

FROM SIGNAL TO SOURCE

A Repeatable Agent Workflow for Turning Live Conversations into Research-Grounded Articles

Capture → Thesis → Deep Research → Challenge → Refine → Draft → Publish → Distribute

What this is

A platform-agnostic workflow you can run with one capable agent in sequential modes or with a small multi-agent team. It is designed for situations where a comment, conversation, observation, or live signal contains the seed of a substantive public article.

Core design principle

Do not let the agent jump from “interesting idea” to “finished article.” Each stage creates a bounded artifact, and each gate must pass before the next stage begins.

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OVERVIEW

What this workflow solves

A way to preserve the energy of a live idea without sacrificing research discipline.

Good article ideas often arrive before they are ready to be articles. They show up in a comment thread, a conversation, an argument, a note, a question, or a pattern that suddenly becomes visible.

The failure mode is familiar: an agent immediately writes polished prose around the first interpretation. The result can sound convincing while mixing observation, inference, theory, and evidence into one undifferentiated block.

This workflow deliberately inserts mediation stages between signal and publication. Each stage has a different job, a different output, and a different quality gate.

The pipeline

Live signal → portable thesis → research specification → evidence map → adversarial review → theory update → article architecture → grounded draft → publication placement → distribution rollout

The aim is not to slow writing down for its own sake. The aim is to make sure the final public claim is stronger than the first intuition while preserving what made the intuition worth pursuing.

USE THIS WORKFLOW WHEN

- A conversation contains a generalizable pattern that seems bigger than the immediate context.
- You want a public article that can survive skeptical readers, not just agree with sympathetic ones.
- The idea crosses domains and needs historical, philosophical, scientific, legal, or institutional grounding.
- You want the final piece to distinguish established sources from your own synthesis or newly proposed framework terms.
- You want publication and social distribution to be part of the same governed process rather than an afterthought.

DO NOT USE IT WHEN

- You only need a quick personal reflection or opinion post.
- The material is purely creative and does not depend on factual substantiation.
- The source signal is too thin to support a meaningful thesis yet.

SYSTEM MAP

The eight-agent pipeline

One workflow, eight bounded roles. A single model can execute them sequentially, but it should not collapse them.

1	Signal Miner	Extracts the live pattern without overgeneralizing.
2	Thesis Architect	Turns the pattern into a testable portable claim.
3	Research Director	Builds the deep-research specification and source plan.
4	Evidence Auditor	Checks what the research actually supports and where it is weak.
5	Theory Refiner	Updates the original theory in response to the evidence.
6	Article Builder	Writes the public article with claim boundaries intact.
7	Publication Architect	Places and packages the article in the correct site lane.
8	Distribution Agent	Creates platform-native rollout posts from the article.

The important distinction is between role separation and tool separation. You do not need eight different AI products. You need the eight responsibilities to remain conceptually separate so one stage does not silently authorize itself to perform the next.

Invariant

Every stage must pass forward both its output and its uncertainty. A later agent may refine an earlier conclusion; it may not erase the fact that the earlier conclusion was provisional.

AGENT 1

Signal Miner

Capture the portable structure hiding inside the live encounter.

Trigger

A comment, thread, meeting, debate, observation, user interview, field note, or unexpected reaction feels like it contains a larger pattern.

INPUTS

- Raw conversation or notes
- Immediate context: who said what and why it mattered
- Any prior concepts already relevant to the pattern

AGENT ACTIONS

1. Describe the concrete encounter before abstracting it.
2. Identify the smallest generalizable pattern that survives outside the original setting.
3. Separate what was observed from what is inferred.
4. Generate 2–4 candidate thesis statements at different levels of abstraction.
5. Identify which domain-specific details should remain examples rather than become universal claims.

Gate before advancing

Do not advance if the “thesis” is merely a restatement of the original anecdote or if it requires assuming motives that are not evidenced.

Required output

A one-page signal brief: encounter, observed pattern, candidate thesis, uncertainty, and why the idea might travel.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Analyze the following live signal as a Signal Miner. Start with the concrete encounter. Extract the smallest portable structural pattern without treating the anecdote as proof of a general rule. Separate observation from inference. Produce: (1) encounter summary, (2) observed mechanism, (3) 2–4 candidate theses, (4) assumptions and unknowns, and (5) what would need research before publication. Do not draft the article yet.

AGENT 2

Thesis Architect

Convert the interesting pattern into a claim that can be challenged, researched, and refined.

Trigger

The signal brief contains a pattern that appears portable beyond the original encounter.

INPUTS

- Signal brief
- Candidate thesis statements
- Any existing conceptual grammar or framework the author uses

AGENT ACTIONS

6. Choose the narrowest thesis that still explains the interesting pattern.
7. Define key terms before using them normatively.
8. Write the strongest plausible counter-thesis.
9. Specify boundary conditions and known exceptions.
10. Turn the thesis into 5–10 research questions that could prove, refine, or defeat it.
11. Mark any new language as proposed terminology rather than established academic vocabulary.

Gate before advancing

The thesis must be falsifiable enough that research could force a revision. If every possible finding confirms it, it is too vague.

Required output

A thesis card containing: central claim, definitions, counter-thesis, boundary conditions, research questions, and proposed framework terms.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as a Thesis Architect. Using the signal brief, formulate a portable thesis that can be tested rather than merely admired. Define the key terms, give the strongest counter-thesis, identify boundary conditions and exceptions, and produce research questions designed to challenge the thesis. Explicitly label any original framework terms as proposed language. Do not assume the original intuition is correct.

AGENT 3

Research Director

Design the evidence hunt before the prose hardens around the theory.

Trigger

A thesis exists, but the evidence base has not yet been assembled.

INPUTS

- Thesis card
- Domains implicated by the claim
- Desired article depth and audience

AGENT ACTIONS

12. Map the disciplines that have studied analogous questions.
13. Prioritize primary sources, peer-reviewed work, university-press books, law/policy texts, official reports, and high-quality historical scholarship.
14. Search for positive cases, failure cases, counterexamples, and legitimate exceptions.
15. Require a citation ledger and example ledger.
16. Ask the research process to distinguish established concepts from structural analogies.
17. Tell the researcher to modify the framework if the evidence demands it.

Gate before advancing

The research prompt must contain a disconfirmation path. If it only asks for sources that support the thesis, rewrite it.

Required output

A copy-paste deep research specification with source hierarchy, questions, counterarguments, output tables, and a final direct analytical question.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as a Research Director. Turn the thesis card into a deep-research specification. Require primary and scholarly sources where possible; positive and negative cases; strongest counterarguments; legitimate exceptions; a citation ledger; an example ledger; and explicit evaluation of whether the framework survives. The goal is not confirmation. The goal is a research foundation strong enough to change the theory before publication.

AGENT 4

Evidence Auditor

Interrogate the research report before it becomes the article's authority layer.

Trigger

Deep research has returned a report, source list, examples, and conclusions.

INPUTS

- Completed research report
- Original thesis card
- Citation and example ledgers

AGENT ACTIONS

18. Identify the strongest findings that genuinely survive across sources.
19. Flag weak sourcing, unsourced examples, citation gaps, false equivalences, and overgeneralizations.
20. Separate primary-source facts, scholarly consensus, contested interpretation, and author synthesis.
21. Check whether quotes are actually verified and whether sources support the exact claim attached to them.
22. Look for domains where the analogy breaks.
23. List claims that should be retained, softened, reframed, or removed.

Gate before advancing

Do not allow a polished research report to substitute for source quality. A confident sentence with a weak source is still weak.

Required output

An editorial evidence memo: strongest support, weak points, overreach, source problems, counterexamples, and publication-safe claims.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as a critical Evidence Auditor. Review the research report against the original thesis. Identify what is strongly supported, weakly supported, contested, or unsupported. Flag citation and attribution problems, weak examples, false equivalences, and places where the analogy breaks. Produce a retain/revise/remove list and a concise statement of what the evidence actually permits the author to claim.

AGENT 5

Theory Refiner

Let the evidence change the model before the model changes the reader.

Trigger

The research has been audited and the original thesis can now be compared to the evidence.

INPUTS

- Original thesis card
- Evidence audit memo
- Research report

AGENT ACTIONS

24. State which parts of the original theory survived unchanged.
25. Identify variables the original model collapsed together.
26. Add necessary distinctions, boundary conditions, and exceptions.
27. Rename or replace tests that overclaimed.
28. Write the smallest formal model that captures the updated theory.
29. Produce a before/after theory comparison in plain language.

Gate before advancing

The updated theory must explain at least one case that the original theory handled poorly. Otherwise the research has not materially informed the model.

Required output

A theory update memo with revised definitions, equations/logic if useful, tests, exceptions, and a one-sentence central claim.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as a Theory Refiner. Compare the original framework with the audited research. Preserve what survived, but explicitly revise what did not. Separate outcome quality, capability, authorization, authority, goal ownership, consent, necessity, proportionality, and accountability when relevant. Produce: (1) what changed, (2) why it changed, (3) the refined model, (4) renamed or revised diagnostics, and (5) a one-sentence claim that is strong but publication-safe.

AGENT 6

Article Builder

Turn the refined theory into a readable public argument without flattening the evidence boundaries.

Trigger

The theory has been updated and the publication-safe claims are known.

INPUTS

- Theory update memo
- Evidence audit memo
- Verified sources
- Author voice and audience

AGENT ACTIONS

30. Open with the human problem or live question, not a literature review.
31. Introduce the structural model only after the reader understands the stakes.
32. Use cross-domain examples to demonstrate recurrence, not to claim equivalence.
33. State exceptions before critics have to supply them.
34. Mark original analytical terms as working formulations when they are not standard academic terms.
35. Place sources close to the claims they support.
36. End with a practical diagnostic or question the reader can use.

Gate before advancing

Every major factual claim should be traceable to a source, and every original synthesis should be recognizable as synthesis rather than inherited authority.

Required output

A web-ready long-form article with title, subtitle, central claim, section architecture, bounded examples, references, and a final diagnostic.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as an Article Builder. Write a public-facing long-form article from the refined theory and audited evidence. Preserve the author's voice, but keep research boundaries explicit. Do not present proposed framework terms as standardized scholarship. Use examples to reveal structure without creating false equivalence. Include legitimate exceptions and counterarguments. End with the clearest answer to the central question and a concise references section.

AGENT 7

Publication Architect

Make the article belong to the site rather than merely exist on it.

Trigger

The article is final and needs a canonical public home.

INPUTS

- Final article
- Current site architecture
- Existing article/essay/research boundaries
- SEO and metadata conventions

AGENT ACTIONS

37. Inspect the existing site before choosing a location.
38. Classify the piece by the site's own publication rules rather than by title or length alone.
39. Reuse the existing article template and navigation patterns.
40. Create canonical metadata, Article schema, social metadata, and publication date.
41. Add the piece to the appropriate index in chronological order.
42. Update the sitemap or discovery structure if the site uses one.
43. Avoid inventing a new homepage rule merely because the article is new.

Gate before advancing

Publication is not complete until the article is reachable through the site's existing information architecture and its canonical URL is represented in the discovery layer.

Required output

A published canonical page plus any required index, sitemap, metadata, and navigation updates.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as a Publication Architect. First inspect the current site structure and existing content boundaries. Decide where this article belongs based on those rules. Then package it using the existing template, canonical URL pattern, metadata, structured data, navigation, index ordering, and sitemap conventions. Make the smallest coherent set of site changes. Do not create a new homepage rule unless the existing architecture requires it.

AGENT 8

Distribution Agent

Translate one canonical article into platform-native invitations to read it.

Trigger

The canonical article is live and has a stable URL.

INPUTS

- Final article
- Canonical URL
- Target platforms
- Author's tone

AGENT ACTIONS

44. Extract 3–5 independently interesting hooks from the article.
45. Match post length and cadence to each platform.
46. Do not turn every platform into the same shortened LinkedIn post.
47. Preserve one memorable conceptual line or formula where useful.
48. Link back to the canonical article.
49. Keep the post valuable enough to stand alone while leaving a reason to click.

Gate before advancing

The rollout must not introduce claims stronger than the article itself. Distribution copy inherits the article's evidence boundaries.

Required output

A platform-specific rollout set: Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Threads, and any other requested channels.

REUSABLE STAGE PROMPT

Act as a Distribution Agent. Create platform-native rollout posts from the final article. Preserve the article's claim boundaries and do not add unsupported certainty. For each platform, choose a hook suited to its culture and length. Make each post useful on its own, then point back to the canonical article. Avoid copy-pasting the same paragraph everywhere.

GOVERNANCE

The six gates that keep the workflow honest

These are the non-negotiable checks between “interesting” and “publishable.”

G1 — Signal / Thesis

Can the thesis be stated without pretending the anecdote proves it?

G2 — Thesis / Research

Could the research plausibly falsify or materially revise the thesis?

G3 — Research / Theory

Are strong sources distinguishable from weak examples and analogies?

G4 — Theory / Draft

Did the theory actually change in response to evidence, or did the evidence merely decorate it?

G5 — Draft / Publication

Can readers tell the difference between sourced fact, contested interpretation, and original synthesis?

G6 — Publication / Distribution

Does every rollout post stay inside the article’s claim boundary?

CLAIM LABELS THAT REDUCE ACCIDENTAL OVERREACH

- Established: directly grounded in a reliable source or well-supported literature.
- Contested: credible sources disagree or the interpretation is materially debated.
- Synthesis: your cross-source inference; sources support the pieces, but the combined claim is yours.
- Proposed framework: a new diagnostic, term, model, or formalization introduced by the author.
- Illustrative: an example that makes the structure visible but should not carry the argument by itself.

Rule of thumb

If the article would collapse when one vivid anecdote is removed, the research base is probably too weak.

AUTOMATION

Master orchestrator prompt

Use this when you want one agent to run the full workflow sequentially without collapsing the stages.

You are the orchestrator for a governed Signal-to-Source article pipeline.

Your job is to move a live idea through eight bounded stages:

1. Signal Miner
2. Thesis Architect
3. Research Director
4. Evidence Auditor
5. Theory Refiner
6. Article Builder
7. Publication Architect
8. Distribution Agent

Operating rules:

- Never jump directly from raw signal to final article when factual substantiation is required.
- Preserve uncertainty and disagreements from one stage to the next.
- Separate observation, inference, established evidence, contested interpretation, synthesis, and proposed framework terms.
- Research must include a disconfirmation path, strong counterarguments, and legitimate exceptions.
- A research report is not automatically authoritative; audit source quality and claim fit before theory refinement.
- Let evidence change the theory. State explicitly what changed.
- During drafting, use cross-domain examples to show structural recurrence without implying false equivalence.
- During publication, inspect the existing site architecture before deciding placement.
- During distribution, never make a stronger claim than the canonical article.
- At the end of every stage, output: STATUS, ARTIFACT, UNCERTAINTIES, GATE CHECK, NEXT AUTHORIZED STAGE.
- If a gate fails, stop and repair that stage instead of advancing.

Start with the material I provide and execute only Stage 1 unless I explicitly authorize a full run.

SUGGESTED MACHINE-READABLE STAGE ENVELOPE

STATUS: pass | revise | blocked
STAGE: 1-8
ARTIFACT: <stage output>
CLAIM_CLASSES: [established, contested, synthesis, proposed, illustrative]
UNCERTAINTIES: [...]
GATE_CHECK: <why it passes or fails>
NEXT_AUTHORIZED_STAGE: <stage number or none>

One-page operating checklist

Print this page or keep it beside the agent run.

☐	1. Capture	Preserve the raw signal and enough context to reconstruct what happened.
☐	2. Distill	Extract the portable pattern; separate observation from inference.
☐	3. Frame	Define a falsifiable thesis, counter-thesis, terms, and boundaries.
☐	4. Specify	Write the deep-research specification before drafting prose.
☐	5. Research	Gather strong sources, positive/negative cases, exceptions, and counterarguments.
☐	6. Audit	Check source quality, quote fit, analogies, and unsupported claims.
☐	7. Update	State exactly how the evidence changed the theory.
☐	8. Draft	Write from the refined theory, not the original intuition.
☐	9. Bound	Label original terminology and keep examples inside evidentiary limits.
☐	10. Place	Use the site's existing publication boundary and information architecture.
☐	11. Publish	Canonical page, metadata, index, sitemap/discovery, final QA.
☐	12. Roll out	Create platform-native posts inside the article's claim boundary.
☐	13. Archive	Store the full artifact chain for reuse and provenance.

WORKED EXAMPLE

How one conversation becomes a defensible article

The point is the transformation chain, not the topic itself.

A live discussion begins with a practical observation from someone doing organizing work: the organizer should create conditions in which workers can organize themselves rather than become the permanent authoritative actor.

INITIAL ABSTRACTION

Worker₀ → resources / knowledge / coordination → Worker₁

The first interpretation is attractive but incomplete: “good mediation increases agency.” Instead of publishing that line immediately, the workflow asks what would have to be true for it to survive medicine, education, disability rights, public administration, organizational power, and legitimate emergency intervention.

Deep research then introduces distinctions the initial model lacked. Capability can increase even when a transformation is unauthorized. Expertise about means does not automatically confer authority over ends. Some mediation is permanently useful, so “the mediator should disappear” is too strong.

REFINED DISTINCTION

Knowledge(Mediator) > Knowledge(Principal)

DOES NOT IMPLY

Authority(Mediator) > Authority(Principal)

The theory is revised before drafting. The resulting article can now distinguish capability, authorization, goal ownership, necessity, proportionality, contestability, and dependency instead of treating “more agency” as the sole test.

Result

The final public article is not the original comment expanded to 2,000 words. It is a researched transformation of the original intuition, with the changes made by evidence visible in the argument itself.

Worked example: brendonrcoleman.com/articles/when-help-becomes-control/

PACKAGING

How to turn this into an agent product

The workflow is useful as a free guide, a reusable prompt pack, or the operating spine of a small research agent.

THREE PACKAGING LEVELS

Level 1 — PDF playbook

Give readers the workflow, gates, stage prompts, and run sheet. They execute the stages manually in their AI tool of choice.

Level 2 — Prompt pack

Provide one master orchestrator prompt plus eight stage prompts as copy-paste files. Add example input/output envelopes.

Level 3 — Stateful agent

Implement stage state, artifacts, gates, source records, and explicit next-stage authorization in software. The agent maintains the evidence chain automatically.

MINIMUM STATE TO PRESERVE BETWEEN STAGES

- Raw source signal and context
- Current thesis version
- Research specification
- Source/citation ledger
- Evidence audit memo
- Theory change log
- Canonical article draft/version
- Publication URL and metadata
- Distribution copy and platform status

Product boundary

This workflow does not guarantee factual accuracy simply because an agent followed the stages. It creates places where source quality, uncertainty, counterevidence, and human editorial judgment can be inspected before publication.

PRINCIPLE

The workflow is itself a mediation system

The agent should increase the author's capacity without quietly becoming the author.

The best research agent does not replace authorship. It changes the conditions under which better authorship becomes possible.

That is why the process matters as much as the prompts. A capable model can research, synthesize, draft, publish, and distribute. The workflow keeps those capabilities from collapsing into one unreviewed act.

Signal-to-Source treats each transformation as its own state change. The agent can propose the next state, but the evidence and the stage gate determine whether the transition is legitimate.

CANONICAL CHAIN

Signal → Thesis → Evidence → Refined Theory → Article → Canonical Publication → Distribution

Used this way, the workflow becomes more than a writing template. It becomes a small governance architecture for turning live thought into public knowledge without losing provenance along the way.

Takeaway

Capture the spark quickly. Generalize carefully. Research adversarially. Let evidence change the theory. Publish canonically. Distribute without overclaiming.