

SAHIL TAYAL / FIELD MANUAL NO. 001

THE OTHER ORBIT

A FIELD MANUAL FOR BEING HUMAN

Twelve original practices to notice, question, act, connect, make, and enjoy life without turning it into a scoreboard.

READ THIS FIRST

Not a self-improvement scoreboard.

This manual is a set of field instruments. Use the ones that fit. Leave the rest. Return when the question changes.

HOW TO USE

Choose a practice that meets a real situation you are facing. Take about ten minutes with a pen or notes app. Describe what you can actually observe before naming what you think it means. If a practice opens a conversation involving another person, invite them; do not turn the worksheet into a verdict about them.

SIX ZONES OF INQUIRY

THINK: evidence, counterfactuals, calibration. ACT: friction, small tests. SEE: ordinary expertise, the trouble with metrics. CONNECT: invisible expectations, feedback. MAKE: tiny useful experiments, sensory noticing. LIVE: choosing what is enough.

THREE COMMITMENTS

1. The worksheets are not assessments and have no score.
2. A more precise question is already a good outcome.
3. People are more complex than the variables we use to describe them.

Original exercises; not clinical assessment, professional advice, or a validated psychological instrument.

SMALL INVITATION

At the top of a fresh page, write: "I might be wrong about ____." Leave the sentence unfinished until you can say what you mean.

01 / THINK

Separate the event from the story

Observation is the world as described; interpretation is the meaning we attach.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

A friend replies three days late. You notice the delay, then conclude they no longer respect you. The delay is real. The reason is still unknown. Different explanations (busy week, avoidance, technical failure, a changed priority) imply different next actions.

TRY THIS

Pick a situation that is occupying your attention. In three columns, write (A) what a recording device could capture, (B) the story you are telling about it, and (C) at least two plausible alternative explanations. Mark the pieces you would need to verify.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

What is known? What is inferred? What would a fair-minded person need before treating your story as fact?

REMEMBER: Clarity is not compulsory optimism. A difficult interpretation may be correct; it just deserves the same evidence standard as a comforting one.

YOUR NOTE

02 / THINK

Ask the counterfactual

The right comparison is often something that never happened.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

An organisation runs a workshop and morale rises. Was the workshop effective? Perhaps. But morale might also have improved because an unpopular policy ended, or because the quarter was less demanding. Before-after change alone does not isolate a cause.

TRY THIS

Choose an outcome you credit to one specific cause. Write the invisible comparison: "If that cause had not occurred, what might have happened?" Name three background variables. Sketch a simple, ethical way to compare the two possibilities, even if you could not carry it out.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

What would you see if your preferred cause had no effect? Are you comparing against a realistic alternative or against nothing?

REMEMBER: Counterfactuals do not magically settle causation. They stop us from mistaking a sequence of events for a demonstration.

YOUR NOTE

03 / THINK

Make a calibration journal

Confidence is a claim about uncertainty, not a measure of personal worth.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

A forecast of "certainly" or "never" closes the door to learning. A dated prediction with an observable outcome lets the world correct your map. We can be sure about an experience while uncertain about why it happened.

TRY THIS

Write one prediction about an observable event within the next month. State the exact event and deadline. Use everyday language such as "more likely than not" or "unlikely". Note the evidence behind the judgment and one credible counterargument. Revisit the prediction after the event.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

Was the outcome defined clearly enough to judge? Did you change the wording after the fact? What did you learn that can improve your next forecast?

REMEMBER: One correct forecast does not prove an excellent model. Look for repeated patterns over time and be alert to lucky guesses.

YOUR NOTE

04 / ACT

Draw a friction map

A stalled action might be a design problem, not a verdict on character.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

You intend to practise music after work but rarely begin. The instrument is packed away, the room is noisy, and the first step is vague. In this setting, motivation has to pay several tolls before a note can be played.

TRY THIS

Choose an intention that keeps slipping. Map its path from cue to first action: when, where, tools, interruptions, emotional costs, and decisions required. Circle one friction that can be reduced without adding pressure or cost. Then add one useful safeguard for an action you want to avoid.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

Which obstacle is environmental? Which skill might be missing? Which conflict reflects a legitimate competing priority?

REMEMBER: Friction is not always bad: privacy checks, consent, rest and safety barriers can protect what matters.

YOUR NOTE

05 / ACT

Design the smallest honest test

A tiny real attempt can teach more than a grand imaginary plan.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

Someone dreams of teaching a course. Before designing a platform and logo, they try one carefully prepared thirty-minute session with two consenting friends. The result cannot prove market demand, but it can reveal confusion, interest, and awkward transitions.

TRY THIS

State the question you actually need to answer. Build a test doable with existing resources and limited consequences. Define what success, failure, and ambiguous results would look like before running it. Write down what you learned, including surprises.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

What would this test tell you? What would it NOT tell you? Is the smallest step also meaningful enough to produce information?

REMEMBER: Experiments are invitations to update, not rituals for guaranteeing a desired outcome.

YOUR NOTE

06 / SEE

Put ordinary expertise under a microscope

Capability often disappears when we look only at job titles.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

Consider someone keeping a small neighbourhood shop running. They remember customer needs, detect stock changes, switch between tasks, navigate suppliers, prevent losses and read social cues. The work may be ordinary in its setting and complex in its execution.

TRY THIS

Choose an everyday activity: hosting guests, commuting, budgeting, caregiving, repairing a hinge, planning a meal. Describe the observation, memory, timing, judgment and cooperation involved. Identify which parts would be invisible to a test score or resume.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

Which skill requires practice? Which expertise is context-specific? Are you romanticising difficulty or overlooking the constraints a person faces?

REMEMBER: Recognising expertise does not mean declaring every practice equally effective. It means paying attention before evaluating.

YOUR NOTE

07 / SEE

Audit a seductive metric

The thing we can count is rarely the whole thing we care about.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

A school celebrates test-score gains. That may reflect learning. It may also come from narrowing lessons to tested material, changing who takes the exam, or sacrificing subjects that matter but are not measured. A metric is a window, not a landscape.

TRY THIS

Pick a metric used around you: grades, followers, output per hour, revenue, response time, attendance. Write the purpose it is meant to represent. Name what it measures well, what it misses, and which behaviours might change when rewards depend on it.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

Who benefits from the metric? Who is invisible? What complementary observations would produce a fairer picture?

REMEMBER: Do not throw numbers away. Pair them with context, countermeasures and the humility to revise the dashboard.

YOUR NOTE

08 / CONNECT

Decode an invisible contract

Many conflicts begin with two reasonable people imagining different agreements.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

Two friends organise a trip. One thinks a plan is confirmed when dates are discussed; the other thinks it is confirmed only after tickets are booked. Each experiences the other as unreliable. Neither rule was ever made explicit.

TRY THIS

Write an expectation that has produced friction. Divide the page into: My assumed rule / Their possible rule / What we actually agreed / What needs renegotiation. Convert your complaint into a low-pressure question: "When we say confirmed, what do we each mean?"

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

What part of the agreement is your assumption? What boundary needs consent? What would a fair revision allow each person to keep?

REMEMBER: You cannot negotiate another person into sharing your preference. An explicit, respectful difference is still progress.

YOUR NOTE

09 / CONNECT

Translate feedback into evidence

Feedback is information to interpret, not a final verdict on identity.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

"You are unprofessional" is hard to use. "The report arrived two hours after the agreed deadline without an update" gives an observable event. The second statement still needs context, but it makes learning and repair possible.

TRY THIS

Choose feedback you have received or need to offer. Label each part as observation, interpretation, request or insult. Rewrite it into a specific event and an actionable change. Then add one question that might reveal missing context. Keep the recipient free to disagree.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

What is useful even if the evaluator is imperfect? Is this feedback about the work or the person? Which changes would improve the underlying goal?

REMEMBER: Good feedback protects both truth and authorship. You may learn from a critique without handing over your identity.

YOUR NOTE

10 / MAKE

Turn one question into a small artifact

Ideas become more testable when someone can touch, try or challenge them.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

"People are more than metrics" is an interesting claim. An interactive scene where a dashboard grows while invisible work disappears could make the tension immediately legible. A small artifact can carry an idea into another person's attention.

TRY THIS

Select a question you care about. Choose one medium: a one-page essay, tiny web interaction, drawing, scent description, audio loop, conversation game, diagram, or handwritten card. Define the one thing another person should be able to do or notice after engaging.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

Would the artifact still be useful without fancy effects? How might someone misunderstand it? What is one accessibility or clarity improvement?

REMEMBER: Publish only if you want. Creating for a single person, or simply understanding your own idea, is a complete reason to make.

YOUR NOTE

11 / MAKE

Follow a sensory memory

A smell or song can open an avenue of attention without dictating a feeling.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

The scent of an old notebook or the first few beats of a song can evoke a place, mood or association. People vary; a smell that comforts one person may have no effect or an unpleasant meaning for another.

TRY THIS

Choose a safe, ordinary sensory cue: tea, rainfall, a remembered song, a familiar room. Spend two minutes noticing without trying to improve your state. Describe concrete qualities first (warm, sharp, distant, rhythmic); then write the memories or associations that arrive. Distinguish them.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

Which words describe the actual sensation? Which describe your interpretation? What did you learn about your personal associations?

REMEMBER: Avoid treating sensory practices as treatment. Respect allergies, sensitivities, preferences and the right to opt out.

YOUR NOTE

12 / LIVE

Write an enough statement

Ambition and contentment do not need to cancel each other.

A SCENE FROM REAL LIFE

Someone keeps replacing a completed goal with a larger one, never noticing the ordinary life being lived between milestones. The problem is not necessarily wanting growth. It may be assuming that the present is worthless until a scoreboard changes.

TRY THIS

List three things you genuinely want to grow and three things that are already valuable, independent of improvement. For one area, write what "enough for now" would look like in behavioural terms: time, relationships, rest, craft, or curiosity. Revisit, do not engrave it in stone.

QUESTIONS WORTH KEEPING

What would still matter if nobody measured it? What do you want because it is meaningful to you rather than merely admired by others?

REMEMBER: Enough is not surrender. It can be a boundary that protects the life within which ambition is exercised.

YOUR NOTE

AN OPTIONAL EXPERIMENT

Seven days of noticing

A light invitation. Seven daily observations, no score, no streak, no requirement to finish.

DAY 1 / LOOK

Write one thing you observed today before you interpret it.

DAY 2 / COMPARE

Name a cause you assume, then a plausible world where it is absent.

DAY 3 / ACT

Remove one unnecessary obstacle from a useful action.

DAY 4 / SEE

Notice a skill performed by someone whose work usually goes unseen.

DAY 5 / ASK

Turn an unspoken expectation into one respectful question.

DAY 6 / MAKE

Create one small artifact that helps one person think or feel.

DAY 7 / LIVE

Write what you would value about today even without a result.

If you miss a day, nothing has been lost. The trail is not a productivity contest.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

CLAIM LEDGER

Worksheet / a better belief

Use this when a claim feels obvious but the stakes are meaningful.

THE CLAIM

Write one clear, falsifiable statement.

WHAT I OBSERVED

List direct evidence, dates and sources.

WHAT I AM INFERRING

Name assumptions and unverified interpretations.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Offer at least two plausible accounts.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE MY MIND

Identify specific counterevidence or an appropriate test.

NEXT BEST QUESTION

Choose a question that will improve the picture.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

CONVERSATION MAP

Worksheet / the invisible agreement

Use this to prepare for a discussion, not to write the other person's script.

THE SITUATION

Describe the moment without assigning motives.

THE RULE I ASSUMED

What did I take for granted?

THE RULE THEY MAY HAVE ASSUMED

State possibilities; do not claim access to their thoughts.

WHAT WE ACTUALLY AGREED

Separate explicit agreement from habit.

A RESPECTFUL QUESTION

Write an invitation to compare expectations.

A FAIR NEXT STEP

What can each person voluntarily agree to?

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

ARTIFACT CARD

Worksheet / make an idea tangible

Use this for a tiny experiment, essay, drawing, scent study or interactive sketch.

QUESTION THAT MATTERS

Which real question motivates the artifact?

WHO IS THIS FOR

A specific person or your own curiosity is enough.

THE ONE THING IT SHOULD DO

One useful insight, feeling or action.

THE SMALLEST VERSION

What can you make using what already exists?

WHAT MIGHT BE MISUNDERSTOOD

Consider clarity, accessibility and consent.

WHAT I LEARNED

Document surprise, ambiguity or useful criticism.

AN OPEN ENDING

Carry the question. Keep the person.

A short manifesto for thoughtful making, acting and living.

WHAT THESE TWELVE EXERCISES SHARE

Knowledge is provisional; evidence can improve it. Action depends on context, not merely intention. Human expertise is wider than the symbols used to measure it. Relationships involve expectations that deserve conversation. Craft can turn thought into something another person can use. And life remains valuable even when nobody is measuring it.

WHAT THEY DO NOT PROMISE

There is no guaranteed method for happiness, no objective ranking of personal worth, no universal formula for motivation or intimacy, and no substitute here for professional expertise when circumstances require it. Any exercise can be skipped or adapted to fit a real person and situation.

A CLOSING INVITATION

Choose one sentence from this manual that you disagree with. Write why. Then imagine how you might investigate the disagreement with care. A field manual should stay corrigible - useful enough to use, modest enough to revise.

For the wider public archive of projects and essays, visit <https://sahiltayal.com/> . To share a thoughtful criticism or response: sahil@sahiltayal.com .

THE WORK IS NEVER FINAL.

That is not a flaw. It is an invitation.