

ORIGINAL FIELD MANUAL / OCTOBER 2026

SWAG IS A VERB.

Seven experiments in self-expression, good boundaries, and the courage to remain a work in progress.

Style Without Asking for Grades

By Sahil Tayal • swag.sahilverse.online

Use time: 20–45 minutes. No scores, assessments, diagnoses or promises of transformation. Just creative reflection you may accept, rewrite, or ignore.

00 / HOW TO USE THIS

A SMALLER IDEA OF CONFIDENCE

SWAG is not being above people. It is learning to choose your own frequency while remembering that other people have their own. You can be playful and uncertain, stylish and unfinished, ambitious and content.

Self-presentation is part of social life, not evidence of dishonesty. People show different sides of themselves in different rooms. The question is whether those choices are thoughtful, respectful, and compatible with the life they want to inhabit.

Three distinctions

Style is not substance. A signal invites interpretation; it does not prove character.

Autonomy is not isolation. You can care about other people without handing them your steering wheel.

Expression is not an assessment. “Velvet Orbit” is a fictional creative costume, not a psychological category.

Where the ideas come from

The activities draw loosely on questions raised by Erving Goffman about social roles, self-determination theory about autonomy, and work on possible selves. They are not validated interventions and do not demonstrate causal effects. Hip-hop’s historical and cultural significance exceeds the playful aesthetic borrowed for this website.

01 / SIGNAL VS. SUBSTANCE

SIGNALS AREN'T EVIDENCE.

Our clothes, biographies, jokes, playlists and websites give people clues about us. Clues are not character verdicts. The work begins when we ask what a signal is useful for, and what it cannot tell us.

An elaborate personal brand can express delight, offer an invitation, or conceal uncertainty. An understated style can signal calm, indifference, or simply a laundry day. Context matters.

THE EXPERIMENT

01. Write three things your current style signals.
02. For each, write one thing someone *cannot reasonably infer* from it.
03. Choose an action that expresses a value more clearly than a symbol does.

QUESTION TO KEEP: What deserves to be seen, and what deserves to stay private?

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02 / SET YOUR VOLUME

QUIET IS A FREQUENCY TOO.

Presence is not measured in decibels. A soft entrance can be confident, a bold one can be considerate, and a cosmic one can be gloriously silly.

The challenge is context: a late-night conversation, a workshop, a grieving friend, a dance floor. There is no universally superior mode.

THE EXPERIMENT

- 01.** Picture a familiar room in three modes: lowkey, electric and cosmic.
- 02.** Write the benefit and social cost of each mode.
- 03.** Choose the mode that fits the people and purpose in *that* room.

QUESTION TO KEEP: Am I choosing the volume, or is the volume choosing me?

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03 / CONTRADICTION WARDROBE

WEAR YOUR MANY INTERESTS.

It is ordinary for a person to love things that do not belong to the same category. Biology and beat-making. Philosophy and storefront operations. Fragrance and a badly timed joke.

Identity labels help us communicate, but the label need not become a lifetime restriction. Sometimes an unusual combination is the beginning of original work.

THE EXPERIMENT

01. List five interests or qualities that rarely share the same résumé.
02. Connect two to invent a project, gift, question or experiment.
03. Identify one label you want to hold more lightly.

QUESTION TO KEEP: Which surprising combination feels alive to me?

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04 / THE CRINGE TAX

MAKE IT. THEN REVISE.

An expression that feels awkward is not automatically bad. Some discomfort comes from learning a new craft or showing a part of yourself. Other discomfort is valuable feedback that a joke, claim, or performance harms the room.

Distinguish the two. You can revise technique and respect boundaries without deleting playfulness.

THE EXPERIMENT

- 01.** Write a deliberately over-the-top one-line introduction for yourself.
- 02.** Rewrite it using one concrete image and less self-promotion.
- 03.** Choose the version that is truer, funnier, or simply more worth sharing.

QUESTION TO KEEP: Is the awkwardness asking me to improve the craft—or erase the attempt?

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05 / THE FOUR-BAR INVENTORY

LET YOUR OWN WORDS TALK.

A short spoken-word structure can move an idea out of the fog and onto the page. This exercise does not claim mastery of rap or the lived experience behind its cultural history.

Borrow the discipline of specificity: concrete scenes, honest verbs, and room for revision. You can write a fictional character instead of your own story.

THE EXPERIMENT

- 01.** Line one: “I come from...” — a place, sound, habit, or scene.
- 02.** Line two: “I carry...” — something not easily visible.
- 03.** Line three: “I refuse to trade...” — a boundary or principle.
- 04.** Line four: “Not complete. Still here. Still composing.”

QUESTION TO KEEP: Read it aloud once. Which verb deserves a rewrite?

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06 / LEAVE ROOM FOR OTHERS

MAIN CHARACTER ≠ ONLY CHARACTER.

Expression and reciprocity can coexist. A strong sense of self is not permission to assume that everyone else wants the same teasing, attention, or emotional intensity.

The other person's behaviour matters more than a story we invent about their intentions. Confidence can ask a question and hear the reply.

THE EXPERIMENT

- 01.** Recall someone who made you feel included without centering themselves.
- 02.** Describe the observable action; avoid guessing the hidden motive.
- 03.** Try an equivalent practice: invite, ask, pause, credit, or make space.

QUESTION TO KEEP: Does my self-expression leave oxygen for someone else?

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07 / MAKE A V2

A LIFE IS NOT A FINAL CUT.

An experiment can be worth making without being worth monetising, ranking or posting. Personal style can change, and past versions can remain fond memories instead of governing laws.

An honest archive includes attempts, imperfections and choices not to publish. The reward can be the making itself.

THE EXPERIMENT

- 01.** Make a small artifact: card, scent sketch, verse, photo, paragraph or gift.
- 02.** Name one quality that works and one thing worth revising.
- 03.** Keep it private, share it by choice, or discard it without guilt.

QUESTION TO KEEP: Did creating this feel worthwhile before anyone reacted?

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08 / CONTEXT & SOURCES

GO FURTHER. KEEP ASKING.

Erving Goffman (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor text for examining impression management and ordinary social roles.

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2000). “The ‘What’ and ‘Why’ of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior.” *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. DOI: 10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01. A conceptual framework for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986). “Possible Selves.” *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954–969. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954. A perspective on the selves people imagine—not a forecasting instrument.

Tricia Rose (1994). *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Wesleyan University Press. For grounding the culture and politics of hip-hop beyond personal style.

EXPLORE RELATED WORLDS

sahiltayal.com — original atlas of identity, hip-hop, scent and creative experiments.

sahilverse.online — paths across research, writing and interactive worlds.

sahiltayal.online — a very unserious alternate entrance.

**A life you enjoy need not become an achievement.
Keep the good bits. Revise the other bits.**