

Week 2 · Exercise

Discover, then Define: Research to Brief

140 minutes across the session · Work alone · Text only, no image tools this week

Today is all language models and runs in the order every project in this class runs: Discover, then Define. Before the break, you will do a competitive audit and gain a better understand about the audience you are designing for using an LLM and double check to make sure the output is accurate. Based on this research you can then work with the LLM to define a creative path forward. You should push past your first idea, let the model argue with what's left, and turn what you found into a creative brief.

WHAT YOU WALK OUT WITH

Checked research	What already exists and who it is for, every claim marked verified or flagged.
A direction	One concept you picked out of twenty, and you can say why you picked it.
A written brief	A paragraph in your own words: what it is, who it's for, how it should feel, what it should not be.
An ideation log	Everything from the three moves, including the parts you threw out.

By the end you should be able to point at one decision you made that the model did not suggest, and explain why you made it. If you can't, you spent an afternoon taking dictation.

One rule for the session: you type the final version of anything you keep. Do not copy and paste!

PICK SOMETHING TO WORK ON — 5 MINUTES

Pick a subject you'd be happy to spend an afternoon with, and decide roughly what you'd make out of it: a brand identity, a poster series, an illustrated story, an editorial feature, or something you propose. If nothing comes to mind, choose from one of these three below. Then, before you open anything, write down the first three concepts you'd come up with on your own — these are your default instincts, the same obvious moves a model would reach for first. You're going to ban them after the break — not because they're bad, but so you're forced to push past them. Keep the paper anyway: it's how you'll tell whether the model's twenty actually go further than your three.

Subject	What you'd make	Worn-out image to ban
A 24-hour laundromat that rents its floor for events after midnight	Brand identity	Bubbles, a spinning drum
A repair café that fixes things people were told to throw away	Poster series, 5+	A wrench, a lightbulb
How a bodega actually makes money	Editorial feature	The neon awning at night

You'll need three models open in three tabs and a document to paste into.

PART ONE · DISCOVER — 60 MINUTES

Three models, one subject. Ask what already exists and who it is for, then go and check. The checking is the part everyone skips and the part that matters most, considering LLMs can hallucinate or provide you with false information.

PASS 1 Landscape 15 min

Ask all three models what already exists in this space: who is making something like it, what it looks like, who it is aimed at, and what nobody is doing. Then take two of the examples you were given and try to find them.

Your move: note what you could not find. A model will name work that does not exist, and catching one of those is worth more than the list it arrived in.

PASS 2 The people 12 min

Same three models, same subject: who is this for, how do they already spend their attention, what would reach them, what would put them off. Keep each model's answer separately.

Your move: write down where the three disagreed. Where they agreed, that is not three sources — it is the same training data three times.

PASS 3 The check 23 min

Go through every claim you have collected and mark it: verified against a source you opened, or unverified. A model's own citation is a place to look, not a check — open it and see whether it says what the sentence claimed it said.

Your move: keep the flags. A claim you could not source is a finding, not a failure — it's evidence of what the model made up. Do not delete it!

POOL 10 min

Bring your marked list. We put the verified claims and the flagged ones in two columns on the board and read them across the whole room, not down your own list. One flagged claim is an anecdote. Everyone's flagged claims together are a map of where these models make things up.

Your move: write down which kinds of claim survived. Numbers, names and dates fail differently from general description, and that difference is the finding.

PART TWO · DEFINE — THE THREE MOVES

Diverge, then interrogate, then brief, all of it built on what you found before the break. Each move ends with a decision only you can make, and those decisions are what you hand in, not the transcript. Write your own prompts.

MOVE 1 Diverge 18 min

Find the three concepts you wrote before the lab and ban them. Ask the model for twenty, ruling out your three and the worn-out image above, and hold it to what you verified about the audience. Read the list, cross out anything that feels familiar, then ask for ten more that sit further out. Do the second round even if the first list looked good.

Your move: pick three. Go by which ones you'd be sorry to lose rather than which ones are easiest to make.

MOVE 2 Interrogate 15 min

Ask the model to argue against all three, and tell it not to suggest fixes. Offering a fix is how a model changes the subject. Then ask which of the three the audience you researched would walk past.

Your move: keep one and drop two. Write down which criticism actually landed. If none of it did, it's worth asking whether your concepts are just safe.

MOVE 3 Brief 20 min

Put the model away and write first. One paragraph: what it is, who it's for — the audience you verified, not one you assume — how it should feel, what it should not be. Then hand it over and ask it to find the holes. Tell it not to rewrite anything.

Your move: retype the brief yourself, all of it. Once a model has smoothed out your writing it stops sounding like you.

SHARE OUT 20 min

Turn to the person next to you and read each other your briefs. You both ran the same three moves on different subjects, so say where your processes went apart — what the models pushed you toward, and where you overruled them. No feedback and no fixing, just share. Take about ten minutes each.

Your move: name one thing the research changed about your direction. If nothing changed, the research was decoration.

WHAT TENDS TO GO WRONG

- **You skip the checking.** A profile you did not check is a false stereotype, and it will feel like truth the whole time you design against it.
- **You take the first list.** The top of a list is where the model is most average. The interesting material is further down, or in the second round.
- **It goes soft on you.** Ask a model to be harsh and it will do it for a turn or two before drifting back to encouragement. Many models just want to please you. Push again, or open a fresh chat.
- **You let it rewrite your brief.** What comes back sounds smoother but says less and none of it is yours anymore.
- **You mistake fluency for quality.** These models write just as confidently about bad ideas as good ones.
- **You hand over the judgment.** “Which of these is best?” is the question that gives your authorship away. Ask it to argue, then decide yourself.

WHERE DOES THE IDEA COME FROM?

A model can hand you twenty concepts because it has read an enormous amount of other people’s thinking, without asking and without paying, in the same way image models have read other people’s pictures. That is not a reason to refuse to use it. It is a reason to know what you are doing while you use it.

- If a concept came out of a numbered list and you picked it, whose idea is it? Does your answer change if you picked it out of twenty instead of two?
- Next week you’ll be disclosing AI use in your images. Will you disclose it in your thinking? Should the two be treated the same way?

You don’t need an answer today. You do need a position by the time you write your AI-Use Policy in Week 8.

WHAT CARRIES INTO THE HOMEWORK

Your research with every claim marked verified or flagged, your three-model comparison, your ideation log from all three moves — honest, not curated — and the brief you wrote.