



The Clear Thinking Handbook

Vist [Field Notes for Modern Life](#)

Your Practical Tool for Modern Life

You don't need a battlefield to learn clarity. Life offers plenty of storms on its own. A difficult meeting. A bad day. A phone call you weren't ready for.

When the day goes sideways, pause. Take a moment in the eye of the storm. Give yourself enough stillness to see what matters and ignore the noise.



A note from the author, John Wozniak and founder of Field Notes for Modern Life.

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to get overwhelmed. Whether you're facing a stressful deadline, a difficult conversation, or simply a chaotic day, staying calm can feel like an impossible task.

This guide provides practical, actionable techniques to help you regain control and navigate challenging situations with composure and clarity.

Not all of us will face real danger in our lives. I did, on a warm summer's day in the Balkans.

"I was the most junior member of a small team on peacekeeping operations in Kosovo. We found ourselves caught in the middle of civil unrest. Things turned quickly. In minutes the situation changed from tense to dangerous."

I won't go into the details here, but I'm still here to tell the story. I was later Mentioned in Despatches, the oldest military award for gallantry. What stayed with me from that day wasn't the chaos. It was the clarity.

Patience. Training. Breath. Focus.

There was no room to panic. Everything slowed. Everything sharpened. I can recall it now as clearly as I could on that June afternoon.

My only aim was to survive, and in an unexpected turn of events, that's exactly what happened.

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In 2013 I faced a personal battle to defeat general anxiety disorder and moderate-to-severe depression. The battles rumble on and I often tell people that it's 'Ok to ask for help.

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Visit my site at [🌐 Field Notes For Modern Life](#) for Modern Life. Get essays, dispatches and small, human stories straight to your inbox.

PART ONE: MICRO-GUIDES

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Micro-Guide 1: The Two-Minute Reset

A simple practice for moments when your day spirals.

You do not always need a full break. Sometimes you need two minutes of honesty and breath.

Step 1: Ground yourself

Feel your feet on the floor. Breathe in slowly for four seconds. Hold for two. Breathe out for six.

Step 2: Name the truth

Say what is happening out loud or in your head.

“I am overwhelmed.”

“I am frustrated.”

“I am tired.”

Naming it removes its teeth.

Step 3: Choose the next step only

Not the whole list. Not the future. Just the next clean action.

Step 4: Move gently

Reset, then continue. No judgement.

💡 **Takeaway:** Clarity begins with one still moment.

Micro-Guide 2: The One-Page Priority Map

A quick way to quiet the noise and see what matters.

Step 1: Write down everything on your mind

A simple brain dump.

Step 2: Circle three things

Only three. These are your priorities for the day.

Step 3: Draw a line through tasks that can wait

Letting go is as useful as leaning in.

Step 4: Give each priority a simple next step

No complexity. No perfection.

💡 **Takeaway:** You cannot think clearly with a crowded mind.

Micro-Guide 3: The Field Notes for Attention Test

A quick way to quiet the noise and see what matters.

If everything feels urgent, nothing is.

In the Army briefing room, urgency had rules.

Ask yourself:

Is this urgent or does it feel urgent? Feelings are poor timekeepers.

Is someone else's urgency being handed to me? Not all fires are yours to put out.

What will happen if I wait ten minutes? Often the answer is nothing.

💡 **Takeaway:** Clarity is controlled attention.

Micro-Guide 4: The Life Triage Model

A quick way to quiet the noise and see what matters.

Borrowed from conflict zones. Adapted for modern life.

Imagine three buckets.

Immediate Must be handled now. Safety, deadlines, commitments, real consequences.

Important Matters for the long term. Planning, health, relationships, growth.

Imagined Worries, hypotheticals, outdated fears, other people's noise.

Most stress lives in the imagined bucket.

💡 **Takeaway:** Clarity is choosing what deserves your energy.

PART TWO: PRACTICAL PAUSES

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The Bad Day Survival List

A set of stabilisers for when the wheels wobble.

💡 Grab a cup of tea or coffee and justpause

Pause before you react

*Ask if it will happen
tomorrow*

slow your breathing

Name the problem

Remember that bad days end

The Clear Thinking Starter Pack

A practical list to create space in a noisy life.

- Turn off one category of notifications
 - Write two lines in a journal each morning
 - Ask one guiding question for the day
 - Decide when your day ends
 - Keep a “not today” list
 - Begin the morning without screens
 - Five minutes of silence before bed
 - One walk each week without headphones
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The Crisis Moment Protocol

A calm, grounded process for when things ramp up.

- Stop. Breathe.
- State what is actually happening
- Separate facts from stories
- Identify who needs to know
- Choose the smallest controllable action
- Delay everything that is not essential
- Move with purpose
- Review the situation when calm returns

PART THREE: WORKSHEETS

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Worksheet 1: The One-Page Clarity Map

What's bothering me:

(write freely)

What I can control:

(short list)

What is outside my control:

(be honest)

Priorities for the next 24 hours:

(choose three)

What good looks like today:

(a simple outcome)

What I should let go:

(one thing only)

Worksheet 2: The Decision Clean-Up Sheet

Define the decision:

(keep it clear)

The facts:

(only what you know to be true)

Why this matters:

(what sits underneath it)

Options available:

(realistic, not perfect)

The simplest good option:

(choose one)

What I will do in the next hour:

(an action you can execute)

Worksheet 3: The Noise Reduction Planner

What drains me:

(write honestly)

What restores me:

(note the simple things)

What I say yes to too quickly:

(pattern spotting)

What I avoid:

(name it kindly)

Three ways to reduce noise this week:

(practical and small)

One promise to myself:

(keep it real)



PART FOUR: PROMPTS

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Prompt Set 1: Clarity in the Moment

- What can I control in the next ten minutes?
 - What story am I telling myself?
 - What would the calm version of me do next?
 - What actually matters right now?
 - What can wait?
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Prompt Set 2: Weekly Grounding

- What made the week noisy?
 - What helped me stay steady?
 - What surprised me?
 - What needs more attention?
 - What can I gently step away from?
 - What do I want next week to feel like?
-

Prompt Set 3: Big Picture Clarity

- What kind of life feels clear to me?
- What patterns keep repeating?
- What am I avoiding saying aloud?
- What season am I in?
- What would future me thank me for?
- What truth am I finally ready to acknowledge?



FINAL NOTE

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There are times when we face adversity. Times when we are far outside our comfort zone. There will be moments when we feel lost or helpless. Being mindful and learning to master ourselves is something that lives in all of us.

Not all of these techniques will help everyone. Find what works for you.

Thank you for reading Field Notes. If this pack helps you in any way, share it with someone who would benefit from it.

Stay steady.

Stay human.

Woz

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