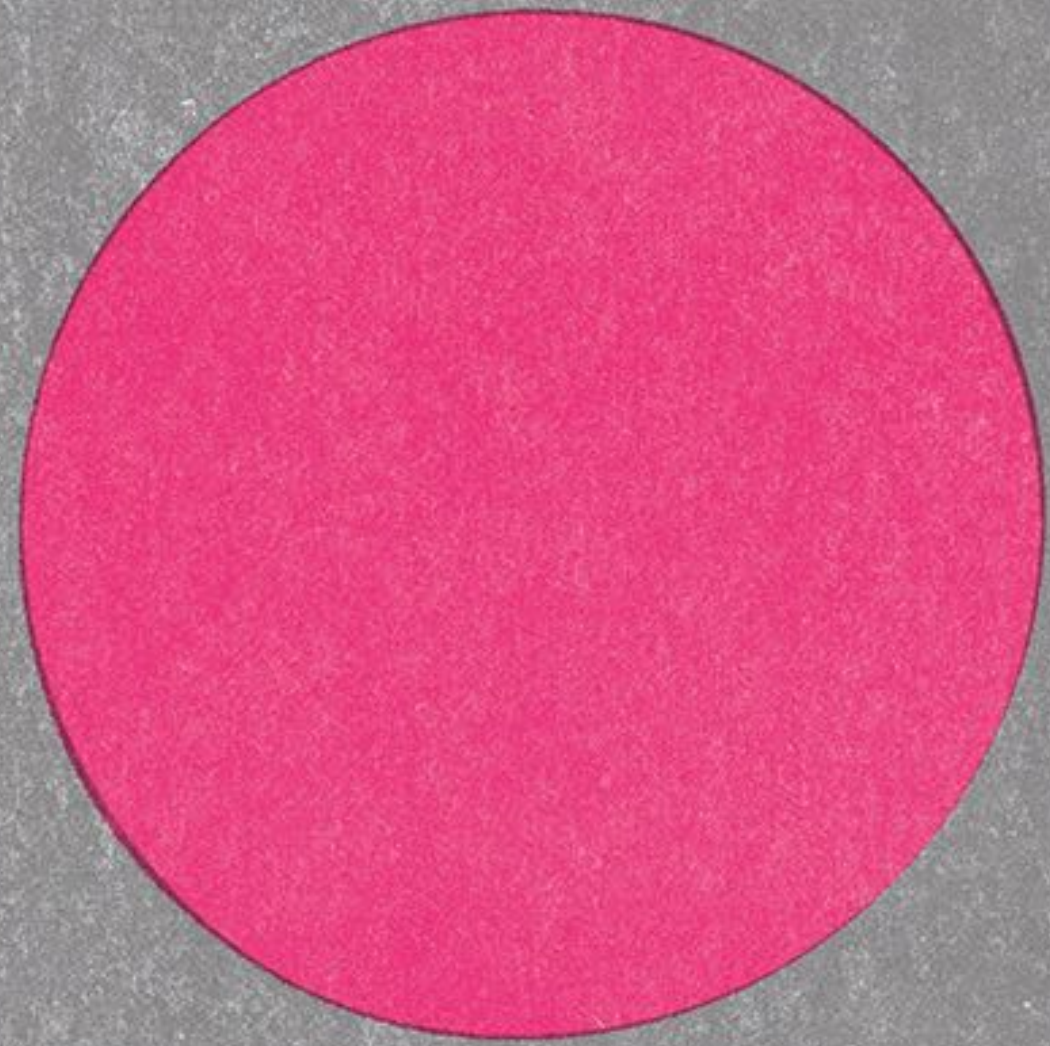




2



Writing is designing

Words and the user
experience



Michael is a **Senior UX Architect** at **Allstate**.

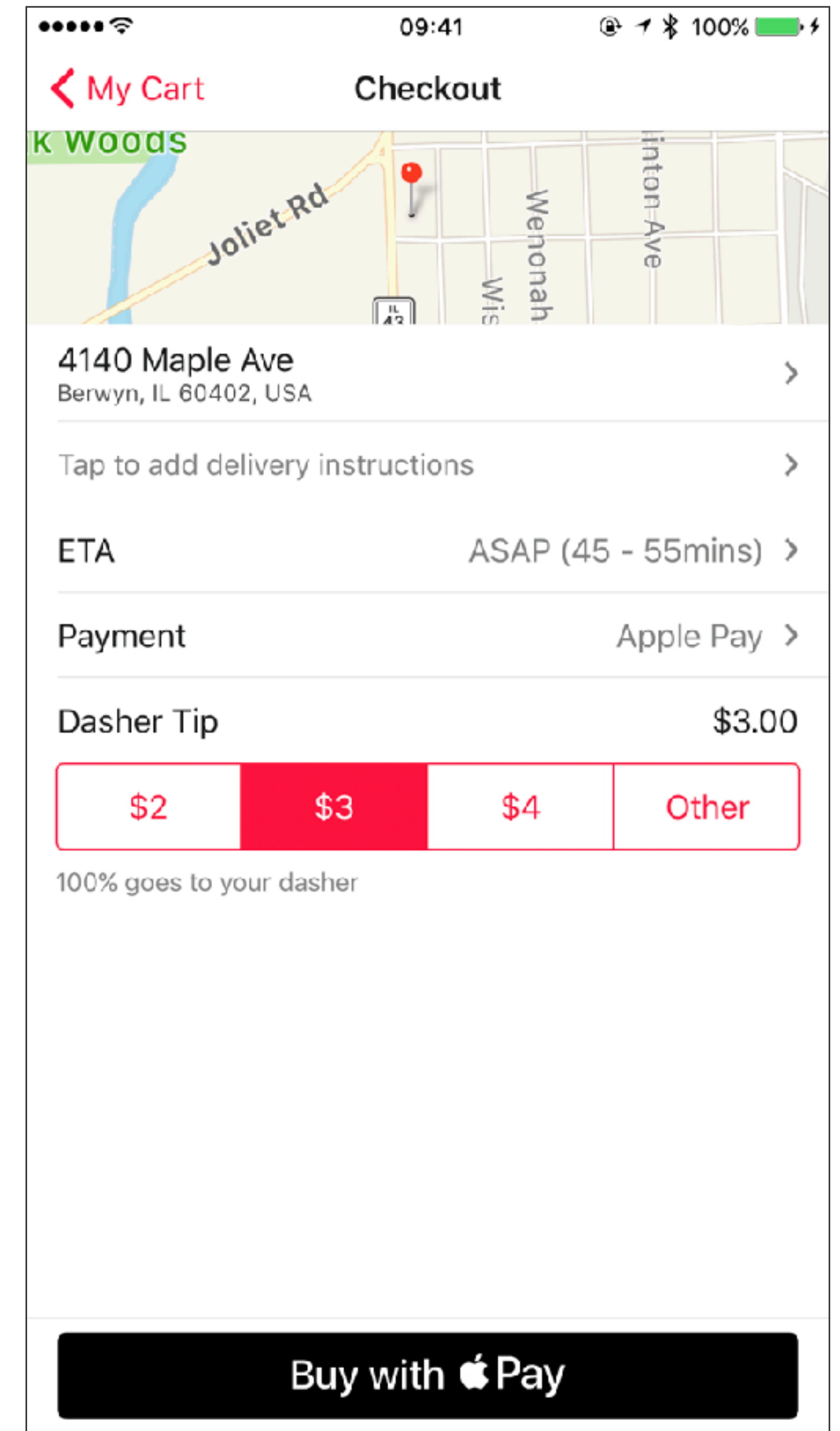
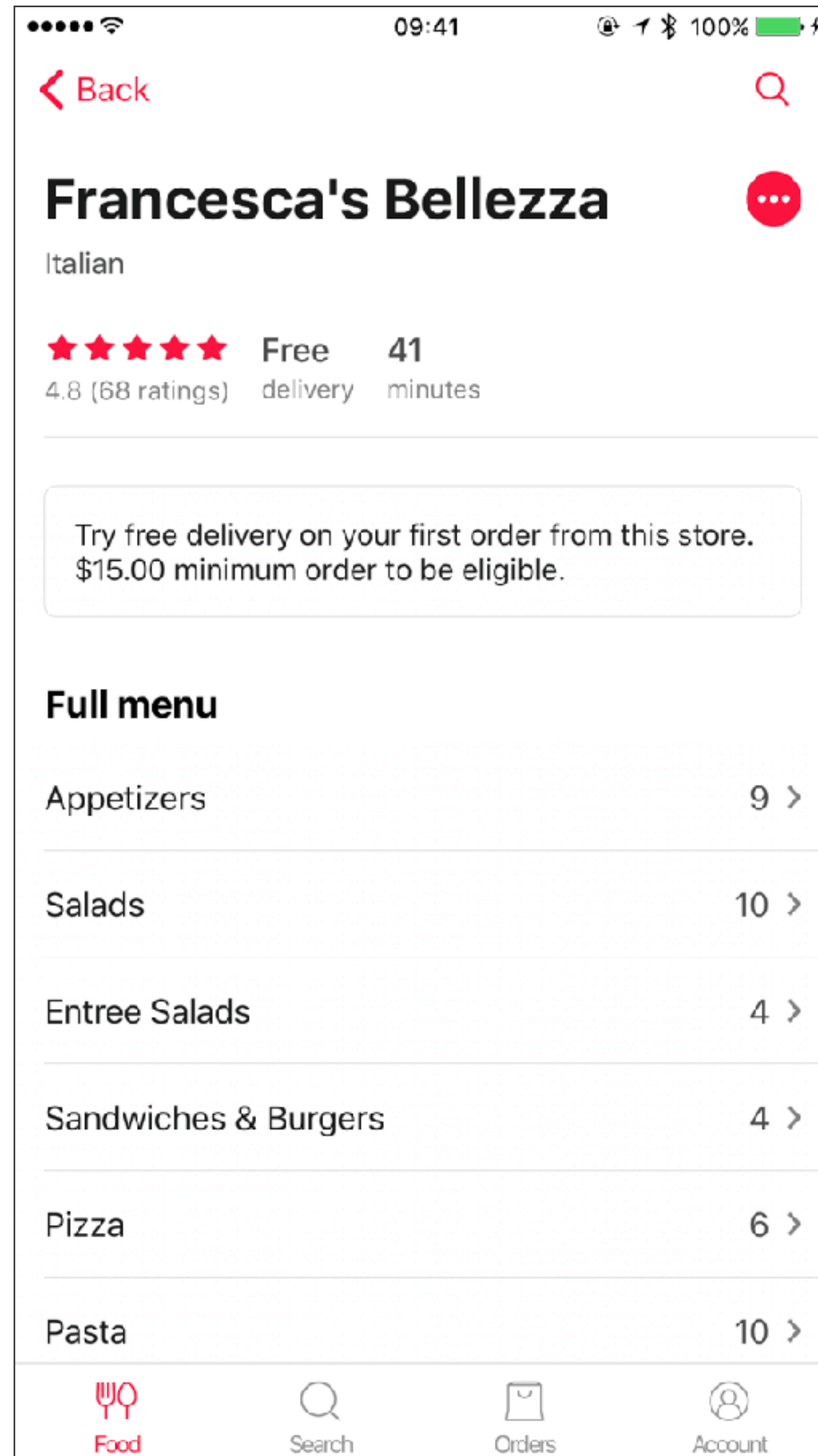
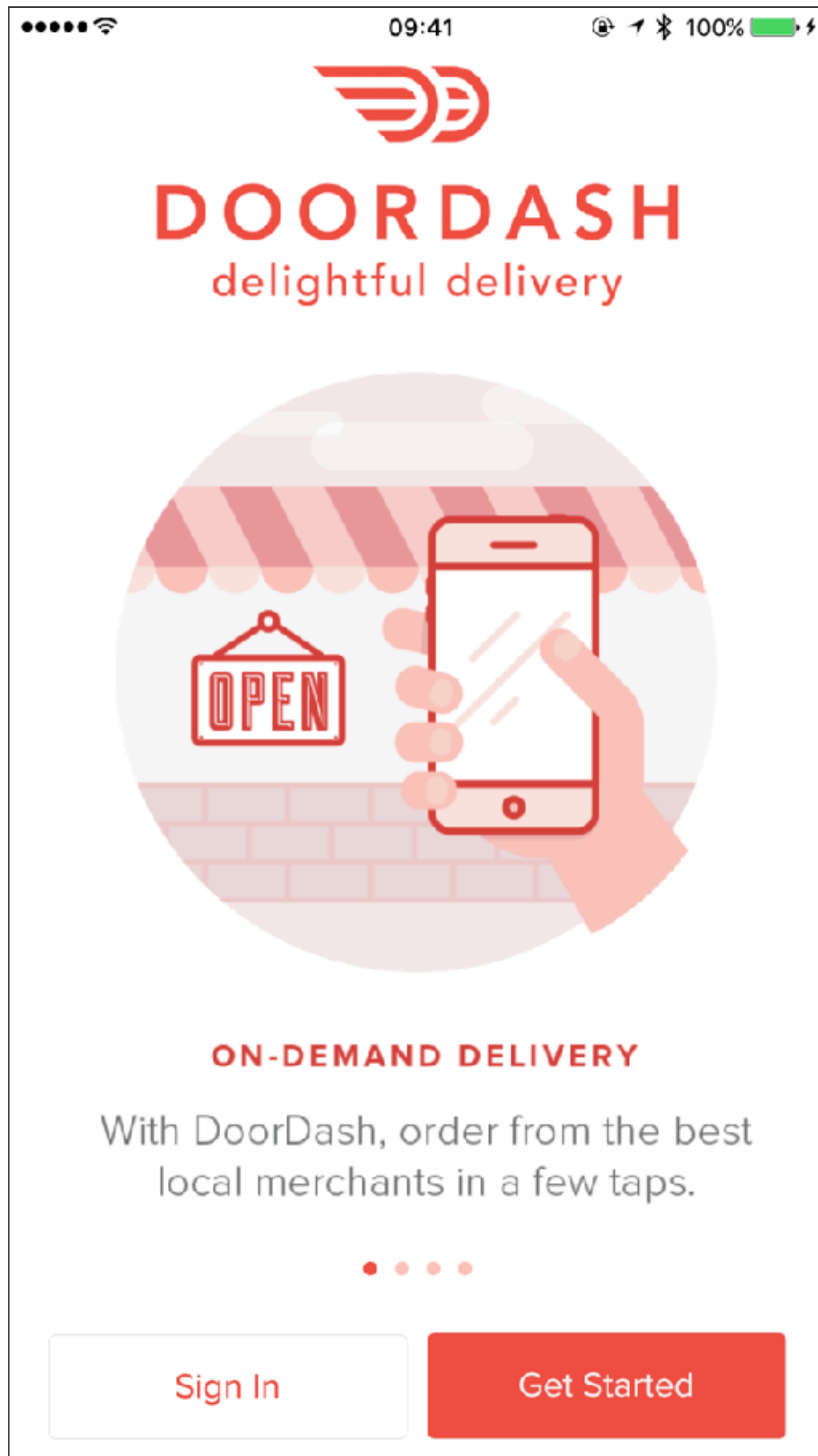
Andy is a **UX Content Strategy Manager** at **Adobe**.

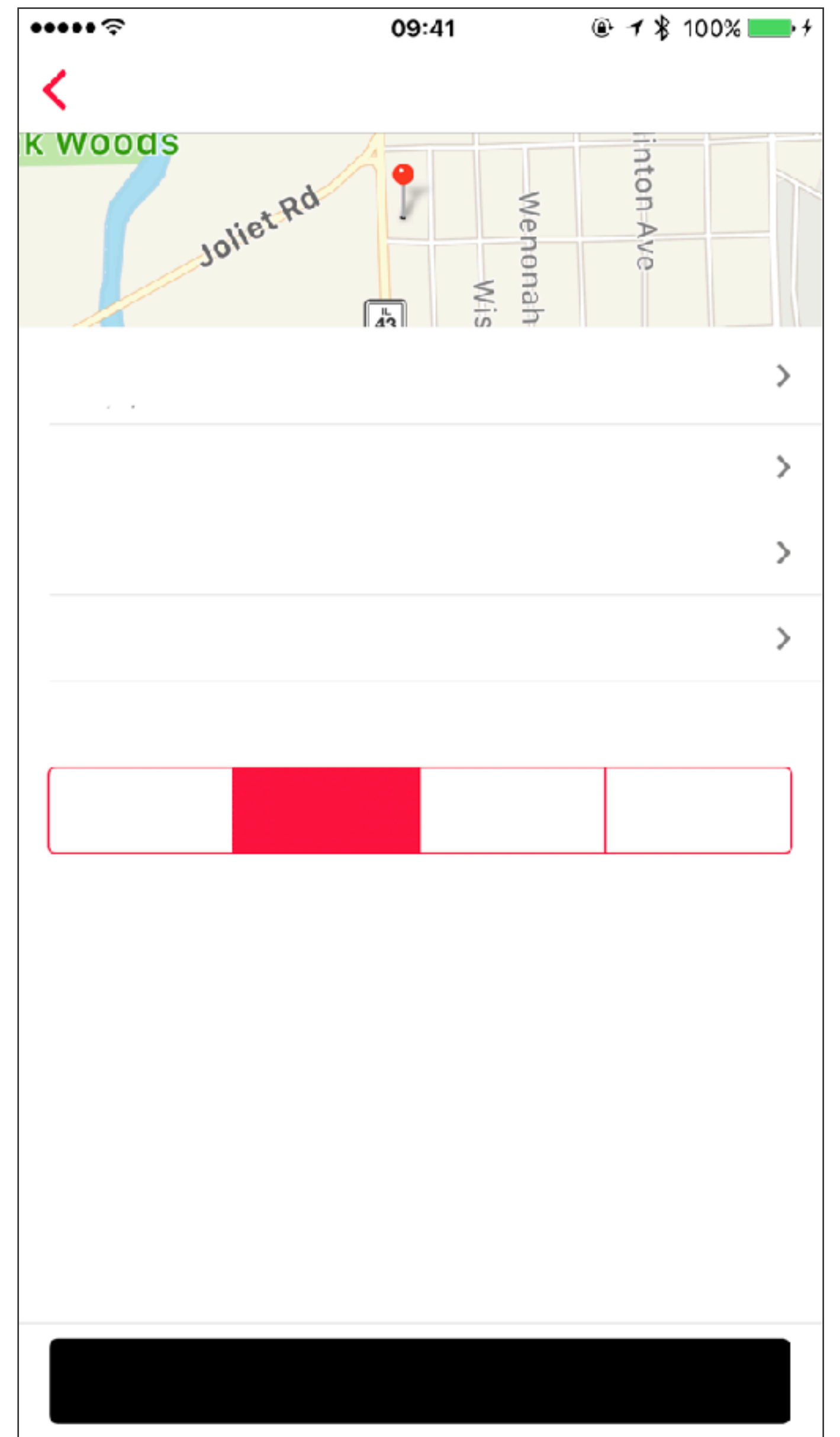
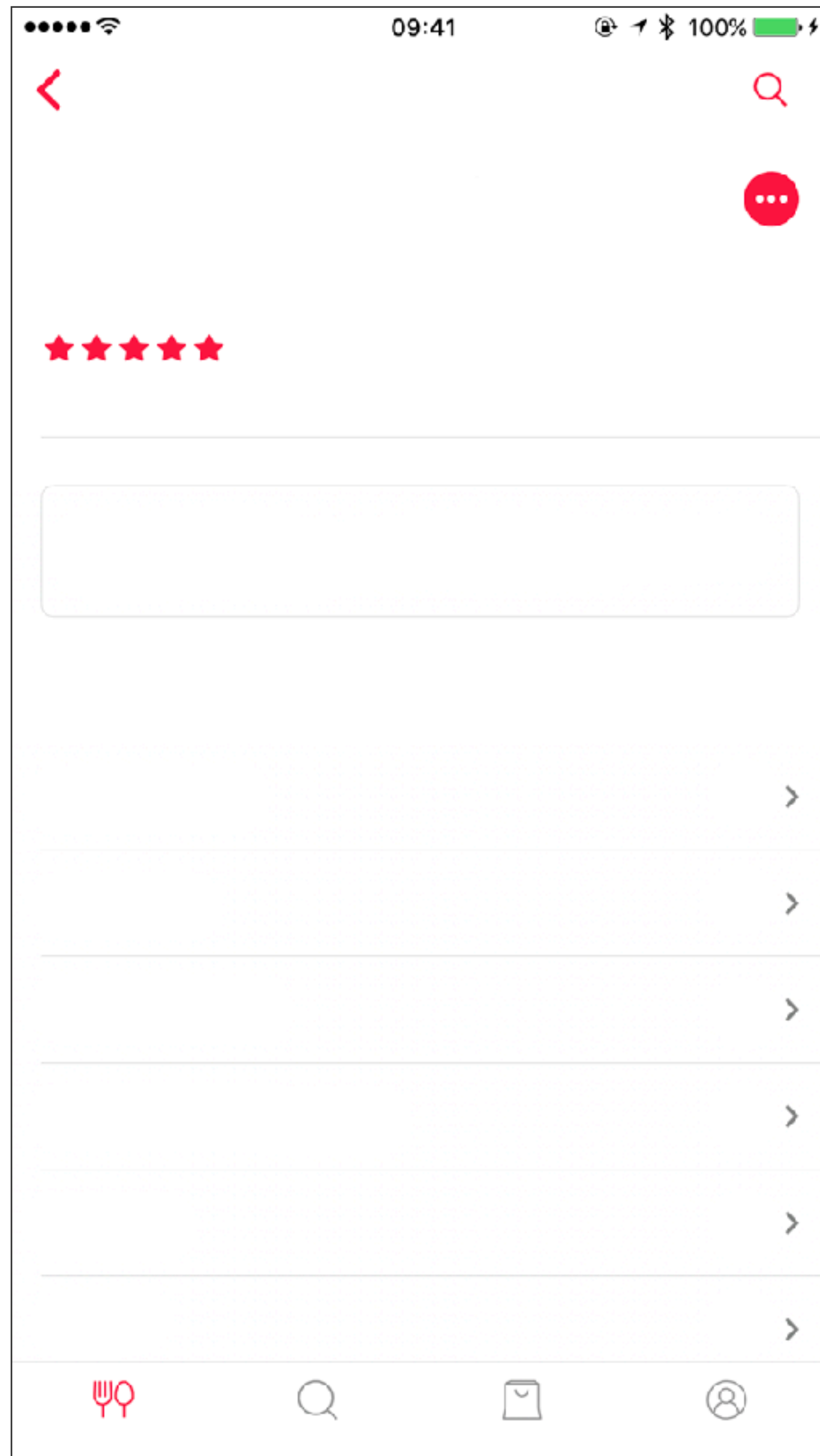
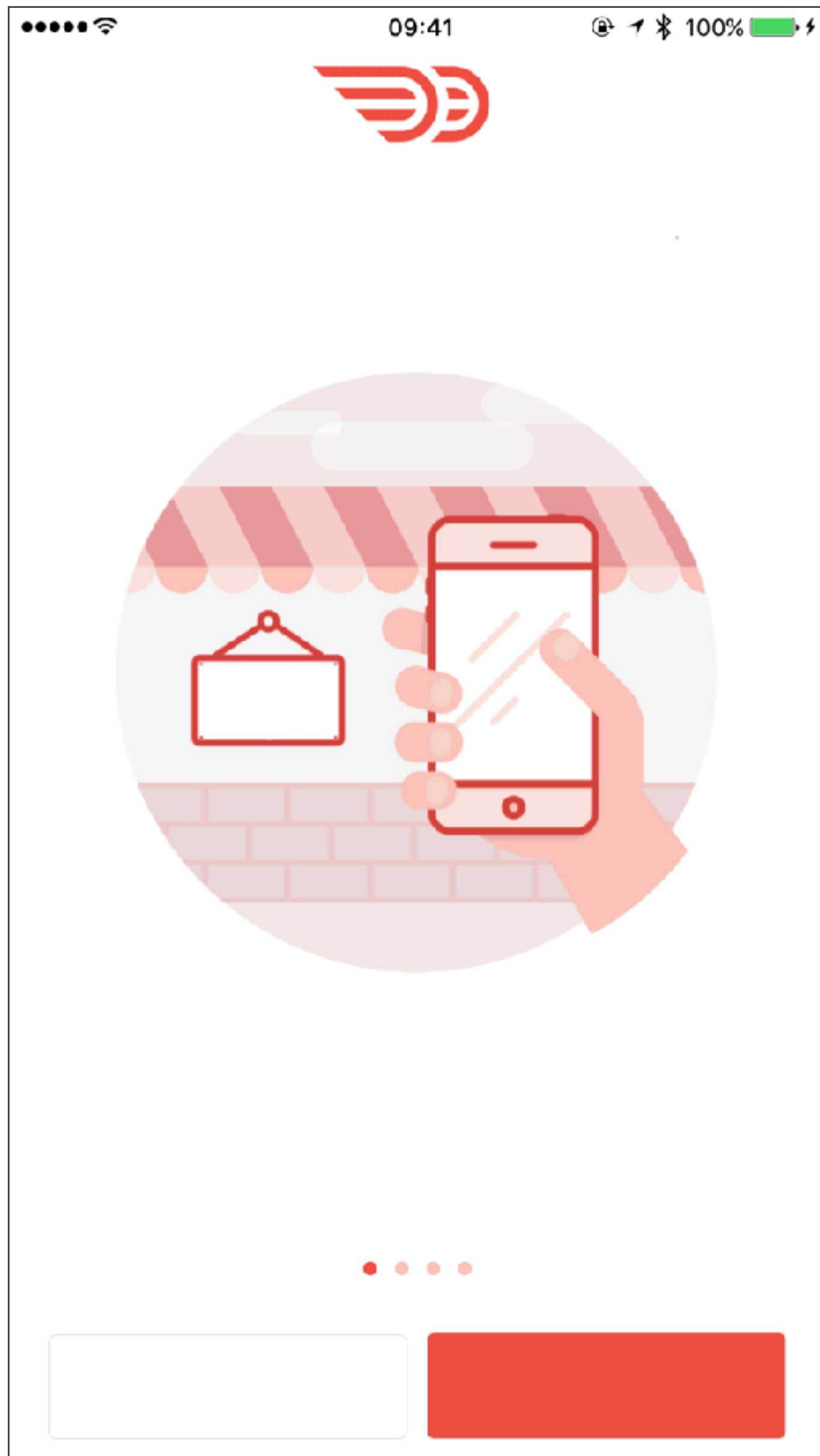
We use he/him pronouns.

Writing is designing

Find the words for the people you serve







To find the right words, **writing** and **design** need to team up in your brain and work together.



*I work on digital products and physical goods, so I'm deeply involved in the design process. But I also want to call out early that my process is the design process. **I don't write fiction or short stories; I use language to solve problems**—whether that's behind the scenes or in the product itself. I use words as material.*

Nicole Fenton

Co-Author, Nicely Said

Button

A writer might ask:

- **What are the right words for this button?**

Button

Done? Continue? Finish? Complete?

A UX writer or a designer might ask:

- **What are the entry and exit points?**
- **What action immediately follows pressing this button?**
- **Are we using the right messaging component here?**



Button

- **What's the inverse action?**
- **How does it translate/localize?**
- **Does it fit within our voice and tone strategy?**



[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

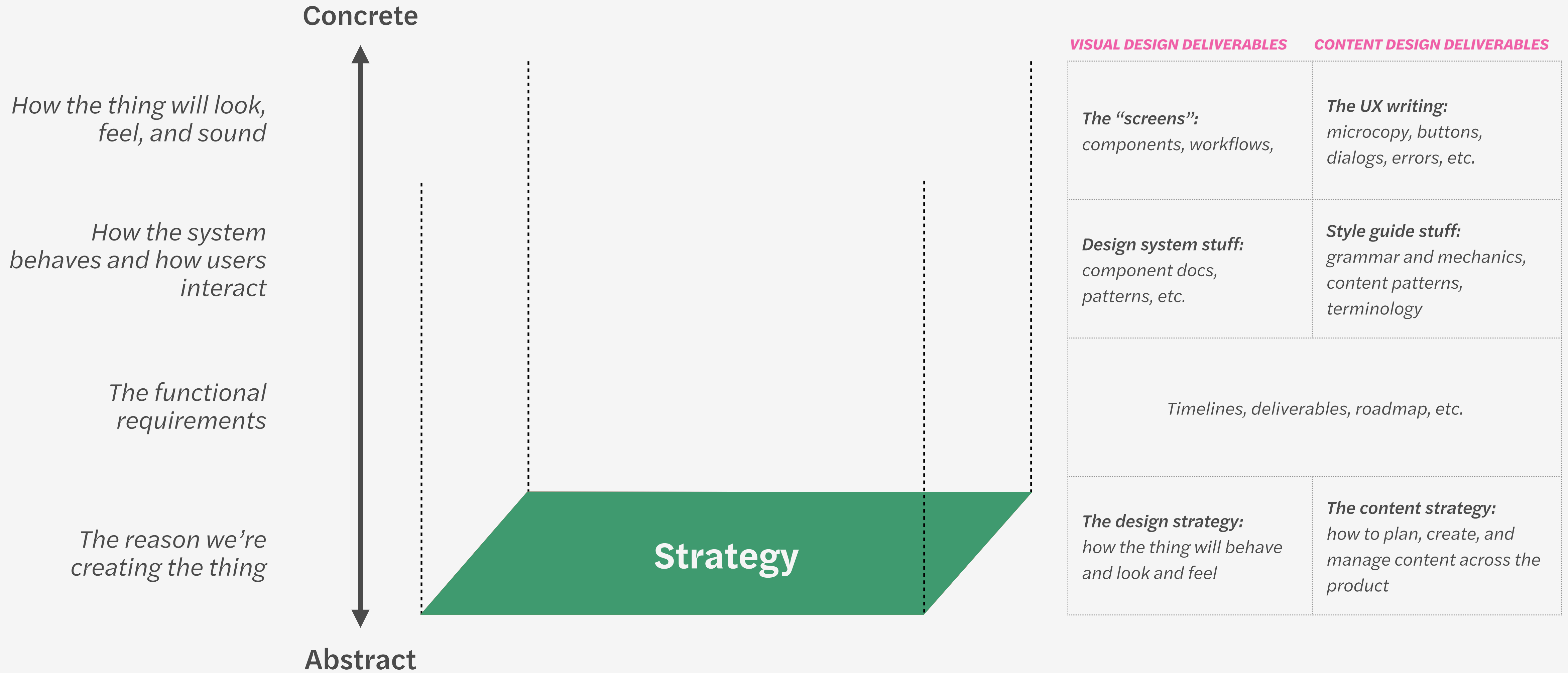
Button

Button

**Writing is about fitting words together.
Designing is about solving problems for your users.**

We design with words.

The ~~Five~~ Four Layers of UX



So if **words** are such an important part of **design**, why do we often think of design in terms of **visual tools**?

**Should I use
Sketch, Figma,
or Adobe XD
to design this
interface?**



**Don't mistake making a deliverable
with making a difference.**

Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

Help users do stuff

A link that takes you to the app's search feature is way more usable than trying to explain where the search icon is.

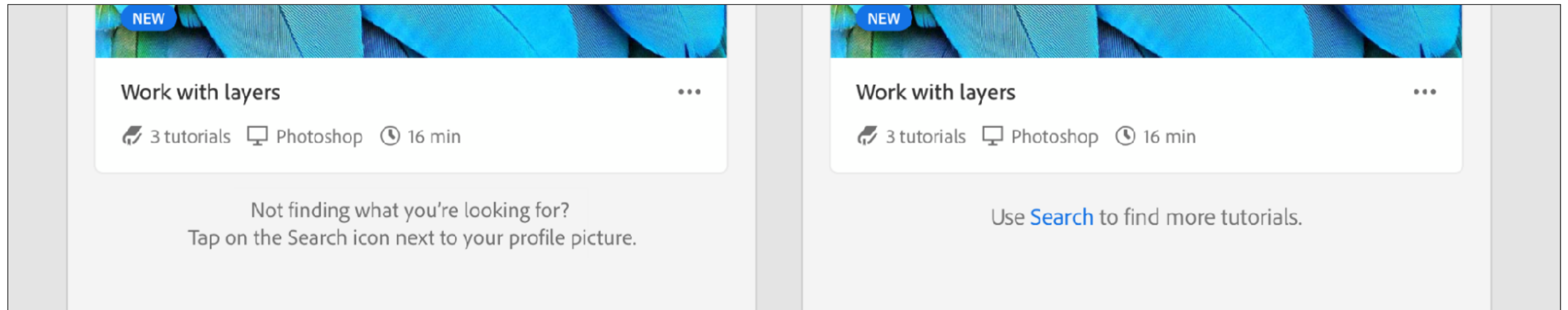


Figure out if people can use **the words**
you've written.

Sarah Richards, author of *Content Design*, points out that **if the words you write for something aren't accessible to everyone, you've made a design choice that prevents people from using that thing.**

In a study with **821 participants**, customer service behavior was found to be one of the **four most important** usability factors out of **76 possibilities**.

"Customer Service Behavior included items that were related to the friendliness and politeness of the system, its speaking pace, and its use of familiar terms."

Melanie Polkosky, PhD

*Toward a Social-Cognitive Psychology of Speech Technology:
Affective Responses to Speech-Based e-Service*



Human communication is the most important gift we have, whether it's through speech or writing. I really do think that human beings are worth fighting for, especially as technology overtakes more and more of what it means to be human.

Melanie Polkosky, PhD

Author, Uncovering Truffles: The Scarcity and Value of Women in STEM

Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

Yes, I want to register for the MeliáRewards loyalty program by Meliá Hotels International and I have read and accept their [Terms and conditions](#). Yes, I want to receive information about special offers and promotions from melia.com and accept the conditions detailed in the [privacy clause](#). If you do not want to receive commercial information, [click here](#).

I do not want to receive advertisements

ACTIVATE ACCOUNT

GRAN MELIÁ
HOTELS & RESORTS

ME
BY MELIÁ

PARADISUS
BY MELIÁ

MELIÁ
HOTELS & RESORTS

CREATE ACCOUNT

Do what users want

The team responsible for this reservation system is using writing and design to force people into the loyalty program and email lists when they're just trying to book a room.

Sign up

Pinterest may contain links to third party websites, advertisers, services, special offers, or other events or activities that are not owned or controlled by Pinterest. We don't endorse or assume any responsibility for any such third party sites, information, materials, products, or services. If you access any third party website, service, or content from Pinterest, you do so at your own risk and you agree that Pinterest has no liability arising from your use of or access to any third party website, service, or content.

More simply put

Pinterest has links to content off of Pinterest. Most of that stuff is awesome, but we're not responsible when it's not.

Explain yourself

Creating legal agreements that use plain language so people can actually understand what they're agreeing to? Very useful.

Writers need to understand a product's purpose and their users' needs to create useful experiences.



I feel like I always need the full context of what I'm solving for, so it's best for my work when I'm able to be in environments where I can get it. If you're joining a project at the very end and there's low tolerance for questions, it's a sign your role as writer hasn't been well positioned or isn't well understood.

Katie Lower

Designer and Writer

Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

TODAY

• 5:14 PM

Hi, [REDACTED] I just saw your message on LinkedIn. I'm so, so sorry to hear of what happened. If I can help in any way or connect you with someone, please let me know. Feel free to reach out any time.

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

• 5:17 PM

Thanks a ton, [REDACTED]! I appreciate the support. I am taking a couple days to process everything and will start the job hunt early next week.

Good luck!

Sounds good

Congratulations!

Harmless?

An accidental tap could make you seem like a complete jerk to someone who just lost their job.

Dashboard Log Community Premium Labs Logout

Andy Welfle
View Profile

Personal Info

Change Profile Picture

Change Cover Image

EMAIL ADDRESS
andy@welfle.com Change Email Address

Reset Password

NAME
Andy
Welfle

SEX
✓ Male
Female

BIRTHDAY
1983 February 20

COUNTRY
United States

STATE
California

CITY
San Francisco

HEIGHT

Easy choice?

For someone like me, this is an easy, quick choice.

But think about the experience a trans woman might have.



If they were thinking about inclusivity, they'd understand that some questions don't have easy answers. By explaining what they want to know and why, it not only helps people on the margins like me, but anyone who may not be easily categorized—and gets them even better-quality information to act on. It's a win-win for the user and for the company.

Ada Powers
UX Designer,
Community Activist

ost c
creat

We require this field because one of the many ways we use this information is in communicating with your insurance provider. Please make sure the sex you provide here is the same as what your insurance provider has on file (usually the same as what your HR has on file). If you would like to tell us more about your gender identity, please click on the "Add gender information" link; that information will not be shared outside One Medical. Our entire team is committed to making sure every member feels safe, welcome, and respected.

Year
YYYY

Sex ⓘ + Add gender information

Male Female

How did you hear about us?

Please select ▼

Next

Give context

If you're asking for this kind of information, tell users why you're asking.



We know that words can really hurt people or help them in their personal lives. We can say really reassuring words to people, and it has this huge impact, and we can say hurtful words, and it can have a years-long impact, but we don't really treat the words we write in interfaces that way.

Natalie Yee
UX Designer

Think about a "News Feed".



News is the feedback mechanism of our society; we vote based on the things we learn in the news. When we take a concept like that and we subvert it for commercial use, that's something that should give you pause.

Jorge Arango

Author, Living in Information



Errors & stress cases

What to do when things go wrong

What's an error?

BIRTHDATE

9/14/1915

Please check the birthdate and try again.

Think in terms of **stress cases**, not
edge cases.

What are your users doing?

- ***A highly stressed parent trying to find the right medicine for their sick child.***
- ***A newly engaged couple trying to figure out how to request a marriage license.***
- ***A driver who was just involved in a car accident trying to schedule and pay for repairs.***
- ***A student trying to get their 3D model ready for class.***

Each error represents a moment where the needs of your users conflict with the needs of your system. Error are opportunities.



*Where you find **sustained** success driven by recommendations, you find **badass users**. Smarter, more skillful, more powerful users. Users who **know** more and can **do** more in a way that's personally meaningful.*

Kathy Sierra

*Author, **Badass: Making Users Awesome***

Writing error messages:

1. Avoid

2. Explain

3. Resolve

Scenario: Check deposits through an app

COLONIAL CLASSICS WCC
©Clarke American

DONALD E. KNUTH
COMPUTER SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CA 94305-9045

11-3167/1210
01

505

Date 8 Mar 99

Pay to the Order of [REDACTED] \$ 2.50

Two and 56/100 Dollars

Security features are included. Details on back.

AMERICA CALIFORNIA BANK
2390 El Camino Real • Palo Alto, CA 94306

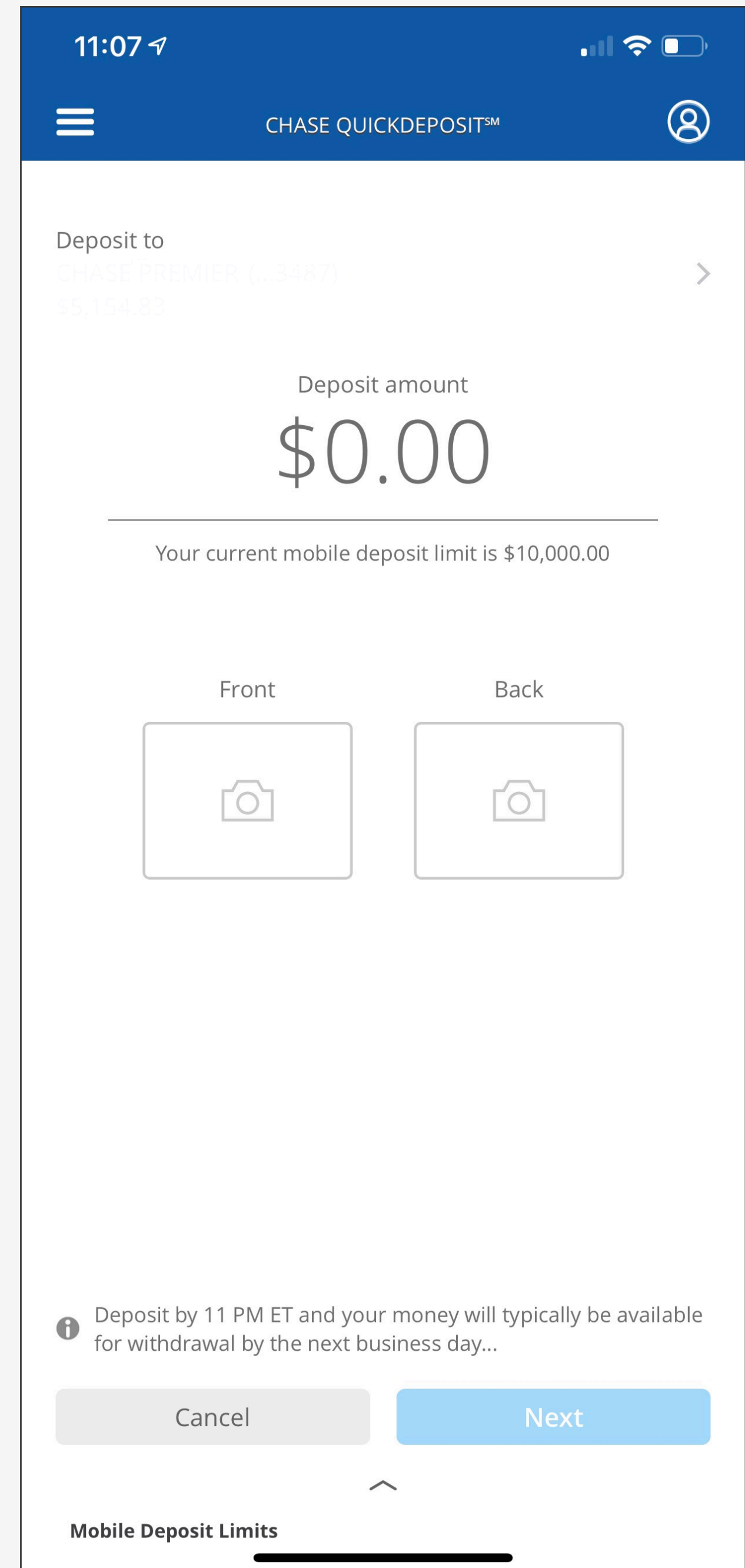
For 3.589 Donald Knuth MP

⑆ 1 291 3 16 7 3 ⑆ 0 5 0 5 0 1 ⑆ 1 4 5 8 4 9 0 6 ⑆ ⑆

Avoid

The "Next" button isn't active until the user enters the amount and takes photos of the check.

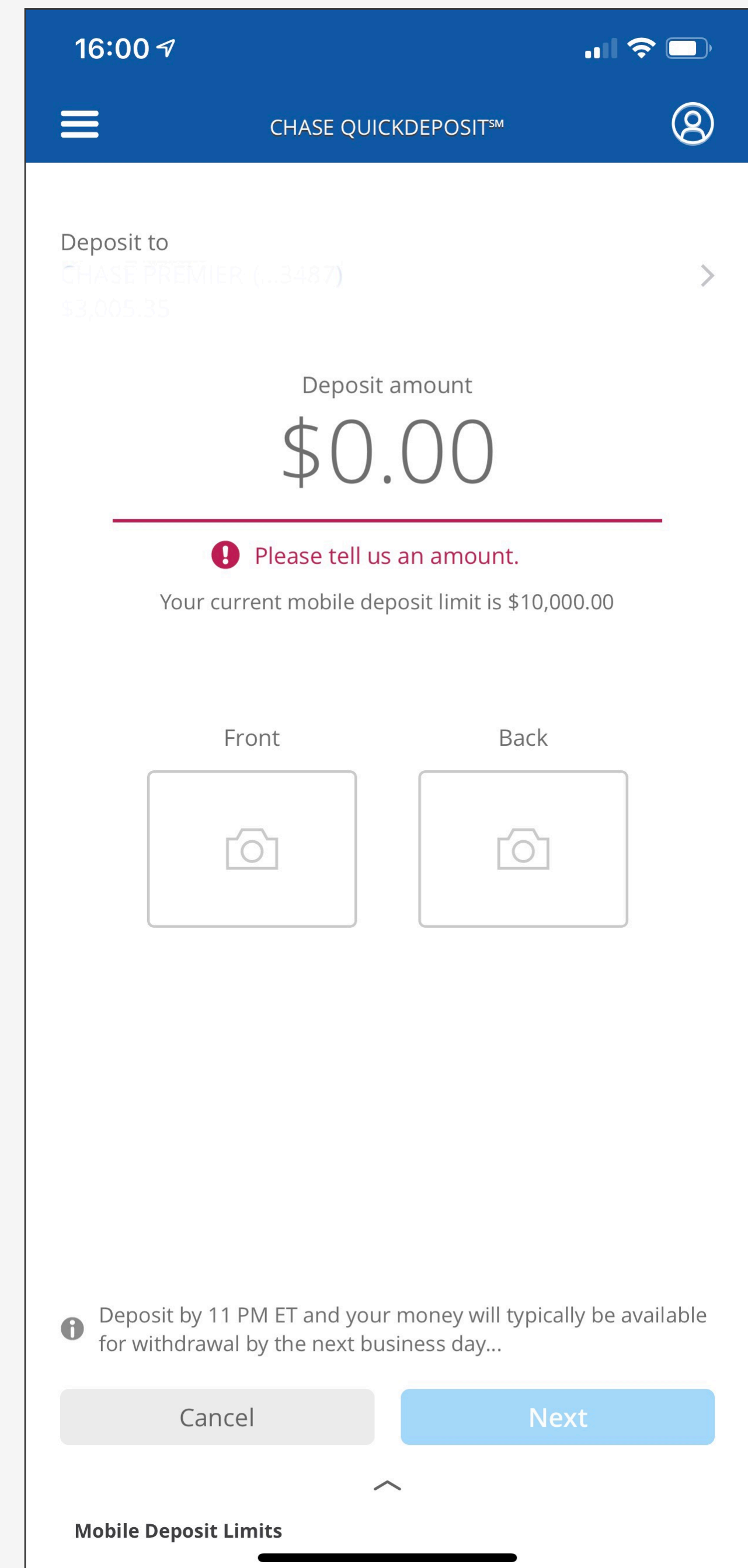
- *The "Deposit amount" field is visually prominent*
- *The app teaches its users what to do by progressively activating UI*



Avoid

However, something like this can only take you so far.

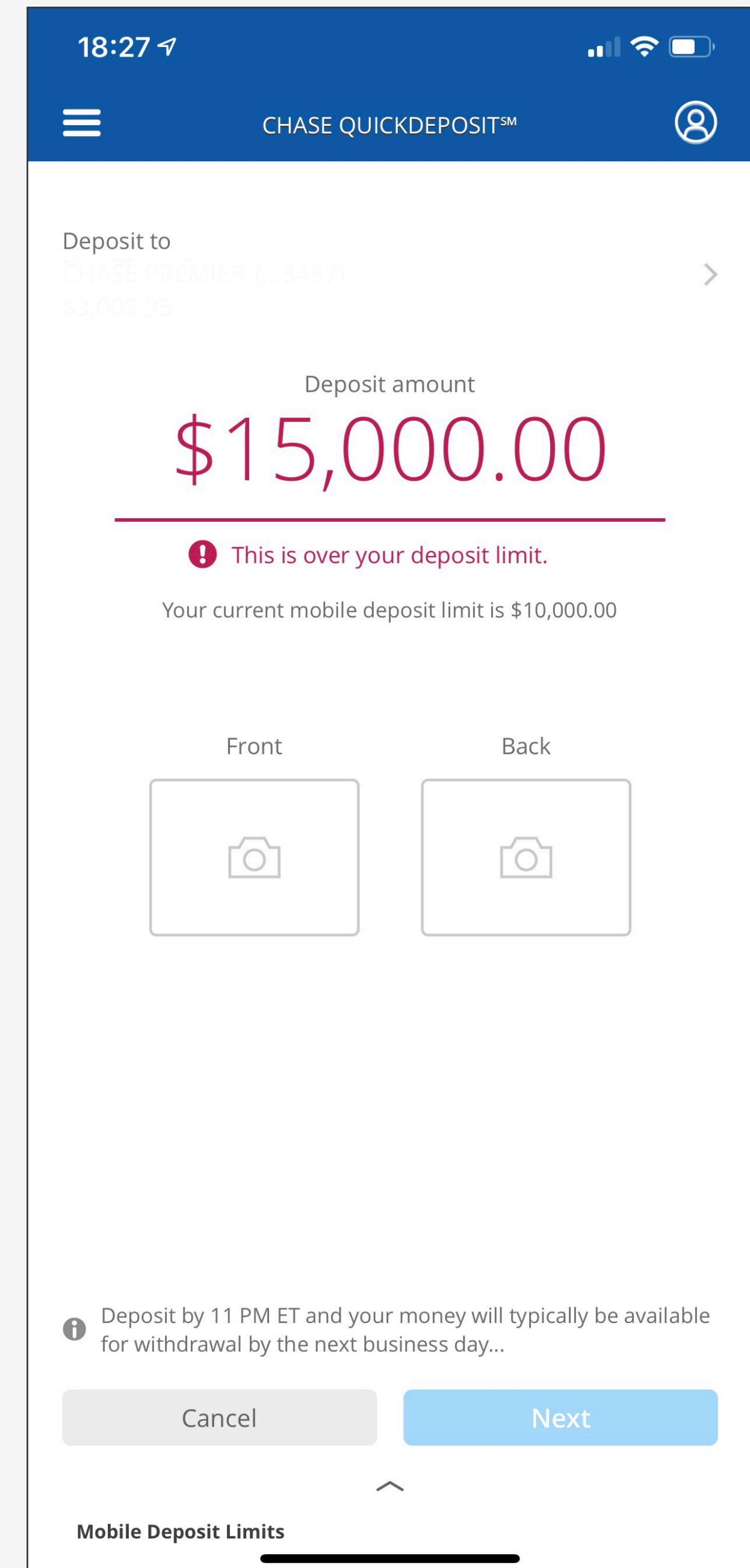
- *If a user enters an amount then deletes it, you still need to show a message*
- *Be wary of accessibility concerns as well—disabling UI can cause issues for visually impaired users*



Explain

Tells the user quickly and clearly what went wrong.

- *Doesn't tell users what do next, e.g. go to an ATM*
- *Doesn't serve users who want to know more about the deposit limit*
- *When unsure, test*



Resolve

Tell the user what to do next. Help them finish their task.



Auto capture didn't work.
Try again or take the picture yourself.

Cancel

Retry auto

Capture manually

Scenario

Your team is designing and building a sign-up flow for an online insurance company. The law says that account holders must be 18 years of age or older, and you've been asked to handle the error state for when users are younger than 18.

Activity

Write down ideas for avoiding, explaining, or resolving the error.

Discussion

How did it go?



***Books are available at
writingisdesigning.com***

**Sign up for our newsletter if you'd
like to stay in touch!**

Thanks!

Time for some Q&A

