

How to examine a claim without being impressed into agreement

A practical, portable toolkit for reading personal portfolios, research claims, product demos and institutional announcements.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

- 1. What exactly is being claimed?** Write a single falsifiable or checkable sentence. Avoid replacing a narrow claim ("a page exists") with a grander one ("the project works").
- 2. What evidence is actually available?** Separate artifacts, self-descriptions, independent records, experiments and interpretations.
- 3. What would change the verdict?** Name missing tests, disconfirming observations and conditions under which you would update.

Reader contract

This guide encourages calibrated judgment, not cynicism. A self-published essay can be useful; a prototype can be creative; a hypothesis can be worth testing. None should be mislabelled as externally validated.

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Six evidence classes

Public artifact. A working URL, document, repository or demonstration establishes that specific material is inspectable. It does not prove impact, authorship priority or effectiveness.

Self-description. A biography, CV or owner-maintained project count is an attributed claim. Ask who attests to it and whether corroboration is needed.

Scholarly claim. Look for paper, methods, venue, peer-review process, correction record and replication. A hosting profile alone is not peer review.

Hypothesis or model. Identify variables, predictions, possible counterexamples and competing models. Illustrative slider values are not measured probabilities.

Prototype. Test actual interactions, failure modes, device support, accessibility and security. A demo is not evidence of broad reliability.

Interpretation. Distinguish direct quotation or observation from causal explanation, judgment and metaphor. More than one reading may fit.

Confidence language that keeps you accurate

Observed: I opened and inspected this artifact. **Attributed:** The author states this. **Consistent with:** The evidence supports, but does not uniquely establish, this explanation. **Not established:** Available sources do not answer it.

A repeatable verification routine

Minute 1 - Translate. Turn a persuasive sentence into a precise claim. What would need to be true?

Minute 2 - Locate. Open the primary source. Verify page title, date, author, and the exact evidence cited.

Minute 3 - Classify. Mark the evidence class; note whether it is primary, independent, repeated or only an assertion.

Minute 4 - Stress test. Ask what rival explanations remain, what is missing, and whether the evidence could be selected or outdated.

Minute 5 - Record. Write a provisional verdict with a source link, access date, and a specific next check.

Worked example A: a public interactive atlas

Narrow claim: A browsable collection of work exists at a public URL. **Possible evidence:** Directly inspect the website and follow a sample of links. **Do not infer:** Unique visitors, completed-project totals, client adoption or usability from the owner-maintained menu alone. **Better test:** Give first-time visitors five tasks and record completion and confusion.

Worked example B: a proposed behavioural model

Narrow claim: A conceptual mechanism and predictions have been articulated. **Evidence:** Definitions and testable propositions in the written proposal. **Do not infer:** Validated predictive accuracy. **Better test:** Predefine measures and predictions, record prospective observations and compare against established alternatives.

Use this with any persuasive claim

Exact claim (one sentence):

Source URL / title / author / date checked:

Evidence class (artifact, self-report, study, prototype, interpretation):

What I verified directly:

What remains unverified:

Strongest alternative explanation:

What evidence would change my mind:

Current wording: observed / attributed / tentative / not established:

Make revision part of the method

A trustworthy correction log should record the affected claim, earlier wording, revised wording, rationale, source and change date. Do not imply independent submissions unless they actually occurred.

A responsible correction email

Subject: Evidence Room - precise correction request

Claim/location: [URL and paragraph]

Issue: [what the published wording appears to assert]

Evidence: [direct link, quote or reproducible observation]

Suggested wording: [narrower, accurate replacement]

Limitations: [anything you have not checked]

Practical pitfalls

Counts are not outcomes. A homepage may list many destinations, but that does not prove independent impact.

Repetition is not independence. Five sites copying one author description are still one source.

Working is not safe. A browser interaction passing a demo does not certify accessibility, security or suitability.

No source is timeless. Capture your access date; sources may move, disappear or change.

Explore the public cases

Visit evidence.sahiltayal.online for the interactive case cabinet and published editorial baseline. For the wider collection, visit sahiltayal.com. Questions and correction proposals: sahil@sahiltayal.com.

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