

The Portable Method

Six steps for applying the Theory of Embedded Intelligence to any topic.

Companion to the essay *The Portable Method*. Two sides, one sheet. Free to copy, post, and hand out — no attribution required in your finished work.

1 Name the system

Draw a boundary in one sentence. Not the field — the system. Not *ecology* but this estuary; not *constitutional law* but this court deciding this class of case. Most confused applications of TEI go wrong right here.

- *What exactly am I studying, and where does it end?*

2 State the standard rendering

What the discipline says, in its own vocabulary, well enough that a practitioner would nod and not wince. Cite it. TEI is a lens, not a shortcut — it cannot compensate for not knowing the material.

- *Would an expert wince at this?*

3 Map the SPCA cycle

Where does it Sense? Process? Communicate, and to whom? Actuate — what does it actually do? And where is Memory: what is retained, in what substrate, for how long? Half a page.

- *Four phases and a memory — in plain words.*

4 Apply the Relabeling Test

The step that decides whether the map was worth writing — see the box below. Most first passes fail it. Failing is normal, and is not a judgment of your ability.

- *Did this make anything checkable?*

5 Find the seam

A phase the field under-describes; a handoff assumed rather than explained; or a cycle that never closes — actuation that never returns as sensing. Look for where the literature says *somehow* and moves on.

- *Where does the field's own vocabulary run out?*

6 Run the capture diagnostic, then actuate

Open or captured — by belief, addiction, money, power, ungoverned AI in a forming mind, inherited emotion, inherited drive? Ask of the system, then of the discipline that studies it — using the four questions overleaf. Then close your own cycle: publish, build, teach, change a practice.

- *Who benefits from this cycle staying closed?*

THE RELABELING TEST

After you finish the SPCA map, ask: did this tell me something I did not already know, that I can now go and check?

Yes — you have a result; pursue it. **No** — you have a translation; discard it and redraw the boundary at step 1.

A framework that cannot fail you cannot help you.

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FOUR QUESTIONS TO ASK OF ANY FIELD

Step six, asked one level up — of the discipline rather than of the system.

1. What is this field's embedded position? Every discipline speaks from somewhere.
2. What can it sense, and what lies outside its sensory range? Not what it has failed to study — what its methods structurally cannot register.
3. What does it take for granted that it might be wrong about?
4. What would it look like as an understanding system rather than a belief system? Would it revise, or defend?

Adapted from the closing invitation of *TEI and AI: A Framework for Worldwide Human Inquiry*.

PARTNER, NOT SUBSTITUTE

A processing partner argues with your rendering. A processing substitute supplies one. A partner leaves you more able to make the next judgment without it.

The test: close the window and defend your map out loud. If you cannot say why the boundary falls where it does, why that phase is the under-described one, and what would falsify the seam — the machine did the processing, whatever the transcript says.

Write your own map first, badly, on paper, before you ask any machine anything. Then ask the machine to attack it.

Use AI to widen Sense and to stress-test Communicate. Never to substitute for Process.

The full essay, the canonical knowledge bases, the twenty CEISS starting areas, and the Mensch Prize list: **TheMenschFoundation.org**

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Essay drafted in collaboration with Claude (Anthropic).

Offered in good faith as a serious application of the theory — not infallible scholarship.

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