CHAPTER 5

Determining the App’s Functionality and Structure

Now that we know we’re building a web app and have our tools at the ready, we can start really planning the app’s functionality. In this chapter, you will:

- Define what the app does
- Determine how users will interact with it (and what will differ based on a user’s role)
- Come up with a plan for the site’s back-end code and database
- Figure out a structure for the front end
- Create a simple wireframe for the app

By the end of this chapter, you should have a very clear idea of how the app will be built; this should eliminate wasted development hours and help keep the app on track.

What Does the App Do?

Before we can plan anything, you need a very clear and concise feature list. This will keep our feature list in check and help avoid any scope creep as you start designing and developing.

Give the App a Mission Statement

Let’s start with a high-level overview of the app that should direct all the decisions you make regarding the app’s functionality.

In one short paragraph, let’s figure out how to describe the app:

This is a simple Q&A web app to allow attendees of a given event to ask questions of the presenter and confirm that a question by another attendee is relevant to them as well, all in real time. In addition, the presenter should have a list of questions and the number of people asking each, from which she can mark a question answered as she gives the answer to the group.
What Doesn’t the App Do?

Equally important—if not more so—than the list of what the app does, is the list of what it doesn’t do. This will inform decisions about whether or not a feature should be included in the app.

This app is intended to be a tool for presenters and attendees of an event that is occurring live and is most likely going to be used in the same physical space as the other attendees. Therefore, the app should not:

- Attempt to replace live discussion.
  - This means the app does not allow comments or answers within itself; it is solely there to present questions, not to answer or clarify them. Allowing discussion within the app could distract from the actual presentation.
- Provide any additional information about the session.
  - The app doesn’t tell attendees what the session is about or provide any resources. That focus is still on the presenter because this app is not meant to take part in the presentation, only the Q&A.
- Provide any organizational tools for the presenter.
  - The presenter’s dashboard is simply a list of questions, ranked by popularity, that can be marked as “answered.” This is not a tool to help presenters get better at presenting; it’s there to help them field questions from the room.

What Roles Will Users Play?

Now that we know what the app does—asks and answers questions—we can define the different types of users that will interact with it.

Because this is a pretty simple application, there are only two user roles: Presenter and Attendee.

Presenter

A presenter will create a room on the app’s home view and then share that room with the people in attendance using a link that will be generated upon the room’s creation. He will be provided with a button that ends the session, which closes it to further questions.

As questions are asked, they will show up on the presenter’s screen in real time with one UI element that allows him to mark the question as answered.

Attendees

Attendees will join a room by either clicking the link provided by the presenter or by entering the room’s ID, which will be the part of the URL that isn’t the domain name (i.e., http://example.com/1234, where 1234 is the room’s ID).

Upon joining the room, attendees will see questions that have been asked in this session previously (if any exist) with an option to vote up that question. Any new questions will appear on the screen in real time.

There will also be a form through which an attendee can ask her own question, which will be added to the list of questions already upvoted by her.

Finally, there will be a link to email the presenter directly if a question wasn’t answered satisfactorily or if the question isn’t appropriate for the whole group.