

The Four Modes

A framework for working smarter with AI tools

75% of people are now using AI tools at work. But 60% of employees say they lack the skills to use them well*. Most advice about using AI focuses on tools and prompts - without addressing the real question: what are you actually trying to get done?

The Four Modes framework closes that gap. It breaks thinking into:

- Compression, when you're overwhelmed and need clarity.
- Expansion, when you're stuck and need options.
- Reflection, when you need to stress-test your own reasoning.
- Execution, when the thinking is done and you need it produced.

Each mode has distinct principles, common pitfalls, and example scenarios to help you apply it to your own work.

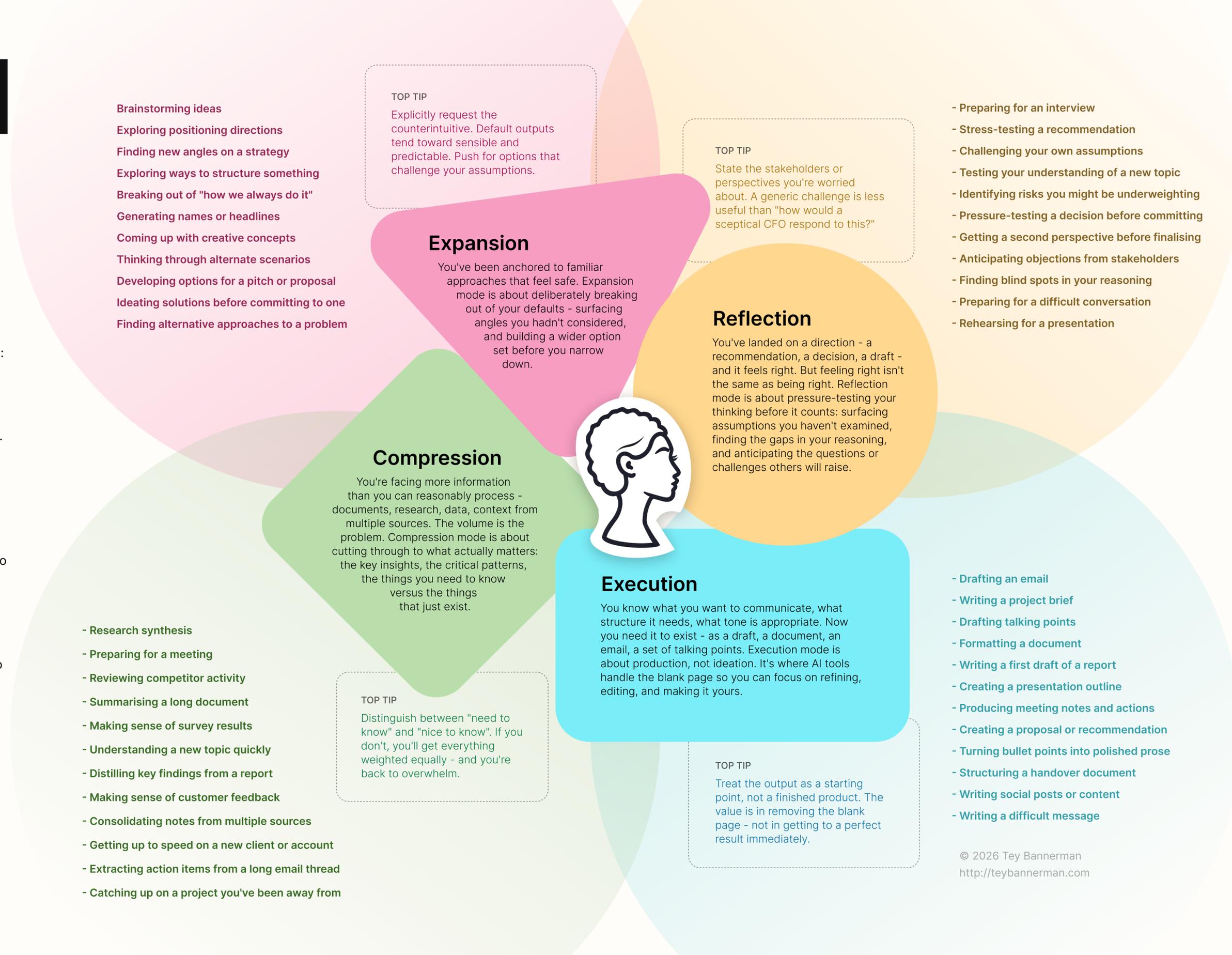
This framework emerged from hundreds of real conversations - workshops, coaching sessions, and questions from people trying to make AI tools actually useful. It draws on cognitive science research into how we process information, generate ideas, and make decisions.

It's designed to be simple enough to remember, specific enough to apply, and flexible enough to work across roles and industries.

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* Source: Microsoft 2025 Work Trend Index



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