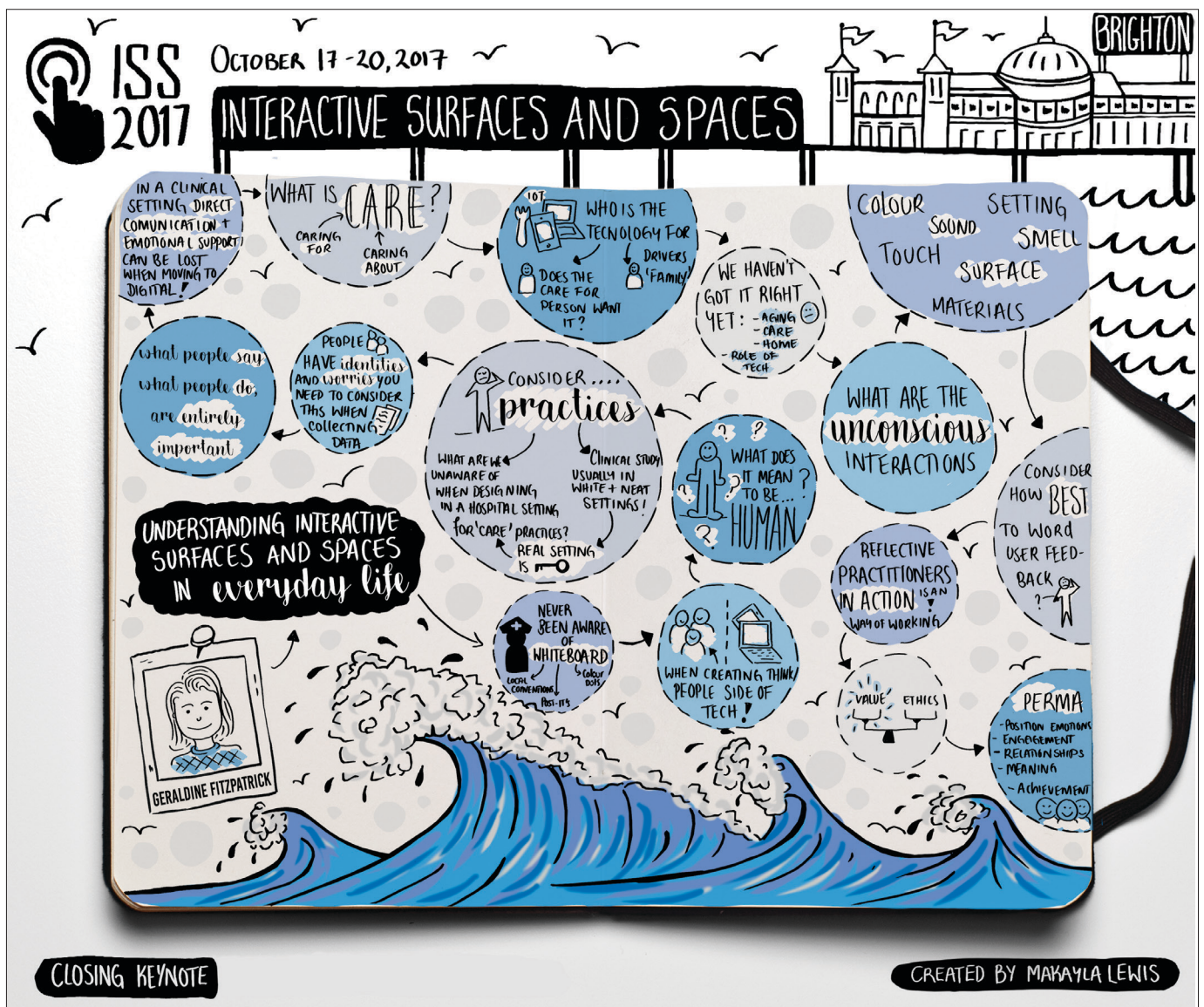


Figure 1. Sketchnote summarizing the closing keynote by Geraldine Fitzpatrick at ACM ISS 2017.

can better support the thinking process and communication of these thoughts to others. Thus, I think awareness and competency in sketchnoting for HCI researchers could be beneficial. I enjoy sharing my sketchnotes and process on my Twitter account @maccymacx.

Nicolai Marquardt: I started sketching during my M.Sc. and Ph.D. studies and quickly found that sketched ideas and concepts could effectively support my research and design process in HCI. Later, while studying for my Ph.D. in Calgary, I joined as a co-author to create the *Sketching User Experiences Workbook* (together with Saul Greenberg, Sheelagh Carpendale, and Bill Buxton), which summarizes many

of the possible methods of using sketching techniques in HCI. During that time, I also began reading about using sketches for visual notetaking and came across Mike Rohde's blog and books (see sidebar). I began creating visual notes of talks and meetings I attended, and many other events I joined. An example from

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last year is my visual summary of Brad Myers's inspiring Lifetime Achievement Award talk at CHI 2017 (Figure 2). The sketched notes help me stay active and engaged during talks and make it easier for me to synthesize what is most important and how aspects of the presented work relate to research I'm working on. Many of my sketchnotes are shared on my Twitter account @nicmarquardt.

SKETCHNOTE TIPS AND TRICKS

To help anyone who is interested in taking up sketchnoting and perhaps broaden their horizons about drawn imagery in general, we have put together advice on avoiding

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are some great sketchnote resources on the Web and in print; here are some to start with:

Nicolai Marquardt and Saul Greenberg. "Sketchnotes for Visual Thinking in HCI" Workshop Paper at ACM CHI '12 Workshop on Visual Thinking and Digital Imagery; <http://grouplab.cpsc.ucalgary.ca/grouplab/uploads/Publications/Publications/2012-Sketchnotes.CHIWorkshop.pdf>

The Sketchnote Handbook by Mike Rohde

The Sketchnote Workbook by Mike Rohde

Sketchnote Hangout by Makayla Lewis; <http://www.sketchnotehangout.com/>

Visual Notetaking for Educators by Sylvia Duckworth

19 Sketchnote Style Sheets by Makayla Lewis <https://www.flickr.com/photos/makaylalewis/27205388423/in/dateposted/>

100 + 1 Drawing Ideas: 100 + 1 Drawing Ideas for Sketchnoters and Doodlers by Mauro Toselli

Visual Thinking: Empowering People & Organizations through Visual Collaboration by Willemien Brand

365 Sketchnote Challenge by Makayla Lewis and Nidhi Narula; <http://www.gumroad.com/snchallenge>

common pitfalls that some of us have encountered. Remember the sketchnote mantra: *ideas not art*. Nobody expects a beautiful drawing. Instead, keep practicing creating visual notes; you will see progress and find a style that works for you.

Choose your tools wisely. We'll return to tools in a later blog post, but for now, find a good pen that flows well and is consistent, and some paper or a sketchbook. It may

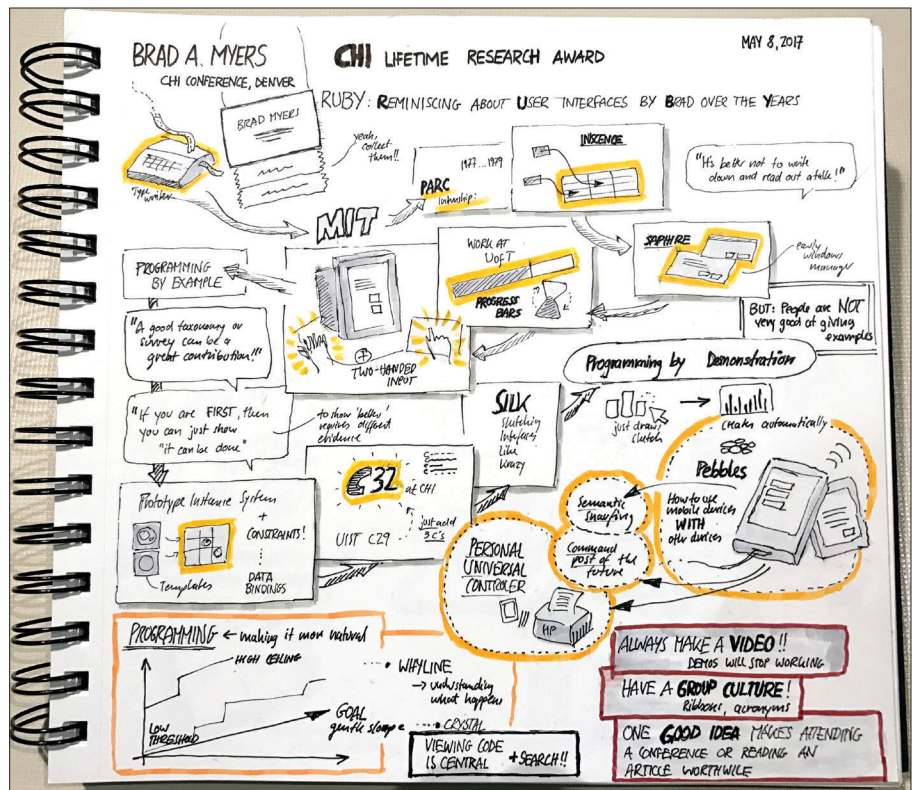


Figure 2. Sketchnote of Brad A. Myers Lifetime Achievement Award presentation at CHI 2017.

also help to find a stiff board (or other material) to lean on. You can also work straight into your tablet or touchscreen laptop, but it might be best to start with simple pen and paper.

About the use of colors. For now, why not start with black and one pastel or light color to emphasize important points, and a gray marker for shading.

Practice icons you think you will use regularly. For example, if you study smart watches, a watch icon that you can draw quickly and in different orientations will be invaluable. Likewise, generic terms such as "AI" might be represented by a robot head or a computer with a face.

Arrive early. It will give you time to find a good seat, preferably near the front. From up close you can draw a quick portrait sketch of the speaker(s), read all the slides without squinting, and are less likely to be disturbed by people coming and going. While you wait for the talk to begin, check the talk title, prepare your page, and get all your pens in order.

Don't try to capture everything. Instead, go for the salient points, interesting quotes, and other items that jump out. You'll be surprised by the depth of your sketchnote.

Use the Q&A time to verify and finish up. Fill in the gaps—if you are unsure about something, ask the speaker a question—complete areas you may have missed, and color or shade your sketchnote. You may not have time to come back to your notes for a while, so it is better to finish during the session. Let's be honest, sketchnotes are ultimately notes—how often do you return to complete your notes?

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