

50 Things To Do This Summer

And What Each One Gives You To Write About

ACADEMIC DEPTH

- ☐ Read one real document in the field you say you love: a policy report, a research paper, a zoning brief. Not a summary of it. The actual thing.
- ☐ Re-learn one concept you passed through but never actually understood. Pick the one you always hope won't show up on a test.
- ☐ Find where your textbook oversimplifies something and look up what the real debate is. The food pyramid is a good starting point: what it left out, who influenced it, and how much has changed since.
- ☐ Take one academic concept and apply it to something measurable in your own life. Try opportunity cost on how you actually spend your time this summer and see if the concept holds.
- ☐ Ask what happens when a formula or model breaks. Every model has assumptions built into it. Find one and challenge it.
- ☐ Study one local issue using real data. Build a simple spreadsheet and see if the numbers tell you something different from what you expected.
- ☐ Redesign a system you deal with every day: the school schedule, club funding, lunch pricing. Work out what you'd actually change and why.
- ☐ Compare how two serious sources explain the same topic and pay attention to what each one leaves out. Try reading one academic paper and one long-form article on the same subject and see where they part ways.
- ☐ Pick one academic micro-skill you're genuinely weak on, something like reading a data table carefully, structuring an argument, or writing a clean thesis sentence, and work on just that for a few weeks.
- ☐ Read one serious piece from a field next to yours. If you're into economics, read a sociologist. If you're into biology, read a philosopher of science.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

- ☐ Read three academic papers in one niche and map where they disagree. The disagreement is usually more interesting than the findings.
- ☐ Replicate a small experiment yourself and see what actually happens. Something simple works: test whether people make different decisions when a choice is framed as a loss versus a gain, or whether background noise affects how long you can focus.
- ☐ Build a short survey to test one assumption you hold. Ask 20 people and be honest about what the results show, including when they contradict what you expected.
- ☐ Cover one news event by reading three different outlets and pay attention to what each one chose to emphasize and what each one left out entirely.
- ☐ Trace one popular claim back to its original source. Try something like "we only use 10% of our brains" or "Finland has the best education system" and see where it actually comes from and what gets dropped along the way.
- ☐ Track one habit for a month: sleep, focus, spending, screen time. Collect real data and analyze it like it belongs to someone else.

- ☐ Shadow someone for a day whose job involves a lot of decisions, a manager, a coach, a doctor, a small business owner. Pay attention to what they're actually managing, not just what their title says they do.
- ☐ Study one failed project in a field you care about, a product that launched and flopped, a policy that backfired, a team that collapsed. Failures are more instructive than successes and much harder to find written up honestly.
- ☐ Find one belief that seems universally accepted in your field, your family, or your friend group and test its limits. Ask where it stops being true.
- ☐ Analyze how incentives shape a system you're inside. A grading curve, a sports ranking, a social media feed. Follow what people are actually optimizing for, not what they say they are.

CREATIVE WORK

- ☐ Make 15 short pieces on one theme with a strict constraint you set in advance, like every piece has to be under 100 words, or every photo has to be taken within one block of your house. The constraint forces decisions you wouldn't otherwise make.
- ☐ Photograph or sketch the same place every day for 30 days. At the end, look at what changed in the place and what changed in what you chose to notice.
- ☐ Take something you've already made, an old essay, a drawing, a project, and redo it from a completely different angle, not to fix it but to see what assumptions the original was built on.
- ☐ Study one artist, writer, or filmmaker seriously and find their repeated patterns. What do they always do? What do they never do? What does that tell you about what they actually care about?
- ☐ Recreate one work you admire in your own style, not to copy it but to understand the decisions behind it. You learn things about a piece by trying to make it that you can't learn by just looking at it.
- ☐ Make something intentionally simple, a one-page essay, a single photograph, a 60-second video, and refine it until it's actually good. Most things are abandoned before they get there.
- ☐ Take one idea and translate it across two mediums: an essay into a visual, a speech into a written piece, a data set into a story. Pay attention to what gets lost and what becomes clearer.
- ☐ Solve one small daily annoyance through design. Something that bothers you every week: a confusing form, a badly organized shared space, a process that wastes everyone's time. Build a solution, even a rough one, and see if it actually works.
- ☐ Keep a 30-day observation notebook with no analysis or commentary, just what you actually noticed that day. Look back at it in August and see what kind of person was paying attention.
- ☐ Open one of your old projects and make it significantly better. Don't start something new. The discipline of finishing and improving something you've already moved on from is different from starting fresh, and harder.

LEADERSHIP AND SYSTEMS

- ☐ Find one inefficient process in a club or team you're already part of and actually fix it. Not a proposal, a fix. Something that was broken and now works better because you changed it.
- ☐ Redesign how your group runs meetings. Most meetings are long because nobody decided what they're actually for. Propose a structure, test it for a month, and track whether things get done faster.
- ☐ Write documentation that would let your organization function without you: how decisions get made, where files live, what the new person needs to know. If it doesn't exist, the organization depends on whoever happens to remember things.

- ☐ Ask your teammates what actually frustrates them about how the group operates. Write down what they say word for word and look for the pattern underneath the complaints.
- ☐ Take full ownership of the logistics for one event: booking, communication, day-of coordination, follow-up. Notice how much invisible work holds things together and how rarely it gets credited.
- ☐ Build a real onboarding system for new members, something they can actually read and use on their own, not a conversation that happens once and gets forgotten.
- ☐ Figure out how decisions actually get made in your group, not what the bylaws say but what really happens. Who has informal influence? What gets ignored? What would have to change for a new idea to actually land?
- ☐ Map one recurring conflict and propose one structural change that addresses the cause rather than the symptom. The conflict doesn't have to be dramatic: it could be that the same people always do the work, that credit gets distributed unevenly, or that decisions get relitigated because no one wrote them down.
- ☐ Study the leadership style of someone you respect in your organization. Be specific: what do they do when something goes wrong, how do they handle disagreement, and what do they seem to give up in order to lead the way they do?
- ☐ Improve one small system instead of starting something new. For example: the way your team communicates before a game, how your club tracks who owes what, or how meeting notes get shared. Pick something that keeps going wrong and actually fix it.

INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

- ☐ Find one visible change in your neighborhood or town, a new building, a closed business, a rezoned lot, and ask who benefits, who pays, and who made the decision.
- ☐ Map the incentives behind one system you use every day. A grading system, a streaming algorithm, a sports ranking. What does it actually reward, what does it quietly punish, and would it look different if someone else had designed it?
- ☐ Compare how two cities approached the same problem: housing affordability, public transit, school funding. Try to understand not just what each one did but why the outcomes diverged.
- ☐ Read seriously into a field adjacent to yours. If you're interested in engineering, read about ethics. If economics, read some psychology. If medicine, read some history of science. The edges of fields are where the interesting questions live.
- ☐ Take one headline you read this week and find the academic or primary source behind it. What does the original research actually say, and how much changed between the study and the story?
- ☐ Challenge one assumption you have held for a long time, not to abandon it but to see if it survives being examined. Write down the best argument against it and see how you respond.
- ☐ Find a failure story in a field you care about: a startup that collapsed, a policy that backfired, a scientific consensus that turned out to be wrong. Figure out what the people inside it were thinking at the time and why the warning signs weren't enough.
- ☐ Take one skill you admire in someone else, a speaker who holds a room, a writer who is always clear, a coach who gets people to perform, and break it into its actual component parts. What would you have to practice specifically?
- ☐ Design a small thought experiment around something you believe and test it in a real conversation with friends. See where it breaks down and what that tells you about the original belief.
- ☐ Ask an adult about a hard decision they made: not what they decided, but how they reasoned through it, what they got wrong, and what they would do differently now.