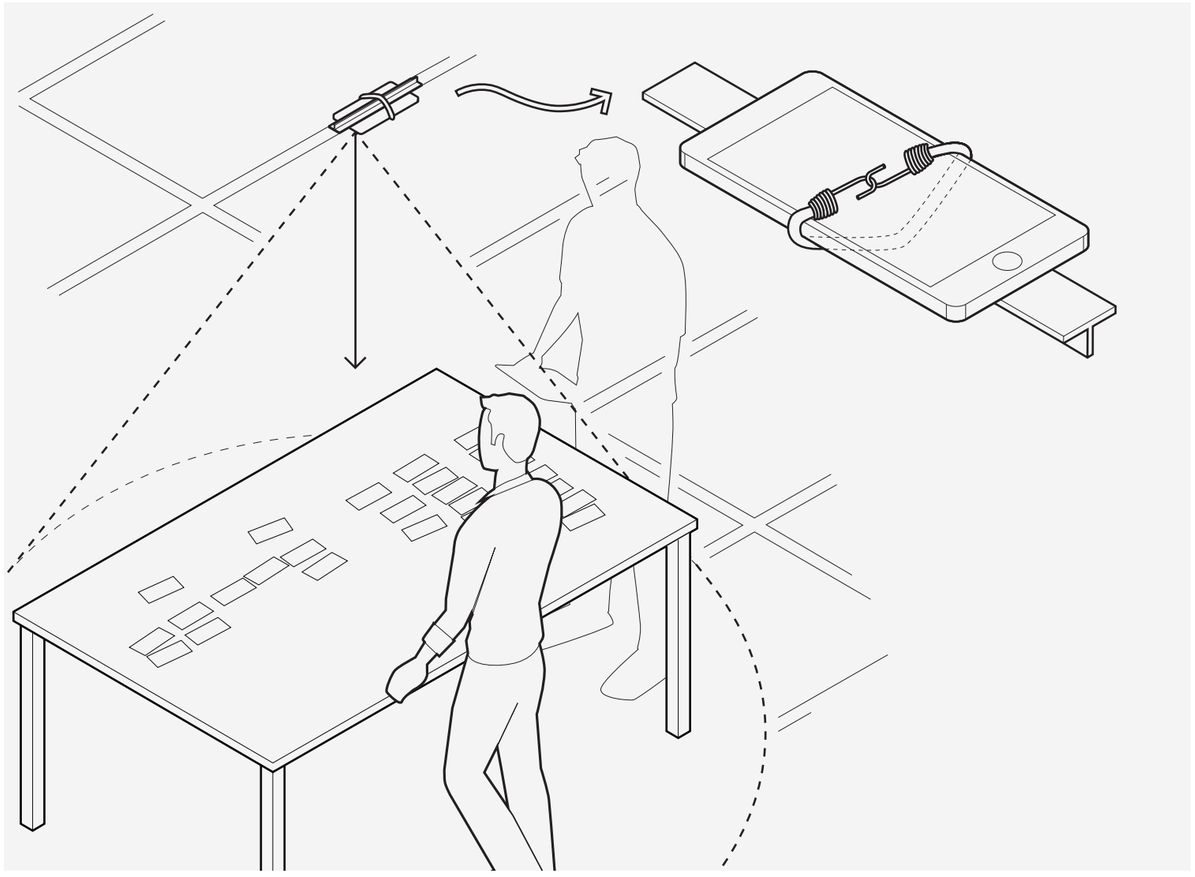
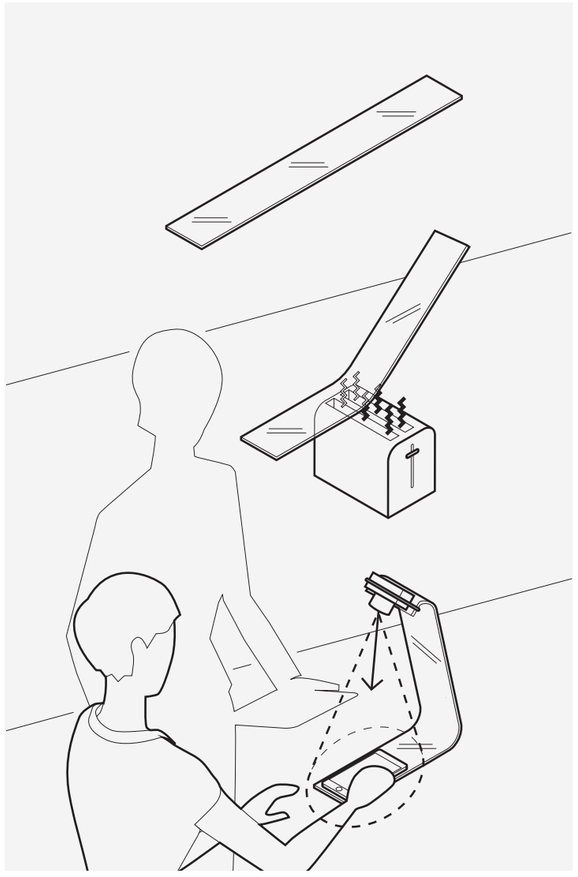
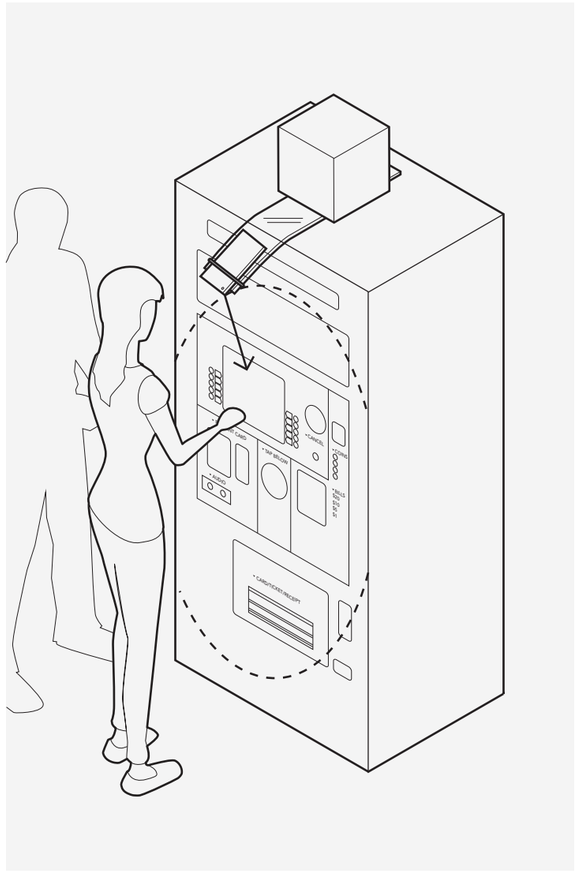
SMARTPHONE VIDEO FOR USER RESEARCH



A mini bungee cord suspends a smartphone from a drop ceiling. Video of card sorting exercises captures participants as they think aloud, motioning to different cards and groupings.



Plexiglass can be bent with the heat from a toaster. Rubber bands hold the camera mount in place.



A counterweight suspends a camera over this pay station, to see a user interact with its different components.

WHY VIDEO RECORD TESTING SESSIONS?

Video provides another layer of information describing a user testing session. In addition to the activity of the session itself, like doing a card sort, participants are often encouraged to "think aloud" as they work. Audio recordings won't capture where people pointed or gesture while speaking. Video helps solve this problem and it makes accurate transcriptions much easier.

Additionally, video can let you capture a kind of "pre web analytics" with paper prototypes or interfaces without user tracking. Video timestamps can show when a user "clicks a link" or "submits a form" on paper.

VIDEO ON A BUDGET

Dedicated video cameras are great for capturing video of testing sessions, but they are expensive to buy or rent and mounting them for different situations can be complicated. Although many digital SLR cameras offer video capture they are not optimized for it—some only record 20 minutes of video at a time requiring you restart the recording a few times during a session.

The video camera in a smartphone is a budget-friendly alternative. If you supplement the built-in camera's video feed with a lapel microphone for audio you will capture a testing session in a way that is very easy to transcribe.

MOUNTING SMARTPHONE CAMERAS

Smart phones are light, so they are easy to mount on the ceiling over a table where tests are being conducted. In a room with a suspended ceiling, small bungee cords can attach a camera easily. Rubber bands are another inexpensive option, and they are strong enough to hold a smartphone in place.

To record a user interacting with their own smartphone you could build a "camera sled" out of a piece of plexiglass. We used a toaster to heat a piece of plexiglass up enough to bend it into shape and had a camera sled in less than an hour. Because plexiglass is so easy to bend it's a great material for making smartphone rigs: you can bend it rather than cutting it and joining pieces together at different angles.

For more involved mounts, Avenger and Manfrotto are two manufacturers that supply a wide assortment of clamps, arms, connectors and counterweights for rigging up almost any kind of camera mount. Combining these with lightweight cameras and inexpensive connectors like mini-bungee cords and rubber bands lets you mount cameras for almost any testing scenario.