

SESSION 2

Observation

Design Thinking for MBAs

(Remote Session)

Monday, January 26, 2026 | Patrick Ray

Today's Session

- This session is remote due to weather conditions.
- We'll practice observation through curated video footage.
- Same goal: **Notice everything.** Try to resist interpretations (for now).

Your only job today is to see, not to interpret, not to judge, just to notice.

Before We Begin

- Pen and paper ready.
- Maximize your window. Noticing details requires screen space.
- Use the largest screen you have.
- Write as you watch.

 You'll share observations from your notes during debrief.



Five Windows into the World

01 Central Park

One location across seasons

02 NYC 1910s

Over a century ago

03 London

Present day, walker's perspective

04 Tokyo (Shibuya)

Density and pace

05 Mumbai (Dadar)

Slow motion, intimate observation

Video 1: Central Park

One location across time

OBSERVATION PROMPT

- What stays the same?
- What changes?

Duration: ~5 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSIYGZhRGd4>



Video 2: NYC 1910s

Over a century ago

OBSERVATION PROMPT

- Watch how people move.
- Watch how people interact.
- Watch how people use space.

Duration: ~8 minutes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ1OgQL9_Cw



Video 3: London

Present day. A walker's perspective.

OBSERVATION PROMPT

- Notice the pace.
- Notice what draws your eye.

Duration: ~3 minutes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Eo-dvEH7g



Video 4: Shibuya, Tokyo

Density

OBSERVATION PROMPT

- Notice your own reaction to the density.
- What overwhelms?
- What do you filter out?

Duration: ~3 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qGiXY1SB68>



Video 5: Stainless (Dadar)

Adam Magyar

Just watch.

High-speed camera slowed to 1/54th speed. A 12-second moment stretched to 2 minutes.

<https://vimeo.com/467675747>



Silent Writing

Take 3 minutes. Write what you noticed.

Don't talk yet.

What Did You See?

No interpretations yet. Just observations.

Drop one word in the chat for what you noticed.

Comparing Contexts

- What was different about observing the 1910s footage vs. present-day?
- How did the pace of Shibuya vs. London change what you noticed?
- What did slowing down (Magyar) reveal that you'd have missed at normal speed?

How Did You Observe?

Let's surface what you naturally do.

Attention Patterns

- What drew your attention first?
- Did you watch the whole frame or focus on individuals?
- What did you ignore or filter out?

We naturally filter a great deal of our sensory input. Design Thinking helps us turn these filters off, or at least acknowledge them.

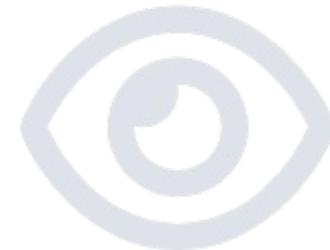
The Interpretation Impulse

- When did you start making up stories about people?
- How quickly did you move from "I see X" to "X is probably...?"
- What assumptions did you make based on appearance or behavior?

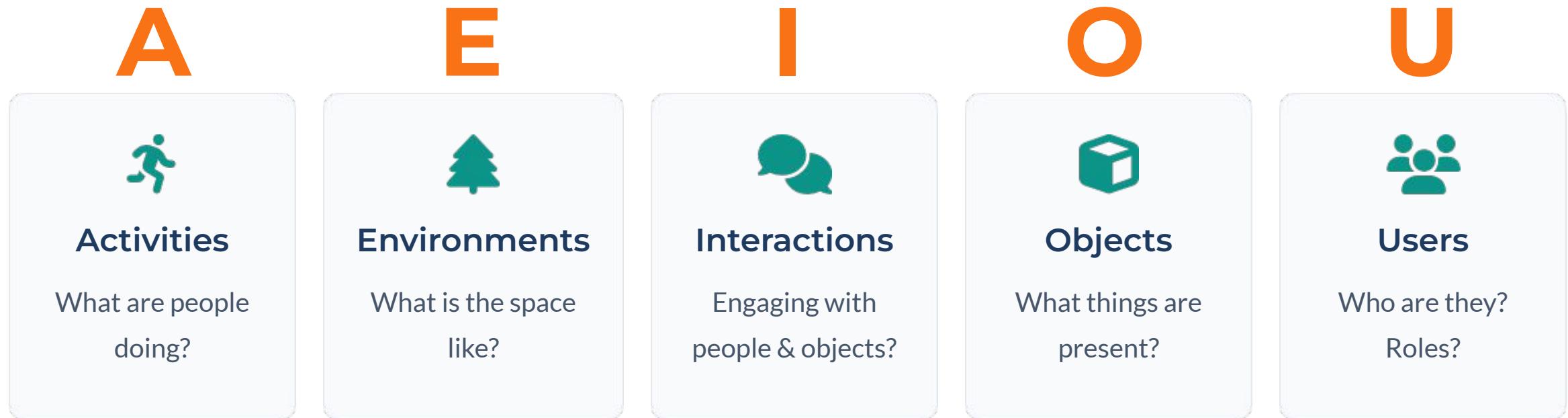
Observation ends where interpretation begins.

Your Observation Strategies

- Did anyone develop a system while watching? What was it?
- Did you notice yourself comparing across videos?
- What would you do differently if you watched again?



A Framework for Observation



Why This Matters

You naturally gravitated toward certain things.

Probably **Activities** and **Interactions**.

But how many of you were systematically
watching the **Environment** or the **Objects**?

AEIOU helps you cover the full frame.

TETHER: Your First Design Thinking Assignment

Take Extended Time to Hold Everything in Review

The Assignment

- 90 uninterrupted minutes observing people in an environment.
- Practice seeing without immediately interpreting or solving.

What to Observe

- **Movements:** Where do people go? How do they move?
- **Pauses:** Where do people stop or hesitate?
- **Interactions:** With people, objects, space?
- **Objects:** What do people carry, use, touch?

Deliverables

- Notebook entry with 90 min of raw observations.
- Assumptions noted separately in margins.
- Half-page written reflection (~250 words).

Write This	Not This
"Person looked at phone, then looked around, then walked to counter"	"Person was confused about where to go"

Sustained observation reveals patterns that shorter observations miss. Your unique vantage point contributes to our collective understanding.

Ideas for Locations:

- Workplace common area
- Coffee shop
- Grocery store
- Transit station
- Park
- Library

Next Session: Shadowing

- Wednesday we return to campus (weather permitting).
- You'll shadow a campus staff member.
- Confirm your shadowee by email before class.

Separating what you SEE from what you ASSUME

See you Wednesday!

Image Sources



https://media.istockphoto.com/id/1447427225/photo/open-bible-journal-and-pen-with-plant-on-desk.jpg?s=612x612&w=0&k=20&c=4HFuDB3nUZtvNp9kDv3XrUHG5BFte_4t0MUmgg568sU=

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Source: www.frameworkfilms.net