



Methods

# Absorb Observe

treemouse research & design

# 00

about

**Having all senses working at par and in rhythm enables one to look beyond and dig for deeper connections. This guide includes a set of activities, designed to focus, sharpen our senses and practice mindfulness. This can assist the researcher when faced with overwhelming diversity and volume of data on the field.**



# 00

## What is Multi-sensorial Awareness?

Multi-sensorial awareness simply means that we are open to and aware of inputs being received by all of our senses. Such awareness leads to our perceptions and memories being a mindful concoction of sights, smells, sounds, tastes and touch.

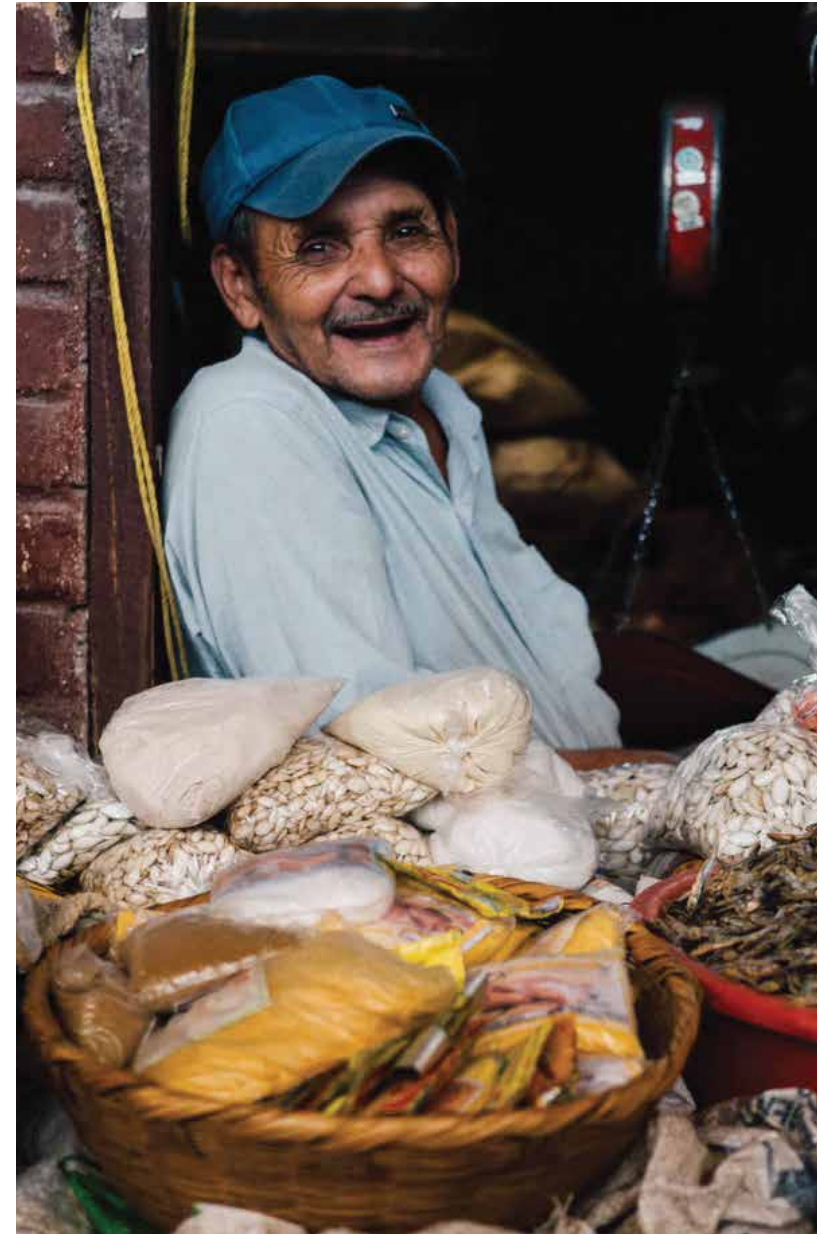
## When is it useful?

Anytime, anywhere. To study behaviours, environments and phenomena.

## Why is it Important?

For most of us, the way we make sense of our surroundings is dominated by visual stimuli. When on field as a researcher, having all senses working at par and in rhythm ensures wholesome, rich field data. It helps in —

- creating deeper, holistic understanding of people and their environments
- creating receptiveness to various forms of data.
- making more complex connections and build natural intuition





# Look Better

*“According to my field notes of the last 8 days, all the vegetable vendors wear a grey striped shirt. That is how I clearly remember it. But today when I consciously saw one of them in a green tee-shirt, it struck me that’s what he always wore. He had never worn a gray striped shirt. None of them ever had.”*

— **A Research Intern at Treemouse**

Most of us primarily depend on our eyes to observe the world around us and make sense of it. Therefore, it becomes imperative to know that our visual recollection is not completely reliable. Our visual memories have many blind spots and fantastical details.

That’s because, to create coherent visual scenarios, our brain interprets and assembles multiple smaller images taken through our eyes.

This process not only omits details as per focus and convenience, but also distorts the scene based on our subconscious biases.

As researchers, it is of immense value to train our eyes to get past these distortions and omissions. It helps us collect detailed, wholesome, reliable data. While practice makes perfect, the following activities are good to get started.



# 01

activity

**Look at this image for a minute.  
Try to remember all the objects  
on it. Then scroll down.**

time  
15 m

materials  
notepad





# 01

## a.

**Try to recount as many objects as you can.**

Couldn't remember enough?

Never mind!

Try again with the image on the next page. You could make use of memory aids this time. Read these tips and tricks for some ideas.

tips and tricks

### **Some Visual Memory Aids**

These are some techniques that serve to enhance your alertness and observational skills as you employ them in everyday life and on the field.

1. Categorization of data
2. Breaking your scene into parts
3. Expanding peripheral vision. Focus, unfocus!
4. Keeping count of the number of things you are trying to remember
5. Converting the scene into a story of things





# 01

**b.**

**Did you do anything differently the next time around?**

Write down about any new technique you tried and how it helped.

**c.**

**Look around you.  
Looks new?**

Training the eye is a matter of practice. When you start looking mindfully, you'll see little details you never saw before. Even in your own home.



# 02

activity

**Look at this artwork of a marketplace in Goa by Mario Miranda for 5 minutes. Try to remember as many details as you can.**

How many people does this scene roughly have? How many women? How many cycles do you see? And babies? Posters?

What are some interesting expressions and exchanges? What ideas does this scene give of Goan life & culture? Don't forget to notice the periphery and corners.

time

**30 m**

materials

**notepad**





# 02

## a.

### Write down an observation report.

Write down everything you can remember. Feel free to include any little details that you can think of.

You can write about kinds of people, their clothes & possessions, your sense of stuff happening in the scene, anything that stood out to you.

Remember to add basic details like date, time, place, duration at the top of your report.

tips and tricks

### Report Writing Tips

These techniques serve to enhance your alertness and observational skills as you employ them in everyday life and on the field

1. Usually, the ratio of the time we take to document our observations to time spent on field is 4:1. You might take lesser time right now because this is a static observation.
2. Carry a little notepad or use the notes app on your phone to keep jotting pointers while on the field.



# 02

## b.

### Collate your observations.

Go back to the image and see how much you recounted. What did you miss? What did you distort / make up?

## c.

### What do you think about visual memory?

What did this exercise do for you? Think about / write down 3 new things you realised about visual memory.

# 03

activity

### Take a walk

Go on a 15 min walk through any place that you are familiar with, say in your neighbourhood, and use some of the tips above to look around, observe and absorb.

Come back and make observation notes.

time

**60 m**

materials

**notepad**



# Hear Better

*"...hearing is special among senses...sound can travel a long way. It will propagate through anything — the ground, water. It works at night, goes around corners. Sounds give you sensory input that is not limited by field of vision."*

— **Seth Horitz, Neuroscientist**

Can you hear that? Those sounds. The ones that are always around you - rumbling AC, whirring fan, distant honks, stray shouts, construction sounds, keyboard clatter, a chirping bird maybe? Of course you can. But are you 'listening' to them? Are they really registering in there, to create a detailed soundscape of the space you inhabit everyday; or are they lost background details?

Hearing plays a big role in our sensory perceptions, much larger than we realize. Seth Horitz explains - "Our hearing is so fast because its circuitry isn't as widely dispersed in the brain as the visual system is, and because it's hooked into the brain's most basic "primal" parts. Noises hit us right in the gut and trigger a visceral emotional response."

Mindful listening can go a long way in helping us navigate the field as researchers. Being attuned to sounds in the ecosystem provides cues for further investigation, conversation, probing and observation.

Sound paints our observations subconsciously. It can help you gather richer layers of input and in certain cases, also distract you from the focus of research. Thus, honing sonic awareness is important to our overall researcher skills.

These simple activities are geared at enhancing the same.



# 01

activity

**Listen to this soundtrack. Immerse yourself. Focus on the different sounds. After its done, write down how many sounds you can recount.**

time

**5 m**

materials

**headphones**

**notepad**



trivia

## Can Sound Overpower Vision?

John E. Marsh and colleagues conducted an experiment to learn more about the impact of the auditory environment on eyewitness recall and identification.

They found that overhearing half a conversation hampers encoding of memories because people's attention is involuntarily directed toward the partial conversation. People seem to have a "need to listen," in which they are driven to try to predict the content of the unheard part of the conversation.

Read more @ [www.psychologicalscience.org](http://www.psychologicalscience.org)



# 02

activity

**Watch a 2 minute video  
and make detailed notes of  
everything you observed.**

time

**15 m**

materials

**notepad**

Recommendation

**Keezi Walks – Youtube**





# 03

activity

**Now 'listen' to the video  
with your eyes closed.**

time

**30 m**

materials

**notepad**

Recommendation

**Keezi Walks – Youtube**





# 03

**a.**

**Write down what you observed this time.**

Compare it with the previous report. Anything new?

**b.**

**How was the experience?  
How was it different?**

Write down about how it felt to just hear a scenario that you have already seen. Think deep and reflect on whether this experience was different. If yes, how did it feel? Why do you think it felt so?

tips and tricks

## **Some Aural Memory Aids**

These techniques serve to enhance your mindfulness of ambient noises and ability to remember them.

1. Create layers of sounds from what you can hear by way of distance or loudness
2. Visualise the sound
3. Make note of sound sources





# 04

activity

## Have a chat with an acquaintance

time

**25-30min**

materials

**phone**

**notepad**

Call someone up and have a 10-15 minute conversation. Be aware ambient sounds along with central conversation.

If possible, record this conversation (with consent). You can use a call recorder app if you have a smartphone.





# 04

## a.

### Answer the following from memory

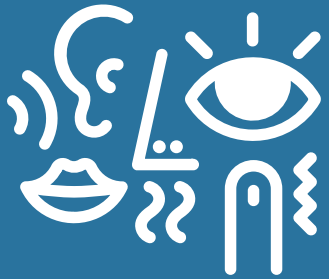
- What was the most distant sound you heard?
- What was the closest sound?
- Which ambient sound was the most recurrent?
- Were there any expressions you could imagine on the face of your respondent based on their voice?
- What observations can you make of the tonality of the respondent's voice during the course of the conversation

## b.

### Compare and reflect

If you have been able to make a recording, go back to it and listen again. Are your answers still the same? What did you miss?

Was this experience any different from your usual calls? How?



# Observe Better

## Smell

Ever experienced moments when a whiff in the air transported you to a certain event? Smells are tied to our long term memories. Being aware of smells on the field can help in the process of recording and memorising your experience.

## Touch and Taste

There is limited scope for using touch and taste as senses on the research field. However, being mindful of them helps extract wholesome meaning from experiences. Being aware of visual texture of things adds richness to observations. Taste evokes memory as well as our instinctive desires and aversions.

On the whole, an immersive experience is one that employs all senses. It is all senses that come together to build the most elusive one-intuition, your sixth sense.

# 01

activity

## Open the Door or Have a Snack

time

15 m

materials

notepad

With complete mindfulness do one single task. Something as simple as opening a door or eating a biscuit would also do. Try to focus all your senses on this single act.

### a.

**Record everything  
you felt.**

You can choose to write, draw, make a sound recording or use any other medium that gives the scope to exhaustively describe your experience.





# 02

activity

## Take a walk... blindfolded.

time

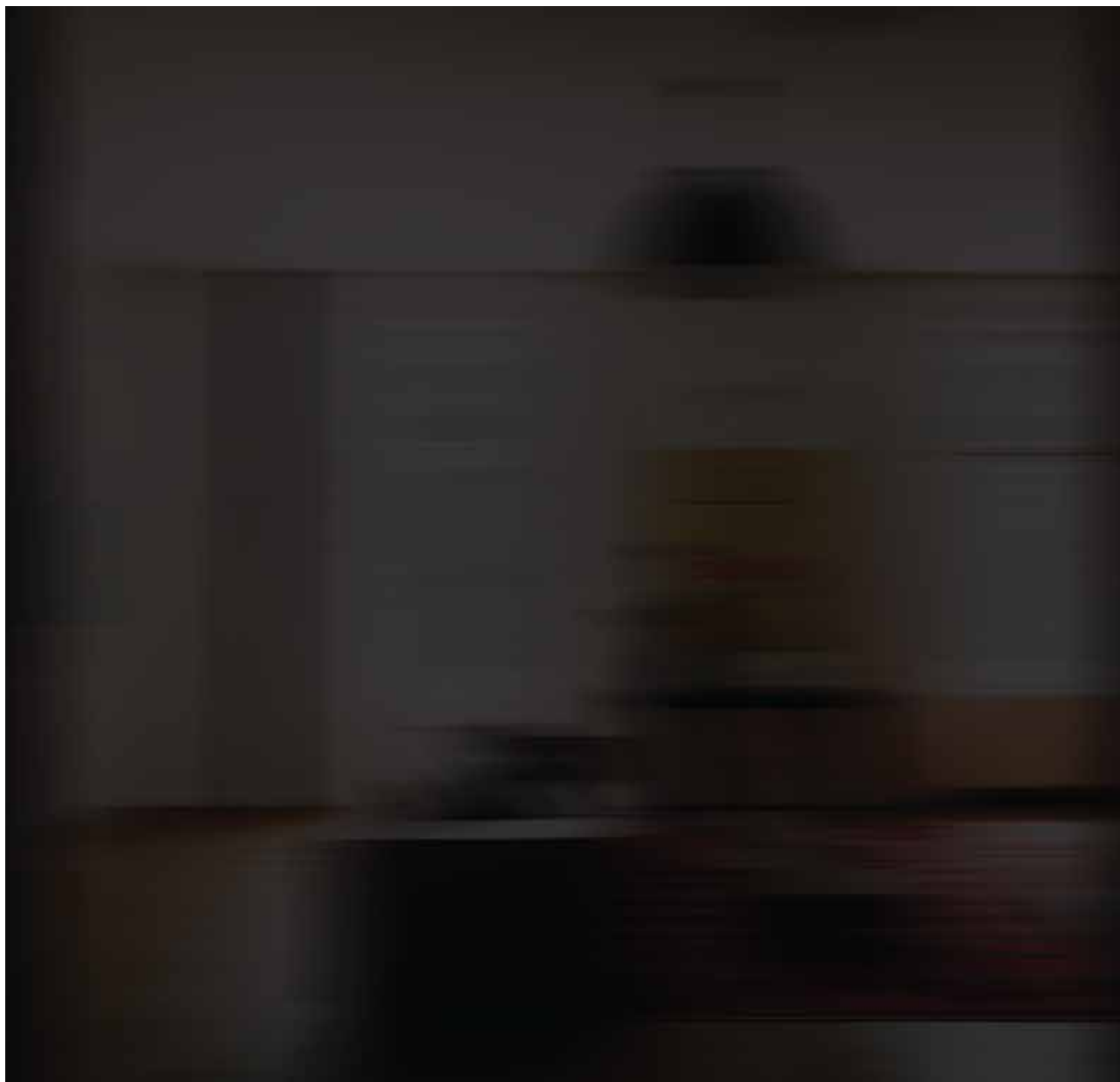
**10–15 m**

materials

**notepad**

**blindfold**

Blindfold yourself and walk around in a familiar space. Be aware of how you are negotiating the space with your entire body guiding you.





# 02

**a.**

**Record the  
experience.**

- Did you become aware of any new sensations?
- Was there something new that you realised about the space?

**b.**

**Think  
within.**

Do you think this has altered the way you would feel that space hereon?



# 03

activity

## Talk to a stranger.

time

**20-40 m**

materials

**notepad  
stranger**

Have an in-person conversation with someone, preferable someone you don't know too well. The conversation could be anywhere between 5-15 minutes.

Your intent is to observe and understand this person in as much detail as possible. Employ the mindfulness techniques that you practiced earlier.

tips and tricks

## People Observation

1. Immediately after the conversation, record your observations in as much detail as you can.
2. While talking, observe their body language in terms of gestures, expressions, quirky behavioural traits, posture, movements, any other nuances that you can make note of.
3. Remember exact phrases and words used by them. Verbatim records have powerful potential to uncover meaning and behaviours.



# Absorb Better

**a.**

**Get..**

Reflect on all the experiences you went through. Assimilate learnings.

**b.**

**Set..**

Pen down a topic that you would like to find out more about. Think of 5 people you could look at, meet with and speak to for the same. Create a rough set of conversation pointers for yourself.

**c.**

**Go**

Go on your first research project! Dont forget to take observation notes immediately after each field visit.