Guide 3: Test the customer problem

Your goal

Use interviews to learn whether potential customers experience the problem, need, or want you identified. Be ready to change your idea if their experiences are different from your assumptions.

An interview helps you understand a person. It is not a sales pitch.

What to produce

A customer problem, need, or want supported by your research. Explain what you assumed, how you checked it, what you learned, and how the evidence shaped your decision.

The CED's suggested activity includes at least one real customer interview outside class. Follow your teacher's instructions for the research and for contacting people safely. One interview is a starting point, not proof about a whole market.

Use paper or your own document. The prompts and scripts below are optional support.

Key terms

- **Interview:** a conversation used to gather information.
- **Hypothesis:** a clear prediction that you can test.
- **Evidence:** information you use to support or challenge a claim.
- **Leading question:** a question that pushes someone towards a particular answer.
- **Validate:** use evidence to check whether an idea is supported. This does not mean proving it is true for everyone.

Step 1: State what you want to learn

Return to your customer description. Write a clear assumption about their experience.

For example: “Students who move between classrooms have difficulty finding pens when lessons start.” The interview should allow people to disagree with this statement.

Choose people who fit your possible customer group. Friends can help you practise, but their views may not represent other customers.

Step 2: Prepare neutral questions

Ask about real experiences before asking for opinions about a future product.

Useful questions include:

- “Tell me about the last time you got your supplies ready for a lesson.”
- “What did you do?”
- “Was any part difficult? If so, what happened?”
- “How do you deal with that now?”
- “What works well about your current approach?”

Adapt these questions to your own idea. Ask a follow-up such as “Can you explain that?” if the answer is unclear.

Avoid “You often lose your pens, don't you?” It suggests the answer you want. Avoid asking only “Would you buy my product?” A polite promise about the future is not evidence of an actual purchase.

Step 3: Ask permission and listen

Ask your teacher which people you may contact and how. Do not approach strangers alone or share private information.

You could begin: “I am working on a school business project. Would you be willing to answer a few questions about [topic]? You can skip any question or stop.”

Agree a suitable time. Listen without defending your idea. Give the person time to explain. Thank them afterwards.

Take notes with permission. Record only what you need. Use labels such as “Participant A” in your project, not names or contact details. Do not record audio or video without permission and your teacher's approval.

Example: Ready Pouch listens

Ready Pouch is our fictional example business. Here, we explore a possible customer problem before choosing a product.

Imagine that one participant describes a delay in finding pens, while another says their existing bag pocket works well. These are invented responses for this example.

The second response matters. The team should not delete it because it challenges the idea. It suggests that an existing solution may be enough for some students.

A reasonable next decision would be to study the students who still face difficulty. It would not be reasonable to claim that all students need a new pouch.

Step 4: Review the evidence and decide

Separate the participant's words from your interpretation. If you did not write exact words, use a summary rather than quotation marks.

Look for shared experiences and differences. Ask whether your participants fit the customer group and whether your questions influenced the answers.

Decide whether to keep, narrow, change, or replace your starting problem. If evidence is too limited, explain what remains uncertain and what research you need next. A result that challenges your idea can improve your project.

Your turn

Complete this record in your own words:

1. Our starting assumption was…
2. We interviewed people who…
3. We learned…
4. This evidence supports or challenges our idea because…
5. We decided to…
6. We still need to check…

Check your work

- My questions allow people to disagree.
- I used real research and did not invent responses.
- I considered evidence against my assumption.
- I explained how evidence shaped a decision.
- I stated the limits of the research and protected participants' privacy.

Next: Develop a solution

In Task 4, you will use what you learned to develop a product idea that addresses the customer problem, need, or want.

Independent guidance based on the AP Business with Personal Finance CED, printed pages 153-154. This is not an official College Board resource.