

SOCIAL WEATHER / VOLUME 01

No one is a forecast.

A field guide to reading human situations without pretending to read minds.

25 fictional case files • 15 useful questions • A practical framework for reciprocity, boundaries and uncertainty

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START HERE / THE BASIC IDEA

What did you see—and what did you add?

A text is short. A colleague is quiet. A friend cancels. Your mind supplies a story. Sometimes that story protects you, sometimes it misleads you, and often it arrives before the evidence. Social Weather is a portable way of slowing down the jump from an event to a verdict.

It does **not** demand that you think positively of everybody. A missed deadline is still a missed deadline; harmful patterns still matter; boundaries need not wait for proof of someone's private intention.

The whole method in five moves

1. **Record the event.** What would a camera, message log, calendar, or shared document establish? Use dates, actions and exact words; leave adjectives about character for later.
2. **Name the interpretation.** "They do not value me" is a possible reading, not a camera recording. Label it as a story, even if it feels emotionally convincing.
3. **Widen the map.** Write down at least three alternatives: an ordinary logistical cause, a difference in expectations, and a less pleasant possibility. Multiple possibilities do not mean equal probability.
4. **Look at the stakes and the pattern.** Does this need a clarification, a boundary, a practical correction, or no response? Repetition and impact can be more decision-relevant than motive.
5. **Choose a proportionate next move.** Ask one answerable question, make a specific request, adjust your own behaviour, or leave it alone. Do not turn uncertainty into interrogation.

The operating rule: Uncertainty about why someone acted does not cancel your freedom to respond to what happened.

THE WORKING METHOD / THREE QUESTIONS

Make room for reality.

Question one: what would survive a fact-check?

Suppose a friend cancels twice. “We agreed to meet on Tuesday and Thursday; both plans were cancelled within two hours of the meeting” is an observation. “They enjoy wasting my time” is a claim about intent. Notice how much extra evidence the second sentence would require.

Useful observation vocabulary: **said, wrote, arrived, left, cancelled, changed, asked, offered, declined, did not respond by [date]**. Less reliable evidence language: **obviously, secretly, always, clearly meant, definitely felt**.

Question two: what else could fit?

A competing explanation is not an excuse. It is a check against certainty. Think in categories: (a) the environment or workload; (b) different communication norms; (c) missing information; (d) differing interests or priorities; (e) the possibility of unfairness or harm. Those categories are prompts for thought, not an exhaustive list.

Question three: what actually needs doing?

Perhaps you need a deadline, not an explanation. Perhaps you need a friend who confirms plans, not a theory about their attachment style. Perhaps you need space. A workable action should be based on your own needs and what can be observed, not on winning a trial about someone’s inner life.

A worked example

Observed: “I sent the draft last Monday and have not received comments by Friday.”

Possible stories: The inbox is overloaded; the review date was not agreed; the reviewer wants to provide detailed comments; the person is no longer available. None follows automatically from silence.

Useful next move: “Are you able to review by Wednesday? If not, I’ll ask another reader so the project can move.”

The principle: A reply is helpful information. A non-reply after a clear deadline is also practical information; it is not necessarily evidence of malice.

UNCERTAINTY WITH BOUNDARIES

Compassion is not compulsory credulity.

A common mistake is to use “perhaps there is another explanation” as an instruction to tolerate the same disruption forever. This guide argues for a narrower and more useful point: **do not confuse your explanation of a pattern with the pattern itself.**

Four distinctions worth keeping

Impact is observable enough to discuss. You can say a late cancellation disrupted travel, an uncredited contribution affected work, or an unclear rule wasted time—even when intent is unresolved.

Repetition changes the practical decision. One missed call may tell you little. A year of missed commitments can tell you that a particular arrangement does not reliably work. You can adapt without claiming knowledge of a heart.

Consent includes declining to discuss. Asking respectfully means leaving a real option not to answer. People do not owe you access to private thoughts simply because you are curious.

Safety can justify immediate action. When there is a credible threat, coercion, or repeated harm, prioritise safety and support. You need not conduct an interpretation exercise before protecting yourself.

A cleaner sentence structure

Observation + effect + specific request + room for choice. Example: “The meeting started thirty minutes later than agreed, so I missed my next appointment. Could we confirm the start time the day before, or reschedule if that is difficult?”

What to avoid

“You always...” makes a narrow event into a universal law. “You wanted me to...” claims a motive. “If you cared, you would...” turns an unspoken preference into a test. Replace those with verifiable descriptions and a request that can be accepted or declined.

These are tools for **better judgment**, not rules that every conversation must follow. Sometimes humour, warmth, silence, or simply changing your plans is the wiser path.

PATTERNS OF RECIPROCITY

A relationship is more than one weather event.

Reciprocity is not a scoreboard. People contribute in different ways, carry different responsibilities, and move through uneven seasons. Yet repeated follow-through, attention and repair are more useful signals than trying to decode an emoji or a typing indicator.

01 / Invitations and follow-through

Notice who initiates, confirms, shows up, gives notice, or proposes alternatives. Someone may like you while being unreliable. Your question is not whether they are secretly a good person; it is whether you can plan together. A reasonable boundary might be: "I can hold a date once it is confirmed, but I won't keep whole evenings open for tentative plans."

02 / Care and capacity

Some people demonstrate care through practical help, others through questions or shared time. Ask for the form you need. If you have clearly requested it and there is still no room for it, the mismatch can be real without either person being a villain.

03 / Repair after tension

When a problem is named, can both people acknowledge the effect, propose a workable adjustment and revisit the agreement? An apology without changed action may be insufficient; changed action without poetry may still matter.

04 / The non-participation option

Neither a potential friendship nor a collaboration must continue simply because there are possible explanations for an uncomfortable pattern. You may opt out while staying fair: "This arrangement is not working for me. I wish you well."

What this framework cannot do

It cannot read hidden feelings, rank people's character, predict romantic outcomes, or calculate the percentage chance that somebody cares. It is a set of questions for making decisions with incomplete information.

THE CASE ATLAS / 25 ORIGINAL SCENARIOS

Try the observation. Hold more than one story.

Every case in the following atlas is fictional. Each includes one verifiable event, four plausible interpretive routes and a grounded way to respond. Do not treat the possibilities as diagnoses, facts about anyone you know, or statistically equal options. These scenarios are exercises in judgment and language.

How to use the atlas: Read the situation, cover the alternatives, and write your own description of what happened. Then compare possible explanations. Notice whether the suggested next move asks for clarity, makes a boundary, or simply closes the loop.

FIELD FILE 01 / 25 • FRIENDSHIP / MESSAGES

The typing dots disappear.

You ask a friend whether Saturday still works. The typing indicator appears, disappears, and no reply arrives until the following morning: “Sorry, Saturday won’t work.”

THE OBSERVATION

The typing indicator appeared; your friend replied the next morning to decline Saturday.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

The interrupted reply. They may have started typing and then been pulled into a task, journey, or conversation.

An awkward no. They may have hesitated because declining plans felt uncomfortable.

A looser reply rhythm. They may consider a next-day answer ordinary, while you expected a same-evening response.

Changing interest. They may be less interested in meeting. That remains possible, not established by this one exchange.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

The delay alone does not identify the cause. If making plans requires timely answers, you can name that practical need without proving why the delay happened.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“No worries about Saturday. For future plans, would it work to confirm by Friday evening? That helps me arrange my day.”

Contrast: “You were clearly ignoring me on purpose. Why do you always play games?”

Why it is less useful: It claims access to intent and turns a scheduling question into an accusation.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 02 / 25 • WORK / COLLABORATION

Left off the meeting invite.

You helped draft a proposal. A follow-up meeting happens on Tuesday; your name is not on the calendar invitation. You learn about it after the meeting.

THE OBSERVATION

A meeting took place and you were not included on its invitation.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

An incomplete list. Someone may have reused an older invite list or selected the wrong group.

A narrower meeting. The meeting may have covered implementation details thought relevant to a smaller team.

Unclear ownership. The organiser may not know you expected ongoing involvement.

Exclusion. You may have been intentionally left out. Check the decision and pattern before concluding why.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

You can ask for the outcome and clarify your role. Impact matters whether the omission was accidental or deliberate.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"I saw there was a proposal follow-up on Tuesday. Could you share the decisions and let me know which next steps I should be part of?"

Contrast: "Why are you sabotaging my visibility by excluding me?"

Why it is less useful: It assumes motive before requesting the information you actually need.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 03 / 25 • PLANS / RELIABILITY

The third last-minute cancellation.

Someone you enjoy seeing has cancelled three separate plans within an hour of meeting, each time with a brief apology but without suggesting a new date.

THE OBSERVATION

Three plans were cancelled close to the start time, and no replacement date was offered.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A demanding period. Unpredictable work or family demands may be interfering with plans.

Plans held loosely. They may view tentative plans differently than you do.

Wanting to, but not managing. They may like meeting but lack the time or energy to follow through.

Lower priority. They may not wish to invest in the connection. Repetition matters more than any single excuse.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Three cancellations are themselves useful evidence about dependability. You do not need a theory of their heart to stop holding your evenings open.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"I understand things can come up. The last three cancellations were very close to our meeting time, so I'm going to stop reserving evenings. If you'd like to plan something you can commit to, let me know."

Contrast: "You clearly enjoy disrespecting me and making me chase you."

Why it is less useful: It assigns intent where a direct boundary based on the repeated pattern would be clearer.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 04 / 25 • CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS / TONE

The one-word “fine”.

After you suggest a different restaurant, someone close to you replies “fine.” Their usual messages are longer. You have not yet spoken about the plan.

THE OBSERVATION

The response contained the word “fine,” and it was shorter than their typical messages.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

Typing in a hurry. They may have replied while travelling or multitasking.

The answer is simply fine. Some people use “fine” as straightforward agreement without added enthusiasm.

A little disappointed. They may prefer the original venue but not consider it worth debating.

Unspoken frustration. They could be upset about this or something else. The message alone cannot establish that.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Tone is especially hard to recover from short text. You may check once, then accept their answer unless later behaviour gives reason to revisit it.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Just checking: does the new place work for you, or would you prefer to stick with the first one? Either is okay.”

Contrast: “You’re obviously mad. Stop pretending you’re fine.”

Why it is less useful: This makes it difficult for a sincere “fine” to be believed.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 05 / 25 • FAMILY / ATTENTION

The missed birthday call.

A sibling sends a warm birthday message in the morning but doesn't call. You had hoped to talk that day; you did not ask in advance for a call.

THE OBSERVATION

Your sibling messaged you but did not make a birthday call that day.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A packed day. Work shifts, childcare, travel, or time zones may have made a call difficult.

A message feels sufficient. They may see a thoughtful written greeting as the main birthday gesture.

They thought you were busy. They may have avoided interrupting what they imagined was a full day.

Reduced effort. They may be investing less in staying connected. A broader pattern would be more informative.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Your disappointment can be valid even when the meaning of their choice remains uncertain. Explicit preferences often help more than silent tests.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"Thanks for the birthday message—it meant a lot. I was hoping we could talk too. Would you have time for a call this week?"

Contrast: "If I mattered to you, you would have called without being asked."

Why it is less useful: It turns an unspoken preference into a proof-of-love test.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 06 / 25 • CREATIVE WORK / FEEDBACK

“Interesting direction.”

You show a creative draft to a collaborator. After a pause, they say “interesting direction” and switch to talking about the deadline.

THE OBSERVATION

They used the phrase “interesting direction” and then discussed the deadline.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

The deadline dominated. They may have prioritised planning because the immediate schedule felt urgent.

An intentionally brief first pass. They may reserve substantive comments until they can read more closely.

A promising beginning. They may actually find the direction promising but not yet have specifics.

Unspoken reservations. They may have concerns they were not ready to articulate. Ask for concrete critique rather than deciphering adjectives.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Vague feedback stays vague. You can request one strength, one risk, and a time for detailed review rather than treating the phrase as a verdict.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Could you point to one part that works and one part you’d change before the deadline? Specific feedback would help me revise.”

Contrast: “I know “interesting” means you hate it. Why won’t you be honest?”

Why it is less useful: It pre-decides the answer and makes useful feedback harder to give.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 07 / 25 • GROUPS / BELONGING

Laughter as you walk in.

You enter a gathering. Two people near the door are laughing; their conversation stops briefly when they notice you. You did not hear what they were discussing.

THE OBSERVATION

Two people were laughing before you entered and paused when they saw you.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A joke ended. You may have walked in at the end of an unrelated funny story.

A natural pause. They may have paused to acknowledge your arrival or make space for a greeting.

A separate conversation. They might have been talking about something personal unrelated to you.

You were the topic. It is possible their conversation concerned you. This single moment is not enough to conclude that.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Your discomfort is real; the content of the conversation is unknown. If a group repeatedly excludes you, address the observed pattern—not a guessed secret conversation.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Hey, good to see you. What have I missed?”

Contrast: “What were you saying about me? I caught you laughing.”

Why it is less useful: It converts an ambiguous scene into an accusation before any evidence is available.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 08 / 25 • DATING / INITIATIVE

Always the first to text.

Over the last month, you have initiated most conversations with someone you're getting to know. They usually reply thoughtfully, but rarely start a conversation themselves.

THE OBSERVATION

You have initiated most conversations; their replies are usually engaged.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

Different phone routines. They may check messages reactively rather than initiating chats.

Less comfortable starting. They may enjoy the exchange but be hesitant to begin it.

A different idea of contact. They may assume replying warmly is enough while you want mutual initiation.

Uneven investment. Their interest or capacity may be lower than yours. The pattern is worth discussing without asserting a hidden motive.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

A month-long pattern is more useful than a single text, but it cannot reveal intention. You can decide that mutual initiative matters to you regardless of the explanation.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"I enjoy talking with you. I've noticed I'm usually the one to start conversations; I'd like a bit more back-and-forth if that suits you. How do you feel about it?"

Contrast: "You never text first because you're keeping me as an option."

Why it is less useful: It introduces an unverified motive and may obscure a reasonable preference for reciprocity.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 09 / 25 • NEIGHBOURS / PUBLIC SPACE

No greeting on the stairs.

A neighbour you have chatted with before walks past you in the stairwell without making eye contact or greeting you. They are looking at their phone.

THE OBSERVATION

They walked past while looking at their phone and did not greet you.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

Attention elsewhere. They may have been reading directions, checking a message, or managing a time-sensitive task.

They didn't register you. They may not have seen you clearly or recognised you at that moment.

Variable greeting habits. They may be friendly in long conversations yet quiet in passing.

A wish for distance. They may not want to chat today or generally. A greeting is an invitation, not a debt.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

One encounter may say little. You can offer a greeting next time without demanding a particular response.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"Hi! Hope your week's going okay."

Contrast: "Why are you suddenly so rude to me?"

Why it is less useful: It treats one non-greeting as proof of deliberate disrespect.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 10 / 25 • MENTORSHIP / EXPECTATIONS

Silence after the draft.

A mentor invited you to send a research outline. You sent it twelve days ago and have not received a response. No review date was agreed.

THE OBSERVATION

You sent an outline twelve days ago and have received no reply.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

An overflowing inbox. Their current commitments may have delayed a non-urgent review.

No deadline was set. They may not know how soon you hoped for a response.

The draft needs time. They may prefer to comment carefully rather than send a quick reaction.

Unable to participate. They may not have the time or wish to engage further. A polite follow-up can clarify whether to move on.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

The absence of a reply does not tell you the quality of your work. You can set your own timeline and seek feedback elsewhere without assuming what the silence means.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Following up on the outline I sent twelve days ago. If a review isn’t feasible, no problem—I’ll seek another reader. If it is, would a date next week be realistic?”

Contrast: “Your silence tells me you don’t respect my research.”

Why it is less useful: It interprets silence as a particular attitude rather than clarifying availability.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 11 / 25 • STUDY / CLASSROOM

The teacher skips your raised hand.

During a seminar you raise your hand twice. The teacher takes three other questions and ends the session without calling on you.

THE OBSERVATION

You raised your hand twice and were not called on before the session ended.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

They may not have seen you. Sightlines and attention can make a raised hand easy to miss.

The discussion ran out of minutes. They may have prioritised questions they could answer quickly.

They wanted varied voices. They may have been distributing airtime for reasons unrelated to your question.

Unfair participation. The pattern might be inequitable, especially if it recurs. You can ask how questions are chosen.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

You know whose questions were taken. You do not know the selection rule. Track a pattern if it matters to your participation.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"I had a question about the last example but we ran out of time. Could I ask it after class, and is there a good way to join the discussion next time?"

Contrast: "You always ignore me because you think I am stupid."

Why it is less useful: It asserts a belief and a pattern not established by this event.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 12 / 25 • WORK / FEEDBACK

The manager says “be proactive”.

In a review, your manager says you should “be more proactive” but offers no example, criterion, or deadline.

THE OBSERVATION

Your manager said “be more proactive” without giving an example or criterion.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A familiar phrase. They may be repeating broad evaluation language without a shared definition.

Different expectations. They may expect initiative in areas you believed required permission.

Work they did not notice. They may be unaware of steps you already took independently.

Unfair review. The feedback could reflect a biased or poorly run process; specific evidence matters.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

The phrase is feedback about an expectation, not a usable measurement by itself. Request behaviours you can evaluate.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Could you give me two examples of where you wanted more initiative, and what a successful version would have looked like?”

Contrast: “You are trying to sabotage my performance rating.”

Why it is less useful: The accusation blocks the evidence request.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 13 / 25 • FRIENDSHIP / GROUP CHAT

The group chat goes silent.

You suggest a weekend walk to a six-person group chat. No one responds for two days, although several people post elsewhere in the group.

THE OBSERVATION

No one answered your walk suggestion for two days, while other posts appeared.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A buried proposal. The invitation may have been lost among memes and logistics.

No direct yes or no. People may assume someone else will reply or that silence means no.

The activity did not appeal. They may like you but not want that particular plan.

Low investment. They may not prioritise meeting; repetition can justify changing your approach.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Being active in a chat is not the same as agreeing to a plan. One follow-up is fine; constant chasing is optional.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Looks like the walk may not be happening. I will make other plans; if anyone wants to join another time, say the word.”

Contrast: “You all ignored me because you do not respect me.”

Why it is less useful: It converts a non-response into shared hostile intent.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 14 / 25 • ONLINE / PUBLIC REACTION

A stranger leaves a sharp comment.

You publish a thoughtful essay. A stranger replies “this misses the point” without explaining what they disagree with.

THE OBSERVATION

A commenter wrote “this misses the point” but offered no specific objection.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

They read another question. Their understanding of your topic may differ from yours.

They posted in a hurry. They may not want to spend time building an argument.

A real gap exists. Your piece may have an omission the comment does not yet explain.

Hostility. The comment may be dismissive; you still need not respond.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

A terse comment is weak evidence about either the critic or your essay. You can request specificity or leave it.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Which claim do you disagree with most? A specific counterexample would help me understand your objection.”

Contrast: “Only insecure trolls say that about my work.”

Why it is less useful: It diagnoses the commenter instead of addressing an argument.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 15 / 25 • COMMUNITY / VOLUNTEERING

You always set up the chairs.

At four community meetings you arrive early to set out chairs. Others thank you, but nobody offers to rotate the task.

THE OBSERVATION

You set up chairs at four meetings; the task has not rotated.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

The work became assumed. When a task is done smoothly, others may stop noticing its cost.

No rota exists. Members may think whoever arrives first chooses the setup role.

Unequal schedules. Some people may be unable to arrive early, without intending unfairness.

Unequal labour. The group may be benefiting from an unfair pattern that needs a rule, whatever the motives.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

You need not prove anyone is selfish to ask for a fair distribution of labour.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"I have set up the room the last four times. Could we make a rotation so this work is shared?"

Contrast: "You are all lazy and take advantage of my kindness."

Why it is less useful: A personal attack obscures a straightforward workload decision.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 16 / 25 • SERVICE / CUSTOMER

The shop assistant sounds abrupt.

At a crowded shop you ask about a return. The assistant answers with a short sentence and turns to the next customer.

THE OBSERVATION

The assistant gave a short answer and moved to another customer.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A crowded counter. The pace may have made a longer answer impractical.

A narrow process. They may have limited discretion or a script to follow.

A brief manner. A concise reply may not signal contempt.

Poor treatment. The service may genuinely be inadequate; ask for clear policy or a supervisor if necessary.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Service quality and someone's inner attitude are different questions. Address the policy or your practical need.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"Could you tell me the return policy and who can help if this case needs an exception?"

Contrast: "You were rude because you hate customers."

Why it is less useful: It attributes a private attitude to an observable service problem.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 17 / 25 • FAMILY / EXPECTATIONS

A relative changes the topic.

You tell a relative about a project you care about. They reply “that sounds nice” and immediately ask about the family business.

THE OBSERVATION

They replied briefly and changed the topic to the family business.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

They know little about the field. They may not know what a useful follow-up question would be.

A familiar conversation path. They may default to topics they understand and can discuss.

Their mind is occupied. A practical issue may have been prominent for them that day.

Limited enthusiasm. They may not share your interest. That does not determine your project’s value.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

You can want deeper engagement without requiring every relative to be your audience.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“I know the shop matters too. Could I tell you one thing I built this week? I would like to share it with you.”

Contrast: “You only care about money and never respect my ideas.”

Why it is less useful: The accusation assigns global motives from one conversation.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 18 / 25 • FRIENDSHIP / PUBLIC EVENT

The invitation arrives late.

A friend invites you to a gathering two hours before it starts. They mention others have known about it since last week.

THE OBSERVATION

You received the invitation two hours before the event; others were invited earlier.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

A spare place opened. The host may have had a change in capacity.

They thought you might be busy. The late invitation may follow a mistaken assumption about your schedule.

Someone forgot. The invitation could have passed through a messy planning chain.

Lower priority. You may not have been among the first invitees. Decide whether that works for you.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

An invitation can be genuine and late. You are free to decline without a dramatic interpretation.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"Thanks for thinking of me. I cannot make something on two hours notice. For future events, could you give me a little more warning?"

Contrast: "I know I am your last-resort friend."

Why it is less useful: It announces a private hierarchy that was never established.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 19 / 25 • CREATIVE WORK / COLLABORATION

Your idea appears in the presentation.

You suggested a framing in a joint brainstorm. A colleague presents a similar framing later without naming you.

THE OBSERVATION

You contributed a framing; a similar one appeared later without attribution.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

Attribution got lost. People may forget where a shared idea first emerged.

Collective ownership. The colleague may assume brainstorm contributions are pooled.

Convergent solutions. They may have arrived at a similar framing separately.

Credit was withheld. Deliberate or not, you can still establish a clearer attribution practice.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Ownership may require evidence about timing and team norms, but credit expectations can be negotiated now.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"That framing resembles what I proposed during Monday's brainstorm. Can we agree on how contributions will be credited in the final version?"

Contrast: "You intentionally stole my idea because you are jealous of me."

Why it is less useful: It makes a motive claim before discussing documentation and credit.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 20 / 25 • NEIGHBOURS / BOUNDARIES

Music through the wall.

Loud music from the next apartment continues past midnight on three weeknights. You have not yet spoken with the neighbour.

THE OBSERVATION

The music was audible past midnight on three weeknights.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

The volume travels farther than expected. They may not know how clearly sound carries through the wall.

Different waking hours. Their routine may be different from yours.

Poor insulation. The structure may amplify moderate volume.

Disregard for quiet. They may continue after a request. Repeated impact is enough for a practical boundary.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

You do not need to prove malice to request quieter nights or contact building management.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“The music has been carrying into my room after midnight this week. Could you lower it at night? I am having trouble sleeping.”

Contrast: “You are deliberately torturing everyone with your music.”

Why it is less useful: It escalates a solvable noise issue into an unverified moral claim.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 21 / 25 • MENTORSHIP / ADVICE

Two mentors give opposite advice.

One mentor tells you to specialise deeply; another tells you to keep exploring. Both heard the same short description of your goals.

THE OBSERVATION

One recommended specialisation and the other exploration after hearing a short description.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

Different routes worked for them. Their advice may reflect paths they personally know.

They optimise for different goals. One may mean this year while the other means the next decade.

The brief was incomplete. Neither has enough information about your constraints to be definitive.

Some advice is poor. A confident opinion can still be wrong. Test it against your own evidence.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Disagreement between mentors does not imply bad faith. Their assumptions may be more useful than their conclusions.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“What conditions would make your advice wrong? I am weighing exploration against depth and want to understand the trade-off.”

Contrast: “One of you is misleading me and I need to know who.”

Why it is less useful: It frames uncertainty as betrayal rather than a question of assumptions.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 22 / 25 • TEAM / REMOTE WORK

The unacknowledged handoff.

You send a work handoff with three action items. Two days later no one has acknowledged it, and the deadline is tomorrow.

THE OBSERVATION

No acknowledgement arrived for your handoff, and the deadline is tomorrow.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

The message was missed. A busy channel can swallow non-tagged requests.

No clear responsible person. Recipients may assume someone else is acting.

Other urgent demands. They may have work that displaced this task.

Avoiding accountability. The team may be neglecting its obligations; you can escalate the deadline without guessing why.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Silence with a deadline is operationally important even when intention is unknowable.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“Flagging that the handoff items need ownership before tomorrow’s deadline. Could each item have a named owner by 3 PM today?”

Contrast: “You are all ignoring this because you want me to fail.”

Why it is less useful: An unverified motive distracts from the urgent coordination need.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 23 / 25 • FRIENDSHIP / SOCIAL MEDIA

They liked everyone else's photo.

A friend reacts to several posts in a shared group but does not react to your photo from the same afternoon.

THE OBSERVATION

They reacted to several group posts but not your photo.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

They did not see the post. Feeds and notifications show content unevenly.

Reactions are inconsistent. They may not treat likes as an index of friendship.

That post did not prompt a reaction. A person can like your company without liking every photo.

Changed closeness. They may be less engaged than before, though one click is a poor measure.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

Platform gestures are thin social data. If you need connection, seek an actual conversation.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"Hey, would you like to catch up sometime next week? I have missed talking with you."

Contrast: "You liked everyone else's post to make me jealous."

Why it is less useful: It turns inconsistent platform behaviour into an invented strategy.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 24 / 25 • ORGANISATION / CHANGE

The policy changes without consultation.

A group introduces new attendance rules after a leadership meeting. Volunteers who manage the sessions were not consulted.

THE OBSERVATION

A new attendance rule was announced after a meeting that did not include the volunteers affected.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

No consultation procedure. The organisation may lack an agreed way to gather input.

A deadline compressed deliberation. Leaders may have felt obliged to act quickly.

Different problems were visible. They may have been reacting to constraints volunteers had not seen.

Concentrated control. Exclusion may reflect a recurring power imbalance; procedural safeguards can address it.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

A process can be unfair even if no one intended harm. Ask for a mechanism, not just a motive confession.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

“These rules affect volunteers directly. Can we review the impact and add a consultation step before future changes?”

Contrast: “You made this policy because you are power-hungry.”

Why it is less useful: A claim about personality takes the focus away from governance.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

FIELD FILE 25 / 25 • PUBLIC SPACE / CIVILITY

Someone cuts the queue.

At a ticket counter a person steps in front of you without saying anything. The queue has been moving slowly for twenty minutes.

THE OBSERVATION

The person stepped in front of you without asking.

FOUR WAYS THE WEATHER MIGHT WORK

They may not have seen the queue. The line's shape or entry point may have been unclear.

They may have a prior instruction. They could have been asked to return to the counter.

They acted without noticing. A rushed moment can cause discourtesy without a grand motive.

Queue jumping. They may have knowingly skipped ahead; a calm correction still works.

WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

You can address the behaviour directly without speculating about character or escalating danger.

ONE LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE

"Excuse me, the queue starts back there. We have been waiting here."

Contrast: "You think the rules do not apply to you because you are arrogant."

Why it is less useful: It adds a personal insult where a factual request is enough.

YOUR TURN / A BETTER NEXT MOVE

What could you ask or decide without treating a guess as fact?

THE QUESTION DECK / 15 STARTING POINTS

Language that makes room for information.

These are starting points, not scripts to extract compliance. Adapt the words, respect refusals and allow silence. A good question asks something answerable without requiring the other person to certify your theory about them.

01 / PLANS

“Would you still like to make a plan, or would another time work better?”

Clarifies interest and timing without demanding a confession.

02 / TIMING

“When would be a reasonable time to hear back?”

Makes a practical schedule possible.

03 / TONE

“I may be reading the tone wrong. Did you mean that as a concern?”

Acknowledges the limits of text tone.

04 / FEEDBACK

“Could you tell me one part that works and one part that needs revision?”

Requests examples rather than decoding vague praise.

05 / BOUNDARIES

“Would you prefer more space around this topic?”

Preserves the other person’s autonomy.

06 / CONFLICT

“Can we separate what happened from what each of us understood?”

Creates space for different accounts.

07 / MISMATCH

“I think we had different expectations. What did you have in mind?”

Looks for the implicit agreement.

08 / WORK

“Who should own this decision, and who needs to be consulted?”

Turns social ambiguity into coordination.

09 / CLARITY

"I noticed a change in the plan. Is there something I missed?"

Requests missing context.

10 / CAPACITY

"Do you have room for this right now, or should I find another route?"

Makes no a workable answer.

11 / FRIENDSHIP

"I enjoy spending time together. Would you like to initiate our next catch-up?"

Offers a fair opportunity for reciprocity.

12 / REPAIR

"That landed differently for me than you may have intended. Can we talk about it?"

Separates impact from inferred intention.

13 / CHECK-IN

"Would you like me to listen, help solve it, or give you space?"

Does not impose a form of support.

14 / APPRECIATION

"I valued what you did. Would it be okay if I told you why?"

Offers connection without pressure.

15 / EXIT WITH CARE

"It seems our rhythms may not match. Shall we leave it here without hard feelings?"

Leaves room for a respectful ending.

THE WRITING DESK / WORKSHEET 01

Make your own field report.

Use the space below or download your own private note from the companion website. The website works without an account. Writing a useful observation is more important than producing a perfect theory.

1 / THE EVENT: What could a camera, message log or shared calendar verify?

2 / THE STORIES: What is your initial interpretation? What else could fit?

3 / THE PATTERN: What has happened more than once? What impact matters?

THE WRITING DESK / WORKSHEET 02

Choose a proportionate next move.

4 / YOUR OPTIONS: What could you ask? What boundary could you set? What could you simply leave alone?

5 / YOUR WORDS: Draft a short message that describes the event, names the practical need, and leaves a real choice.

6 / REALITY CHECK: Could someone answer your request without agreeing with your story about their motive?

You never have to send this draft. It may be enough to clarify your own next move.

EVIDENCE AND LIMITS

A useful method, not a mind-reading machine.

Social Weather draws on the general distinction between observed behaviour and attribution: people explain events using personal and situational causes, often with incomplete information. The examples in this guide are original teaching material. They have not been validated as a psychological instrument, scored for predictive accuracy, or tested as therapy.

Use this guide to improve questions, not to pronounce diagnoses or announce what another person “really” feels. Human relationships are shaped by culture, access, neurodiversity, time, material constraints and individual differences; one narrow template cannot capture them all.

Further reading

- [NOBA Project – An Introduction to the Science of Social Psychology](#)
- [NOBA Project – Social Cognition and Attitudes](#)
- [APA Dictionary – Fundamental attribution error](#)
- [APA Dictionary – Attribution theory](#)

Take the method further

Try the interactive scenarios, copy considerate phrases, or prepare a private note at socialweather.sahiltayal.online. Explore the larger world of writing, ideas and experiments at sahiltayal.com.

Thoughts, disagreements or better evidence? Write to sahil@sahiltayal.com.

SAHIL TAYAL / SAHILVERSE

A freely available field guide for clearer thinking and less certainty theatre.