The Reveal

Facilitator guide

About this activity: the team is confident it agrees on something important — a priority, a goal, "what good looks like." This activity tests that. You ask one sharp question about what people **value**, everyone writes a one-line answer privately, and all the answers go up at once. The differences become impossible to miss: the same words meant different things to different people. You name the one gap that would most have hurt the work — and then you stop. You are not here to resolve the difference. You are here to make it visible, so the team stops trusting an agreement it never actually had.

What is The Reveal? A team says the same words and assumes it shares the same meaning. The danger isn't open disagreement — it's **false agreement**: everyone is certain they're aligned, and no one has tested it. This activity captures what each person privately means, then reveals it all at once — so the hidden difference surfaces now, on a card, instead of later, as rework.

WHEN DO I USE THIS?

The right moment

Picture this: your team agreed, everyone nodded, the meeting ended early. Weeks later the work starts going in different directions — not because anyone disagreed, but because everyone thought they agreed. Each person quietly meant something different by the same words. This activity catches that in fifteen minutes, before the work commits to it.

USE IT WHEN

The team is **confident** it already agrees on something important — a priority, a goal, "what good looks like" — and you want to test that before committing the work to it. Best when it's a quiet, comfortable agreement no one has actually checked.

DO NOT USE IT WHEN

You need to check people **heard** a message the same way › that's Echo Test. You need to agree one ranking under pressure › that's Prioritise Under Pressure. Or the team already knows it disagrees — there's no false agreement to reveal.

The one test before you start: is the team **certain** it agrees? This tool works on false consensus — the comfortable agreement nobody has tested. If the room already knows it's split, there's nothing to reveal.

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· WHAT WILL THE TEAM LEAVE WITH?

What you'll leave with

WHAT YOU GET

The hidden differences in what people value, made visible — on paper. One specific difference the team was certain didn't exist. And a shared, honest view of where the agreement is real and where it isn't — a base for the next conversation, elsewhere.

WHY IT MATTERS

The team realises it wasn't aligned — it only thought it was. That difference would have surfaced later as conflict, rework or a missed deadline. Seeing it now, on a card, is the cheapest it will ever be to find.

PART 1 BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

get ready

1 · WHAT IS MY JOB HERE?

Your job

Ask one sharp value question, protect the silence so answers stay private, reveal them together — and stop at the gap. You are exposing a difference, not resolving it. Your job is to:

- get the **one question** right — it must ask what people value, not what they should do
- protect the silent write — no talking, no thinking out loud, before the reveal
- reveal every answer at once, read exactly as written — don't smooth them into agreement
- name the one gap that would most have hurt the work
- stop at the reveal — do not let the room start ranking or fixing it

> **The one thing the team should learn:** the risk isn't that you disagree — it's that you're all certain you agree, and no one has tested it. Public agreement is cheap; the private answer is the real one.

2 · WHO DOES WHAT?

Roles

Who	What they do
You (facilitator)	Run the activity. Ask the one value question and say nothing else. Protect the private write. Reveal all answers at once and read them as written. Name the gap — then stop. You do **not** answer the question yourself, and you do **not** steer the answers.
The team (3–6)	Each person privately writes their own one-line answer, before anyone speaks — their real answer, not what they think is wanted. Then they read the wall together and help name the gap.

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Say this to the team before you start (in your own words): "We think we agree on something important. Before we bet the work on it, we'll each write privately what matters most, put it all up at once, and see how close we really are. We're just going to look — not fix anything today."

3 · HOW DO I START?

Opening script — 2 minutes

Say this in your own words before you start. Do not read the app page out loud.

SAY

"We all feel aligned on this — so let's test it, quickly. I'm going to ask one question. Each of you writes a one-line answer on your own card, alone, no talking. Then we put every card up at the same time and read them as written. We're not scoring anyone and we're not fixing anything today. We just want to see whether we actually mean the same thing — because usually, when we're this sure, we don't."

4 · HOW DO I PREPARE?

Setup and materials

ONE STATEMENT · ONE QUESTION · WRITTEN ALONE · REVEALED TOGETHER

THE STATEMENT WE ALL "AGREE" ON
"This project's priority is to ship a quality product, fast."

One question, asked once · written privately: "What matters most for this to succeed?"

Maya	Tom	Priya	Dev	Sam
Hit the date. Ship on time, period.	**No critical bugs.** Quality over speed.	**Customers love it.** UX is everything.	**Clean codebase.** No tech debt.	**Stay in budget.** Don't overspend.

Same five words on the wall — five different meanings. Nobody knew until the cards went up.

The reveal is the result. Name the gap that would most have hurt the work — then STOP.

Don't rank it. Don't resolve it. Seeing it is the whole job today.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"Yeah, we're totally aligned."

WHAT THE WALL SHOWS
Five different priorities.

Write the "agreed" statement where everyone can see it. Ask **one** value question, once. Everyone writes a one-line answer **alone**, on their own card — then all cards go up **at the same time**. The spread is the reveal.

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Material	What it is, and when you use it
One “agreed” statement	The thing you’ll test — “customer experience comes first,” “ship quality, fast,” “this project’s priority is X.” Just one. No statement, nothing to reveal. Step 1.
One value question	The tool lives or dies on this. It asks what people **value**, in one line — not what they heard, not what to do. Prepare it before you start. Step 2.
Index cards or sticky notes	One per person, so every answer is written privately before any are seen. Private-first is the mechanism, not a nicety. Step 3.
A wall or table	Space to reveal all the answers at once, side by side, so the difference lands on everyone together. Step 4.
Capture sheet	One sheet. You write the statement, the divergent answers, and the one named gap — as the activity runs.

> **The private write is the whole tool — protect it.** The instant people hear each other, they borrow words and converge, and the real difference vanishes before anyone sees it. Silent write, then reveal all at once. Guard that above everything else.

Words to know: the **statement** is the thing everyone believes they agree on. The **question** asks what each person values. An **answer** is one person’s private one-line reply. The **gap** is the difference between answers — the reveal — and you **stop** once it’s named.

5 · HOW DO I SET THE QUESTION?

Get the one question right

About 80% of the run depends on this one question. A vague or leading question (“what are your thoughts?”, “what should we do?”) produces meaningless variation and kills the reveal. Don’t rely on instinct — check your question against all three tests before you ask it.

Test	Ask yourself	Verdict
1 · Value	Does it ask what they **value** — not what they heard, or what to do?	About a plan or action › rewrite
2 · One line	Can it be answered in one short line, alone, with no discussion?	Needs discussion › narrow it
3 · Open	Could honest people genuinely answer it differently?	Only one sensible answer › sharpen

> **Safe questions that pass all three:** “What matters most for this to succeed?” · “What’s the single biggest priority here?” · “How would we know this succeeded?” Each asks about value, fits one line, and invites genuinely different honest answers.

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PART 2 DURING THE ACTIVITY

run it

Before you begin — 30-second check

- ✓ The one statement everyone "agrees" on is written up where all can see it
- ✓ Your one value question is prepared — and passes all three question tests
- ✓ Every person has a card or sticky note and something to write with
- ✓ The team understands the one rule: write alone and silent, then reveal together
- ✓ Everyone knows to write their real answer — not what they think is wanted

6 · WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Run the activity

Name the statement › Ask ONE question › Write privately › Reveal together › Name the gap · stop

1. Name the statement

2 min

"What's the one thing we all believe we agree on here?" Write it where everyone can see it — that's what you're about to test.

2. Ask ONE question

2 min

Ask a single question about **value**, then say nothing else. Don't ask what people should do. One question, asked once.

> **Safe examples:** "What matters most for this to succeed?" · "What's the single biggest priority here?" · "How would we know this succeeded?"

3. Write privately

3 min

Each person writes their own one-line answer, alone, before anyone speaks. No talking, no looking. Collect the cards, or have people hold them face-down.

> **Protect the silence.** The instant people hear each other, they converge and the real difference vanishes. Don't let anyone think out loud — and don't answer it yourself.

4. Reveal together

5 min

Put every answer up at once and read them aloud, exactly as written. Let the differences sit in the room.

> **Hold.** Do NOT allow discussion or interpretation yet, and don't smooth answers into agreement ("I think Tom basically means..."). The silence means the reveal is working — let it land.

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5. Name the gap — then stop

5 min

Once the surprise settles, ask the bridge question that turns interesting differences into the one that matters:

> **Ask:** "Which of these differences would most likely have caused problems if we hadn't seen it today?"

Then write that one difference as a single sentence, using this pattern:

> **Write it as:** "We thought we agreed on ___, but half the team meant ___, while the other half meant ___."

Photograph it. Then stop — don't rank, fix or plan. Resolving it is a separate session, another day.

These times are indicative and will depend on the nature of the problem and the size of the team. A full run is about 10–20 minutes for a team of 3–6. Slow down on Step 2 — get the question right before you start. Don't rush the silence in Step 3. Step 5 ends fast: name the gap, stop.

THE ONE RULE

Write alone and silent — then reveal together. The reveal only works if nobody hears anyone else's answer first. The moment people talk before they write, they use each other's words and the real difference converges away. Private write, simultaneous reveal — every time.

While you run — when to step in, when to stay out · a principle, not a step

STEP IN	STAY OUT
Your question drifts to "what should we do?" → pull it back to value.	The reveal goes quiet → let the silence do its work.
Anyone talks before writing → stop them; protect the silence.	People are surprised or uncomfortable → that's the tool landing.
The room starts resolving the gap → hold the line; name it only.	Answers vary a lot → good; don't rescue the "agreement."
Someone explains away a difference → read it as written.	The team wants to fix it now → redirect to later, don't run it here.

The clearest tell it's time to step in: the team has seen the differing answers and is sliding into "okay, so how do we align it?" That's the trap. Step in: "We're just naming the gap today — not solving it." Hold the reveal; resolution is another tool.

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PART 3 AFTER THE ACTIVITY

use it again

7 · HOW DO I FINISH?

Closing script — 2 minutes

SAY

"Look at the wall. We were all certain we agreed — and we each meant something different by the same words. Nobody was wrong; we just never tested it. That gap would have shown up later, in the work, far more expensively. We've seen it now — and that was the whole job today. Next time we're all nodding, ask the question that saves the weeks: we said the same words, but do we actually mean the same thing?"

8 · DID WE GET A GOOD RESULT?

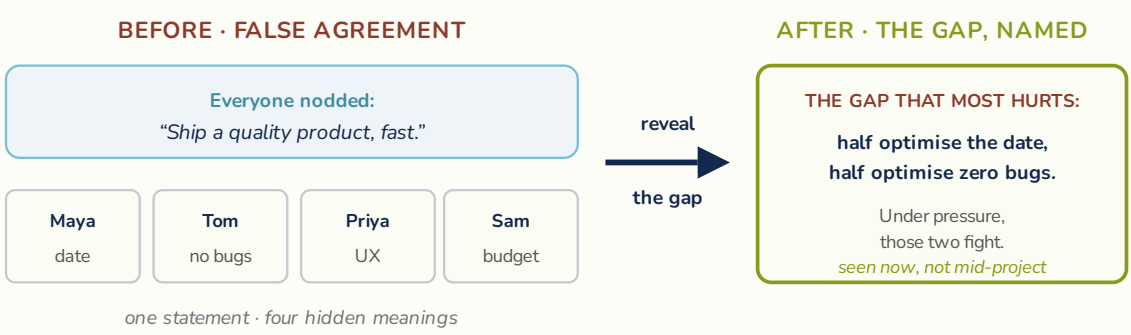
Check your run

GOOD RUN

Private answers, revealed together, that visibly differ on the very thing everyone was sure of — and one named gap that would have hurt the work. The team leaves having **seen** it, not solved it.

HOLLOW RUN

People discussed before writing, so answers converged and nothing real surfaced. Or the team slid straight into fixing the gap. Either way you lost the reveal — to discussion, or to resolution.



The risk was never that they disagreed — it's that they were all certain they agreed.

Stop at the reveal. Naming the gap is today's output; resolving it is a separate tool.

"We said the same words — do we mean the same thing?"

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Before people leave — the finish check

- ✓ The statement everyone “agreed” on was written up and tested
- ✓ One value question was asked once — and answers were written privately, alone
- ✓ Every answer went up at the same time — the simultaneous reveal
- ✓ The specific differences were read as written, not smoothed over
- ✓ The one gap that would most have hurt the work is named and written down
- ✓ You stopped at the reveal — no ranking, no fixing
- ✓ A photo of the wall and the named gap has been taken

9 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS A HABIT?

Build the habit — 30 seconds

THE HABIT

“We said the same words — do we actually mean the same thing?”

A team that has run this once tends to pause before banking on a comfortable agreement and test it, rather than assume it. That pause — checking meaning, not just words — is the lasting change, and it costs ten minutes against weeks of rework.

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Appendix · Reference

You should not need this while you run the activity. Read it before, or use it if something goes wrong.

10 · WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Recovery guide

What happens	What to do
The answers all match — real agreement	Good, and now it's tested rather than assumed. Say so, and move on with genuine confidence. A clean match is a valid, useful result — not a failure.
Someone talks before writing	Stop immediately and reset that card — one voice's convergence ruins the signal. Re-ask, silent, on a fresh card.
The team rushes to resolve the gap	The most common failure. "Today we only name it." If they need to resolve it, book Prioritise Under Pressure — don't let this become that.
A senior voice "clarifies" what everyone meant	That's the false consensus coming back. Read the cards as written — the point is what people actually wrote, not the re-interpretation.
The question produced bland, identical answers	Your question was too closed or too obvious. Re-ask with a sharper value question — "how would we know this succeeded?" often re-opens it.
Answers differ but nobody's surprised	Then the team already knew it disagreed — this wasn't false consensus. Fine; note the differences and move to resolving them elsewhere.

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11 · WHAT DO I WRITE DOWN?

The capture sheet — what you fill in

One sheet runs the whole activity. You write on it as the reveal runs. It carries the statement, the divergent answers, and the one named gap — the output — on a single page the team keeps.

1 · THE STATEMENT WE "AGREED" ON — and the one question you asked

Statement: "Ship a quality product, fast." · **Question:** "What matters most for this to succeed?"

2 · THE ANSWERS, AS WRITTEN — private, revealed together

Person	What they wrote
Maya / Tom	"Hit the date." / "No critical bugs."
Priya / Dev / Sam	"Customers love it." / "Clean codebase." / "Stay in budget."

3 · THE ONE GAP THAT WOULD MOST HAVE HURT THE WORK (named — then stop)

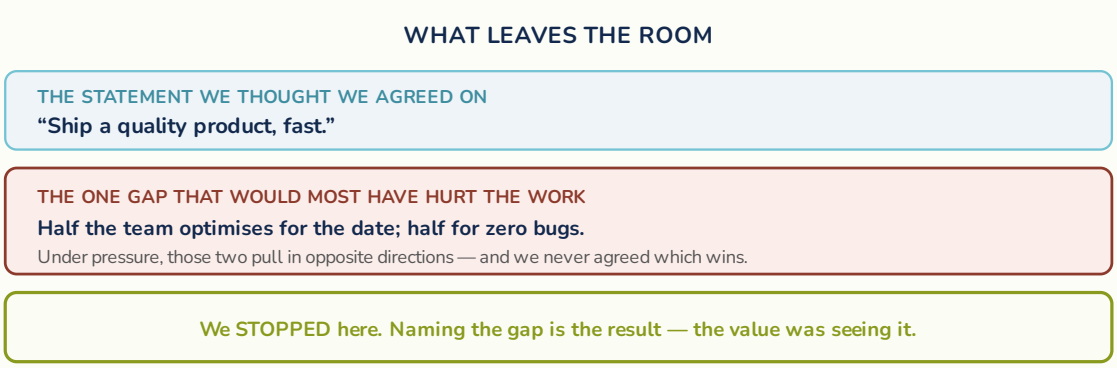
The gap: half optimise for the date, half for zero bugs — under pressure they fight, and we never agreed which wins. **Stopped here.**

Box 1 holds what you tested — the statement and the question. Box 2 holds the private answers, the evidence of how far apart the team really was. Box 3 is what leaves the room: the one named gap — not a solution.

12 · WHAT DOES A GOOD RUN LOOK LIKE?

Worked example

A product team had "fully agreed" the priority was to ship a quality product, fast. The facilitator tested it — "on your own card, no talking: what matters most for this to succeed? One line." The cards went up together: "Hit the date." · "No critical bugs." · "Customers love it." · "Clean codebase." · "Stay in budget." One engineer said, "...huh — I genuinely thought we all meant the same thing." Another added, "I didn't even realise I was assuming that." The facilitator asked the bridge question — "which of these would most likely have caused problems if we hadn't seen it?" — and named the one that would cause the most harm: half the team optimises for the date, half for zero bugs, and under pressure those two pull in opposite directions. Then the team asked, "so what do we do about it?" — and the facilitator held the line: "That's a separate session. Today we just needed to see it. And now we have." She photographed the wall and closed. Refusing to solve it in the room is the whole discipline — the value was in seeing the difference, and resolving it would have hidden the reveal under a planning discussion.



Done well: a real difference the team was sure didn't exist — seen, named, and left unresolved.

Hollow run: people discussed before writing (answers converged), or slid straight into fixing it.

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13 · WHAT GOES WRONG MOST OFTEN?

Common mistakes

- **Letting people talk before they write.** The biggest one. People use each other's words and the answers converge — the real difference vanishes. Silent write, simultaneous reveal, every time.
- **Sliding into resolution.** "So how do we align it?" turns the reveal into a priorities workshop. Name the gap and stop; resolving it is a different tool, another day.
- **Smoothing answers into agreement.** "I think Tom basically means the same as Maya…" erases the reveal. Read the cards as written; the differences are the point.
- **Asking the wrong question.** A question about actions ("what should we do?") or an obvious one produces meaningless variation. Run the three question tests before you ask.

14 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Several tools surface hidden differences — but in different things. Reach for the one that matches what you're testing.

If the hidden difference is in…	Use this
what we **value** ("what matters most here?"), when we're sure we agree	**The Reveal** — this tool. Expose a false consensus before the work does.
what we **heard** ("what did they ask us to do?")	**Echo Test** — checks whether a message was understood the same way. Comprehension, not values.
…and we must agree **one ranking**, under pressure	**Prioritise Under Pressure** — surfaces differences in order to force a shared order. Resolving, not just exposing.
the real reasons people **resist** a change	**Surface Honest Resistance** — what people are protecting, not what they value in general.

> **Rule of thumb:** The Reveal exposes a difference in what we **value** and stops there. The moment you start ranking or resolving that difference, you've moved to Prioritise Under Pressure — a different tool, on purpose.

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