DutchBoard

Design Process — Duolingo for Expats
Role: UX/UI Designer | Timeline: 6 weeks

A structured, low-friction Dutch learning experience

Built around the realities of expat life — not textbook exercises.

15	54	7,700
Levels	Sections	Flashcards

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01 — The problem

Why expats struggle

Dutch is the language of everyday life in the Netherlands — but most expat tools prioritize exams over survival.

01 — No clear starting point
Users don't know their level and feel blocked before they even begin. The first screen is a wall of options.

02 — Irrelevant content
Existing apps focus on generic phrases instead of real-life Dutch needed for daily tasks — bills, shops, bureaucracy.

03 — Low consistency
Lack of structure and visible progress leads to drop-off within days. No system means no habit.

> **I don't even know where to start. Everything feels random.**
> — Representative user, Amsterdam

Key insight: The problem is not motivation — it's lack of clarity and structure.

02 — Research

Understanding the user

Interviews with expats in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht — 4 nationalities.

PATTERNS IDENTIFIED

- **Practical vocab** — Phrases that actually help, not textbook phrases
- **Short sessions** — 5–10 minutes max — fits commute or couch
- **Clear progress** — Streaks & levels gamification every time

PERSONA CARD

SM — **Sara M. — 29**
Software Engineer · Amsterdam, Netherlands, NL

Frustrations
- Learn practical Dutch for daily life without structured classes
- Doesn't know her level, loses progress, uses Google instead
- Learning in short bursts — commute, couch, before bed

"I just want something simple I can do every day."

03 — Design principles

3 design principles

1. **Reduce thinking → increase action**
   No discussion first task. Select choices in seconds and start immediately. Zero barriers to entry.
2. **Make progress visible at all times**
   Users always know where they are, what section they're on, and how much is left.
3. **Focus on real-life Dutch**
   Content designed around expat needs — groceries, transport, housing — not generic classroom phrases.

05 — The product

15 levels (A1 → Master)
Clear path across Dutch speaking exam

Section-based structure
Each level: 3–4 topics (Transport, Housing, Food, ...)

Flashcard learning
Flip, Swipe, Mark — bite-sized learning sessions

Persistent progress
Clear resume location, never lose your place

Flashcards · Quizzes · Progress tracking · Profile · Phrase library

06 — Decisions & trade-offs

Why flashcards?
Fast, flexible, works in short sessions.
Matches real user behavior — it lets us ship faster by enough for meaningful learning.

Why no placement test?
Adds friction before value.
Users start immediately instead of overthinking their level. Self-selection works because all levels are visible.

Why visible structure?
Reduces anxiety and guilt.
Users understand the whole system on the levels page — no surprises, no dead ends.

Trade-Offs – What we left out intentionally

Trade-offs — intentional choices
No gamification — Avoids distraction, helps focus on the words
No social — Prioritizes stability over complexity now

07 — How users move through the app

Landing Page → Sign Up Flow → Choose Level → Dashboard → Flashcard Session → Progress Tracker

Returning users: Sign in → instantly resume at their level. No friction, no onboarding.

WHAT USERS SEE ON THE LEVEL CARD

Level 1	Level 3
A1 Beginner	A2 Pre-Intermediate
Greetings & Phrases — 120 cards	Body & Health — 120 cards
Family & Relations — 100 cards	Travel & Directions — 120 cards
Food & Daily Life — 80 cards	Shopping & Money — 110 cards

08 — Visual direction

Clarity over personality

Warm & friendly — cognitive load minimized in the design.

COLOR PALETTE

Background	Text	Blue	Card BG	White	Border
#F7F6F3	#1A1A1A	#3B82F6	#EEEDEB	#FFFFFF	#E2E0DC

09 — Learn Dutch

Choose Your Level

Master Dutch through interactive flashcards.

PROGRESS · SECTIONS · LEVELS

KEY COMPONENTS

BUTTONS: Primary · Secondary

PROGRESS BAR: Primary — Secondary — Inactive 0%

TEXT FIELD: Enter your name

BUTTON MODAL: Sign Up · Send Message

10 — Testing & fixes

GOOD: FOCUS ON FLOWS
Users hesitated when a section had no progress — the button looks inactive.

FIX: Show progress even when it's zero — "Start" CTA, not "Continue".

GOOD: FOCUS ON FLOWS
Long section names like "Conditionals & Complex Sentences" broke the card layout.

FIX: Truncate with ellipsis + full name visible when the section is opened.

11 — Handling the unexpected

- **Incorrect login** — Clear error message, password reset — never reveal which field is wrong.
- **Empty fields** — Inline validation highlights missing field without clearing the form.
- **Bot protection** — Google reCAPTCHA v3 (1 / 5 / 10 — faster and less friction than reCAPTCHA).
- **Long sessions** — Lazy loading keeps Conditionals & Complex Sentences, ~~~ hundreds, full view under actions.
- **Lost progress** — Local storage + sync on login — no onboarding, no friction.

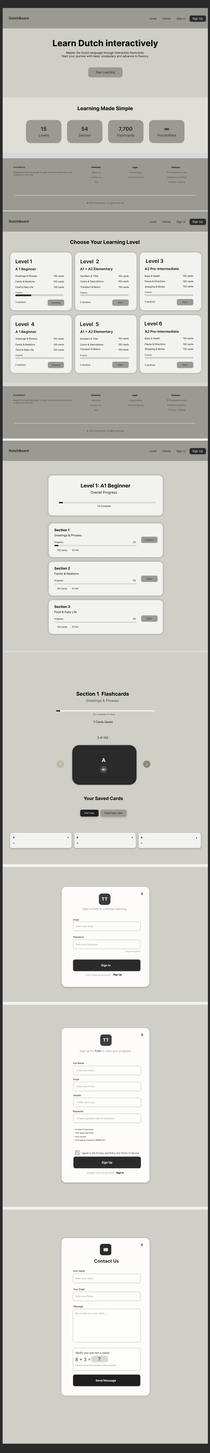
12 — User Growth

OUTCOMES

Platform surpassed increased reach
After launch, Talk Tutor Lab attracted new users through targeted channels.

Growth metrics
- **+500** New signups in first month
- **+12%** Month-over-month growth
- **+42%** Week-over-week active users
- **87%** Retention after 7 days

13 — What comes next

- Referral program Let satisfied users invite friends. Most of growth is strongest in tight expat networks.
- Expand to other expat communities Apply the same structure to other communities to reach newcomers early.
- Content expansion Add workplace-specific sections for professional contexts.
- Community features Discussion board where users share tips and practice together.

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