WORKSHOPSKILL · PARTICIPANT KIT

Relay Brief — Participant Workbook

The guide in print, a frame to write after every debrief question, and session notes pages.

Folder: `relay-brief` · Category: communication · 8–20 people (lines of 4–6) · 20 min · offline + online · print props · assessment-type

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20	8–20	print props
MINUTES	PEOPLE	SETTING

Relay Brief — Facilitator Guide

A five-constraint task brief is whispered down a line of four or six people, and the last person rebuilds it out loud. The distance between the original and the rebuild is the whole lesson: a verbal handover loses information at every hop, and everyone along the line felt certain they passed it on fine. Nobody has to be careless for this to happen — which is exactly why the exercise works on teams that blame inattentiveness.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Watched a five-constraint brief arrive with two or three constraints intact — **while every hop was honest**.
2. Caught themselves or a teammate filling a hole with a plausible guess instead of a question.
3. Named one written-handover habit they will use on the next real handover, from the loss they actually saw.

When to use this activity

- A team keeps getting work wrong downstream and blames inattentiveness; the real culprit is the handover itself.
- You want a fast, visceral demo of why specs need to be written down and read back, not "cleared up" in a call.
- You have twenty minutes and a line of 4–6 people (run two lines in parallel for a bigger room).

What one hop does

Each hop does three things to the brief: **drops** a constraint, **compresses** a number ("by Friday the 12th" becomes "soon"), and **injects** a plausible guess to fill the hole. Nobody lies — every person genuinely believes they passed it on accurately. That confident distortion is what the debrief lands on.

Setup

Clock: twenty minutes on the floor, measures included. A tight room can run the relay itself in eight minutes; the reveal and the debrief are what you protect.

Space: a clear line of four to six people standing or seated facing away from one another, far enough that neighbouring lines cannot overhear. Two or three lines can run in parallel in a normal training room.

Materials per line:

Item	Source
1 × brief card (facilitator only — never leaves your hand)	`relay-brief-prop-cards.pdf` (the Brief)
1 × rebuild-record card per person in the last three hops	`relay-brief-prop-cards.pdf` (Your Rebuild)
1 × observer tally card	`relay-brief-prop-cards.pdf` (Tally)
1 × rule card — *no notes, no repeats*	`relay-brief-prop-cards.pdf`, or read it aloud
1 × participant workbook per person	`relay-brief-workbook.pdf` (US Letter: `relay-brief-workbook-Letter.pdf`)

Item	Source
2 × answer sheet per person	`relay-brief-paper-form.pdf` — one for the pre, one for the post

Grouping rule: put the line together from people who actually hand work to each other — a real chain, not a random six. The transfer lands harder when the line is the team.

Roles: person one (the only reader of the brief), the middle hops (each passes once), the last person (rebuilds aloud), one or two observers (tally card, may not speak during the relay).

How to run it

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–2	Pre-measure	"Five statements about your own last week of handovers — not about the game."	Answer alone on the answer sheet
2–3	Line up	Form the line, facing away. State the two rules: no notes, one pass only.	Stand or sit in line; the last three hold a rebuild card
3–11	Relay	Show the brief card to person one for ten seconds, then take it back. "Pass it on, once, quietly." Move down the line with the timer.	Each hop tells the next in private; the last three write their own version before hearing the next
11–14	Reveal	"Last person: state the brief as you heard it." Then read the original aloud, slowly. Line the two up in front of the line.	The line counts surviving constraints on the tally card, hop by hop
14–18	Debrief	Run the debrief sheet with both versions visible.	Name what was dropped, compressed, invented; choose one habit
18–20	Post-measure	Same five statements, now about what the relay just showed them.	Answer alone; compare the shift, not the person

Then run the debrief — see `relay-brief-debrief.md`.

The brief card

Write one brief with **exactly five** deliberate constraints and show it only to person one. Each constraint must be something a line can lose. Example (swap in your own domain — keep the shape):

> "Reprint the **Q3 field guide**, **250 copies**, **coil-bound**, in **matte**, **deliver to the Nairobi office by Friday the 12th**."

The five work best as a mix: one quantity, one process, one finish, one place, one deadline. Vivid items survive; a bare date or a finish spec is what quietly falls out — the same thing that falls out of real handovers.

Failure modes

1. **People write notes.** Rescue: hold the rule and say why — the leak is the point, and a note is a patch that hides it.

2. **One comedian breaks it on purpose.** Their joke lands, but the room learns “someone messed up” instead of “the channel leaks.” Rescue: reset the line — everyone passes honestly — and take the fun into the debrief, where the pattern is the finding.
3. **The room hunts a culprit.** Rescue: read the hops in order — “hop three only had what hop two gave them.” The system leaks; the person did not.
4. **A hop asks for a repeat.** Rescue: no repeats is the only rule you must never bend. One telling is what a Tuesday afternoon voicemail is.

Variations

- **Online:** run the line as a serial chain of private messages, one hop at a time, each person forwarding from memory only, no scrolling back. The reveal is a screenshot wall.
- **Large groups (20+):** run two or three lines in parallel with a co-facilitator or an observer per line, then compare the surviving-constraint counts in plenary — different lines, same leak pattern.
- **Written-handover variant:** replace the whisper with a chain of forwards, each person writing to the next from what they received, thirty seconds per hop. The loss changes shape — the place survives, the deadline and the finish die — and the lesson about a written spec gets sharper.
- **Short version (12 min):** four-person line, one relay, no measures, six-minute debrief. Keep the reveal; without the side-by-side there is no evidence.
- **Assessment-type:** run the pre-measure before lining up and the post-measure right after the debrief — see `relay-brief-assessment.json`. The interesting number is how confidence in “one clear telling” collapses, not the score.

Facilitation notes

- The strong moment is the first person hearing the final rebuild and realising it came from their own accurate telling.
- Read the original aloud at the reveal *slowly*, once. Rereading it softens the finding.
- Strongest transfer question: “Which handover this week went down a line like this one?”

Put it on the wall

Print `relay-brief-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to put the run of show, what one hop does and the debrief questions on one wall while you facilitate.

Props in this folder

- `relay-brief-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): brief card, rebuild-record cards, observer tally, rule card, branded backs, blanks
- `relay-brief-guide.md` — this run sheet
- `relay-brief-debrief.md` — six debrief questions, failure modes of the debrief, scoring cues
- `relay-brief-assessment.json` — pre/post measure preset: 5 items, two reverse-scored
- `relay-brief-paper-form.pdf` — the measure as a print-and-fill answer sheet
- `relay-brief-workbook.pdf` — participant workbook: the idea in plain words, the hop log, notes and action page
- `relay-brief-slide-deck.html` / `.pdf` — the deck for teaching or projecting, one idea per slide

- `relay-brief-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks
- `relay-brief-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole activity on one A3 wall sheet: run of show, what one hop does, watch-outs
- `relay-brief-start-here.md` — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go
- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `*-Letter.pdf` — US Letter editions of the print documents

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the props, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs no projector and no account: one card, one line, one reveal.

Relay Brief — Debrief Sheet

> Six questions, three failure modes of the debrief itself, one rule: both versions stay visible until the room is done with them.
>
> Use with `relay-brief-guide.md`. The debrief runs minutes 14–18.

How to run this debrief

- Write the original brief on one side of a flip chart and the rebuild on the other, **in the words the last person used**. Erasing nothing is the whole discipline.
- Go hop by hop, not person by person. The unit of analysis is the hop; the moment the room starts analysing people, the lesson is gone.
- End on a sentence someone will actually say out loud tomorrow. Insight without a script evaporates by Wednesday.

Read the two versions side by side

1. **What survived.** Count the constraints the rebuild kept. Most lines land two or three out of five. That number is the data, not a score to defend.
2. **What was dropped.** Which constraint vanished first? Usually the least vivid one — a bare date, a finish spec — which is exactly what quietly falls out of real handovers.
3. **What was invented.** Point at a detail in the rebuild that was never in the original. Nobody lied; every hole gets filled with something plausible. That is assumption-injection, live.

The six questions

1. The line at work.

“Where in a normal week does your work go down a four-hop line like this one — stand-up, ticket, forward, ’as discussed’?”

→ Targets: transfer. Expect ticket comments, shift handovers, “I’ll just tell them at stand-up”. Ask which specific chain they mean.

2. Confident and wrong.

“Which hop felt most certain it passed it on clearly?”

→ Targets: the gap between certainty and fidelity — the finding itself. Do not let the room turn hop three into a character; the hop was certain *because* it had nothing else to work with.

3. The written form.

“What one written form — a spec, a checklist, a recap message — would have stopped the biggest loss you just saw?”

→ Targets: a concrete repair with an owner. A recap message costs ten seconds; the rebuild cost the line three constraints.

4. The invented detail.

“Point at something in the rebuild that was never in the original. Where did it come from?”

→ Targets: assumption-injection made visible. Naming one invented detail is worth more than a rule about “don’t guess”.

5. What fell first, and why that one.

“Which constraint vanished first in your line — the date, the quantity, the finish, the place? Why that one?”

→ Targets: salience. Vivid, concrete items survive a hop; bare numbers and qualifiers die. That ordering is what a written spec is for.

6. The restated brief.

“Who will restate the next real brief back to its author today? Say the sentence you will use.”

→ Targets: rehearsal in words. “Can I read that back to you?” is a habit; “let’s communicate better” is a poster.

Failure modes of the debrief itself

Failure mode	Why it happens	The rescue
It plays as a party game	The dropped bits are genuinely funny	Laugh once, then point at the chart: “that exact loss is in your inbox this week.”
The line blames the middle	One hop clearly dropped a lot	Read the hops in order — each had only what the last gave it. The channel leaks, not the person.
Nobody owns a fix	The debrief stalls at “wow”	End on one written-handover habit with a name and a when, out loud, in the room.

Scoring cues (assessment-type sessions)

If you ran the pre/post measure (`relay-brief-assessment.json`), these observables during the relay are what justify the shift in the report:

Observable	Points to
A hop asks a question and is correctly refused	The rule is understood, not resented
The rebuild keeps a qualifier nobody emphasised	Salience, not effort, decided what survived
Someone volunteers “I added that” about an invention	Assumption-injection recognised in themselves
At the reveal, a hop revises its own confidence	The measure’s target construct, moving in real time

Reading the pre/post

Score the individual before/after delta and the team’s average shift (see `relay-brief-assessment.json`). Report `total_delta` and `construct_deltas`, honour `report_note` — and never rank a person by how much they dropped. A relay loses information at every hop by design; the finding is about the channel.

The line at work.

Where in a normal week does your work go down a four-hop line like this one — stand-up, ticket, forward, ’as discussed’?

Confident and wrong.

Which hop felt most certain it passed it on clearly?

The written form.

What one written form — a spec, a checklist, a recap message — would have stopped the biggest loss you just saw?

The invented detail.

Point at something in the rebuild that was never in the original. Where did it come from?

What fell first, and why that one.

Which constraint vanished first in your line — the date, the quantity, the finish, the place? Why that one?

The restated brief.

Who will restate the next real brief back to its author today? Say the sentence you will use.

Session notes