

# Spreadsheet Thinking Lab

Plan reliable tables, calculations and reporting checks.



**Julian Parker**

Fictional editorial pen name • Original learning workbook

Guided explanations, examples, exercises and writing space

## READ BEFORE USING

# A practical workbook, honestly described.

Spreadsheet Thinking Lab uses the fictional editorial pen name Julian Parker. That name does not represent a verified professional identity, biography, qualification or affiliation.

This is original, AI-assisted educational starter material. It contains guided practice pages, fictional scenarios, planning tools, self-review rubrics and writing space. It is not a 256-page continuous-prose textbook, an accredited course, a professional certification or individual advice.

The examples are invented for practice. Organisations, clients, outcomes and figures in exercises are fictional. Do not use them as customer testimonials or as evidence of commercial results.

You may complete the exercises for your own learning or authorised internal training. A store owner should review and approve the content, product description and local terms before selling it. Do not imply endorsement by any named platform or software provider.

For exercises involving personal or organisational information, work with fictional or authorised material. Keep passwords, card details, sensitive records and confidential information out of shared worksheets.

This workbook does not promise employment, earnings, business growth or any particular result. Professional decisions require appropriate review for your own circumstances.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

# One useful lab at a time.

## Choose your context

Spreadsheet learners practising model design and review before implementing formulas in their preferred tool.

## Use a real, bounded project

Pick a small task you can describe without disclosing confidential information. You can instead use the fictional studio examples in the labs.

## Work through eight moves

Each lab includes a concept brief, a worked example, a mapping page, a decision table, a constraint scenario, a project draft, a self-review and a next-step plan.

## Treat writing space as working space

The pages intentionally leave room for sketches, drafts and corrections. Record why you made a choice, not just the choice itself.

## Check before you apply

Separate what you observed from what you assumed. Test a small revision and ask a suitable reviewer about high-impact decisions.

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## LAB 01 / STRUCTURE THE PROBLEM

# Question brief

## Purpose

Use this lab to make question brief visible rather than leaving it as a vague intention. The output is a one-page question brief. Aim for a draft you can explain and revise, not a polished document with missing assumptions.

## Connect it to your route

This task belongs to structure the problem. Review your notes on question brief and decide which inputs are relevant. Do not copy every earlier detail; carry forward only information that supports the current decision.

## A practical method

First, name the person who will use the result. Then record the question, the inputs you have and the information still missing. Draft the smallest useful version. Compare it with the intended outcome and ask what could be misunderstood.

## Observation versus assumption

Label a statement as observed, supplied, estimated or still unknown. An attractive layout does not make an unsupported claim more reliable. Keep an evidence note beside any decision that depends on a fact.

## Ready for review when

A reader can identify the purpose, your chosen approach and one next action. Keep unresolved questions visible so the next lab, input inventory, starts from an honest record.

### Your focus

Write one sentence describing what this lab should help you decide.

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## LAB 01 / WORKED EXAMPLE

# A draft you can question.

The fictional example follows a small studio preparing a one-page question brief for a small project. They have one working session and need something another person can understand without a long explanation.

## Initial draft

“We need a better question brief.” This names the area but not the user, boundary or test of success.

## More useful draft

“Create a one-page question brief for our next review. State the intended user, the three most important inputs, one unresolved question and the action we want the reader to take.”

## Review note

The team separates supplied information from estimates. They keep the first version small and ask a second person to explain what they think it means.

## Revision decision

If the reader cannot explain the intended action, revise the order and labels before adding more detail. Carry the unresolved question into input inventory.

### Your critique

What would you keep, change or test in this fictional example?

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## LAB 01 / MAP THE INPUTS

# Make the starting point explicit.

Complete the fields for question brief. A precise boundary is more useful than a long list of unsupported detail.

**User and purpose**

Who will use the result? What decision should it support?

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**Known inputs**

What information is available? Record its source or origin.

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**Unknowns and assumptions**

Which statements need checking before you rely on them?

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**Constraints**

What limits the time, scope, format or level of detail?

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LAB 01 / COMPARE OPTIONS

# Choose with a reason.

List three possible approaches to question brief. Compare them using the same criteria, then explain your choice. Leave a question open rather than filling an unknown cell with a guess.

| Approach | Why it helps | Main limitation | What to check |
|----------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
|          |              |                 |               |
|          |              |                 |               |
|          |              |                 |               |

**Preferred approach**

State your choice, the reason for it and the uncertainty that remains.

## LAB 01 / REVIEW RUBRIC

# Check the work, not just completion.

Review your question brief using the questions below. Mark each one as clear, needs work or not yet checked. Write an example to justify your mark.

**Purpose**

Can a reader explain what this output is for?

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**Evidence**

Are observations and assumptions visibly separated?

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**Usability**

Is the structure clear enough for the intended reader?

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**Action**

Is there a realistic next step and a named unresolved question?

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