

co·wonders



**6-word**  
**rule**

## 6-word rule

Written by: **Jorge Aguado Sánchez (Co.Wonders)**

### What is it about:

- building clarity and focus in communication
- breaking down communication barriers with a simple, yet deep, activity
- promoting self-awareness and creative storytelling

---

**source:** From the inspiration of Ernest Hemingway, writer, to Larry Smith, founder of SMITH Magazine.

---

**domains:** personal development, team building, creative storytelling and writing, icebreaker

### approach description:

The legends says Ernest Hemingway was challenged to write a story using only six words. He (supposedly) wrote: *"For sale: baby shoes, never worn.* This minimal and powerful story became a symbol of how much emotion and meaning can be set into just six words.

Some years later, Larry Smith, launched the Six-Word Memoir Project on SMITH Magazine. He invited people to share their own life stories in six words, transforming a narrative into a global storytelling movement.

This tool is a creative communication technique designed to bring self-expression, reflection and connection through storytelling. This method works by asking participants to summarize a story, experience, or identity in exactly six words. The challenge is to choose those words that represent the person while giving emotion and understanding.

It can be used in various topics or themes, from personal identity (*"Lost, found, grew stronger than ever"*), work role (*"Communicator in climate, activist in heart"*) or life philosophy (*"Dream big, act bigger, stay grounded"*).

# 6-word rule

## aim of use:

The 6-word-rule communication canvas can be applied in multiple spaces, from education to team-building or personal development. It brings a spark of challenge and creativity at the same time, while it helps participants to reflect on their life. It also builds on empathy and novelty, as it works on storytelling techniques to build relationships among participants.

---

## educational method:

- **Step 1: Introduction and theme choosing model**

Explain to participants the 6-word rule and the story behind it from Ernest Hemingway or Larry Smith.

Share some examples with them:

- "For sale: baby shoes, never worn."
- "Lost job, found passion, started over."

Ask them to put a theme in a piece of paper (e.g. "your life story", "work experience", "an important moment"), and gather them in a bowl.

- **Step 2: Individual reflection and sharing**

Ask participants to write their own 6-word-sentence based on the chosen theme.

Encourage them to focus on clarity, emotion, and storytelling.

Once done, pair participants with another person. They need to share the sentence and the meaning behind their words.

communication canvas



# 6-word rule

- **Step 3: Group sharing**

Welcome participants to share their 6-word-sentences with the whole group. This time only the sentence. Invite them to ask later for the story behind.

If you have time, pick another theme or topic, and go back to step 2.

- **Step 4: Debriefing**

- What was the most challenging part of this exercise?
- What word was the hardest to find? And the easiest?
- Did you learn something about yourself or others?
- How do 6 words capture complex stories? Is it possible?
- How can we use this tool in our daily life?

- **Step 5: Optional - The wall of sentences**

Create a wall where everyone's stories are displayed.

If you have time, you can even create a self-editing Zine! Ask some participant with drawing skills to make the front part of the zine and gift one to every person or scan them to give it digitally.

---

## read more:

- **Website:** Six-Word Memoirs by SMITH Magazine
- **Book:** Not quite what I was planning - Six-word memoirs. Larry Smith (2008)



**6-word rule**

**co·wonders**



Cofinanciado por  
la Unión Europea