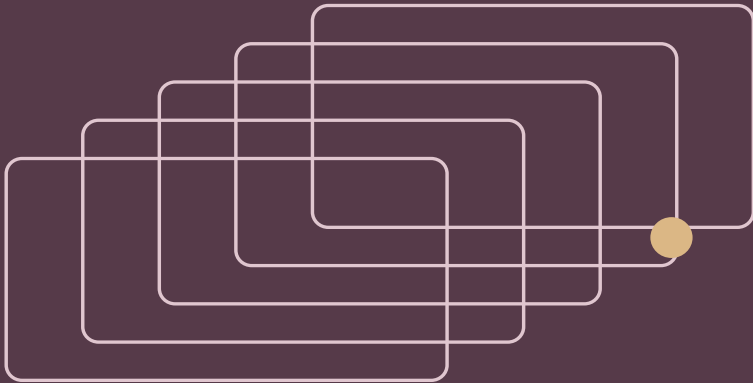


The Story You Tell Yourself First

How to examine an interpretation
and decide what to do next



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A short guide to understanding everyday life

About this edition

The Story You Tell Yourself First

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This guide concerns ordinary judgments about events, other people, and yourself. Nina, Leila, Ben, and the people around them are invented characters. Their stories illustrate possibilities, not explanations of every reader's life. The exercises are optional educational suggestions. This guide and its tools have not been clinically reviewed or tested with readers. Use what helps with a particular decision, and set aside what does not.

This sample contains the opening chapter of the complete guide.

Text developed with AI and editorially reviewed. The explanations distinguish research, interpretations and original practical suggestions.

CHAPTER 1

The conclusion arrives early

Nina finds her workshop missing from the timetable before Owen has finished handing out the pages.

She checks the second page. Then the first again. The Saturday boxes are empty. A course proposed by another tutor is there, on Thursday afternoon, with a room number beside it.

Nina coordinates adult courses at a small learning centre. On Monday she sent Owen, the programme manager, a plan for a workshop on finding work: reading advertisements, preparing a short application, and practising an interview. People had asked about something like it after her last course. She had put Saturday on the plan because several of them worked during the week.

Now it is Wednesday, and nobody has mentioned it.

Owen is discussing a room change. Nina hears enough to write the new room number in the margin. She is also composing an explanation of why her workshop matters, though she has no intention of delivering it. If she has to make the case again, she thinks, that will only show how little attention he paid the first time.

Last term, Owen removed an activity she had proposed without explaining why. She found out when the final

programme appeared. She remembers standing by the printer with much the same feeling she has now.

When he asks whether there is anything else to discuss, she says nothing. She puts the timetable under her notebook. On the way back to her desk, she decides she will stop volunteering ideas for a while.

The missing workshop is a fact about the draft in front of her. “He has decided it isn’t worth discussing” is an explanation of that fact. Her experience last term gives her a reason to consider it. But she has not asked why this proposal is absent, whether a decision has been made, or what might still be possible.

Already the explanation is doing practical work. It has helped her decide to leave the meeting without asking.

Perhaps you recognise the movement. Someone changes a plan, and you know what that says about your importance to them. A colleague asks a question, and you know what they think of your ability. There may be good reasons for your reading. The difficulty is noticing where the event ends and the account you give of it begins.

Ben’s version happens in his kitchen. He cuts into the second loaf he has made from a new recipe. The inside is dense and slightly damp. He puts the knife down and looks at the remaining flour on the counter.

A friend calls while he is clearing up. They discuss dinner later in the week. Ben suggests going somewhere.

“We could eat at yours,” the friend says.

“Better not. I can’t cook.”

He means it at that moment. He has two loaves to support him, one in front of him and one remembered from Sunday. The soups he makes regularly and the omelette he has been cooking for years do not come to mind as objections. Those are things he already knows how to make. Bread was supposed to be cooking.

Ben's disappointment is understandable. It does not give a complete account of what he can make for dinner.

In this book, a *story* is an account of what something means. Calling it a story does not make it a lie. It may be accurate, partly accurate, or mistaken. "First" simply means that this is the explanation that takes hold early, before you have considered what else would be worth knowing.

You do not have to investigate every passing thought. Most days already contain enough work. This guide concerns the occasions when an interpretation begins making an important choice for you: whether to speak, withdraw, accept an arrangement, or rule something out.

For Nina, the immediate choice is whether to ask about the workshop. She has begun treating that conversation as pointless before discovering what Owen would say.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE

Continue the conversation

Follow Nina, Leila and Ben as they separate observations from interpretations, consider other explanations and decide what information could change their minds.

Inside the complete book

2. An explanation gives the details a meaning
3. What gets counted
4. Does the old expectation fit this occasion?
5. Give the explanation something to answer
6. Ask, decide, and leave something unknown
7. When more thinking stops helping

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