A FIELD GUIDE TO BETTER QUESTIONS

A printable laboratory for knowledge gaps, idea collisions and careful reasoning.

A question is not a confession of ignorance. It is a tool for deciding what deserves attention.

Three exercises. Seven reusable question patterns. No scores, diagnosis, tracking or secret algorithm.

HOW TO USE THIS

Choose an idea you are genuinely curious about. Write before you search. Distinguish observations from stories about them. Return to your notes after new evidence appears.

This guide stands alone: you do not need the website or an account.

Curiosity Engine · Sahil Tayal · New Delhi · 2026

https://curiosityengine.sahilwho.online/ | https://sahiltayal.com

00 / THE IDEA

CURIOSITY HAS MORE THAN ONE SHAPE

George Loewenstein proposed an influential information-gap account: people can become curious when they notice a gap between what they know and what they want to know. Subsequent work discusses curiosity across psychological and neural perspectives. These are research programmes, not a simple formula for all people or circumstances.

The purpose of this field guide is narrower and more practical: to help turn a vague interest into a question you could investigate.

Three distinctions to carry

• An observation is something you actually noticed or recorded.

• An interpretation is a possible meaning or explanation attached to that observation.

• A hypothesis is a proposal that could, in principle, encounter evidence for or against it.

A tiny example

Observation: Three teammates stopped speaking during a meeting.
Interpretation: They might have disagreed, felt uncertain, or simply had nothing to add.
Hypothesis: Changing the meeting format could alter participation. Test it rather than declaring motives.

Personal exercise

Write one small observation and two distinct interpretations. What extra information would separate them?

Observation: _____

Interpretation A: _____

Interpretation B: _____

Information I need: _____

01 / REFRAME

QUESTION FORGE

Start with a topic or assumption. Choose a thinking lens. Use the prompts below to create questions rather than premature conclusions.

My topic: _____

Why does this matter to me? _____

My confidence today (low / medium / high): _____

Five lenses

• Mechanism: What process might produce the result? What else could explain it?

• Systems: What feedback loops, incentives or constraints are invisible?

• Counterfactual: If an assumption were reversed, what would we expect?

• Human: Whose experience or perspective is missing?

• Time: How might the conclusion change over days, years or generations?

Example: unfinished projects

Instead of “people abandon ideas because they lack discipline,” try: “Which constraints, incentives and changing priorities predict whether a creative project gets finished?” A useful follow-up is: “How might we distinguish low motivation from limited time?”

Forge three new questions

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Which answer would surprise me the most? _____

02 / CONNECT

IDEA COLLIDER

A cross-disciplinary connection can reveal a useful analogy. But analogies are invitations to think, not proof that two domains obey identical laws.

Domain A: _____ Domain B: _____

What does A study or value? _____

What does B study or value? _____

Try the following four collisions

• Transfer: What tool or perspective from A could help us notice something in B?

• Friction: Where does the analogy fail? Which differences matter?

• Method: What evidence would we need to compare the two responsibly?

• Ethics: Who benefits from this new connection, and who might bear costs?

Worked example: perfume × psychology

Question: “How might scent-linked memories affect the way people describe familiar places?” This is a research question, not a claim that a particular scent creates a certain memory.

My best collision

New question: _____

Useful overlap: _____

Where the analogy breaks: _____

Evidence I would need: _____

EVIDENCE LAB

Curiosity without evidence can become an attractive story that never encounters reality. This instrument makes your standards visible before the result arrives.

My claim: _____

Is it an observation, interpretation, or hypothesis? _____

A fair test in six moves

• Define: What, exactly, is being claimed?

• Operationalize: What would count as an observable result?

• Compare: Which baseline or alternative explanation matters?

• Challenge: What result would make the claim less credible?

• Bound: For whom, where and when might the claim differ?

• Revise: What would I change after learning something new?

Worked example: “teams reduce creativity”

First ask what “creativity” and “team” mean. Then compare tasks, group conditions, and measures, while considering selection effects. A single vivid example cannot establish a general effect.

My test design

Possible counterexample: _____

Fair comparison: _____

What would change my mind? _____

What could I still be overlooking? _____

04 / KEEP THESE

SEVEN QUESTIONS WORTH REUSING

01 What would change my mind?

Prevents the claim from becoming impossible to revise.

Example: What result would weaken my favourite explanation?

02 What have I actually observed?

Separates the event from a story about the event.

Example: What did the message, meeting or record literally show?

03 What alternative explanation survives?

Generates competition between plausible hypotheses.

Example: Could differences in context explain the outcome?

04 At what scale?

Changes the unit of analysis.

Example: Does the pattern hold for individuals, teams and institutions?

05 Who is missing?

Searches for omitted perspectives and constraints.

Example: How would the affected person describe the situation?

06 Under which conditions?

Avoids turning a local finding into a universal law.

Example: When does this explanation stop working?

07 What happens next?

Adds time and indirect effects.

Example: What unintended consequences might appear later?

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUPPORTS

Evidence: Loewenstein (1994) offers an information-gap theory of curiosity. Kidd and Hayden (2015) review psychological and neuroscientific accounts. Gruber, Gelman and Ranganath (2014) report a laboratory study relating curiosity states to memory in their specific task.

Interpretation: Asking better questions may be a useful intellectual practice. These sources do not validate the Curiosity Engine as a cognitive intervention, nor do they show that using this specific website improves memory.

Creative experiment: The website combines your own text with hand-written prompting templates. It does not infer personality, read emotions, or measure intelligence.

Source notes (original academic works)

1. Loewenstein, G. (1994). The psychology of curiosity: A review and reinterpretation. Psychological Bulletin, 116(1), 75–98.

https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.116.1.75

2. Kidd, C., & Hayden, B. Y. (2015). The psychology and neuroscience of curiosity. Neuron, 88(3), 449–460.

https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26539887/

3. Gruber, M. J., Gelman, B. D., & Ranganath, C. (2014). States of curiosity modulate hippocampus-dependent learning via the dopaminergic circuit. Neuron, 84(2), 486–496.

https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25284006/

Privacy note

The website requires no login and sends no form entries to a server. Saved field notes remain in the page session until copied. The printable guide requires no online access after downloading.

06 / TAKE IT WITH YOU

MY OPEN QUESTIONS

Pick one question worth a little more attention. You are not required to solve it immediately.

What I am noticing:

_____

What I might be assuming:

_____

Three questions I want to keep:

_____

What evidence would help:

_____

Something that would surprise me:

_____

One new connection I want to explore:

_____

The point is not to know everything. It is to remain capable of changing your mind.

Return to the Sahilverse: https://sahiltayal.com

Write to Sahil: sahil@sahiltayal.com