Version 2 · Revised 11 November 2026 · 8/12

Use Questions to Generate Ideas and Explore Opportunities

By the end of this guide, you can

Produce alternative problem frames and turn one promising idea into a bounded learning test.

Bring to the task

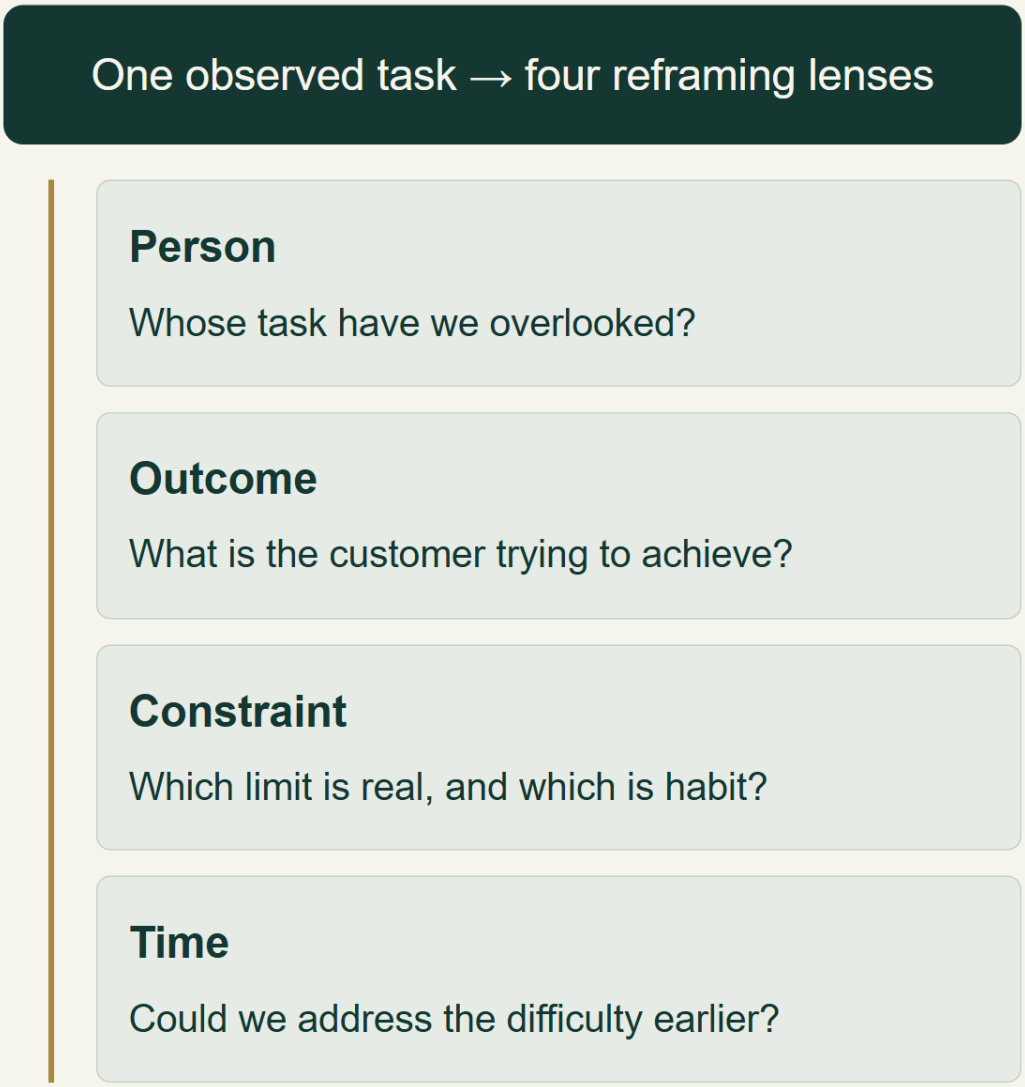
A specific user or customer task, observations about the difficulty and meaningful constraints.

“How can we make our proposal template shorter?” invites edits to a document. “How can a buyer find the information needed for a decision?” invites changes to navigation, timing, conversations or the document itself. Both may be useful, but they open different spaces for action.

Innovation questioning begins by reconsidering the frame: who is trying to achieve what, where does difficulty occur and which assumptions have selected the current approach? Reframing is not permission to ignore evidence. It should explain the same observed situation in another useful way.

EXPLAIN · APPLY

Reframe the task and test a critical assumption



Original Tibyan teaching aid. Illustrative example; not observed field results.

Reframing should illuminate the observed task. Move from distinct approaches to the one assumption that needs a useful test now.

Text explanation of the graphic
Reframe the task and test a critical assumption
One observed task → four reframing lenses
Person
Whose task have we overlooked?
Outcome

What is the customer trying to achieve?
Constraint
Which limit is real, and which is habit?
Time
Could we address the difficulty earlier?
Original Tibyan teaching aid. Illustrative example; not observed field results.

Case, demonstration and correction

Reframe a customer-onboarding task

Fictional teaching case. Namaa's new customers receive a welcome email and a setup form. In three invented walkthroughs, two customers could not identify who would confirm their first-week setup date. This tiny packet identifies a design question; it does not estimate how common the problem is.

Frame	Working question	A different approach
Document	How can a new customer find the date-confirmation contact in the welcome message?	Put the named contact and next step beside the date field.
Coordination	How can the customer and delivery coordinator confirm the date together?	Offer a short confirmation call before setup begins.
Decision visibility	How can both parties see whether the date is proposed or confirmed?	Use a shared status card with a named owner and confirmation state.

“Which welcome-email color will customers prefer?” is an attractive but weak reframing here: color preference may leave the observed ownership problem untouched. A defensible frame still explains the original difficulty.

A complete bounded test card

Selected approach: a fictional status card. **Assumption:** a new customer can distinguish a proposed date from a confirmed date and identify the person who can change it.

Exhibit C1 — original card text: “First-week setup: 15 November 2026, 09:00. State: proposed. Confirmation owner: Hana, delivery coordinator. Next action: await Hana’s written confirmation before treating the date as agreed. Request date changes from Hana.” All times use this fictional team’s business clock. The team can maintain one named confirmation owner for this exercise.

Task: give three relevant colleagues playing new customers a fictional card; ask each to name the date state, the confirmation owner and the next action without hints. These are simulated users; a later test with intended customers is still required.

Decision rule for this design exercise: all three must identify the state, owner and next action correctly before the team takes the card to a small intended-customer trial. Any misunderstanding of a confirmed commitment triggers a revision. This is a conservative, fictional screening choice for this task, not a universal usability threshold.

Invented result: two people identify all three correctly; the third reads “proposed” as confirmed. Product coordinator Dina changes the label to “Proposed — awaiting confirmation from Hana” and retests the changed task. She does not recommend rollout or infer demand.

Exhibit C2 and answer key — reveal after the attempt: keep C1’s date, owner and next action, but replace the state line with “Proposed — awaiting confirmation from Hana.” The correct reading of either version is: the date is not confirmed; Hana owns confirmation and receives change requests; the customer waits for her written confirmation before treating the date as agreed.

What would change the next action? Accurate interpretation with substantial coordination effort would shift attention to workload. Accurate interpretation at manageable effort would justify a limited customer trial. Continued misunderstanding would require redesign or a different approach. None of these outcomes establishes willingness to pay, sustained adoption or business impact.

Weak record: “Three people liked the card, so customers will buy.” **Improved record:** “The exercise exposed one commitment-state error; revise the label before testing with intended users.” The changed decision follows the observation.

COMPARE · NOTICE

Different frames reveal different options

Document frame

How can the proposal be easier to scan?

Test a shorter structure without losing needed information.

Coordination frame

How can sales and operations clarify assumptions earlier?

Test the timing and feasibility of a conversation.

Decision frame

How can the buyer distinguish confirmed and unresolved items?

Observe a reader using an assumptions summary.

Original Tibyan teaching aid. Illustrative example; not observed field results.

Compare mechanisms, not cosmetic variations. For each approach, identify what must be true and choose evidence that can change the next commitment.

Text explanation of the graphic
Different frames reveal different options
Document frame
How can the proposal be easier to scan?
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Coordination frame

How can sales and operations clarify assumptions earlier?
Test the timing and feasibility of a conversation.
Decision frame
How can the buyer distinguish confirmed and unresolved items?
Observe a reader using an assumptions summary.
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Your reusable working record

1. Observed user/task and limit

Describe the difficulty before proposing the product.

2. Frame → question → approach

Write at least three different mechanisms.

3. Constraints and excluded frame

Keep real limits and explain a rejected frame.

4. Critical assumption and task

Choose the uncertainty that controls the next commitment.

5. Participants, materials and procedure

Separate simulation from intended-user evidence.

6. Decision rule before the test

Explain why the criterion fits this particular decision.

7. Observation, next decision and owner

Report errors and the changed choice, not just liking.

8. Limits and review trigger

State what the test cannot establish.

Annotated completed record

Observed user/task and limit

Two of three fictional walkthrough participants could not identify the first-week date-confirmation owner. The packet does not estimate prevalence.

The observation is specific and its sampling limit stays visible.

Frame → question → approach

Document → find the contact → revised welcome message. Coordination → confirm together → short call. Decision visibility → distinguish states → shared card.

The alternatives change how the task works, not only its wording.

Constraints and excluded frame

The team can maintain one named confirmation owner; the message must distinguish proposed from confirmed. Color preference does not address the observed ambiguity.

The rejected frame is judged against the user task, not taste.

Critical assumption and task

With the card, a new customer can identify the confirmation state, owner and next action without hints.

The assumption can be examined through observable interpretation.

Participants, materials and procedure

Dina gives three colleagues the supplied C1 card separately; each names the state, owner and action. She records errors without coaching.

This is a screening simulation; customer usability remains unknown.

Decision rule before the test

For this exercise, all three must identify state, owner and next action correctly before a small customer trial. Any commitment-state error means revise first.

A fictional screening rule is not a universal standard.

Observation, next decision and owner

Two identify all three correctly; one read proposed as confirmed. Dina revises the label and retests before approaching intended customers.

The observation leads to redesign, not a demand or rollout claim.

Limits and review trigger

No claim about payment, long-term adoption or revenue. Review immediately after retest; if interpretation is clear but workload excessive, inspect the coordination option.

The next uncertainty can shift even when the design becomes clearer.

Practice and retry

Before reading the test result, choose a frame and write a decision rule. Then use the invented result to decide what changes. Add a new constraint: no staff time is available for an extra call. Reconsider feasibility without pretending that the constraint proves the card works.

Common error and corrective feedback

Common errors: changing the task until the favored idea wins; counting cosmetic variants as distinct mechanisms; interpreting praise as adoption; inventing a threshold after seeing the result.

Independent-study alternative

Use the supplied observations and write your frames before revealing the example. Read the fictional results only after committing to a rule. Record the change you made and why.

Check your work

- Frames relate to observed work.
- Approaches differ in mechanism.
- Constraints are explicit.
- The test answers a specific uncertainty.

Apply and review

Review what the test revealed and decide whether to develop, revise or set aside the approach.

Sources and further reading

- Magistretti, Pham & Dell’Era (2025). The creative process of problem framing for innovation
- Stanford d.school. How Might We Questions

TIBYAN · تبيان · Version 2 · Revised 11 November 2026

Original evidence-informed teaching aid. Cases and example records are hypothetical; the assessment is not a validated certification.