

Assumption Audit — Facilitator Run Sheet

Folder: `assumption-audit` · Category: creativity · 3–8 people · 20 min · offline + online · print props · tool pack

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20

MINUTES

3–8

PEOPLE

print props

SETTING

Assumption Audit — Facilitator Guide

A plan only works if a list of things nobody wrote down are true. The team surfaces those hidden assumptions, tags each one Evidence / To-verify / Fragile-if-false, and ranks them by how much the plan rests on it. **Unlike a risk register that lists what might go wrong, this audit names what the plan already believes — and finds the two or three beliefs that would actually break it.** Each fragile assumption leaves the room with an owner and a date to check.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Surfaced the unwritten assumptions a plan quietly depends on — ten or fifteen of them.
2. Tagged each Evidence / To-verify / Fragile-if-false and ranked the fragile ones by load.
3. Owned the top two or three: who checks it, by when, and the fallback if it turns out false.

When to use this activity

- A plan looks solid and everyone agrees too quickly — usually because the load-bearing assumptions are invisible.
- You're about to commit time or money and want to know what the plan secretly depends on.
- You have 3–8 people who built or will run the plan, and twenty minutes; it works on a call.

The three tags

Tag	Means	Turns into
Evidence	We've checked this — here's how we know.	Nothing; it's solid. Move on.
To-verify	We believe it but haven't confirmed it.	An owner and a date to check it.
Fragile-if-false	If this is wrong, the plan changes a lot.	The first thing you verify — and a Plan B.

Setup

Clock: 20 minutes total — frame 2, surface 6, tag & rank 5, assign 5, read back 2.

Space: a wall or shared board with the plan up top, room for a stack of assumption cards, and a short ranked list of the fragile ones.

Materials per person:

Item	Source
A pad of blank cards	any index-card stock
A pen	bring your own

Materials for the room: the three tag cards (Evidence / To-verify / Fragile-if-false) and a “who checks it, by when” card from [assumption-audit-prop-cards.pdf](#).

Grouping: 3–8 people who built or will run the plan; one plan per sweep.

Roles: everyone surfaces and tags; you keep the first pass silent, force the ranking, and end on names and dates.

How to run it

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–2	Frame	Put the plan up. Define an assumption: something the plan needs to be true that isn't written in it.	Read the plan; ask clarifying questions
2–8	Surface	Silent, then round-robin: every “the plan assumes...” on a card. Aim for 10–15. Don't judge yet.	Write assumptions silently, then read them aloud one per turn
8–13	Tag & rank	Each assumption gets one tag. Then rank all “Fragile-if-false” by how much the plan rests on it.	Tag each card; vote or argue the ranking of the fragile ones
13–18	Assign	For the top 2–3 fragile assumptions: who checks it, by when, and what's the fallback if it fails?	Name an owner and a date for each; sketch the fallback
18–20	Read back	Say the scariest assumption out loud. Confirm the owner and the date. That's the deliverable.	Hear the commitment read back; correct if wrong

Why silent-then-round-robin

Open discussion anchors on the first loud opinion. Silence lets each person write their own assumptions first; the round-robin then surfaces the odd one out — often the most load-bearing one nobody said aloud yet.

The card

Use the faces from [assumption-audit-prop-cards.pdf](#): three tag cards (Evidence / To-verify / Fragile-if-false), a “who checks it, by when” card, and a blank to author your own. Keep the tag definitions in view — the mislabels (“risk” instead of “assumption”, everything “fragile”) are what the cards prevent.

Failure modes

1. **It becomes a risk list.** A risk is something that might happen; an assumption is something believed true right now. Rescue: keep asking “what do we assume here?” — the word *assume* forces the present tense.
2. **Everything is marked important.** Forcing a ranking of the fragile ones is the point — if nothing is top, the plan has no soft spot, which is almost never true. Rescue: cap the fragile list at three; make the room choose.
3. **No owner, no date.** An audit that doesn't name who checks what by when was theatre. Rescue: end on names and dates; refuse to close a row without both.
4. **The plan author defends every assumption.** They built the plan and hear each challenge as criticism. Rescue: assign them the scribe role — writing cards keeps their hands busy and their mouth less defensive.

Variations

- **Remote:** shared doc or whiteboard — the silent pass in writing, the round-robin on mic.
- **One page only:** cap the surface at eight assumptions, then rank. Good when the team over-generates.
- **Pre-mortem hybrid:** for the top fragile assumption, jump to “it's false — now what?” before assigning an owner.

- **Recurring:** run it at each milestone on the same plan; the tag counts sliding toward Evidence is the health signal.

Facilitation notes

- The strongest moment is the room realising a shared “obvious” was never checked.
- Park opinions as assumptions to verify rather than debating them live; it keeps the round fast.

Put it on the wall

Print `assumption-audit-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to put the run of show, the three tags and the “who checks it, by when” prompt on one wall while you facilitate.

Props in this folder

- `assumption-audit-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): three tag cards, a “who checks it, by when” card, a blank card, branded backs
- `assumption-audit-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks (`-Letter.pdf` is US Letter)
- `assumption-audit-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole audit on one A3 wall sheet
- `assumption-audit-guide.md` · `-debrief.md` · `-start-here.md` — the facilitator guide, the debrief, the one-page start here
- `assumption-audit-license.md` — what you may do
- `SKILL.md` · `assumption-audit.zip` — the machine-readable manifest, and the whole folder in one download

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the cards, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs nothing but a wall, blank cards and a pen each.

Assumption Audit — Debrief

The plan didn’t get safer by feeling confident — it got safer when you named the beliefs holding it up and put a date on checking them.

Use with `assumption-audit-guide.md` . The read-back at minute 18 is the compressed version; this sheet is the full one.

How to run this debrief

- Keep the ranked “fragile” shortlist **in view** — the debrief is about those two or three, not the whole wall of cards.
- Push on the ranking: which one really carries the plan? “All equally important” means the ranking didn’t happen.
- Land on owner + date for every fragile assumption, and check each date falls before the point of no return.

Read the board

1. **The tagged counts.** How many Evidence vs To-verify vs Fragile-if-false? A pile of to-verify means you were about to commit on untested ground.
2. **The top fragile ones.** These are the plan's soft spot — not a full risk list, just the two or three it truly rests on.
3. **The surprising ones.** The assumption someone wrote that no one else had thought of — that's the value of the silent first pass.

The six debrief questions

1. The invisible belief.

“Which assumption did everyone quietly believe but nobody had written down or checked?”

→ Targets: the shared blind spot the silent pass exists to surface.

2. The plan-breaker.

“If the top fragile one turned out false, what actually changes — the plan, or just the plan of work?”

→ Targets: distinguishing a real pivot from a scheduling adjustment.

3. The owner and the date.

“Who owns checking each fragile assumption, and by when? Is that date before the point of no return?”

→ Targets: commitment quality — a check without a date is a wish.

4. The surprise.

“What assumption about the work are you glad surfaced, because you'd rather test it than live inside it?”

→ Targets: the relief signal — what the room was carrying without naming.

5. The ranking fight.

“Where did the room disagree about which assumption was most fragile — and what did that disagreement tell you?”

→ Targets: the underlying values or risk appetites that the ranking exposed.

6. The next audit.

“What's the next plan or milestone that deserves this same twenty-minute pass — and when will you run it?”

→ Targets: transfer — scheduling the habit instead of ending the exercise.

Failure modes of the debrief

Failure mode	Why it happens	The rescue
It reads like paperwork	Everyone just wants to get on	Re-read the top fragile assumption — that's not process, that's the thing that bites.
Owners were named but no dates	“We'll look into it”	A check without a date is a wish; give every owner a before-the-decision date.
It stops at the list	Surfacing feels like the win	The deliverable is the ranking + who/dates, not the wall of cards.