

The Feedback Digest — Facilitator Run Sheet

Folder: the-feedback-digest · Category: self-assessment · 1–2 people · 20 min · offline + online · print
props · tool pack

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20

MINUTES

1–2

PEOPLE

print props

SETTING

The Feedback Digest — Facilitator Guide

You collect the feedback you’ve actually received — from reviews, Slack, 1:1s, emails — and sort it into three piles: things you already knew, things that surprised you, and things you’re going to dismiss. The surprised pile is the point: it’s the part of how you land that you can’t see from the inside. Then you write one sentence about yourself the whole set supports, and one action that follows from the surprise.

How this differs from `the-leader-checkup` : The Leader Checkup *collects* new feedback from a team, live, with the leader listening without defending. This folder assumes the feedback already exists — scattered across reviews, messages and overheard remarks — and treats it as evidence to be sorted, not re-asked for. Run the checkup when nobody has told you yet; run this digest when too many people have, and none of it has been read.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Gathered the real feedback they’ve received recently — verbatim where possible, on one card per item.
2. Sorted every item into **Already knew** / **Surprised me** / **I’ll dismiss**, with a stated reason for each dismissal.
3. Read the surprised pile as a blindspot, written one honest sentence the whole set supports, and committed one action that follows from the surprise.

When to use this activity

- A review cycle just ended and the feedback is filed away, unread — the surprising part still unanswered.
- The same piece of criticism keeps arriving from different people, and each arrival gets individually explained away.
- Before asking for *more* feedback — digest what already arrived first; otherwise the new round is just noise layered on unread signal.

Setup

Clock: twenty minutes for a solo digest. In pairs, each person sorts their own piles; the read-back at the end adds five more.

Space: a table big enough for three visible piles. Piles hidden under a stack are piles unsorted.

Materials per person:

Item	Source
3 × sorting cards — Already knew · Surprised me · I’ll dismiss	<code>the-feedback-digest-prop-cards.pdf</code>
1 × “the sentence the evidence supports” card	<code>the-feedback-digest-prop-cards.pdf</code>
1 × “one action from the surprised pile” card	<code>the-feedback-digest-prop-cards.pdf</code>
8–20 × blank cards or sticky notes — one per feedback item	<code>the-feedback-digest-prop-cards.pdf</code> — the blanks
1 × pen	verbatim beats paraphrase; write what was actually said

Grouping: 1 person, or a pair each digesting their own feedback.

Roles: solo, you sort your own piles; in pairs, the partner’s only move is to read the surprised pile back, verbatim — no commentary, no reassurance.

How to run it

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–6	Gather	“One card per item, verbatim where you can. Reviews, messages, things said in passing.”	Write each piece of received feedback on its own card
6–12	Sort	“Three piles only. ‘Already knew’ is the comfortable pile, not the useful one. Dismissals need a spoken reason.”	Place every card into Already knew / Surprised me / I’ll dismiss
12–16	Read the surprise	Point at the surprised pile only. “What keeps repeating there?”	Find the repetition — that pattern is the blindspot
16–20	Sentence + action	Demand the unflattering sentence, then the action that traces to the surprise — not to the comfortable pile.	Write one sentence the whole set supports, and one concrete dated action

Then run the debrief — see `the-feedback-digest-debrief.md`.

The card

The three sorting cards define the only legal piles — Already knew, Surprised me, I’ll dismiss — which is what turns a gloomy re-read of old feedback into an experiment: every card must land in a named pile, and the piles have different jobs. The sentence card enforces the honest version (“the evidence supports”, not “the version I’d like read aloud”), and the action card ties the commitment to the surprised pile specifically, because an action sourced from the comfortable pile is how people avoid changing.

Failure modes

1. **Only safe feedback was gathered.** Every item sits in “already knew” and the surprised pile is empty. Rescue: pull one card out of the dismiss pile and ask what it would mean if it were true.
2. **The whole review lands as one card.** “They think I’m not leadership material” is a mood, not evidence. Rescue: split every item into one behavior; surprises are usually about a specific thing, not “you”.
3. **The dismiss pile is huge and reasonless.** That is not judgment, it is a wall. Rescue: force a one-sentence reason per dismissal; where none can be produced, move the card to “Surprised me”.
4. **The action comes from the comfortable pile.** A growth action that confirms what you already believed is a way of not changing. Rescue: the action must name which surprised card it follows from.

Variations

- **After a review cycle:** digest everything from one round while it’s fresh; the surprised pile is your development plan.
- **With a trusted colleague:** they read your surprised pile back to you — it’s easier to hear your own blindspot in someone else’s voice.
- **Recurring:** re-run each quarter; a surprise that keeps coming back isn’t a misunderstanding, it’s a pattern.
- **Online:** the three piles are three columns in a shared doc, items pasted verbatim from chat and mail; the read-back happens on a call.

Facilitation notes

- Surprise is the signal. What you didn't already know is the entire point; the pile that confirms what you believed is just noise.
- Dismiss only with a reason. "I'll dismiss" is allowed — but you have to say why, out loud, in one sentence. A reasonless dismissal is the blindspot hiding.
- Verbatim matters. Paraphrase softens exactly the sentences worth reading.

Put it on the wall

Print `the-feedback-digest-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to keep the two rules — surprise is the signal, dismissals need reasons — in view while the piles get sorted.

Props in this folder

- `the-feedback-digest-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): three sorting cards, the evidence-sentence card, the action-from-surprise card, blanks, branded backs
- `the-feedback-digest-guide.md` — this run sheet
- `the-feedback-digest-debrief.md` — the debrief questions and the failure modes of the debrief
- `the-feedback-digest-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks
- `the-feedback-digest-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole tool on one A3 wall sheet: the run, the two rules, the watch-outs
- `the-feedback-digest-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 cards, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs nothing but a table, some blank cards and the pile of feedback you already have.

The Feedback Digest — Debrief

The surprised pile is the only part of feedback you cannot get any other way — the debrief is where it stops being a sting and starts being data.

Use with `the-feedback-digest-guide.md`. The sentence-and-action phase at minute 16 is the compressed version; this sheet is the full one.

How to run this debrief

- Keep the three piles physically separated and visible. The argument of this tool is the shape of the sort, and re-mixing the piles erases it.
- Spend the debrief in the surprised pile. The "already knew" pile is for compliments; nothing changes there.

- Close on the action card, and make it name which surprised card it follows from.

Read the piles

- Which pile is biggest? If “Already knew” dwarfs the rest, you may have only collected feedback you were already comfortable with.
- Look at “I’ll dismiss.” Did each dismissal have a real reason, or is that pile where the hard stuff got set aside?
- Is there anything in “Surprised me” that two different people said? Repetition across sources is the strongest signal you have.
- What did you expect to be surprised by — and isn’t there? Sometimes the absence is its own data.

The eight debrief questions

1. What would make it true.

“For each item in the surprised pile: what would have to be true for it to be right, even partly?”

→ Targets: reading surprise as a hypothesis instead of an attack.

2. Content or source.

“Is it the content that surprises you, or the source? (Same words from a different person can land differently.)”

→ Targets: separating “this isn’t true” from “this shouldn’t be said by this person” — the second is its own finding.

3. The uncomfortable edge.

“What about this is uncomfortable enough that you’d rather not look? That edge is usually where the blindspot is.”

→ Targets: locating the blindspot by its temperature, not its wording.

4. The friend test.

“If a friend showed you this exact pile about themselves, what would you tell them?”

→ Targets: the compassion you extend to others but not to your own data.

5. The honest sentence.

“The sentence you wrote — is it the honest one, or the one you’d want read aloud? Rewrite it until it’s true.”

→ Targets: the difference between a summary and an admission; the evidence either supports it or it doesn’t.

6. The action’s origin.

“Does the action follow from the surprised pile, or from the comfortable one? A growth action from the ‘already knew’ pile is a way of not changing.”

→ Targets: tracing the commitment back to a specific surprised card.

7. The witness.

“Who will you let hold you to it, and when will you check?”

→ Targets: making the commitment social and dated — feedback that nobody watches reverts.

8. The next quarter’s read.

“What feedback would you have to collect next quarter to know whether this one shifted?”

→ Targets: pre-registering the re-run; the recurring surprise is the pattern, and its disappearance is the proof.

Failure modes of the debrief

Failure mode	Why it happens	The rescue
No surprises at all	Only safe feedback was gathered, or you're defending	Pull one item you'd have put in "dismiss" and ask what it would mean if it were true.
Everything is a surprise	Whole reviews are being read, not single pieces	Split each into one behavior — surprises are usually about a specific thing, not "them."
The dismiss pile is huge and reasonless	Judgment is being used as a wall	Force a one-sentence reason per dismissal; where you can't produce one, move it to "surprised."