

SAHIL TAYAL / SAHILVERSE / EDITION 2026

STRANGE WITH STANDARDS.

A practical field manual for crossing disciplines, designing useful experiments, investigating claims, and publishing work that gives something back.

16+ FIELD TOOLS / 12 CREATIVE PATTERNS / THREE WORKED CASES

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An instrument, not a manifesto.

Use these pages on a real project. Cross out principles that do not survive contact with your subject. The purpose is improved judgment, not a fixed personal style.

The three promises

- A creative process that opens up surprising options without mistaking novelty for quality.
- A discipline of explicit evidence, uncertainty, counterexamples and accessible alternatives.
- A useful thing for your visitor to take away: a question, tool, model, worksheet or better distinction.

Suggested pathways

IF YOU ARE...	START WITH...
Looking for an idea	Pages 3–5: framing, synthesis and the seven moves
Already building	Pages 6–8: patterns and interaction contracts
Writing or researching	Page 9: claims, sources and uncertainty
Preparing to publish	Pages 14–17: red-team checks and worksheet

WORKING RULE

A beautiful feature must either clarify a concept, help an action, improve access, or delight without obstructing any of those.

A necessary distinction

This is an editorial creative framework, not a scientific assessment of Sahil Tayal, a universal methodology, a design certification, or evidence that any particular project works. Use it as a testable set of heuristics.

Four rules. Four failure modes.

The style is not the font, colour, or animation. It is the repeated choice to connect boldly and test carefully.

01 Cross-pollinate

Bring unlikely fields into contact. Example: opportunity cost clarifies competing uses of attention. Limit: a family relationship cannot be evaluated as if every exchange had a market price.

02 Question the frame

Ask who supplied the categories, which variables are visible, and whose lived constraints disappear. Reframe “How can people become more productive?” into “What work is worth doing, and for whom?”

03 Build to think

Have visitors choose, compare, rearrange, inspect or annotate. Make the manipulation expose a relationship. If removing the interaction changes nothing about the understanding, it may be decorative.

04 Leave something useful

Choose a takeaway before polishing the interface: worksheet, small model, reference list, conversation guide, source trail or printable map.

FOUR FAILURE MODES

Novelty without meaning. Moral certainty without evidence. Interactivity without learning. Personal branding without public usefulness.

The question behind the question.

A problem statement is already a theory about what matters. You can revise it before spending a week building the wrong thing.

The five-question frame audit

- What is the exact claim or friction? Describe the situation before describing the solution.
- What has the question assumed is normal, desirable, scarce or measurable?
- Who gets a voice in this framing, and who does not?
- What would a critic or differently situated person call the problem?
- What evidence would change my mind about my preferred framing?

Mini worked example: “Why are people lazy?”

WEAK FRAME	BETTER QUESTION
“People are lazy.”	What competing demands, incentives, obstacles or mismatches could explain non-action?
“They lack discipline.”	What data would distinguish motivation from opportunity and friction?
“Gamify everything.”	Would a reminder, simpler process, accessibility fix or resource help more?

YOUR OUTPUT

Three candidate framings. Write one argument for each and a piece of evidence that could falsify it.

From “what if” to “it exists.”

A practical sequence you can actually inspect. It is a loop: the seventh stage often sends you back to the first.

MOVE	ACTION	VISIBLE OUTPUT
01 NOTICE	Observe friction or contradiction.	One investigable question.
02 REFRAME	Write three competing frames.	Alternative premises.
03 SYNTHESISE	Borrow two distant lenses and note limits.	Analogy + breakpoint.
04 MODEL VISITOR	Define action, learning and accessible path.	Visitor journey.
05 PROTOTYPE	Build one meaningful interaction.	Small working artifact.
06 RED-TEAM	Test claims, access, devices and comprehension.	Fix list and evidence log.
07 RELEASE	Publish caveats and a substantive takeaway.	A living revision trail.

What “smallest honest prototype” means

The smallest version that still lets somebody understand and attempt your core insight. Sometimes it is a paper choice card. Sometimes a text-only page. Only sometimes a full simulation.

STOP CONDITION

If you cannot explain what the visitor will understand differently, return to the framing stage before increasing the technology.

Be strange. Be rigorous. Be humane.

Treat the tensions as dials, not a ranking of people. You can turn one up only while retaining the minimum needed from the others.

Depth versus accessibility

Depth adds concepts, counterexamples and evidence. Accessibility makes those concepts navigable and understandable. Neither requires dumbing things down: layer the complexity.

Playfulness versus clarity

A playful reversal can sharpen understanding. Surprise that hides instructions or interrupts focus imposes costs without helping the question.

Humanity versus sentimentality

Human-centred work notices constraints and consequences. It does not assume one romantic explanation fits everyone, or that warmth substitutes for verification.

Innovation versus reliability

Try CSS animations, Canvas, SVG, WebGL or WebGPU only where they matter. Keep the content legible and usable when they fail, are unsupported, or are disabled.

THE 30-SECOND FEATURE TEST

For each feature, finish the phrase: “Without this, visitors would struggle to __.” If you cannot, simplify it or classify it as optional delight.

Research moves you can reuse.

Patterns are structured prompts, not evidence of universal psychological mechanisms.

01 The Frame Audit

List the loaded assumptions inside a question. Example: replace “How do we win at work?” with “Which workplace outcomes are worth pursuing and for whom?” Trap: the kinder-sounding frame is not automatically true.

02 The Claim Ladder

Label statements observation, evidence-backed claim, interpretation or speculation. Example: user clicks do not alone establish motivation. Trap: using rigorous typography to cover shaky inference.

03 Analogy & Breakpoint

Borrow an explanatory lens, then write two failure points. Example: scarcity describes some time decisions, but unlike money, attention also changes with meaning and context. Trap: calling a metaphor a causal theory.

Practice card

Choose one of your ideas. Write the question, the hidden assumption, two alternatives, and the evidence that would most threaten your preferred answer.

Experience moves that teach.

Make the visitor do something that a static sentence cannot do as effectively.

04 Make the Trade-Off Felt

Give visitors a constrained choice, reveal what was foregone, and show who benefits. Trap: rigging the options to force your conclusion.

05 The Reveal After Action

Ask for a prediction or decision before explaining the mechanism. Trap: confusing a confetti reveal with learning.

06 Static Before Magic

Write an accessible text explanation of a model before converting it to motion and controls. Trap: hiding the main point in a canvas inaccessible to keyboard and screen-reader users.

Practice card

Sketch one interaction. List exactly what the visitor manipulates, sees, learns, and can still understand if animation is switched off.

Human and craft moves.

A useful system respects the people who encounter it, not just its creator.

07 The Missing Person

Ask whose costs and constraints your design overlooks. Seek direct input instead of confidently narrating another group's perspective.

08 Boundary + Warmth

Build examples where someone can be caring without granting unlimited access, attention or consent. Fictional dialogue is not a prediction of any person's motives.

09 Respect the Unknown

Say what you do not know. Include counterexamples and uncertainty without manufacturing equivalence between strong and weak evidence.

10 One Irreplaceable Interaction

Choose the one interaction that teaches the most. Build it before secondary effects.

11 The Takeaway Contract

Decide what the visitor keeps: worksheet, model, question or specific habit of inquiry.

12 The Reality Veto

Let tests overturn aesthetic preferences. A screenshot cannot establish keyboard access; a checklist alone cannot establish comprehension.

Make certainty earn its place.

A useful creative experience can be imaginative and intellectually honest at the same time.

TYPE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO SAY
Observed	Three pilot users opened the explanation.	"In our small test, three people opened it."
Source-supported	A documented fact from a dated primary source.	Cite the source, date and relevant limitation.
Interpretation	The visitors may have found it interesting.	"One possible interpretation is..."
Speculation	This mechanism might generalise.	"A hypothesis worth testing is..."

Three tests for each claim

- Traceability: can a reader identify where the fact came from?
- Scope: does the evidence support this population, time period and exact wording?
- Adversarial reading: what credible evidence or alternative mechanism complicates it?

Sources are not decoration

Use original studies, official reports or high-quality syntheses when possible. Prefer specific, checkable claims to impressive but untraceable numbers. Update information that changes over time.

WRITE THIS INTO THE INTERFACE

"Illustrative example—not a prediction of real outcomes." Or: "This mechanism is a creative hypothesis rather than an empirically validated model."

A meaningful visitor contract.

A delightful page should still make sense with the sound off, motion paused and the mouse unplugged.

Define the interaction in five lines

- Arrival: the visitor's initial question or practical need.
- Action: the one meaningful choice or manipulation available.
- Mechanism: what changes, and why?
- Learning: what does the result reveal—and what does it not?
- Takeaway: what can the visitor save, reuse or discuss?

Accessible implementation checklist

- Give every control a descriptive label, visible focus and a keyboard pathway.
- Keep essential information in semantic HTML; treat Canvas as optional enhancement.
- Respect prefers-reduced-motion and offer manual motion controls.
- Support small screens and zoom without hiding a critical control.
- Never let colour, audio, hover or animation be the only carrier of meaning.

WHEN HIGH-END GRAPHICS ARE WORTH IT

Use advanced rendering when the spatial relationship, procedural behaviour or feedback itself explains the idea. Otherwise the simplest medium may be the most sophisticated choice.

The Friction Observatory.

An illustrative creative design for exploring intention-action gaps without pretending the UI diagnoses anybody.

The question

Why might someone sincerely intend to act and still not follow through?

Lenses

Behavioural science: motivation, cues, opportunity and competing pressures. Design: reduce steps and make consequences visible. Ethics: avoid equating a missed action with moral failure.

Visitor action

Choose between fictional scenarios: unclear next action, insufficient time, conflicting priorities, inaccessible interface. Each choice reveals several plausible causes and what evidence would help distinguish them.

Useful takeaway

A two-column “intention / actual barrier” worksheet and a reminder that an illustrative scenario cannot infer any particular individual’s inner state.

One fast prototype

Four buttons, each opening a clear explanation and a short alternate hypothesis. No tracking or pseudoscientific personality scoring.

TEST IT

Can users describe two alternative explanations for the same behaviour? Can they navigate by keyboard and leave with a more precise question?

The Trade-Off Room.

A public-choice exhibit that takes costs seriously without reducing human value to money.

The question

Why can reasonable people prefer different allocations of limited resources?

Visitor action

Give the visitor 10 illustrative tokens to divide among transport access, public parks and library programmes. Explain what each option aims to improve, which groups may benefit, and which effects are unknown.

Two redesign opportunities

First ask whether a shared asset, partnership or phased plan changes the budget constraint. Then ask whether the categories ignore unpaid care, accessibility or long-term effects.

Why a simple scoreboard misleads

A “happiness score” pretending to measure all social outcomes would manufacture false precision. Show transparent assumptions and narrative trade-offs instead.

Useful takeaway

A one-page matrix: chosen investment / opportunity cost / affected groups / important unknowns.

TEST IT

Can visitors articulate one opportunity cost and one unquantified value without believing the toy tokens predict real municipal budgets?

The Scent of a Memory.

An experiential project linking perfumery, language and recollection while respecting differences between people.

The question

How can scent become a doorway to storytelling without claiming one smell produces the same feeling in everybody?

Visitor action

Invite a visitor to choose descriptive notes—citrus, woods, floral or gourmand—and assemble a short fictional memory vignette. If scent samples exist, participation is optional and informed.

Boundaries

Do not promise therapeutic outcomes, universal emotions or accurate personality inference. Note sensitivity and allergy considerations in any physical workshop; offer non-scent alternatives.

One fast prototype

A text-first branching experience that maps a note to three plausible, different stories, each explicitly fictional and open to disagreement.

Useful takeaway

An editable scent storytelling grid with note family, associations, uncertainty and personal interpretation columns.

TEST IT

Can people create different but equally valid stories? Can a person avoid exposure to fragrance and still participate meaningfully?

One-page creative commission.

Fill this in before design starts. A project becomes clearer when it has an answer for each question.

Human question

What deserves investigation? State it without assuming the answer.

Person and context

Who is this for? What are their conditions, constraints and possible reasons to disagree?

The one action

What can the visitor do that reveals something important?

Knowledge boundary

Which factual claims require sources? What is only an interpretation or design hypothesis?

Prototype and evidence log.

Do not grade yourself. Record what happened, what you think it means and what you will revise.

TEST	OBSERVATION	NEXT CHANGE
Visitor understands opening	_____	_____
Meaningful task works	_____	_____
Keyboard and focus	_____	_____
Reduced motion	_____	_____
Narrow mobile	_____	_____
Link + download	_____	_____

What surprised you?

Did a visitor take away a different idea than you intended?

Record a counterexample or disagreement that deserves attention.

DO NOT ERASE FAILURE

A test that reveals a confusing interaction is useful evidence. The release quality depends on what you repair next.

The 16-point red-team gate.

These are verifiable questions, not a numerical quality score. Mark what you actually checked.

Substance & honesty

- ☐ A stranger can name the value of the experience.
- ☐ Facts are sourced and interpretations labelled.
- ☐ Important uncertainty is visible.
- ☐ No fabricated metrics, pseudo-science or misleading personal scores.

Interaction & craft

- ☐ Each core interaction helps with a real understanding or action.
- ☐ Error, empty and edge cases behave sensibly.
- ☐ Downloads exist, open and contain meaningful material.
- ☐ Navigation and outbound links have been verified.

Accessibility & performance

- ☐ Complete keyboard operation and visible focus.
- ☐ Reduced motion and optional animations really work.
- ☐ Reading hierarchy and contrast are readable.
- ☐ Narrow mobile, tablet and desktop checked.

Human consequences

- ☐ Privacy practice is stated; no sensitive input is leaked.
- ☐ Visitors can disagree, opt out or use the text path.
- ☐ Vulnerable users and plausible harms considered.
- ☐ Authorship, contact and correction routes are clear.

A better ending than applause.

The project does not end when an animation plays or a deploy succeeds. It ends when a visitor receives what you promised.

Release statement template

This project helps [audience] explore [question] through [specific action]. It explains [mechanism] using [sources or stated illustrative assumptions]. It does not claim [important limitation]. Visitors can leave with [useful artifact].

Invite a serious correction

Ask: “What part is hardest to believe? What did this leave out? Did you actually learn the thing I hoped to explain?” Record what changes your work—not just praise.

Measure with humility

A page view is not proof of comprehension. A download is not proof of impact. A positive comment is not a universal result. Use specific observations proportionally to their evidence.

One last question

If the creator’s name disappeared from the interface, would this still be worth someone’s time?

RETURN TO THE WORLD

This field guide accompanies the interactive STYLE Laboratory. Visit style.sahiltayal.online for the generative brief, visual synthesizer, pattern cards and self-audit; visit sahiltayal.com for the larger work.

Useful standards & starting points.

These are reading routes for good practice, not sources claiming this original method is scientifically validated.

Accessibility

W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

Motion and animation

MDN: prefers-reduced-motion —

<https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/CSS/@media/prefers-reduced-motion>

MDN: scroll-driven animations —

https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/CSS/CSS_scroll-driven_animations

Usability and web performance

web.dev Core Web Vitals — <https://web.dev/articles/vitals>

For your own sources

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Sahil Tayal | sahil@sahiltayal.com | <https://sahiltayal.com/>

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