

Start · Stop · Continue — Participant Workbook

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

Folder: start-stop-continue · Category: reviews · one team of 4–8 · 30 min · offline + online · print props · assessment-type

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Start • Stop • Continue — Facilitator Run Sheet

The retrospective that fits in one wall: every card is exactly one verb — start something, stop something, keep something. The structure is small; the discipline is real: no card survives without an owner and a date.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, the team will have:

1. Seen its own working patterns <mark>sorted into three honest piles</mark>.
2. Turned the loudest pain into one action with one owner and one date.
3. Practiced the retro discipline: cards are behaviors, never people.

Setup

Space: one wall or whiteboard; online, a shared board with three columns.

Materials:

Item	Source
1 × START card per person	start-stop-continue-prop-cards.pdf (card 1)
1 × STOP card per person	start-stop-continue-prop-cards.pdf (card 2)
1 × CONTINUE card per person	start-stop-continue-prop-cards.pdf (card 3)
1 × timing card	start-stop-continue-prop-cards.pdf (card 4) — for you

The card rule — say it out loud: “One behavior per card. Never a person’s name. ‘Stop cc-ing the whole team’ — not ‘stop cc-ing Dana’.”

Grouping rule: one real team, 4–8 people, including its lead. Larger teams split into working pairs first, then merge boards.

Minute-by-minute script

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–3	Frame + card rule	State the rule. Deal the three cards per person	Read cards, think
3–11	Silent writing (8 min)	No talking while writing — quality over speed	One behavior per card, all three verbs
11–18	The wall (7 min)	Invite reads; cluster duplicates live	Post cards, hear echoes, merge
18–24	Vote (6 min)	Three dots each: what matters most this cycle	Dot-vote across all piles

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
24–30	Owner + date (6 min)	“Top card per pile gets an owner and a date. Say them out loud.”	Commit aloud; photograph the wall

The wall photo and the three commitments are the retro’s artifacts — see [start-stop-continue-debrief.md](#) for the 10-minute close.

Known failure modes & rescues

1. **Cards arrive pre-blamed.** “Stop being late to standup” — aimed at one person everyone can name. Rescue: rewrite live, with the room’s permission: “the behavior is arriving unprepared — stop that.” Behaviors only, every time.
2. **Everything lands in CONTINUE.** Praise is safe; START and STOP stay empty. Rescue: cap CONTINUE at three cards per person before the wall goes up — scarcity moves honesty to the hard piles.
3. **The vote splits into camps.** Dots pile along team lines; the retro becomes a referendum. Rescue: silent dot-voting only, and re-cluster the top five into one shared shortlist before the owner round.

Variations

- **Sprint-length version:** 20 minutes, one verb per person per sprint — rotate verbs weekly.
- **Remote:** shared board, cards as stickies, dot-vote with emoji, photo becomes an exported PNG.
- **Paired version:** for low-trust teams, write cards in pairs first — every card carries two names, which halves the exposure.

Props in this folder

- [start-stop-continue-prop-cards.pdf](#) — poker print-ready: START / STOP / CONTINUE / timing cards
- [start-stop-continue-guide.md](#) — this run sheet
- [start-stop-continue-debrief.md](#) — 8 debrief questions, 3 failure modes
- [start-stop-continue-assessment.json](#) — pre/post measure preset
- [start-stop-continue-paper-form.pdf](#) — the A4 answer sheet: the measure as a print-and-fill form
- [start-stop-continue-workbook.pdf](#) — participant workbook: the idea in plain words, guided items, notes and action pages
- [start-stop-continue-slide-deck.pdf](#) — the slide deck for teaching or projecting
- [start-stop-continue-slide-deck.html](#) — the same deck for any browser, speaker notes on N
- [start-stop-continue-license.md](#) — what you may do with all of this, in plain language
- [start-stop-continue-activity-poster.pdf](#) — The whole activity on one wall (A3): meta, run of show, debrief questions, watch-outs.
- [start-stop-continue-start-here.md](#) — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go

- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `start-stop-continue-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief sheet, bound as one A4 PDF

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 retro itself runs on cards, a wall and one discipline: behaviors, never people.

Start · Stop · Continue — Debrief Sheet

8 questions, 3 failure modes, one rule: the wall photo is the contract.

Use with `start-stop-continue-guide.md`. Runs 10 min after the owner round.

The 8 questions

1. The pile sizes.

“Look at the wall: which pile is biggest, and what does the shape say about this team right now?”

→ An all-CONTINUE wall is a team at ease or a team afraid. Ask which.

2. The hardest card.

“Which card was hardest to write — the START, the STOP, or the CONTINUE? Why that one?”

→ STOP cards are usually hardest; asking why surfaces the fear behind the behavior.

3. The echo cluster.

“Which cluster gathered the most duplicates? What is it like to know five people wrote the same STOP?”

→ Echoes are the team’s quiet consensus finally made visible.

4. The card nobody posted.

“Was there a card you wrote and pocketed? No need to read it.”

→ Heads nodding is enough. The pocketed cards tell you the retro’s safety ceiling.

5. The vote and the silence.

“Which high-vote card got discussed the least? What’s underneath it?”

→ Sometimes the room votes for a card precisely to avoid talking about it.

6. The daily version.

“Between this retro and the next one, where will the wall’s three verbs show up without a formal retro?”

→ Transfer question. Expect: 1:1s, channel threads, sprint planning.

7. The three commitments.

“Read the three owner-plus-date cards aloud. Do all three still feel real, right now?”

→ One may wobble under the room’s eyes — renegotiate it on the spot, honestly.

8. The photograph.

“Who has the wall photo? When does it get pulled up next — before or after the next retro?”

→ Closing question. The photo is the contract; schedule when it gets audited.

3 known failure modes of the debrief itself

- 1. **The retro becomes a venting session.** STOP cards get debated one by one, time dies, nothing is owned.
Rescue: the vote already chose — debate belongs to the top card per pile, nowhere else.
- 2. **The lead answers everything.** The most senior voice interprets every cluster.
Rescue: hand the interpretation to the card-writers: “author reads, room listens” as a rule.
- 3. **Commitments are vague to be safe.** “Improve sync” — owner, date, no verb anyone can audit.
Rescue: the one-line test: can someone who missed the retro tell if it happened? If not, rewrite.

If you are running the pre/post measure (`start-stop-continue-assessment.json`), note these observables:

Observable	Points to
STOP pile size vs. CONTINUE pile size	Honesty level
Duplicate clusters form without prompting	Shared pain surfacing
All three commitments pass the one-line test	Commitment quality

The report your team receives is a self-comparison across cycles, never a ranking against other teams — keep it that way.

The pile sizes.

Look at the wall: which pile is biggest, and what does the shape say about this team right now?

The hardest card.

Which card was hardest to write — the START, the STOP, or the CONTINUE? Why that one?

The echo cluster.

Which cluster gathered the most duplicates? What is it like to know five people wrote the same STOP?

The card nobody posted.

Was there a card you wrote and pocketed? No need to read it.

The vote and the silence.

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The daily version.

Between this retro and the next one, where will the wall's three verbs show up without a formal retro?

The three commitments.

Read the three owner-plus-date cards aloud. Do all three still feel real, right now?

The photograph.

Who has the wall photo? When does it get pulled up next — before or after the next retro?
