

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES LOG

A paranormal investigation is theater—the good ol’ fashioned kind that comes out of rituals. When the rituals are collaborative, as they often are in, say, an EVP vigil, the theater is participatory as well, and everyone participates even when they have no lines. Participants want to compare notes, corroborate one another’s claims, and get in on social camaraderie of swapping anecdotes. They want to have their voices represented in the investigative procedures, hear and see themselves in the middle of the drama when they play back their recordings. This sort of theater is obviously not the sole domain of paranormal investigating. Everyone from astrophysicists studying dark matter, to fourth-graders making dry ice volcanoes for the science fair, experiences the drama of their activities in a subjectively impactful way.

The problem is, whenever the words “theater” and “paranormal” show up in the same sentence, “fakery” is the first thought to enter our minds—the kind of fakery that at one time in the history of our field used to mean a medium’s son-in-law hiding in the cabinet, waiting for his cue to *rap-rap-rap* on the door; or, the bunko of a tambourine levitating overhead while seancers struggle not to break the circle; or, the Abbott-and-Costello shenanigans of thirteen-year-olds who pull out the Ouija board and planchette themselves into histrionics. Sadly, these negative associations continue to hound us today and are why the theater of paranormal investigating gets such a bad “rap.” (Sorry. That was a terrible pun.)

Addressing this bias comes down to what you want to do with that theater of discovery. If you value the entertainment side of it, as is often the case with Ouija (*errrr*, because it’s a board game), then you’ve had your fun, and that’s okay. However, if you value the discovery side of it, then you’re obligated to put the theater of it to work, which includes taking stock of the quantitative and objective experiences alongside the qualitative and subjective ones. In fact, systematic self-observation is a critical component of all empirical study, including science-based paranormal investigating. Self-observation occurs whenever you report aloud a tactile sensation, a breeze on your skin, feelings of gloom, a “thickening” of the air, a pall of darkness, a voice spoken softly in your ear, or any other heart-quickenning intrigue. (Of course, it’s just as valuable to learn that someone else at

the time is or isn’t having the same personal experience as you.)

Announcing personal experiences is the flip side to meta-surveillance: just as it’s important to have someone monitoring the DVR or logging noises from outside that might contaminate what’s going on inside, it’s also valuable for investigators to monitor and report what’s happening to them physically, internally, psychologically, and emotionally. For instance, a very common report during paranormal investigations, particularly after the midnight hour, is the sensation of something brushing against the tiny hairs (or maybe not-so-tiny hairs) on the back of the arms. In most cases, it means the temperature outside has reached dew point—a correlation that could not have been made if either one of those, meta-surveillance or self-observation, were overlooked. Happily, the cameras and recorders we employ in hopes of capturing potential evidence also serve to document in real time our moments of self-observation, which can be transcribed into media logs and later parsed for further analysis.

But, depending on your investigative style and philosophy, subsequent media review might play only a limited role—maybe even no roll at all—denying you a record of those experiences. Perhaps, as a matter of practice, you don’t use recording equipment, preferring instead the intuitive, metaphysical approach to a gizmo-reliant empirical approach. Maybe you’re looking for cathartic self-reflection, or wish to journal certain experiences you weren’t otherwise comfortable sharing in front of others. Under these circumstances, you need a method other than A/V recordings to document and collate the datum of self-observation. You need a personal experiences log.

Although its research value to your group may vary depending on how objective your methodologies are, the log’s design is similar to media review logs, only with greater emphasis on descriptive-narrative content. If you and your group perform outreach services for clients, then you may wish to include selected entries from your team members’ logs to supplement or corroborate findings in the final case report. Regardless, whether you use it as a diary of self-reflection in which to chronicle your paranormal intrigues, or as a research protocol of self-observation in which to record your subjective experiences, you’ll find this particular log a useful and adaptable template.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

CASE NO:

NAME:

DATE (IF DIFFERENT FROM THE CASE NUMBER).

<i>time</i>	<i>location</i>	<i>Initials of those present</i>	<i>description</i>