

ASK TWO QUESTIONS

Simulation Workbook

Six cases for clearer requests, bounded decisions, and usable handoffs

For employees, freelancers, and people working across more than one professional role.

Facts first

Authority visible

Next action

Practice simulations, not predictions about real coworkers.

Ask Two Questions - Simulation Workbook

Ask Two Questions is a set of short, repeatable simulations for people who must make a clear request, surface a constraint, or repair a shared record. It is designed for an employee, a freelancer, or a "slasher" who moves between more than one professional role. The exercise is about observable work conditions: time, scope, resources, authority, and handoff quality.

These are simulations, not predictions about real coworkers. A role card gives a bounded situation; it does not diagnose anyone's personality, motive, income, or emotional state. Participants should name what is known, label what is assumed, and ask for the smallest missing fact that changes the decision. There is no universal ideal phrase. The goal is a reversible, specific next move that another person can understand and answer.

How to run a case

Read the scene once without improving it. On a second pass, underline fixed facts and circle the decision that is still open. Take the role of Role A, Role B, or observer. Role A states the constraint and a proposed next step. Role B responds using only the information available in the scene. The observer records which facts were preserved, which assumptions were introduced, and whether the next action has an owner and a time.

A compact round can take 15 minutes: three minutes to read, four minutes to play, four minutes to replay with one changed fact, and four minutes to reflect. A longer round can compare the employee, freelancer, and slasher framing. The framing changes the surrounding context; it does not grant authority, add resources, or alter the arithmetic.

Keep four boundaries visible during every round:

1. **Fact:** directly stated in the scene or confirmed in the replay.
2. **Assumption:** a reasonable working hypothesis that must be checked.
3. **Authority:** who can fix the date, scope, access, record, or handoff.
4. **Next action:** a concrete message, decision, or artifact with a named owner.

When a participant says "we can just..." ask which person has authority and which resource makes that possible. When a participant says "they must have meant..." return to the record and ask what can be verified. The facilitator should stop a round when the group starts predicting a real person rather than practicing the stated decision.

Case C01 - Fixed Deadline: Friday demo trade-off

Scene and canonical facts

The canonical baseline fixes the demo at **Friday noon**. The demo needs **CORE 3h + HANDOFF 1h = 4h**. Optional polish is estimated at **3h**. Only **5h** are available. The full **7h** is impossible within the available time. In the baseline, the open question is which outcome fits the fixed Friday slot. The phrase "which outcome/date is fixed" belongs to an incomplete-information or counterfactual replay: if someone proposes moving the date, ask who can explicitly authorize that change; the date does not move just because it is discussed. Core 3h and the mandatory handoff 1h cannot disappear by implication. A bounded proposal is to deliver core plus handoff on Friday and schedule optional polish later. No authority, teammate, tool, or extra hour is invented by the simulation.

Three role frames

- **Employee:** You are preparing a team demo. Friday noon is fixed in the baseline; the scene does not say who may move it or who may remove polish. Ask the person who owns the commitment which outcome fits that date, and who can authorize any date change.
- **Freelancer:** A client has asked for a demo. The scene does not provide a contract clause, a change-order process, or permission to recruit another person. Describe the available package and ask the client to choose the trade-off.
- **Slasher:** You are dividing time between an employed role and a paid side project. The five hours are the total available for this piece of work. Do not quietly take time from the other role or assume that the day can be extended.

Decision checkpoint

Role A can say: "I have five hours. Core and handoff take four hours, while the optional polish takes another three, so the full seven-hour version cannot land by Friday noon. Friday noon is fixed in this baseline; which outcome fits that slot? If the full polished scope must stay, who can explicitly authorize a new date? If Friday noon remains fixed, I can prepare core plus handoff by then and put the optional polish into a later slot, subject to your confirmation." This is a proposal, not a claim that the speaker can move the date or authorize the later slot.

Role B must answer one decision question rather than praising the effort. Confirm what "core" and "handoff" must contain for Friday noon. If polish is mandatory, name who can explicitly approve a later date or a scope reduction. A date change is only a counterfactual until that authorized confirmation arrives. Do not say that a seven-hour task will somehow fit in five hours, and do not make the mandatory core or handoff disappear.

Missing information and explicit assumptions

Missing information includes the decision-maker for the date, the minimum acceptance criteria for core, the recipient and format of the handoff, whether the five hours are uninterrupted, and whether optional polish can be accepted after the demo. The arithmetic is explicit; the work estimates are treated as current estimates, not guarantees. It is an assumption that the existing core materials are usable. It is also an assumption that "Friday noon" refers to a shared time zone. Both should be checked before a final promise.

Plausible consequences

Choosing core plus handoff preserves the fixed date and creates a usable transfer, but the demo may look less polished. Choosing polish plus core would take six hours and still leave no hour for the mandatory handoff, so the transfer risk becomes visible rather than disappearing. An explicitly authorized date change may protect the seven-hour scope, but it creates a new coordination task. Silently dropping handoff can leave the next person unable to run or explain the demo even if the screen looks finished. Each consequence is a work outcome, not a judgment about a person.

Replay prompts

1. The date owner replies, "Friday noon cannot move, and the handoff is required." What exact contents belong in core and handoff, and what is the smallest polish item that can wait?
2. A reviewer says, "The polish is the only part the audience will notice." Ask whether that changes the fixed outcome or only the preference. If the date must move, who can explicitly authorize it?
3. Another stakeholder adds a two-hour feature. Record the new request separately; do not fold it into the five-hour estimate without a new scope decision.

Reflection and instructor notes

Ask: Did the player preserve the 3h + 1h + 3h arithmetic? Did they treat Friday noon as fixed in the baseline and reserve date movement for an explicit authorized counterfactual? Did they offer a package without pretending to approve a later slot? Did the replay expose a handoff risk? The instructor should listen for false certainty ("I'll make it work"), invented capacity ("someone can help"), and hidden substitution ("we can skip the handoff"). A strong round makes the trade-off legible and leaves the authorized person with a small decision.

Case C02 - Scope Swap: Scope change inside a five-hour budget

Scene and canonical facts

The remaining budget is **5h**. The original agreed work is **CORE 4h + HANDOFF 1h**; the core consists of a **2h data section** and a **2h recommendations section**. A new request adds **2h**. The original work already consumes the remaining five hours, so the new request cannot be absorbed without a decision. The bounded options are to swap or remove **2h** from the agreed scope, or defer the request and use a new authorized budget. The simulation does not assert entitlement, legal terms, or a contractual remedy.

Three role frames

- **Employee:** Your team's remaining work window is five hours. A new stakeholder asks for two more hours of work. You can show the impact and ask the scope owner to choose what moves; you cannot declare that another team must pay or work late.
- **Freelancer:** The client has added a two-hour item. State what the current five hours already cover and ask whether to replace two hours of agreed work or authorize a new budget. Do not infer a legal right from the word "agreed."
- **Slasher:** The project has five hours left inside the time you reserved across roles. A two-hour addition would displace something else. Put the displacement on the table instead of borrowing time from an unseen commitment.

Decision checkpoint

Role A can present a small table aloud: "The five hours currently cover four hours of core and one hour of handoff. The new request is estimated at two hours. Which two hours of agreed scope should be removed or deferred, or should the request wait for a newly authorized budget?" If the scope owner cannot decide immediately, record the request as pending and protect the original five-hour plan until a decision arrives.

Role B can choose a swap by naming the removed item and its consequence. Alternatively, Role B can defer the addition and identify who will confirm a new budget and by when. "Just add it" is not a decision because it leaves the original core and handoff without a stated change. "That is not allowed" is also too strong when the scene gives no legal or contractual facts.

Missing information and explicit assumptions

Missing information includes the acceptance criteria for the added request, the owner of the agreed scope, whether any original item is genuinely optional, and the process for authorizing new budget. The two-hour estimate is an assumption to verify after the request is clarified. It is an assumption that the handoff still needs one hour; ask whether the recipient can accept a smaller transfer without increasing risk. No one may assume unpaid overtime, a replacement worker, or a right to refuse based on terms not present in the scene.

Plausible consequences

Swapping two hours may satisfy the new requester while leaving a known gap in the original deliverable. Deferring the request protects the agreed five-hour package but may delay a useful enhancement. A new budget preserves both scopes if authorized, but it introduces approval time. If nobody records the choice, different people may work from different versions of the scope. The practical consequence to surface is the missing item, date, or owner.

Replay prompts

1. The requester says the added item is "small" but cannot describe acceptance criteria. Ask for a test or example before accepting the two-hour estimate.
2. The scope owner says, "Keep core and cut handoff." Ask what recipient, date, and risk are created by that choice; do not silently remove the handoff.
3. A client asks for the addition before the next meeting. State what can be documented now and who can authorize a budget or scope change.

Reflection and instructor notes

Ask: Did the player protect the original 4h + 1h arithmetic? Did they separate a request from an authorized change? Did they avoid legal or entitlement language? Did they name the displaced outcome? The instructor should reward a clear two-option proposal and a written decision point. Watch for moralizing ("they are taking advantage"), mind-reading, or a vague "we need more time" that hides which item moves.

Case C03 - Credit Repair: Correcting a shared credit record

Scene and canonical facts

An existing report inaccurately says there was a **solo author**. The record confirms that **Alex prepared the analysis** and **Jo validated the data**, and **both agreed shared attribution**. The repair is to correct the shared record and acknowledge the contribution. The simulation does not assume intent from a screenshot or from the inaccurate wording. It practices a verifiable record repair, not an accusation.

Three role frames

- **Employee:** You see the report in a team workspace. Ask the record owner to correct the author field or add a contribution note, using the confirmed work record. Do not claim that a colleague deliberately erased anyone.
- **Freelancer:** You are reviewing a client deliverable or case study. Confirm what Alex and Jo each prepared, then propose a corrected credit line. Do not invent a rights or payment dispute from the screenshot.
- **Slasher:** You contributed to one role while another role's report is being reused. Keep the correction factual and scoped: who prepared analysis, who validated data, and where the shared record should change.

Decision checkpoint

Role A can say: "The current report says solo author, but our work record confirms Alex prepared the analysis and Jo validated the data, and both agreed shared attribution. I propose changing the author line to reflect both contributions and adding the two-part contribution note. Can the record owner confirm the edit and tell us where the corrected version will be stored?" If the owner cannot edit immediately, attach the evidence and log a pending correction with a named reviewer.

Role B should answer the edit request. A useful response identifies the field to change, checks the source record, and states when the corrected version will be visible. If the response challenges the evidence, ask for the specific source rather than debating intent. Do not treat an apology, a screenshot, or a private assumption as the completed repair.

Missing information and explicit assumptions

Missing information includes who owns the report, the exact system of record, the approved wording for contributions, and whether the report has already been distributed. The scene confirms the analysis, validation, and agreement; it does not establish why the inaccurate solo label appeared. It is an assumption that the source record is accessible to the editor. It is also an assumption that a correction notice is needed for everyone who received the report; ask the owner.

Plausible consequences

Correcting the record makes the work history usable and gives future readers a more accurate attribution. If the report has already been sent, a correction note may be needed so downstream readers do not retain the old version. If the team argues about intent before changing the field, the inaccurate record persists. If the edit names both people but loses the distinction between analysis and validation, the correction improves visibility but reduces precision. Preserve both roles.

Replay prompts

1. The report owner says, "The screenshot is all I have." Ask for the underlying record that confirms the contributions; do not infer intent from the screenshot.
2. A third person says both names are enough and wants to delete the contribution detail. Ask whether the distinction between analysis and validation matters to future users.
3. The report has already been copied into a slide deck. Identify the copy owner and the smallest correction notice needed for downstream readers.

Reflection and instructor notes

Ask: Did the player state the confirmed facts exactly? Did they avoid assigning motive? Did they name the record owner, edit location, and visibility check? The instructor should separate two moves: correcting the data and acknowledging the contributions. A round is incomplete if it offers only a private apology or only a new sentence while the source record remains wrong. Credit repair is an observable record task.

Case C04 - Access matrix before a vendor handoff

Scene and bounded facts

A vendor handoff is scheduled for **16:00** and depends on a **12-row access matrix**. The current copy is from Monday, and **two rows are unverified**. The subject-matter owner can verify them at **16:30**; no substitute has been confirmed. You have **45 focused minutes from 15:00 to 15:45** before an existing meeting. The decision is whether to prepare a clearly marked draft with two open rows, move the handoff until after verification, or ask the authorized owner to name a delegate. Do not assume new access or invent a substitute.

Three role frames

- **Employee:** You can prepare the matrix and list questions, but access approval belongs to the owner or a named delegate. Ask whether the 16:00 meeting is a review of a draft or a final transfer.
- **Freelancer:** You can package the verified rows and flag the two gaps. Ask the client who may verify access and whether the vendor can receive a partial, labeled draft.
- **Slasher:** Your 15:00-15:45 window is real and bounded by another role. State what can be prepared in that window without claiming that the later owner or meeting can move.

Decision checkpoint

Role A can propose: "By 15:45 I can package the ten verified rows, mark the two unverified rows, and send the questions to the owner. Should 16:00 be a draft review, or should the final handoff wait until the owner verifies at 16:30? If a delegate is authorized, please name that person." The key is to label the draft so the vendor does not mistake it for a complete access grant.

Missing information, assumptions, consequences, replay, reflection

Missing information includes the vendor's tolerance for a partial draft, the exact evidence needed for each row, and who can authorize a delegate. It is an assumption that the ten rows copied from Monday are still current; verify the source timestamp. Sending a labeled draft may preserve the meeting while leaving two open items; delaying may protect accuracy while creating a new time coordination; sending an unlabeled matrix risks an incorrect access handoff. Replay with the owner unavailable at 16:30, or with the vendor asking for a final file at 16:00. Ask whether the player kept the two-row gap visible and identified an owner. The instructor should stop any move that turns "current copy" into "approved access."

Case C05 - A short overlap for an eight-file package

Scene and bounded facts

A client handoff is set for **10:00**. The package contains **eight files**: **six are final**, while **two need a 30-minute quality check** that only the **client's QA reviewer** can perform, and the QA reviewer is available **only after 14:00**. The receiving freelancer has a **15-minute overlap at 09:45** and next works after **14:00**. You have **35 minutes from 09:00 to 09:35** to package the handoff; you cannot perform the QA yourself. Decide whether to hand off the six final files with two clearly marked pending items, move the handoff, or ask the client to name a receiver who can accept the full package later. Do not imply that the receiver can extend their day.

Three role frames

- **Employee:** You are handing work from one shift to another. Ask whether the 10:00 event is a progress transfer or a final acceptance, and record the two files still needing QA.
- **Freelancer:** You are transferring a client package to another contractor. Define the six-file partial package and the acceptance test for the two pending files; do not promise a 10:00 final if the QA cannot fit.
- **Slasher:** Your 09:00-09:35 focus window and the receiver's 15-minute overlap are fixed in this simulation. Put the timing conflict on the page instead of borrowing time from either role.

Decision checkpoint

Role A can say: "Six files are final. Two need the client QA reviewer's 30-minute check, and the reviewer is available only after 14:00. I can use my 35 minutes to package the six final files and a manifest, and the receiver has 15 minutes at 09:45. Do you want the 10:00 transfer to be a labeled six-file progress handoff, or should final acceptance wait until after 14:00? If it must be final at 10:00, who can authorize a different receiver or a reduced QA requirement?"

Missing information, assumptions, consequences, replay, reflection

Missing information includes which two files are risk-bearing, whether the client accepts a partial transfer, and who can approve a different receiver. It is an assumption that the six final files share no dependency with the two pending files. A labeled partial handoff preserves continuity but may create follow-up work; waiting preserves a complete package but leaves the next person without the six usable files; reducing QA may save time but needs explicit authorization. Replay with one pending file becoming critical, or the client saying "final" means all eight. Reflect on whether the player distinguished progress from acceptance and protected the 15-minute overlap. The instructor should look for a manifest, a pending list, and a named next check rather than a vague "I'll send what I have."

Case C06 - Two role windows around a one-page brief

Scene and bounded facts

At **13:00**, a partner requests a revised one-page brief by **16:00**. The rewrite is estimated at **60 minutes** and factual review at **30 minutes**. You have a **45-minute focus block from 13:15 to 14:00** and a **20-minute handoff with a reviewer at 14:00**. The reviewer has the source data but not the latest brief. A second role or shift starts at **14:30**. The decision is whether to send a scoped draft for review, request a later delivery time, or assign a named reviewer for the full version. Do not assume the reviewer can work without the brief or that the second role can be paused.

Three role frames

- **Employee:** You are balancing a team request with a scheduled shift. Ask the request owner whether a draft by 14:00 is useful and who can complete the factual review after the handoff.
- **Freelancer:** You have promised a partner a brief but need review. State the 45-minute draft window, the 20-minute review handoff, and the point at which the 16:00 promise needs confirmation.
- **Slasher:** Two roles have explicit time windows. Treat the second role's 14:30 start as a constraint, not a character flaw. Ask which output is highest priority and who owns the unfilled review time.

Decision checkpoint

Role A can propose: "I can draft for 45 minutes and bring a scoped brief to the reviewer at 14:00, but the stated work adds 90 minutes total and the reviewer has only 20 minutes without the latest brief. Do you want a draft plus a review question by 14:00, a later complete delivery, or a named reviewer who can take the 30-minute factual check before 16:00?" The proposal makes the missing time and handoff visible without promising that the second role disappears.

Missing information, assumptions, consequences, replay, reflection

Missing information includes the brief's minimum acceptance criteria, which facts require review, whether the reviewer can receive a draft before 14:00, and who may name another reviewer or move the 16:00 date. It is an assumption that a 45-minute draft can cover the highest-priority section; confirm the section. A scoped draft may let the reviewer catch factual issues early but may not satisfy the partner; a later complete delivery protects review quality but changes the date; a named reviewer preserves the date only if that person accepts the task. Replay with the partner requiring all one page by 16:00, or the reviewer unavailable at 14:00. Reflect on whether the player named the handoff artifact and the decision owner. The instructor should watch for "I'll review it later" without a time, owner, or source brief.

Closing debrief

Across the six cases, ask participants to compare the smallest useful artifact: a time-and-scope equation, a change table, a corrected record, a labeled access matrix, a package manifest, or a scoped brief. Which artifact made the decision easier to answer? Which assumption stayed visible? Which role frame changed the wording but not the underlying boundary? End by writing one replay rule the group can carry into the next simulation. The rule should describe an observable action, such as "name the two items that will move," rather than a claim about how people generally behave.

Write-in reflection

Use this page after any case. Keep the answer about the work state, not a personality judgment.

Which case made a constraint easiest to see?

What fact did you initially treat as an assumption?

Where did authority need to be named before the plan could move?

What artifact would make the next handoff receivable?

Write one observable rule to carry into your next conversation.
