AI in UX & Product Design

2026 SURVEY REPORT

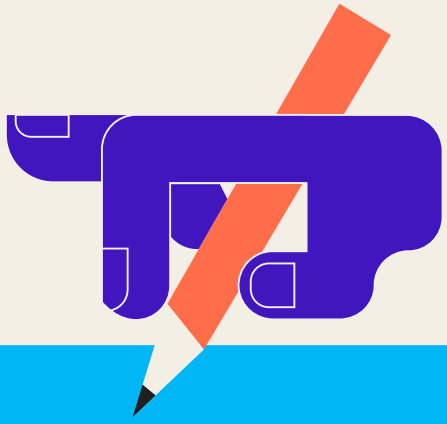
Designlab

About Designlab

Designlab is a leading provider of design education, offering courses and training for digital designers and teams at all levels. As AI reshapes the design industry, Designlab is committed to helping designers understand, integrate, and leverage AI tools in meaningful ways. This report reflects our ongoing efforts to track the impact of AI on design workflows and skills.

About This Survey

In late 2025, we surveyed over **200** UX and product designers across our community to understand how AI is being implemented in design workflows. Respondents included individuals with between two and 25+ years of design experience working across a range of industries, including SaaS, finance, education, healthcare, e-commerce, and others. We gathered insights on AI usage, impact, challenges, and future expectations. This report synthesizes our findings into several key insights, supplemented by direct quotes and deeper conversations with our community.



A Note From the Team

Dear Designlab Community,

Over the past two years, the pace of change in AI tools has been monumental, moving from early experimentation to something much more embedded in everyday design work. With that shift comes a new set of questions: not whether AI belongs in design, but how designers are choosing to use it, where it adds real value, and where designers' expertise still matters most.

This report marks Designlab's second survey on AI in UX and product design. Last year, we set out to understand how designers were beginning to experiment with emerging tools. This year, we were able to look more closely at how those experiments have evolved. With a year of comparison, new questions, and deeper qualitative insight, we can start to see patterns—not just in adoption, but in how designers are thinking critically about AI's role in their work.

What emerges from the latest data is a picture of growing familiarity paired with increasing discernment. Designers are using AI more frequently and across more parts of the design process, particularly in content, research, prototyping, and iteration. At the same time, they remain critical when it comes to quality, trust, and overreliance. AI is widely viewed as a powerful support—one that accelerates work and expands possibilities—but not as a replacement for creative judgment, taste, or accountability.

Perhaps most notably, designers are beginning to look beyond using AI tools toward shaping AI-powered features, signaling a gradual expansion of the design role itself. Alongside this shift is a broader reflection on differentiation: in a world where AI tools are widely accessible, what will organizations (and design professionals) do to set themselves apart?

Our goal with this report is not to point to a particular path forward, but to bring clarity to where our industry stands today. By grounding the conversation in real data and real voices from the design community, we hope to help designers, teams, and organizations navigate this moment with confidence and intention. Whether your workflows are already AI-driven or you're still figuring out where these tools fit into your process, we hope this report offers perspective and a useful lens through which to consider what's next for the UX and product design landscape.

— Team Designlab

AI's Role in Design Workflows Today

KEY INSIGHT:

AI is an increasingly regular part of designers' workflows, but rarely the center.

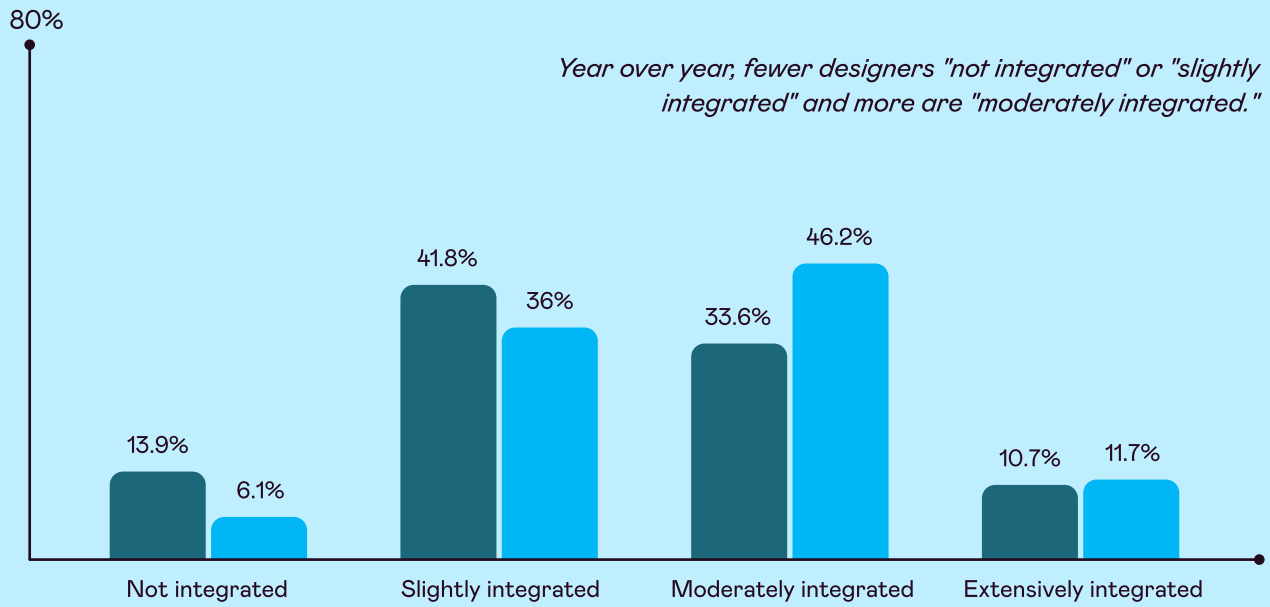
For most, AI tools have become an everyday part of how designers get work done, though they haven't displaced human judgment as the core of the design process. In this year's survey, nearly 60% of designers say AI is moderately or extensively integrated into their workflows, compared to 44.3% the previous year. At the same time, the share of designers not using AI dropped to just 6%. This shift is mirrored in time spent: designers using AI for more than a quarter of their work hours increased, indicating that AI use is becoming nearly ubiquitous.

Still, designers are clear about AI's role in their process; they see it as supportive rather than directive. One designer notes, "AI in UX/UI design acts as a powerful co-pilot, but it augments, not replaces, human designers."

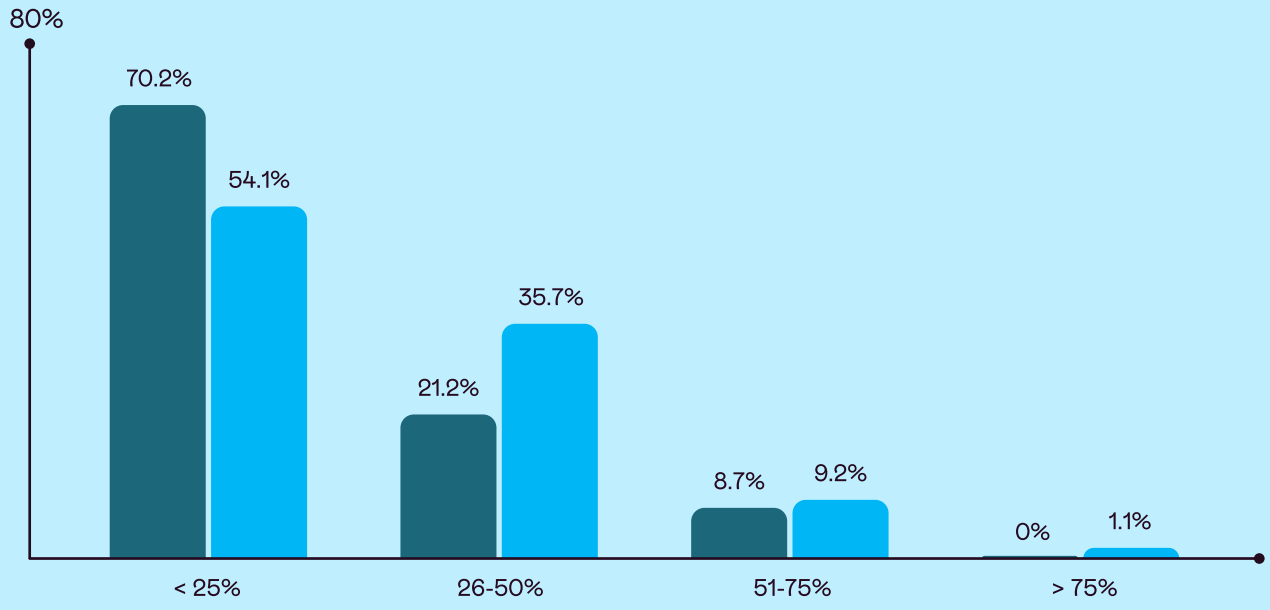
This sentiment is repeated by other designers. AI is increasingly present, but designers still see themselves as responsible for "empathy, ethical judgment, and human-centered outcomes."

The story here is not transformation, but normalization: AI has moved beyond experimental, yet it still hasn't become the main driver of design workflows.

To what extent are AI tools or workflows integrated into your design process?



What % of your design work (in hours spent) involve AI tools or workflows?



> *The key insights are AI as a quality enhancer, a driver of personalization, and a tool that frees designers for higher-level, empathetic work, all while demanding ethical responsibility and continuous learning from designers.*
>
> *— Freelance Product Designer, SaaS*

What Are Designers Using AI For?

KEY INSIGHT:

AI is moving deeper into the design process.

AI's most consistent value for designers remains efficiency; as was the case in last year's report, a majority of designers note time savings from using AI: 60% of respondents in this year's report say AI reduces time spent on routine tasks, and 28.7% say it helps them ship designs faster. What has changed in the last year is where in the design process AI is being applied.

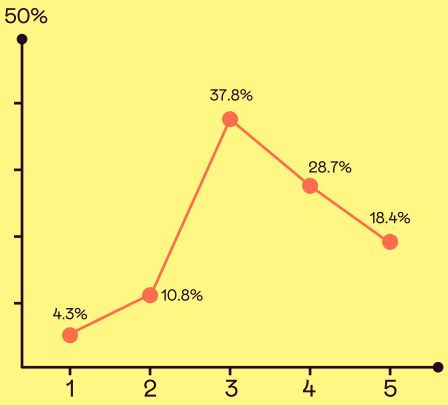
As was the case last year, the majority of designers are routinely using AI for UX writing and microcopy, followed by user research and data analysis. However, our recent survey data shows AI use cases moving into design execution and iteration. The clearest signal is in prototyping and wireframing: while only about 20% of designers used AI for these tasks in last year's report, that number has now jumped to 57.3%. This suggests that designers are no longer limiting AI to text-based work and are now beginning to use it for more visual tasks.

In the latest survey, 38.4% of designers are producing more design variations per project, compared to 21.2% last year. This increase points to even faster iteration throughout the design process. At the same time, AI adoption is lower for visual design and asset generation, accessibility improvements, testing and evaluation, and personalization. Therefore, designers are adopting AI first in areas where it accelerates ideation and iteration, while staying cautious about using it for final execution.

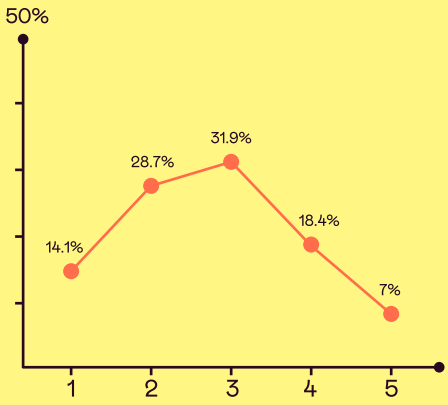
How frequently do you use AI tools for the following tasks?

1 - Never
2 - Rarely
3 - Occasionally
4 - Often
5 - Always

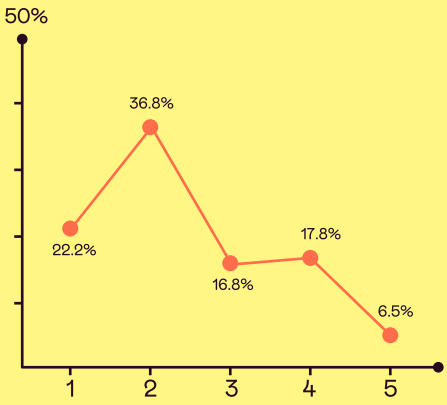
Concept exploration and creative ideation



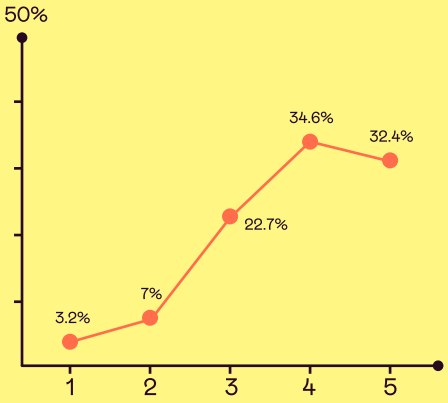
Prototyping and wireframing



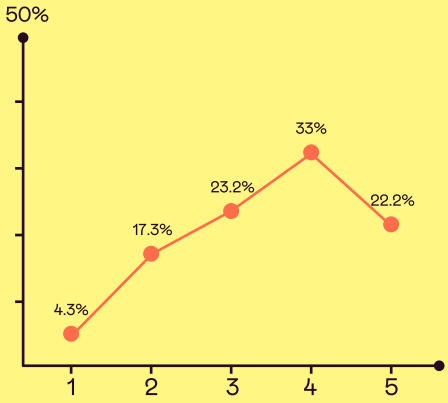
Visual design and asset generation



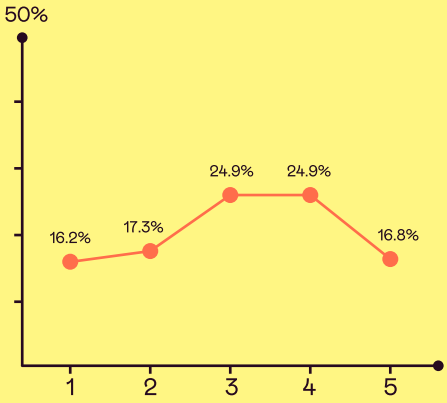
Content creation (e.g., UX writing, microcopy)



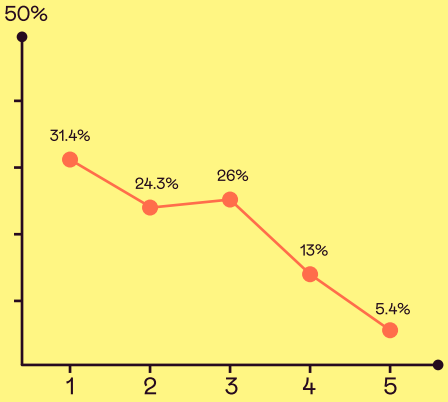
User research synthesis and analysis



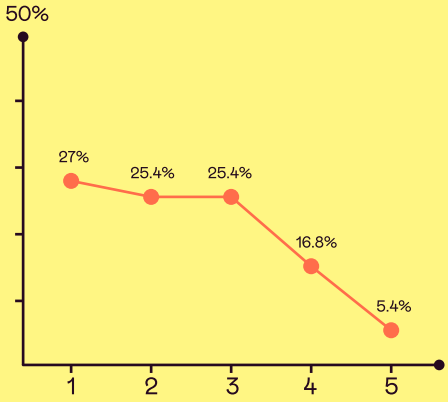
Analytics, behavioral insights, or data-driven pattern detection



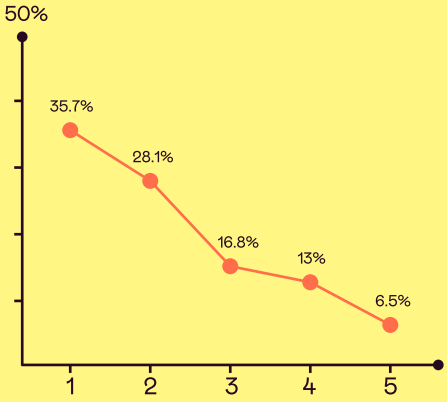
Accessibility improvements



Personalization and user journey mapping



Testing, evaluation, and simulation



The AI Tool Landscape

KEY INSIGHT:

ChatGPT remains the leader, but a second tier of tools has emerged.

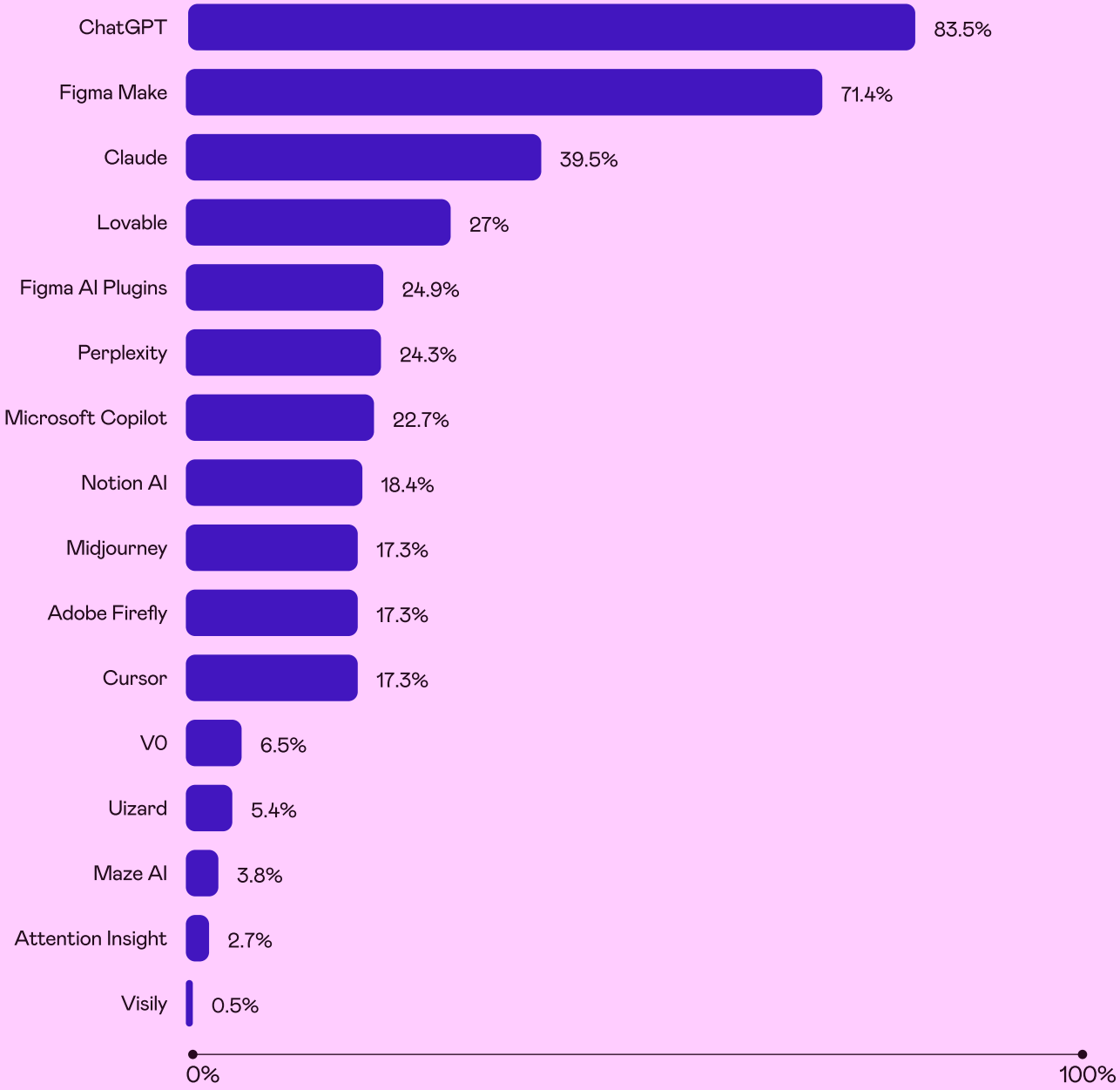
For many designers (and much of the world), ChatGPT was the first AI tool that achieved widespread usage. This was clear in last year's data where ChatGPT was by far the most widely used AI tool cited. This year, ChatGPT remains the foundational AI tool for designers, but it no longer defines the landscape on its own.

The most significant shift is the rapid adoption of competing LLMs and AI prototyping tools. **Figma Make, now used by 71.4% of respondents**, did not exist at the time of last year's survey, yet has quickly become a core part of many designers' workflows. Additionally, impressive market share growth for tools like **Claude** (last year: 14%; this year: 39.5%), **Lovable** (not cited in last year's report; this year: 27%), **Perplexity** (last year: 9%; this year: 24.3%), and **Microsoft Copilot** (last year: 7%; this year: 22.7%) point not to displacement, but to expansion. Rather than replacing ChatGPT, designers are adding complementary tools as specific use cases mature, assembling multi-tool AI stacks that reflect different needs across research, ideation, and prototyping.

This pattern reflects a shift toward more deliberate, use-case-driven adoption. Designers are not abandoning ChatGPT, but layering in additional tools where they accelerate specific parts of the workflow. Adoption is clustering around two primary use cases—LLMs for research, synthesis, and ideation, and AI prototyping tools for rapid exploration and iteration. Figma Make stands out not because it replaces downstream production work, but because it operates directly inside a production design environment, making it easier to generate starting points and iterate quickly without leaving established workflows.

As these workflows begin to stabilize, however, the pace of experimentation appears to slow. Designers describe growing friction in evaluating and maintaining an expanding set of tools, raising the bar for what earns a permanent place in their stack. As one respondent noted, "It's very time consuming at this point to evaluate and work with different tools...and many are not mature enough for design and visual aspects."

What AI tools or platforms do you currently use in your work?



[I use] ChatGPT for research, discovery analysis, UX writing, and benchmarks support, and Figma make for prototype and testing. They really improve my workflow in terms of learning, efficiency and how fast a design solution can be shipped.

— UX/UI Designer, Corporate Events

Barriers to AI Use

KEY INSIGHT:

Designers' concerns have shifted from access and understanding to risk, quality, and accountability.

In last year's survey, many of the barriers designers cited centered on learning how to use AI tools and understanding where they fit into the design process. This year, as AI adoption has increased, those concerns have shifted. The challenges designers report now are less about access or awareness and more about risk, quality, and accountability—reflecting a growing focus on the consequences of AI use in real-world design work.

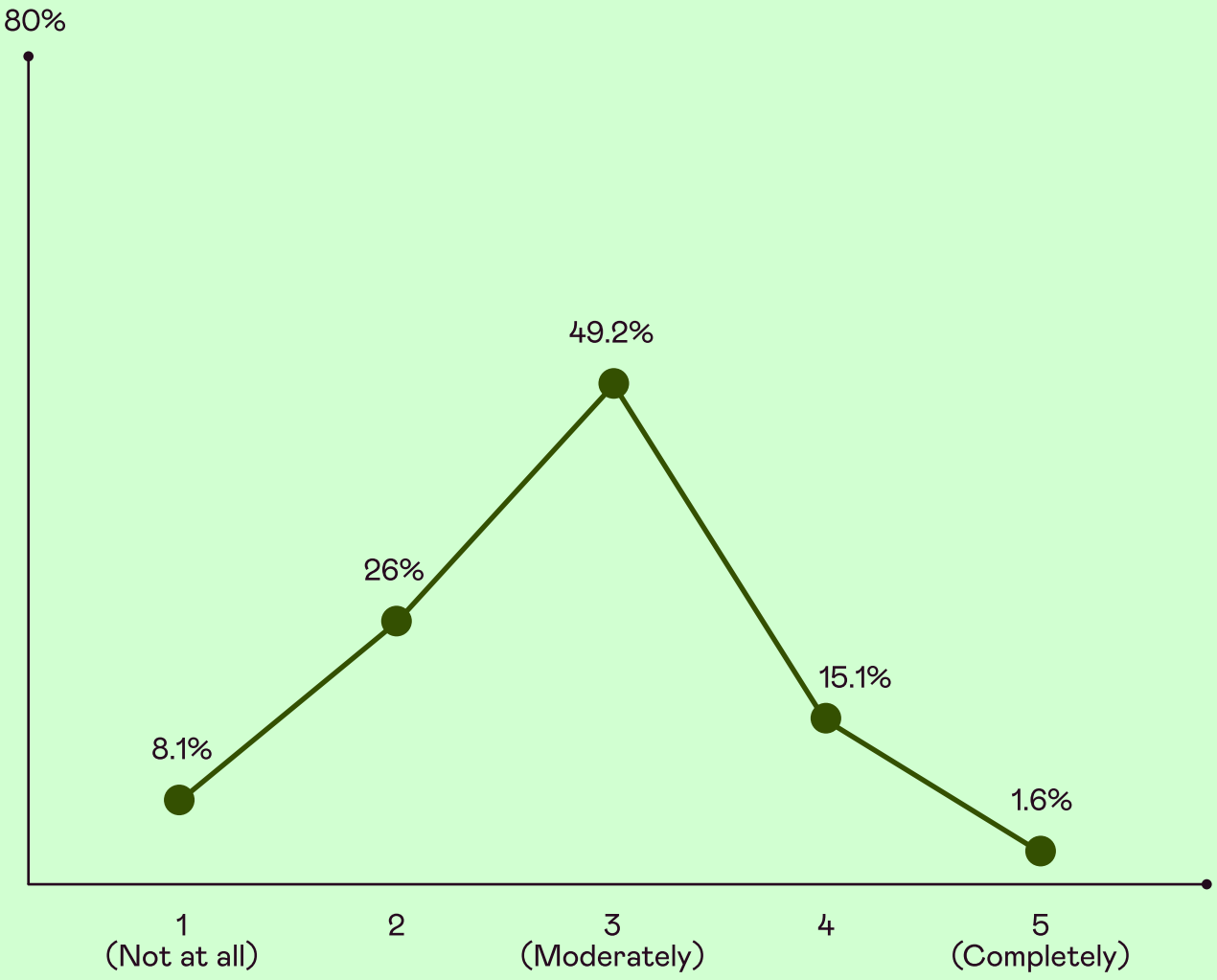
Designers most frequently point to tool limitations and compliance or data privacy as major concerns. Ethical considerations (48.1%) also rank highly among reported barriers.

Quality issues stand out in particular—56.8% of designers cite AI's negative impact on design quality as a concern. Designers worry that AI-generated work can appear polished while masking deeper usability issues, unclear authorship, or unresolved questions of ownership. As one respondent noted, it is "hard to use AI in a team environment when there's no clear way to validate or audit what it's producing."

Concerns about unreliable or inconsistent outputs are also widely reported this year, with the majority of designers (49.2%) noting they only moderately trust the work of AI. Designers describe a need to apply judgment—recognizing when AI accelerates their work and when it risks obscuring real problems rather than solving them.

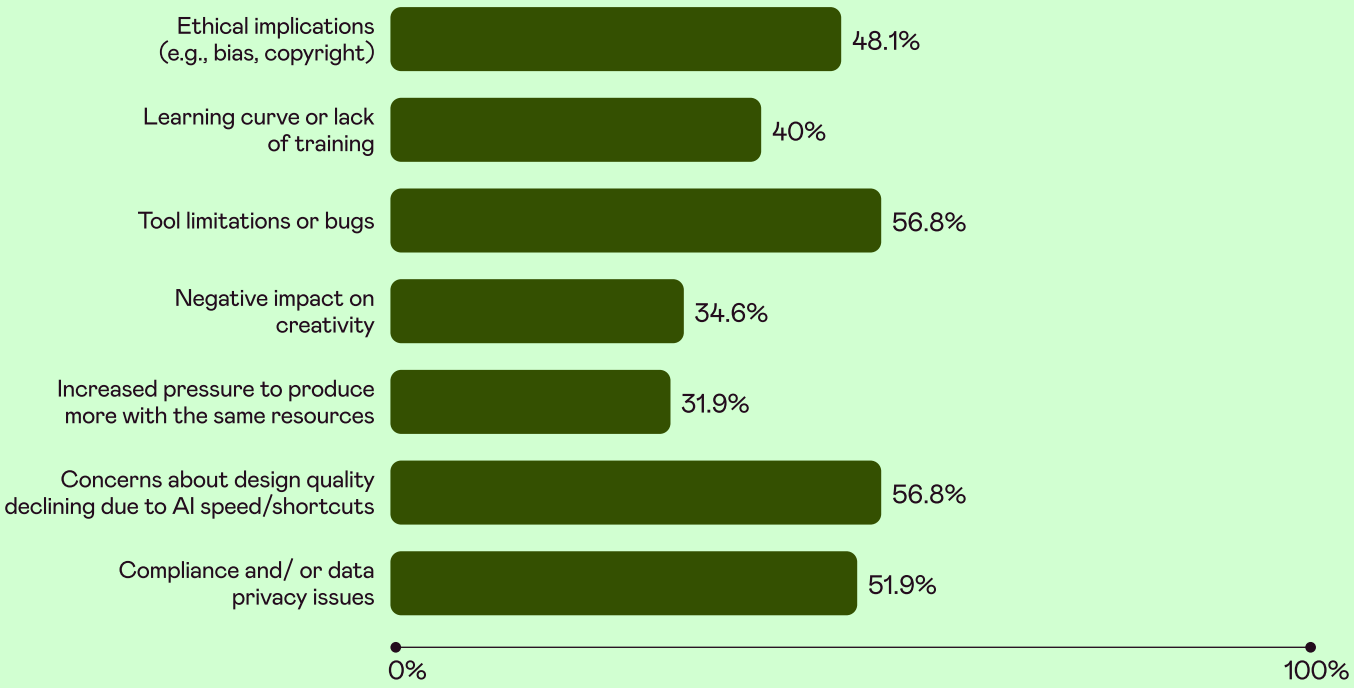
Taken together, these concerns reflect a growing sense of professional responsibility rather than resistance to AI itself. Designers are not pushing back on adoption; instead, they are applying critical judgment, setting boundaries, and weighing long-term impact as AI becomes more embedded in everyday design practice.

How much do you trust AI-generated design outputs in your workflow?

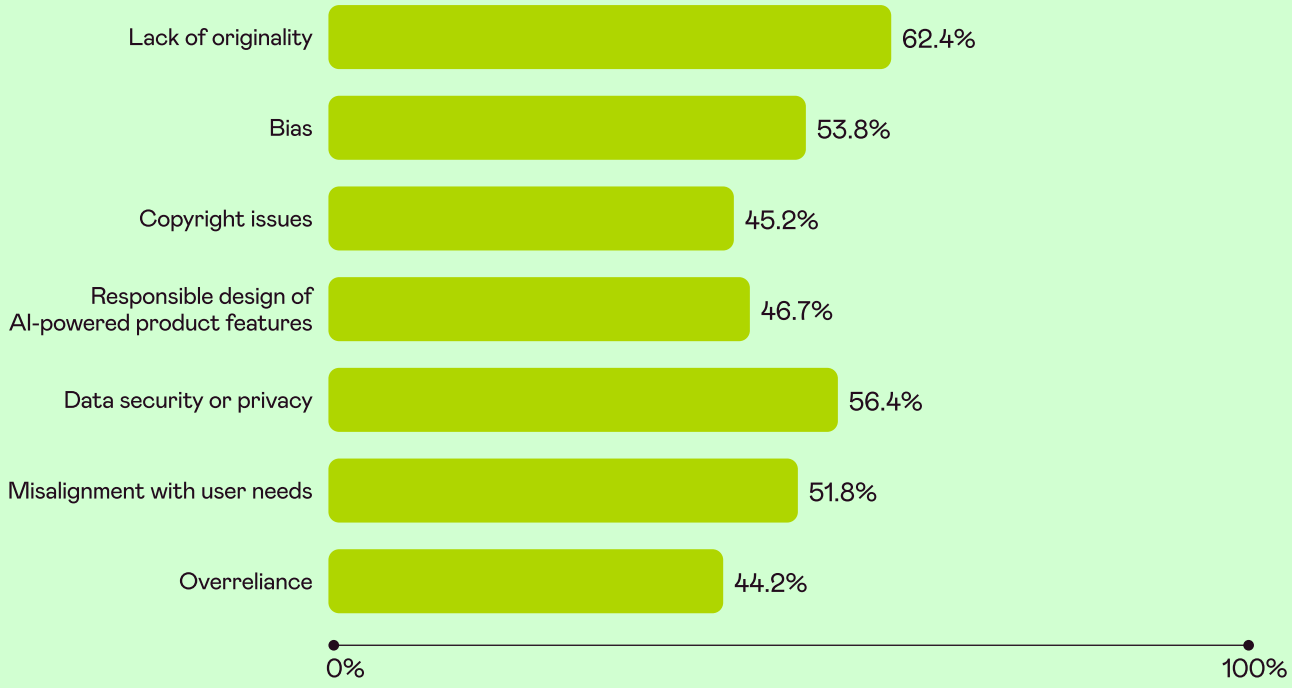


> *AI in design is less about speed and more about judgment. Treat it as a design material, not a feature. The hardest work is framing intent, defaults, and guardrails. Empty states turn into real interactions. And if the UX is sloppy, AI will amplify the mess instantly.*
>
> *— UX/UI Designer, SaaS*

What challenges or concerns have you encountered when using AI tools?



Which ethical aspects of AI-generated work concern you most?



Designers' Sentiments on AI

KEY INSIGHT:

Designers see AI's future as assistive—with real anxiety about homogenization.

Designers' outlook on AI is neither utopian nor alarmist, but pragmatic. The majority of designers we surveyed believe AI will continue to function as a deeply embedded assistant rather than a replacement for human judgment.

At the same time, many designers raised a broader concern about what happens as AI becomes ubiquitous. If the same tools—trained in similar ways—are available to everyone, what will ultimately differentiate products and experiences?

This concern about homogenization is shared by many respondents. Designers worry that without strong human direction, AI-generated work could flatten visual language, interaction patterns, and brand expression. They also express concern that AI adoption may be driven by optics rather than outcomes, with organizations prioritizing speed or cost-cutting without meaningfully improving user experience.

Alongside these views on AI itself, designers are also reflecting on what AI means for their roles, teams, and long-term career paths. Survey responses indicate that AI has not yet led to widespread reductions in team size or dramatic role displacement, according to about 76% of designers. But it is beginning to influence how work is distributed and the skills designers are expected to develop. Designers who pair strong fundamentals with AI tool fluency and critical thinking about AI's limitations report greater confidence in adapting to these changes.

In total, the data suggests that designers do not view AI as an existential threat—but they do see it as a force that must be shaped deliberately. As AI takes on more execution, differentiation shifts upstream: toward product vision, ethical judgment, user understanding, and taste.

> *The design process will still be intact [in five years], but perhaps we will have more autonomy to do less menial tasks and focus more on strategy and storytelling.*
>
> *— UX/UI/Product Designer, Social Consumer Apps*

> *A recurring question is what will become the new thing that sets products, product teams, and companies apart. If everyone is using the same tools and deriving similar advantages in terms of speed, quality, etc., what will be the thing that actually sets any particular team apart?*
>
> *— UX Designer, SaaS*

Designing AI Experiences

KEY INSIGHT:

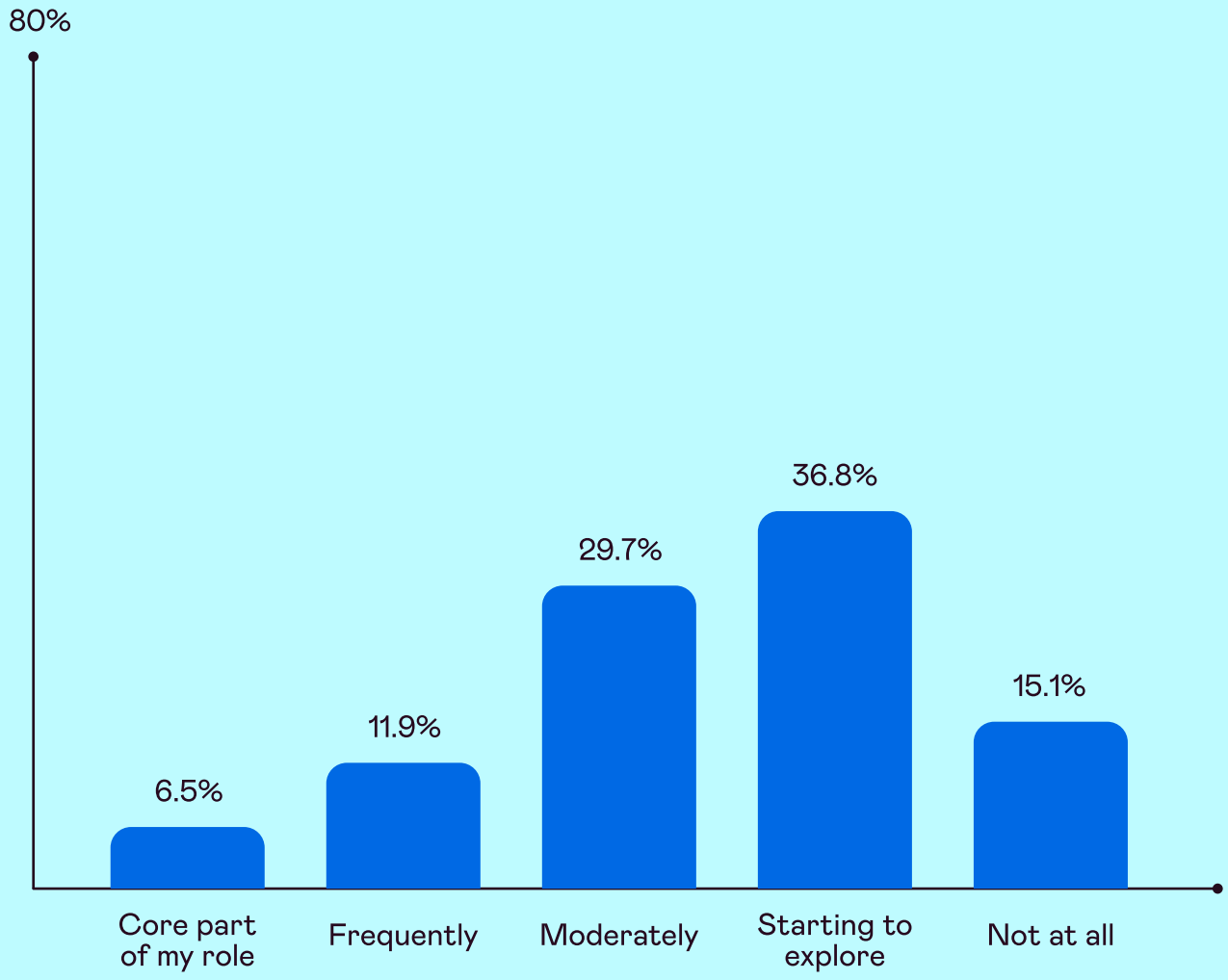
Designers are going beyond using AI tools for their work and increasingly designing AI-powered interactions.

This year's survey report captures designers' growing involvement in AI-powered product features—an area we didn't explore in our 2025 report. While only 18.5% report designing AI features frequently or as a core part of their role, nearly 67% say they are at least starting to explore this space. Taken together, this suggests the field is early—but moving quickly from experimentation toward real product work.

As designers get involved in AI features, the work shifts from "using AI to move faster" to designing how AI shows up in the product: what users can ask for, what the system returns, how much control users have, and what happens when the output is wrong or uncertain. In practice, this often looks less like "designing the model" and more like designing the interaction around it—inputs, constraints, feedback, and failure states.

That shift also raises new design questions that established human-AI interaction guidance emphasizes: how to set expectations, communicate uncertainty, support correction, and recover gracefully when systems fail. As AI becomes more embedded in products, organizations also face broader trust and risk considerations (reliability, privacy, accountability) that influence what responsible UX looks like in AI-powered experiences.

To what extent are you currently designing AI-powered product features?



> *There is so much focus on using AI but not enough focus on designing AI features and I think this is the larger issue that needs addressing. We need better ways to map existing products to AI.*
>
> *— Product Designer, Healthcare SaaS*

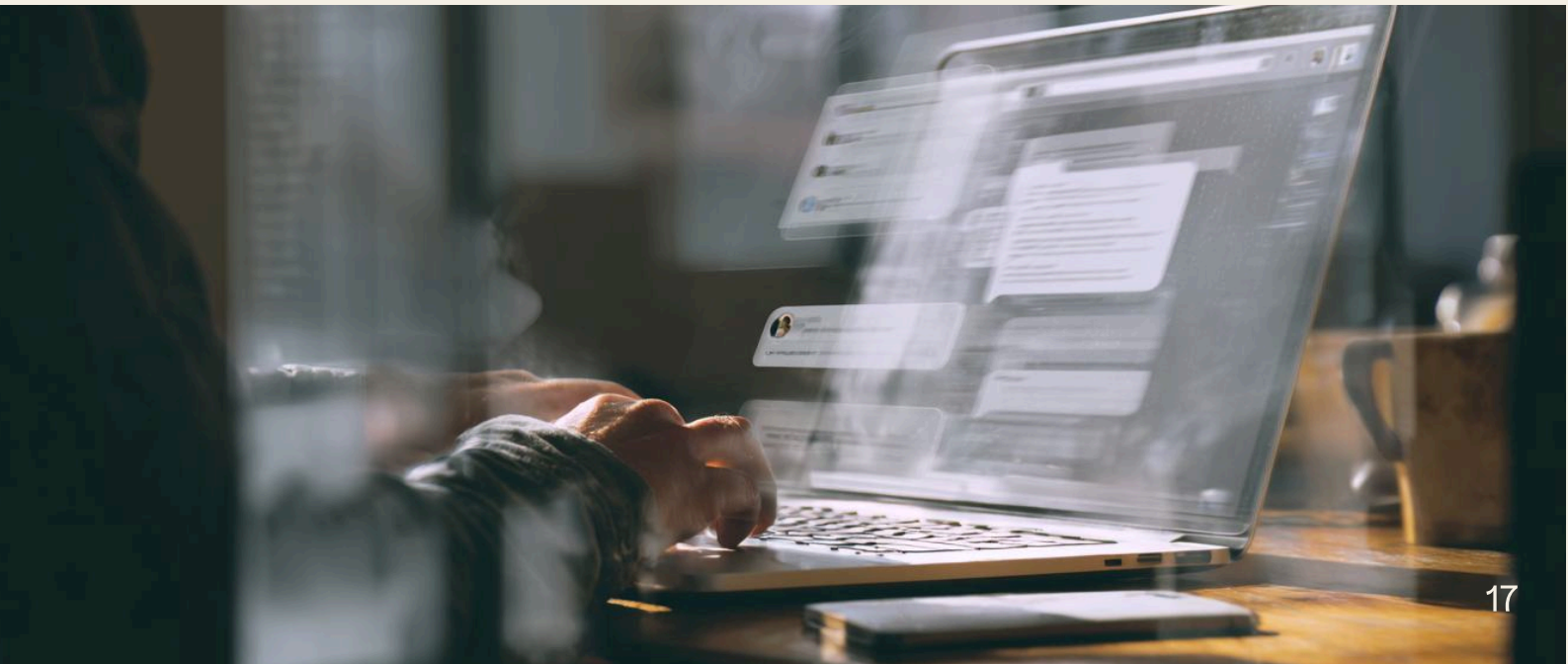
Closing Thoughts

AI is no longer an unfamiliar technology for designers, but a normalized part of the design process. This year's survey shows clear growth in how frequently and where designers are using AI, particularly as it moves beyond text-based tasks to prototyping, and design iteration. At the same time, AI has not replaced human judgment or system thinking. Designers consistently describe AI as a tool that accelerates work, expands options, and reduces friction, without becoming the source of production-ready design.

What stands out most to us in this 2026 survey report is maturation. Designers are increasingly selective about how and when they use AI, weighing speed against quality, convenience against trust, and experimentation against risk. Concerns around reliability, privacy, and design integrity are not signs of resistance—they reflect professional accountability. As AI tools become more integrated in workflows, designers are applying sharper judgment, setting clearer boundaries, and resisting the idea that efficiency alone is a measure of success.

Looking ahead, designers are aware of the strategic questions AI raises. As AI tools continue to become widely implemented, differentiation will depend less on efficiency and more on vision, taste, ethics, and deep user understanding. At the same time, a growing number of designers are beginning to move beyond using AI tools to designing AI-powered features. This shift is pushing design work into unfamiliar territory and further blurring boundaries between product management, product design, and engineering.

Ultimately, the designers and teams best positioned for the next phase are not those who adopt AI fastest, but those who adopt it most thoughtfully. AI is proving to be a powerful collaborator, but only when guided by skilled designers who understand its strengths and limits.



Want to learn more?

At Designlab, we believe AI will continue to influence the future of UX and product design. That's why we're at the forefront of AI education for UX and product designers. If you or your team are interested in how the most skilled designers are integrating AI tools into their design workflows in meaningful ways, we recommend you check out our wide range of programs and courses or contact us about customized trainings for your team.