

Three Levels of Your Idea

Describe your idea at three levels of specificity — from the concrete thing you built to the general principle behind it. A free worksheet for inventors.

An articulation exercise: describe your invention at three levels of abstraction so you can separate what you literally built from what your invention really is. This is product thinking, not legal advice.

The Three Levels

Idea Name

A short, plain-language name for the idea you're describing.

1. Specific Implementation

The most concrete version: what you actually built or sketched. Specific numbers, materials, code, components, environments — the thing that exists, or the thing you'd ship today.

2. What It Does

One step broader: what does the invention DO for a user, without committing to a specific implementation? The function, not the form. Strip the specifics above and see what's left.

3. The General Principle

The broadest defensible version: the underlying idea that holds at the most general level — the pattern someone else might apply differently while still being your invention.

Which Level Matters Most?

Which level is the real value: the specific implementation (this is what I'm shipping) / what it does (the function is the value) / the general principle (the idea is the value) / all three equally? No wrong answer; it orients the conversation.

Before You Rely On This

Disclaimer (subject to final review by IP counsel). This template is used solely to document, organize, and describe a technical idea. It and any output are for informational and technical-documentation purposes only and are not a substitute for advice from qualified intellectual property counsel. Use of this template does not constitute legal services or legal, patent, patentability, inventorship, ownership, claim-drafting, filing-strategy, deadline, or freedom-to-operate advice, and does not create an attorney-client relationship with Obviously Not. Intellectual-property protection can be time-sensitive: public disclosure, product release, open-source publication, sale, offer for sale, demo, or other external sharing may affect available rights. You are solely responsible for promptly consulting qualified intellectual property counsel about any legal or IP issue.