

GO TOO FAR INTO ONE THING

Almost everyone shows up sure they don't have a topic. Then they start listing what they've actually been reading about lately and there turn out to be five or six. This side is for getting those out of your head and onto paper. The sheet is yours to keep — nothing on it gets collected.

1 Twelve places a hole tends to be hiding

Most of these will do nothing for you. One or two will remind you of something specific, and that's the whole job.

01 Your search history

It's right there. Whatever you looked up at 1 a.m. and then closed the tab on.

02 The thing you walk past

There's something on your walk to class you've never once wondered about on purpose.

03 A claim from your major

Every field has a number everybody repeats. Somebody measured it once, in one year, on one sample.

04 What you believed at eight

You stopped believing it at some point and never went back to see what was actually going on.

05 What's in your pocket

Where the parts come from. Who settled on the shape. What it replaced.

06 A rule that seems arbitrary

A credit hour. The length of a semester. Somebody chose, and there were meetings about it.

07 A word you can't define

Organic. Stainless. Broadband. Unsalted. Most of them have a legal definition, and it's stranger than you'd guess.

08 A price

The textbook. The inhaler. The hot dog at the stadium.

09 A fight you can't name the sides of

You know experts argue about it. You have no idea what either side actually says.

10 The most boring thing you can see from here

Manhole covers, traffic cones, pallets. Nobody is competing with you for these, and they go deep.

11 The thing only you know about

Your hometown's odd industry. A relative's trade. A game nobody else here has played.

12 Something that stopped existing

A store, a format, a whole profession. People did that job full-time and now nobody does.

2 Somewhere to put them

Ten lines because there was room for ten, not because you need ten. Two is a fine afternoon.

The sign-up form asks everybody what they've been down lately, and so far no two answers have come anywhere near each other. Whatever occurs to you first is almost certainly not what the person next to you is writing.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

The next part happens walking

In a few minutes we'll pair off, walk a lap of the plaza — out past the carousel and back — and read these to each other. Two reasons. Somebody else's list tends to shake loose one you'd forgotten you had. And walking outside genuinely helps: in a Stanford study people came up with more ideas walking than sitting, and the ones who walked outdoors came up with the best of them. We lost the classroom this week, so we may as well take the one thing that comes with being outside.

Come back with whatever you've got, and there's the other side.



The field guide
How to actually dig,
for after tonight

WHICH ONE WOULD YOU WANT TO HEAR?

Any of them could be a talk. What changes is how much a room thinks it already knows.

The clearest explanation in the room is usually the one that teaches nobody anything

Derek Muller — the guy who makes Veritasium — ran this for his PhD before he had a channel. 364 physics students, four versions of the same Newton's laws material. The clean, concise explainer moved their scores **almost not at all**. The versions that named what students already believed and then took it apart produced **large gains**. Confidence, meanwhile, **went up about the same in every group** — the ones who learned nothing were just as sure they had.

In a companion study, the version that worked was the one students said took **more mental effort** — it felt harder, and that turns out to be the mechanism. An explanation of something people think they already understand gets filed under "already knew that." The wrong answer has to come up first, or the right one slides straight past.

3 Three things the good ones tend to have

Yours doesn't need all three. One is usually plenty.

01 The room already has an answer, and it's wrong

With no prior belief there's nothing to turn over. A room that's sure of something false will sit still for ten minutes.

02 It fits into one question

"Why is every banana the same variety?" is a question. "Bananas" is a browsing session. Two sentences is probably two talks.

03 Something at the bottom isn't a retelling

A study, a filing, a patent, a transcript, test results published because the law says so. It makes the last two minutes.

And if one is nearly there

- **Too big for ten minutes** — take the part that surprised you, say the rest exists.
- **You already know everything you'd say** — still a real talk, and an easy first one.
- **Everybody's seen the documentary** — the talk is what it skipped, or got wrong.
- **Nobody disagrees about any of it** — somebody lost an argument on the way here.
- **Four things to explain before the good part** — open on the good part and backfill.

4 One way to structure a talk

One shape of several, not a rule.

1 The wrong answer goes first

Fifteen seconds in: "most people think..." The room leans in, having just been told it's wrong.

2 The question comes before the answer

School hands over the answer and then quizzes you. His videos run the other way round: the question sits there a while first.

3 Story and mechanism, back and forth

When the technical part gets heavy he cuts to the person, or the fight, or the absurd detail. Then back, before either goes stale.

Before you leave the plaza

Three lines and there's a talk in order. Stays with you.

MY QUESTION — one sentence, ends in a question mark

WHAT I ASSUME THE ANSWER IS — before looking anything up, so you can be wrong on the record

WHERE I'D START LOOKING — a person, a database, a specialist's word for the thing

WOULD YOU WANT A SLOT EVENTUALLY ☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ Not for me

☐ Bring the topic, let somebody else run it

Nothing to claim tonight — officers are presenting on the 18th, and a poll for dates follows it.

Up to ten minutes, and no minimum — three minutes is a real talk. Slides are optional. Nobody gets called on: a slot is something you claim, never something you're handed.

Next: Fri Sep 18, 6–7 PM, Lawrence Hall 231 — indoors, officers presenting. The GroupMe poll closes Sun the 20th and only sets the meeting day.