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# THE SCENT FIELD GUIDE

*An observer's workbook for the invisible art*

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Fragrance structure & perception

18 material portraits & 8 creative studies

Ten exercises, a scent brief and field sheets

Practical safety literacy and further reading

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## A NOTE FROM THE WORKSHOP

# Before you smell anything

Perfume is not a list of pleasant ingredients. It is a changing experience shaped by chemistry, attention, memory, culture, and the context in which a person encounters it. A perfumer can propose an architecture; the wearer supplies their own history. That is why the same fragrance can suggest a rainstorm to one observer and a polished wooden desk to another.

This guide is a companion to the interactive experience at [scentcraft.sahiltayal.online](https://scentcraft.sahiltayal.online). It is meant to be taken away, annotated, shared with attribution, and used whenever you smell a fragrance with curiosity. You do not need a laboratory to complete the observational exercises. A few finished perfumes, fragrance blotters, ordinary descriptive language and patience are enough.

## The three layers of an honest observation

### 1. Sensation

What is directly noticeable? For example: dry, citrus-like, leafy, powdery, cool, strong, faint, changing. These descriptions are still subjective but aim to report the experience.

### 2. Association

What does the smell bring to mind? For example: an old notebook, a local market after rain, a childhood wardrobe. These memories are meaningful without being universal.

### 3. Inference

What are you guessing about a material, ingredient or intention? "This must contain vetiver" is a hypothesis. A label or laboratory analysis may be needed to establish composition.

#### THE GOLDEN RULE

A conceptual scent brief is not a safe formulation. No note-pyramid sketch, descriptive material portrait, fictional percentage, or online activity can replace evaluation of actual ingredients, intended product categories, supplier documentation, stability, labeling and applicable rules.

## How to use the workbook

Read Chapters 1 and 2 to develop a vocabulary. Explore the material atlas without treating it as a shopping or dosing guide. Borrow one of the eight fictional accord studies in Chapter 4 to practise design thinking. Complete a few of the ten exercises, then use the brief template to describe a scent concept in language a collaborator can interrogate. Save the final field sheets to compare your observations over time.

**Publication note.** Written as independent educational material by Sahil Tayal. No brand affiliation or safety certification is implied. Main home: [sahiltayal.com](https://sahiltayal.com).

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 01

# The perfume in time

A model for changing perception, not a stopwatch for molecules.

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## Why the pyramid is useful

A traditional fragrance pyramid divides an experience into an opening, a heart and a base. It gives people a shared language for a process that otherwise feels elusive. Brightness may strike first. Floral, spicy or green qualities may form a recognizable middle. Woods, musks or resins may dominate what remains. But these impressions overlap. An accord can smell woody from the first seconds; a heart material can persist unusually well; a fresh effect may be recreated with substantive ingredients.

## What it does not prove

The labels “top”, “heart” and “base” are partly conventions used to describe perceptual roles. They do not impose universal evaporation times. Vapor pressure, concentration, solvent, substrate, air flow, temperature, interactions between materials, smell sensitivity and attention all affect the wearing experience. Some materials are perceptible at astonishingly small amounts; others can be present without being consciously noticed.

## A practical timeline, without false precision

### FIRST ENCOUNTER

What catches your attention at the initial smell? Record the loudest impression plus one quiet counterpoint. Try to avoid naming an ingredient immediately.

### DEVELOPMENT

Return later without forcing a strict time interval. Has the outline become warmer, softer, greener, more powdery, more textured or simply quieter?

### LATER IMPRESSION

Notice what you still detect and what disappears. Ask whether the experience feels continuous or as if one character yielded to another.

### A SCIENTIFIC CAUTION

It is tempting to assign universal “15-minute top notes” or “24-hour base notes.” Those numbers are not dependable predictions for a finished fragrance. When you measure your own observation intervals, report them as observations of that test—not general chemical laws.

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 02

# How to keep a scent journal

A repeatable observation method gives memory somewhere to land.

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## The four-pass method

### Pass 1 — Blank encounter

Choose a finished commercial fragrance and a labeled blotter, if available. Smell briefly and write five ordinary adjectives. Do not look at the marketing copy or note pyramid first.

### Pass 2 — Search for contrast

Ask what conflicts inside the experience: cool/warm, airy/dense, green/sweet, polished/rugged, translucent/resinous. A surprising contrast often gives better information than a family label.

### Pass 3 — Return without a fixed schedule

Put the blotter aside and come back after an interval you can record. Compare the new notes with your first entry. Avoid assuming changes have to follow a single canonical order.

### Pass 4 — Separate certainty levels

For each descriptor mark O (observed), A (association) or H (hypothesis). “Powdery” may be O; “grandmother’s dressing table” is A; “ionones” is H.

## Questions that improve discrimination

- If you covered the label, would your description change?
- Did one attribute become more noticeable only after you stopped attending to another?
- Which part is distinctive, and which could be present in many perfumes?
- Could the same description fit different combinations of materials?
- What would a second observer notice that you missed?

### BLOTTING SAFETY

This workbook uses finished, commercially supplied fragrances for observation. Do not sniff raw concentrated fragrance chemicals straight from containers. Follow product labeling, avoid exposure if you are sensitive, and work in well-ventilated spaces.

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 03

# The material atlas

Eighteen portraits for learning a vocabulary. Each is an impression, not a dosage.

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## 01 / BERGAMOT OIL

Sparkling peel, bitter zest and an almost tea-like freshness. It can brighten a resinous concept by contrast. Cold-pressed citrus oils may raise phototoxicity concerns depending on material grade and constituents.

## 02 / PINK PEPPER

An effervescent, rosy spice that suggests a lively opening without necessarily tasting culinary. Natural extracts and compositions vary. Useful to compare with citrus for the difference between sharpness and sparkle.

## 03 / CARDAMOM

Green, cool, lightly citrusy spice with a warming undercurrent. Ask how the same idea can read cold against amber but warm against mint-like freshness.

## 04 / HEDIONE

A trade-name fragrance material commonly associated with airy jasmine-like diffusion and transparent florality. The sense of “air” is a perceptual quality, not a measurable promise from a creative brief.

## 05 / ROSE ABSOLUTE

Petal, green, honey, spice and dense floral nuances can coexist. Natural rose materials vary with provenance and extraction, so the word “rose” is not a complete specification.

## 06 / JASMINE SAMBAC

A rich white-floral profile that may feel creamy, tea-like or animalic. A “jasmine note” in a finished perfume may instead be a reconstruction.

## 07 / IONONES

A family of fragrance molecules associated with violet, iris and soft powdery-woody qualities. Different members of the family vary; a group name does not identify one exact sensory result.

## 08 / ISO E SUPER

A velvety, cedar-like synthetic material often described as transparent woodiness. Some individuals notice it differently; a strong claim about guaranteed sillage or wear time would be misleading.

## 09 / VETIVER OIL

Rooty wood, earthy smoke, grassy bitterness and mineral edges are recurring impressions. Distillation and origin shape the result. Its appeal is often texture rather than sweetness.

## 10 / CEDARWOOD

Dry pencil-like woodiness and structural restraint. One commercial oil, one cedar species and one reconstructed cedar accord can behave differently.

## 11 / CASHMERAN

Warm musky woods and a soft, textured quality that can evoke fabric and comfort. Its sensory label is not a health claim or an indication of safe use level.

## 12 / AMBROX-TYPE MATERIALS

A family of dry amber, mineral and skin-like ideas. Related-sounding commercial names do not always denote identical ingredients.

## 13 / LABDANUM

Balsamic, dark resinous warmth that may hint at leather, dried fruit or amber. It can give a sparse concept a shadow without requiring a literal leather material.

## 14 / VANILLIN

Familiar vanilla warmth associated with comfort and food. In an accord it can be used to soften a rough edge, but aroma associations are personal.

## 15 / COUMARIN

Hay, tonka-like sweetness and a tobacco-almond impression. It helps explain why green and warm can coexist. Check restrictions and allergen requirements for any real formulation.

## 16 / VIOLET LEAF ACCORD

A constructed green scent idea, often described as watery, cucumber-like or metallic. "Violet leaf" can mean an accord, not necessarily a single distilled natural ingredient.

## 17 / OAKMOSS-STYLE ACCORD

Forest-floor depth and damp shaded bark, important to classic chypre imagery. Real moss materials can be restricted; merely calling something a substitute does not prove compliance.

## 18 / GEOSMIN

A highly potent earthy impression associated with damp soil. It is an evocative teaching example, not an invitation to experiment without proper controls or documentation.

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 04

# Eight imaginary accords

Treat each concept as an artistic problem: what opposing ideas must coexist?

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## 01. Velvet Copper & Smoked Fig

A soft, ripe-fig atmosphere held against a dry, charred woody edge. The interesting question is not “how much smoke?” but “can smoke remain a shadow rather than become the protagonist?” Consider a fig-leaf direction, dry cedar and an amber background.

**Design question:** If you remove the smoky idea entirely, does the composition still have a point of view?

## 02. Midnight Rain on Terracotta

A rain-soaked courtyard still radiating a memory of heat. Try to distinguish wet-green facets from earthy-mineral associations. Violet-leaf impressions, rooty woods and petrichor cues can help articulate the idea, but none is itself “terracotta.”

**Design question:** How can you communicate the heat of stone without turning everything warm and sweet?

## 03. Solar Amber & Dried Bergamot

A bright opening caught in a patient, resinous interior. The creative aim is a sense of brightness that echoes after the brightest components become less noticeable. Imagine bitter citrus, airborne florality and dry amber.

**Design question:** Which recurring character makes it feel like one story rather than two perfumes?

## 04. Old Paper & Botanical Ink

A library rendered without an actual paper extract. A powdery-violet mood, dry wood and restrained vanilla can suggest archival softness. The ink is metaphorical; do not assume the product would contain real ink.

**Design question:** What makes this a human memory rather than a museum prop?

## 05. Glacial Pine & Frost

A cold-air illusion without relying on extreme menthol-like force. Cool spices, green atmospherics and transparent woods may create a more nuanced frost.

**Design question:** Could your imagined frost be understood as space and silence?

## 06. Burnt Honey & Cedar

Comfort turning slightly strange: hay-like sweetness, a dry wooden frame and a ghost of toasted warmth. In design terms the challenge is restraint.

**Design question:** At what point does the sweetness erase the woody tension?

## 07. Electric Violet & Ozone

A flower imagined through glass and city light. Ionone-like violet, aqueous greens and airy floral space produce the friction between synthetic futurism and delicacy.

**Design question:** How do you keep it recognizable as a flower without making it conventional?

## 08. Spiced Saffron & Birch

An intimate, darkly textured narrative: luminous spice set against resinous wood and leather-like associations. "Saffron" is a scent direction, not proof of saffron extract.

**Design question:** What keeps the structure from becoming an indistinct dark cloud?

### NO IMPLIED RECIPE

These eight fictional studies purposely contain no mixing ratios. A descriptive note may be an accord, a molecule, a family, a memory or a marketing name. Turning a story into a product is a distinct technical discipline.

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 05

# Write a brief that earns a conversation

A good brief narrows ambiguity while leaving room for discovery.

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## A practical structure

### Working title

Name the concept without treating the name as evidence. “Old Paper & Botanical Ink” is a compelling poetic direction; it is not a material list.

### The scene

Describe a concrete setting in two or three sentences: a closed library after rain, a warm scarf left by a friend, a garden under electric lights.

### The tension

Pick two qualities that must coexist. A useful tension helps the collaborator prioritize trade-offs: warm yet airy; familiar yet strange; green yet comforting.

### The essential signatures

Choose two or three impressions the project should preserve. Fewer priorities are easier to test and refine.

### The exclusions

Name what would break the concept: “not candy-sweet,” “avoid heavy smoke,” “no harsh clean-laundry impression.”

### The use context

Clarify whether this is an exhibition narrative, personal gift, learning exercise or a potential cosmetic. Different end uses demand different technical and regulatory work.

### The observations to collect

Specify evaluation questions rather than guaranteed outcomes. Example: “Does the fresh edge remain noticeable on blotter after the first return?”

## Example — The Lantern Room

**Scene:** A quiet reading corner at dusk, with a window open after rain. **Tension:** sheltered warmth against incoming cool air.

**Opening:** softly aromatic, almost citrusy. **Heart:** powdery violet and spacious floral air. **Foundation:** transparent cedar with mild resinous comfort. **Avoid:** overly edible sweetness or aggressive smoke. **Evaluation:** Does the green-cool accent remain present enough to keep the warmth from feeling sealed off?

### A CAREFUL CLAIM

A well-written brief does not predict how long a fragrance lasts, how far it projects, whether it changes anyone's mood, or whether it will be safe on skin. Those matters require evidence beyond prose.

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 06

# Ten small experiments

No lab equipment required for these exercises. Use finished, labeled products and your own sensory journal.

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## 01 / The unlabeled first impression

Without looking at marketing notes, write three adjectives, one comparison and one uncertainty. Afterward compare your description with the brand's narrative. Which words came from the object and which from the story?

## 02 / The same perfume, two occasions

Smell the same finished fragrance in two different contexts on separate occasions. Record ambient conditions and your attention. Do not assume any difference is caused by the formula.

## 03 / Ordinary language only

Describe a fragrance to a friend without saying amber, gourmand, chypre, fougère or any industry shorthand. Can you still convey shape and emotion?

## 04 / Three words become a scene

Pick three descriptors such as dry, cool and luminous. Write a location with sensory details that evoke them. Then translate the scene back into a restrained scent brief.

## 05 / Disagree with yourself

Return to a past entry and add a second interpretation. A "powdery" note might be floral, cosmetic, dusty or dry. What evidence would help distinguish them?

## 06 / The memory boundary

Write a personal memory prompted by scent, then explicitly mark which portion is private association. Ask whether another observer could reasonably experience something else.

## 07 / Compare two citrus directions

Use two finished fragrances with citrus impressions. Describe the contrast in brightness, bitterness, softness and surrounding textures, rather than claiming specific molecules.

## 08 / A low-volume experiment

Compare descriptions after pausing and resuming attention at a comfortable distance. Do not repeatedly or intensely inhale in pursuit of certainty.

## 09 / Write an anti-brief

Take an accord you like and write three constraints that would make it stop working. This trains precise negative feedback, which is often more useful than "make it better."

## 10 / A collaborative nose

Invite someone to write their impressions independently before you share yours. Compare observation words, associations and hypotheses; avoid ranking who has the better nose.

# Safety and professional boundaries

Real material selection is a different task from learning olfactory language.

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## Before a fragrance becomes a product

### Identify the actual material

A common name can cover different extracts, grades and trade materials. Record the supplier, chemical identity when available, batch and relevant safety data.

### Determine intended end use

An eau de parfum, a leave-on skin product and a room product do not share identical use patterns or assessment categories.

### Consult current standards

IFRA standards may prohibit materials, restrict their concentration in finished products, or impose specifications. Limits are generally applied to finished consumer products, not merely to neat concentrate.

### Account for complex naturals

An essential oil can contain restricted constituents. “Natural” is not a shortcut to safe, hypoallergenic or unrestricted.

### Review exposure and documentation

Supplier SDS, IFRA documentation where applicable, allergen composition, intended use, local regulations, stability, labeling and suitable evaluation are part of formulation work.

### Keep claims within evidence

Do not infer medical benefit, therapeutic certainty, psychological control, guaranteed attractiveness, universal emotional response or guaranteed wear time from scent descriptions.

#### NOT A PRODUCTION MANUAL

This publication deliberately omits mixing concentrations, skin-application recipes, raw chemical smelling instructions and compliance certificates. It is an educational workbook, not a substitute for a professional safety assessment, supplier data or current regulatory guidance.

## Primary reading and verification

International Fragrance Association, “Understanding the Standards”: [ifrafragrance.org/understanding-standards](https://ifrafragrance.org/understanding-standards). Explains prohibitions, restrictions, specifications and why a final product category matters.

International Fragrance Association, "Using the Standards": [ifrafragrance.org/using-the-standards](https://ifrafragrance.org/using-the-standards). Clarifies that quantitative restrictions refer to finished consumer goods and that suppliers/manufacturers have specific responsibilities.

US Food & Drug Administration, "Fragrances in Cosmetics": [fda.gov/cosmetics/cosmetic-ingredients/fragrances-cosmetics](https://fda.gov/cosmetics/cosmetic-ingredients/fragrances-cosmetics). Background on cosmetic status, safety, ingredients and fragrance sensitivity in the US context.

US Food & Drug Administration, "Allergens in Cosmetics": [fda.gov/cosmetics/cosmetic-ingredients/allergens-cosmetics](https://fda.gov/cosmetics/cosmetic-ingredients/allergens-cosmetics). Background on allergic contact dermatitis and ingredients associated with sensitivity.

**Scope note:** The above sources explain important principles but are not a complete assessment of Indian or any other jurisdiction's current manufacturing, labeling, cosmetic or chemical obligations. Check applicable local requirements before production or sale.

FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 08

# Your reusable fragrance brief

Print this page, or use the private browser-based brief tool on the ScentCraft website.

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**Project title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is this for?** \_\_\_\_\_

**The place, person, feeling or scene**

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**Two qualities that must coexist**

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**Opening / first encounter**

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**Middle / developing character**

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**Foundation / what you hope remains**

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**Must preserve / must avoid**

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**What would you ask a collaborator to test?**

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This is a conceptual document only. Do not substitute chosen note words for a compliant materials list or approved formula.

## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 09

# Observation sheet / edition one

A repeatable record for comparing impressions, not making numerical performance promises.

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Fragrance or blotter ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Date / place / context: \_\_\_\_\_

Source and label checked: \_\_\_\_\_

## FIRST ENCOUNTER

Observed sensory features

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Personal memories or associations

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Tentative ingredient guesses (mark these as guesses)

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## RETURN VISIT

New impression, interval and conditions

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What has changed in your description?

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Alternative explanation or uncertainty

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FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 10

# Observation sheet / edition two

Share only what you are comfortable sharing. Independent impressions can coexist.

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Fragrance or concept: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer A / observer B: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer A: three observations, one association, one uncertainty

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Observer B: three observations, one association, one uncertainty

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What do both observers notice?

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Where do they disagree productively?

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What would be worth testing or clarifying?

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## FIELD NOTES / CHAPTER 11

# A better vocabulary

These oppositions are descriptive prompts rather than measurable axes or universal judgments.

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**Bright / subdued**

Does an impression jump forward or sit behind other features?

**Transparent / dense**

Can you sense space between facets, or does it read as a compact mass?

**Dry / plush**

Does a surface suggest pencil wood, powder, fabric or resinous softness?

**Green / ripe**

Does a note lean toward leaf, stem or fruit?

**Cool / warm**

Are there minty, airy, spicy, balsamic or sunlit associations?

**Mineral / organic**

Does it evoke wet stone, metal, root or living vegetation?

**Clean / textured**

Is it smooth and polished, or irregular and earthy?

**Simple / layered**

How many distinguishable impressions can you describe without guessing?

**Familiar / strange**

What is recognizable, and what resists an easy reference?

**Continuous / contrasting**

Does a later impression feel related to the first?

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