

The Practice Compass

A Writer-Performer Purpose Workbook

A reflective tool for clarifying what drives your work, what it serves and how you want to practise.

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Use this slowly. You do not need to answer every question, resolve every contradiction or disclose anything unsafe. This is an educational reflection tool, not a test of talent, a diagnostic instrument or a therapeutic assessment.

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1 / BEGIN WITH EXPERIENCE

Start with a moment

Purpose is often easier to find in lived experience than in a polished explanation. Begin with one moment when the work felt necessary, alive or unmistakably yours.

1. Describe the moment. What were you writing, making or performing?

2. What drew you into the work - an image, sound, question, memory, conflict, rhythm or need?

3. What changed in you, the room or the audience while the work was happening?

You are gathering evidence, not trying to sound impressive.

2 / DRIVE

What keeps calling you back?

Separate the reasons that sustain the practice from the reasons that merely reward it. Both may be present; the task is to notice their different effects.

1. What drives you to write or perform when nobody is watching?

2. What question, wound, pleasure, obsession or possibility repeatedly returns in your work?

3. What would be missing from your life if you stopped making this work?

4. Which external rewards matter to you - publication, recognition, income, belonging, influence - and what do they make possible?

3 / VALUES AND BOUNDARIES

What governs the practice?

A value becomes useful when it changes a decision. Non-negotiables may protect your ethics, voice, health, relationships or conditions for making work.

1. Name three values you want a reader, listener or collaborator to encounter in the work.

2. What are your non-negotiables? What will you not trade for approval, speed, access or prestige?

3. Where does your current practice already embody those values? Give concrete evidence.

4. Where is there a gap between what you say matters and how you presently work?

4 / AESTHETICS, POETICS AND LINEAGE

What teaches you how to make?

Your practice may be informed by formal theories or by inherited, embodied and community knowledge. Treat named theory and lived knowledge as equally worth examining.

1. Which writers, performers, forms, scenes, languages or traditions make your own work more possible?

2. Which ideas about beauty, difficulty, pleasure, form, voice or truth shape your choices?

3. What aesthetic, ethical, poetic, political or sociocultural theories inform you - explicitly or implicitly?

4. Which inheritances do you want to continue, revise, refuse or place in conversation?

5 / AUDIENCE AND CANON

Who is the work trying to reach?

Audience is not a single imagined judge. Your work can address several readerships at once, including people who are not yet present or who have been excluded from the record.

1. Who do you most want to feel recognised, challenged, accompanied or surprised by the work?

2. What impression do you hope the work leaves on its readership or audience after the event is over?

3. What do you want to add to, disturb, repair or make newly visible within the canon?

4. Whose approval are you currently imagining? Does that imagined reader enlarge or narrow the work?

6 / ETHICS, POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

What is the work answerable to?

Creative freedom and responsibility are not opposites. Consider where your freedom meets other people's lives, histories, labour, consent and vulnerability.

1. What do you stand for in the work - if anything - and how is that stance made visible through craft rather than declaration alone?

2. Who or what are you answerable to when working with memory, community, identity, archive or another person's story?

3. Where do power, access, money or institutional expectations enter the making and circulation of the work?

4. What consequences are you willing to accept for the positions the work takes? What consequences should not be passed to others?

7 / MASKING AND AUTHENTICITY

Where do you edit yourself before the page?

Adaptation can be skilled, strategic and protective. It can also become costly when it repeatedly removes the qualities that make the practice feel alive. Authenticity is not compulsory disclosure and should not require unsafe exposure.

1. Where do you make yourself, your language or your ambitions more acceptable to an imagined gatekeeper?

2. Which adaptations feel chosen and useful? Which feel automatic, exhausting or estranging?

3. What are you afraid might happen if the work became more recognisably yours? Include real risks as well as inherited fears.

4. What is one safe, specific movement toward greater authenticity in voice, form, process or performance?

Greater authenticity may mean clearer boundaries, not greater exposure.

8 / LIFE ALIGNMENT

How should the work shape your life?

A sustainable practice has to negotiate time, money, health, care, relationships, place and rest. Purpose is not only what the work says; it is also the life the practice builds around it.

1. How do you want writing and performance to inform your life journey over the next three to five years?

2. What do you hope the practice gives you besides finished work or public recognition?

3. What conditions help you make work without abandoning your health, relationships or other responsibilities?

4. What version of success would look impressive from outside but feel misaligned from within?

9 / THE ROLE

What is a poet or performer for?

You do not need a universal answer. Define the role you are willing to inhabit now, while leaving room for it to change.

1. What do you think is the role of the poet?

2. What becomes possible in performance that cannot happen on the page - and vice versa?

3. When should the artist witness, entertain, unsettle, preserve, refuse, imagine, translate or remain silent?

4. What responsibilities belong to your role, and which expectations do you decline?

10 / SYNTHESIS

Write your practice compass

Complete the stems in plain language. Let contradiction remain visible. The aim is a working orientation, not a permanent manifesto.

1. I make work because...

2. My practice is guided by...

3. I am answerable to...

4. I refuse...

5. I want my work to leave...

6. To practise more authentically, I will...

11 / EXPERIMENT

Test the compass in practice

Purpose becomes clearer through decisions. Choose one small experiment that lets you observe whether your process, work and values are moving into greater alignment.

1. The tension or gap I want to explore is...

2. For the next 30 days, I will try...

3. The value or non-negotiable this experiment protects is...

4. I will know the experiment taught me something when...

5. My review date and the person, journal or practice I will use to reflect are...

Revise the compass when the work, context or life changes. A useful orientation can remain alive.