



SANKOFA LEARNING DESIGN

Retrospective

A Team Member's Field Guide to Filling the Room with Truth

Practice the moves in the simulation. Reference them here.



THE SHAPE OF THE MEETING

Five phases — your job in each

You're not running the agenda — but knowing its shape tells you when each of your moves matters most. Truth belongs in every phase; here's what your seat owes each one.

1

Set the stage **your cue**

The facilitator names the blameless frame and models their own miss. Don't wait to be told twice — take it at face value. That moment is your signal the ceiling is real and safe to use.

"If they can put their own bad call on the table, so can I."

2

Gather data **where your truth goes in**

Put your real slice into the timeline — including where your work slowed or nearly broke. In silent brainwriting, type the true thing, not the safe one. This is the phase your honesty is built for.

3

Generate insights **name the real why**

Trace your friction to the system, not a person — and that includes owning your own part. Say the "why" you actually saw, not the one that's easiest to say out loud.

4

Decide action items **take the slot**

When an item touches your work, own it out loud — take the owner slot, name a measure, accept a deadline. Don't let a vague "someone should" pass with your name half-attached to it.

5

Close the session **last cheap moment**

Leave with your commitments clear. If something's still unsaid, this is the last moment it's cheap to say it — before it shows up expensive in the next cycle.



FROM YOUR SEAT

Seven moves — the tell, and what to say

Each move answers a moment you can feel coming. Catch the tell, make the move.

1 Come ready

Tell: the retro's on your calendar and you haven't looked at your own slice yet.

"Where did my work slow, stall, or nearly break — and what's the one thing I'd rather not say out loud?" *Walk in with that written down.*

2 Say the uncertain part

Tell: you're about to say "probably fine" and change the subject.

"It's mostly there — but here's the part I'm least sure about: [name it]."

3 Back the flag

Tell: a teammate just raised an early risk and the room went quiet.

"I've seen something like that on my end — good catch. Let's look at it together."

4 Own it, don't point

Tell: your first instinct is "QA should have caught this," not you.

"The handoff didn't flag the schema change, so I built against the old one — let's add a schema-change note."

5 Fill the silence

Tell: the facilitator asked an open question and the room froze.

"I'll go first — the thing that slowed me down was [specific]." *Being first gives the next person cover.*

6 Turn a complaint into an experiment

Tell: you're about to vent about a tool, a client, or a process.

"Here's the friction — let's try [one change] for two sprints and measure [X]. I'll own it."

7 Own it, close the loop

Tell: an action item lands vague — "someone should," "make it better," "at some point."

"Who owns it, what's the number that means done, and by when?"



TWO CHEAT SHEETS

Point vs. own • make it real

Pointing sends the risk to someone else. Owning it keeps you on the team and points the room at a process it can actually change.

POINTING / DODGING — DON'T SAY	OWNING IT — SAY THIS INSTEAD
"QA should have caught this, not me."	→ "The review caught the surface bug but not the config — what would make the config easy to check?"
"Ask Marcus — he approved it."	→ "The config slipped past the handoff — where should that check live?"
"I flagged it in Slack, so it's not on me."	→ "I flagged it in Slack but not here — I'll bring it to the room next time."
"That wasn't really my area."	→ "It touched my handoff — here's what I saw from my side."

Make your action item real

Before you accept an item, check it has all three. Miss one and it quietly dies before the next retro.

An owner Someone's name is on it — ideally yours if it's your work.
Say: "I'll own it," not "someone should."

A measure "Done" is a specific number or state you could check.
Say: "Done means [the number]," not "make it more reliable."

A deadline A date or a named sprint, not "soon."
Say: "By [date / which sprint]," not "at some point."



BEFORE, DURING, AFTER

The truth checklist

Run this quietly around every retro. The room fills with truth one person at a time — be one of the first.

● Before the meeting

- ☐ Review your slice of the timeline — where your work slowed, stalled, or nearly broke.
- ☐ Write down one honest observation you'd rather not say out loud.
- ☐ Decide the one uncertain thing you'll name even if no one asks.

● During the meeting

- ☐ Say the uncertain part out loud — in the room, not in a private message after.
- ☐ Back the first person who flags a risk, before you know if it's real.
- ☐ Own your part in system language — no "who," no dodging.
- ☐ Be first into a silence; put a true thing in so the next person can too.
- ☐ Turn a complaint into a testable experiment before you air it.

● After the meeting

- ☐ Make sure every item you own has an owner, a measure, and a deadline.
- ☐ If something stayed unsaid, say it before the notes close.

Weekly self-check

- Did I say at least one uncertain thing out loud instead of "probably fine"?
- Did I back someone's flag before I knew if they were right?
- Did I own my part in system language instead of pointing?
- Did I turn a complaint into an experiment the team could actually run?