



# The Feel Factor<sup>®</sup>

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Prepared for SkincareLab  
Project SkinSync App

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## Introduction

Skincare is personal in a way most product categories are not. It sits at the intersection of health, appearance, and self-image, and the people who use SkinSync will arrive carrying more than a list of products. They will arrive with hope, mild scepticism, and a quiet anxiety about whether anything will actually change. That emotional reality is not a peripheral consideration. It is the design brief.

The Feel Factor Framework exists to make those emotional stakes visible, and to translate them into decisions. Not tone-of-voice decisions or colour palette decisions, but structural ones: what a user encounters first, what the product asks of them and when, how it handles the moments where progress is slow or results are unclear. The framework emerged from a series of workshop exercises and structured conversations between the SkincareLab team and We Are Affective. What surfaced was not a set of aspirations about how the product should feel. It was a clear-eyed picture of how it currently risks feeling, and what needs to change.

The framework maps those findings across three layers of the user experience. The first covers the opening sixty seconds, what a user feels before they have committed to anything. The second covers the journey, how the emotional experience holds or fragments as the habit takes shape over days and weeks. The third covers identity, how a user feels about themselves after using the product over time, and whether SkinSync has shifted something real. Each layer carries its own risks and its own opportunities. The sections that follow address all three.

## What It Currently Feels Like

There is a version of SkinSync that works. The routine builder is functional, the tracking logic is sound, and the core habit loop is genuinely well-considered. The product does what it says. What has not yet been built is the emotional architecture that makes a user feel something when they use it, something beyond the mild satisfaction of ticking a box.

That gap is not a flaw in the product concept. It is simply the natural state of a digital product before the emotional layer has been designed with intention. The workshop exercises made this visible quickly. SkinSync has the structural conditions for a meaningful daily habit. What it does not yet have is the connective tissue that turns a functional interaction into a felt one.

Layer	Current Experience	Emotional Quality
First Impression	User is asked to set up a routine before understanding what the app offers them	Overwhelmed, uncertain, mildly transactional
The Journey	Logging becomes repetitive; setbacks read as failure; progress is not made visible early enough	Anxious, under-rewarded, gradually disengaged

Layer	Current Experience	Emotional Quality
Identity Transformation	User finishes a session having logged data but without any sense of what it means for them	Unsure, passive, lacking confidence in their own skin knowledge

What the workshops surfaced, consistently, was a user who arrives with genuine curiosity and a fair amount of openness. They are not hostile. They want this to work. The Aspiration Gap exercise named the emotional context well: curiosity about whether this app will actually help, a little self-consciousness about having a skin concern at all, and mild scepticism born from previous products that promised more than they delivered. That is a generous starting point. The product has goodwill to work with.

The problem is what happens next. The First 60 Seconds exercise described the current first impression plainly: a bit overwhelmed, asked to set up a routine before they have worked out what it is for, feeling like homework rather than help. And the Heartbreak Scale confirmed that trust is low, sitting at two out of five, not because the product has done anything wrong, but because it has not yet done anything to earn it. Users arrive open and leave, if not disappointed, then simply unaffected. That is the starting point. It is also the opportunity.

## The Three Layers

The three layers are not stages that follow each other in sequence. They compound. What a user feels in the first sixty seconds shapes what they are willing to tolerate in week two. What week two feels like determines whether they are still present for the moment, somewhere in month one, when the product finally has enough data to tell them something true about their own skin. Designing one layer without considering the others is how products end up functional but forgettable.

For SkinSync, the First Impression layer is about relief more than information. Users arrive, as the workshop exercises made clear, carrying genuine curiosity and a fair amount of self-consciousness. Skin is personal. The first sixty seconds need to honour that, not with sentiment, but with simplicity. An experience that gets out of the way, asks one useful question, and shows something immediately relevant does more for trust than any amount of onboarding copy. The question is not what the product can communicate in that window. It is what the user can feel.

The Journey layer is where most apps lose people, and where SkinSync faces its most specific risk. Skin takes weeks to respond. The product cannot manufacture progress that does not exist, and it should not try. What it can do is make the slow middle feel purposeful rather than empty, surface small signals before the big ones arrive, and handle setbacks with the kind of language that frames them as information rather than failure. The Identity Transformation layer follows from that. If the journey has been handled well, the user who reaches month one does not just have a log of their routine. They have a genuinely different relationship with their own skin. That shift, from confused and reactive to

## Layer 1: First Impression

The first sixty seconds of SkinSync currently ask too much. Before a user has seen anything that feels relevant to them, they are being asked to configure. Products to log. Routine steps to define. Decisions to make about a process they have not yet understood. The experience opens in the mode of a form rather than a conversation, and the emotional effect is immediate: mild overwhelm, mild deflation, and a quiet question forming in the back of the mind about whether this is going to be worth the effort.

That is not an uncommon opening for a product in this category. It is, however, a missed opportunity in a category where the person arriving is already carrying something. The Aspiration Gap exercise named the emotional context with some precision. Users come to SkinSync with curiosity about whether this app will actually help, self-consciousness about admitting they have a skin concern, mild scepticism from previous products that did not deliver, and a little impatience. They want quick value, not a long setup. What the current experience offers them instead is homework.

The First 60 Seconds exercise drew a direct comparison. Headspace was named as a product that got this right: first open, it asks how you are feeling, surfaces a simple breathing animation, and communicates in seconds that it is a calm and considered tool. MyFitnessPal was named as the counterexample, a product that opens straight into a paywall and a lengthy signup form before showing anything useful. The current SkinSync opening sits closer to the second model than the first. That is the gap.

### **Desired feeling**

Relief. Not excitement, not aspiration, not a promise of transformation. Just the quiet, immediate sense that the app already understands something true about why the user is here, and is going to make the next step obvious rather than effortful.

The emotional shift required is specific. Users arrive feeling a mixture of hope and uncertainty. Skin is personal and tied to confidence, and there is a low-level vulnerability in opening an app that asks you to examine and track your face. The first sixty seconds need to absorb that vulnerability rather than amplify it. That means one clear question, not a form. One visible next step, not a dashboard of empty widgets. The feeling of being met, rather than processed.

The Aspiration Gap exercise described the desired end state precisely: from self-conscious to comfortable, from confusion to clarity. Those shifts do not happen over months. The conditions for them are set in the first sixty seconds. If the opening experience signals warmth, simplicity, and immediate relevance, users arrive at their first routine feeling guided. If it signals complexity and obligation, they arrive already wondering whether they will come back tomorrow.

### **What the workshops told us**

The First 60 Seconds exercise produced the clearest picture of what needs to change. Participants described the current first impression as feeling like being asked to set up a routine before they had even worked out what it was for. The language used was revealing: homework, not help. That distinction is worth sitting with. Help implies the product is doing something for the user. Homework implies the user is doing something for the product. The current opening reads as the latter.

The exercise also named what the first sixty seconds should feel like instead: relief, like the app already gets their skin type and just wants to help, not interrogate them. The design decisions generated in that session were direct. Skip signup. Ask skin type first. Pre-fill a starter routine. Show one clear "today's routine" screen rather than a dashboard. Use calm visuals. Delay account creation until after first use. Each of those decisions points back to the same principle: remove every obstacle between the user and their first moment of genuine value.

The Heartbreak Scale added important context. Trust opened at two out of five, a score that reflects not hostility but the absence of any reason to believe yet. The trust deficit is not the product's fault. It is simply what arrives with a new user who has tried things before. What the exercise identified as the fastest route to closing that gap was showing clear evidence behind any insight, letting users see their own data plainly with no exaggerated claims, and being upfront when there is not yet enough data to draw a conclusion. That honesty has to begin in the first sixty seconds, before there is any data at all. An opening experience that signals transparency and restraint earns more trust than one that oversells.

The Aspiration Gap exercise surfaced the internal dialogue present at first open with particular clarity. "Is this app actually going to understand my skin?" "Do I need to know all my products before I start?" "Is this going to be another thing I forget to use?" Those questions are not obstacles to overcome. They are the emotional reality of the person arriving. A well-designed first sixty seconds does not pretend those questions do not exist. It answers two or three of them quietly, through what it shows and what it does not ask for.

**Design decisions required**, Ask one question before anything else. Skin type, or how skin has been feeling lately, rather than opening with a product list or account creation. This signals immediately that the app is here to understand the user, not to process them., Pre-fill a starter routine based on the answer to that first question. Removing the blank-slate problem on day one eliminates the decision fatigue that causes people to close an app before they have used it. The user can edit and refine over time. The first session needs to feel easy, not comprehensive., Show a single "today" screen as the first real view. Not a dashboard, not a feature overview, not an empty progress tracker. One screen, one action, one clear next step. The visual architecture should communicate that SkinSync is a calm daily tool, not a complex system to be mastered., Use visuals and colour that match the emotional register of skincare. Soft, uncluttered, unhurried. The First 60 Seconds exercise was explicit that the tone should not feel like a productivity app. The aesthetic signals how the product expects to be used, and calm visuals invite calm habits., Delay account creation until after the first routine is complete. Asking for commitment before demonstrating value is the pattern that erodes trust before it has a chance to form. The user should experience the product's usefulness first. The account can follow.,

Set an honest expectation about pace in the onboarding moment. A single, plain line acknowledging that skin takes time to respond does more for long-term retention than any reassuring visual. It signals that SkinSync will not overpromise, and it begins the trust conversation in exactly the right register.

## Layer 2: The Journey

The middle stretch of SkinSync is where the emotional experience is most at risk. The first session has a natural energy to it, something new, a routine taking shape, a small sense of possibility. But that energy is not self-sustaining. By the end of week one, and certainly by week two, logging starts to feel like administration. The novelty has faded, visible progress has not yet arrived, and the user is left in a gap the product has not designed for.

The First 60 Seconds exercise named this moment directly. After a week or two, when the novelty fades, logging starts to feel like a chore and progress isn't visible yet, so motivation drops. That is not a behaviour problem on the user's part. It is a design problem. The product has not given them enough to feel between the beginning and the payoff.

What makes this stretch particularly fragile for SkinSync is the nature of the category. Skin takes time. Four to six weeks is a realistic minimum before most users will see anything they could point to. That timeline is honest, and it should be respected, but it creates a long window in which the product has to hold someone's attention without the evidence they came for. Right now, that window is largely empty. Check-ins arrive. Data accumulates. Nothing yet connects the effort to anything meaningful. And when a streak breaks, as it will, there is no language in place to reframe that as normal. It reads as failure, quietly, and that quiet reading is enough to make someone close the app and not come back.

The Heartbreak Scale scored anxiety at three out of five during the journey, with specific triggers named: seeing a breakout and assuming the routine is failing, feeling judged by a missed day, progress photos feeling exposing rather than helpful, and skin insights that read as flat data rather than something to feel good about. Those are not edge cases. They are the ordinary emotional texture of weeks two, three, and four for most users.

### **Desired feeling**

The emotional experience across the journey should feel like being accompanied through something that takes time, rather than left alone with a log. The shift is not dramatic. It does not require the product to manufacture enthusiasm or celebrate every micro-action. What it requires is a consistent sense that the effort is accumulating into something, that the product is paying attention even when results are not yet visible, and that when things get difficult or slow, SkinSync responds with steadiness rather than silence.

The Aspiration Gap exercise mapped the ideal emotional arc with clarity. Curious at first, then cautious while building the early habit, then reassured the first time an insight makes sense of something the user had already noticed, then encouraged, then gradually confident. That arc does not happen by accident. Each stage requires the product to do something specific: hold the user through

the cautious phase without losing them, surface the reassurance moment before they decide the app is not working, and give them something concrete to feel encouraged by before the big before-and-after proof arrives.

The desired feeling is not euphoria at any point. It is quiet momentum. The sense that understanding is building, that the user is learning something real about their own skin, and that the product is a reliable companion in that process rather than a tool they are managing.

### **What the workshops told us**

The Heartbreak Scale produced some of the clearest evidence about where the journey currently fails. Delight was scored at two out of five, but the exercise was careful to name where delight exists in potential: completing a streak feels small but satisfying, the first before-and-after photo comparison is a genuine "oh wow" moment, and a skin insight that matches how the user feels that day lands as something real. What was also named was what surrounds those moments. Daily check-ins feel routine instead of rewarding. Streaks have no real celebration when they hit a milestone. Insights read as flat data. There is no small surprise or personality in the day-to-day experience. The delight is there to be built on. It just has not been designed for yet.

The Aspiration Gap exercise identified the biggest single risk with directness: no visible progress in the first few weeks. If the user does not see or feel any change early on, they will assume the app is not working and quietly stop opening it. The exercise also named what could derail the journey beyond that: a streak break feeling like failure, too many notifications turning a calm habit into a nagging chore, skin insights delivered flatly when results are not improving, and comparison anxiety if results ever feel benchmarked against others. Those are not hypothetical risks. They are the specific emotional landmines the design needs to route around.

The Identity Shift exercise added important structural evidence. It identified that no clear link is currently drawn between actions and outcomes, so users log data without learning from it. Setbacks are treated the same as failures, with no reassurance built in. Insights are generic rather than personal, so they do not feel earned or specific. And there is no moment that marks progress, no threshold the user ever feels they have crossed. That last point matters beyond the identity layer. The absence of meaningful milestones in the journey is part of why the middle stretch feels empty. The product moves forward without ever acknowledging that the user has.

The First 60 Seconds exercise described the ideal week-by-week progression in terms worth returning to. Day one feels easy and guided. By week two, small wins show up: a streak, a "skin feels calmer" note, a photo comparison prompt. By month one, the user can see a real before-and-after and trusts the app's read on what is working. That is a coherent emotional architecture. The design decisions required to make it real are specific.

**Design decisions required**, Surface early positive signals before week two. The product should identify and surface small, honest observations in the first ten to fourteen days, not waiting for statistically significant trend data. Something as simple as noting consistency, or reflecting back what

the user has logged in plain language, gives them something to feel during the window before visible results arrive., Reframe streak breaks as information rather than failure. When a user misses a day, the language matters more than the mechanic. "Skin tracking works even on imperfect weeks" does more for retention than a broken-streak graphic. The Heartbreak Scale was explicit here: frame setbacks as data, not failure, and pair any negative reading with a next step., Build a milestone system that marks real thresholds, not just streaks. First week complete. First skin pattern identified. First month logged. First photo check-in. These are moments the product currently passes through without acknowledgement. Naming them gives the user something to feel proud of at a point in the journey where pride is hard to manufacture from results alone., Schedule photo check-ins at week two and week four rather than leaving them to the user's initiative. The First 60 Seconds exercise was direct about this: give the user proof of progress before they would otherwise lose interest. A prompted comparison at week two, even if change is subtle, is more sustaining than a comparison feature the user has to seek out., Keep notifications light, specific, and contextually aware. The Aspiration Gap exercise named aggressive push notifications as a direct route to making a calm habit feel like a nagging chore. Reminders should feel like a gentle nudge from something that knows the user's rhythm, not a guilt mechanism. Frequency, tone, and timing should all be configurable, and the default should err on the side of restraint., Connect insights to habits explicitly, not just to dates. When the product surfaces an observation about skin condition, it should link that observation to something the user actually did or changed, a new product introduced, a few days of better sleep logged, a step added to the PM routine. That connection is what turns a diary into understanding, and understanding is what sustains the journey when results are still on their way.

## Layer 3: Identity Transformation

Most users who reach this point in a skincare app arrive with data but not understanding. They have logged their routines. They have noted their skin conditions. They have built a streak, or broken one, and felt the quiet deflation of that. But when they look back at what they have done, nothing tells them who they are becoming. The product has recorded their behaviour without reflecting anything meaningful back to them about it.

The Identity Shift exercise captured this with a precision worth sitting with. Before using SkinSync regularly, the user is reactive, jumping between products without a clear plan, a little anxious every time something changes, unsure what is causing flare-ups or what is actually working. That is not just a knowledge gap. It is a felt experience of being at the mercy of something unpredictable. Their skin feels like something that happens to them, not something they understand.

The First 60 Seconds exercise described the post-session feeling in its current form with equal clarity. Users have logged a routine but have no real sense of whether it is working. There is effort but not much confidence. That is a significant gap between what the product is capable of delivering and what it is currently delivering at the level of identity. A person can use SkinSync consistently for weeks and still feel, fundamentally, like someone who does not really understand their own skin.

## **Desired feeling**

The Identity Shift exercise completed the sentence this way: this product turns someone who feels confused and unsure about their skin into someone who feels informed and in control of it.

That is the shift. Not a dramatic transformation, not a new self, but a settled, earned sense of competence. The user who has been using SkinSync for a month should be able to explain why they use what they use. They should recognise their own patterns. They should trust their skin more than they used to, not because the product has told them to, but because they have actually watched it respond to things they can name.

The Aspiration Gap exercise mapped the new beliefs that should feel true by this point. "My skin isn't a mystery, I can actually understand what it needs." "Consistency matters more than finding a miracle product." "I know my own skin better than any influencer or ad does." Those beliefs do not form because the app has said them. They form because the app has created the conditions for the user to discover them through their own experience.

The identity being built here is not glamorous. It is quiet and capable. Someone who used to feel reactive and uncertain now feels grounded and informed. That is a real shift, and it is the kind of shift that turns a habit app into something a person feels genuinely attached to.

## **What the workshops told us**

The Identity Shift exercise was direct about what currently prevents the shift from happening. No clear link is drawn between actions and outcomes, so users log data without learning from it. Setbacks are treated the same as failures, with no reassurance built in. Insights are generic rather than personal, so they do not feel earned or specific to the person receiving them. There is no moment that marks progress, no threshold the user ever feels they have crossed. The app moves forward without ever acknowledging that the user has moved with it.

The Heartbreak Scale added a specific and telling detail. Pride was scored at three out of five, but the conditions for higher pride were identifiable. What would make the experience feel more empowering was language like "you now know your skin reacts well to X," marking real milestones beyond streaks, framing the user as someone building knowledge over time rather than following instructions, and giving them a simple way to see how far they have come since day one. Each of those is an identity-level decision, not a feature decision. They are about what the product reflects back to the user about who they are becoming.

The Heartbreak Scale also named the exercise where the gap between expectation and reality became undeniable. Two weeks in, the user checks their progress photo and sees almost nothing. They expected clear improvement. The reality is that skin takes longer than the app's pacing implies. They feel deflated and start to doubt whether the routine is working at all. That moment is not just a retention risk. It is an identity risk. The person who arrives open and hopeful, and encounters two weeks of invisible progress with no framing to make sense of it, does not just lose interest in the app.

They quietly absorb the feeling that their skin is resistant to improvement, that they are someone for whom this kind of consistency does not pay off. That belief, once formed, is hard to undo.

The First 60 Seconds exercise described the desired emotional arc from the other direction: from overwhelmed and unsure to calm and in control of their skin. And it named what the post-session feeling should be, not just after a month, but after any given session. In control of their skin, not just following a routine but understanding what it is doing for them. That framing is the right target. Every design decision in this layer should ask whether it moves the user closer to that feeling or further from it.

**Design decisions required**, Surface pattern recognition as soon as the data honestly supports it. The first time SkinSync can connect a skin observation to a specific habit or product, that moment should be named clearly and in plain language. Not as a statistic, not as a chart, but as a sentence the user can read and immediately recognise as true about their own skin. That is the moment the identity shift begins in earnest., Mark milestones that reflect growing knowledge, not just growing consistency. First month completed matters. So does first skin pattern identified, first ingredient concern resolved, and first informed product decision made. These are not gamification mechanics. They are moments the product can use to tell the user something true about who they have become through using it. A streak tracks effort. A milestone tracks understanding., Use language that positions the user as the expert on their own skin. Phrases like "you now know your skin reacts well to X" or "based on what you've tracked, your skin tends to settle after Y" do something that generic insights cannot. They attribute the knowledge to the user's own observation, which is both more accurate and more identity-affirming. The product is not telling them something. It is showing them what they already know., Build a simple "look back" view that makes the journey visible. A before-and-after photo comparison is part of this, but not the whole of it. A summary of what the user has learned, which products have worked, which conditions have improved, which patterns they have identified, gives them a narrative about their own skin that they could not have told before they started. The Aspiration Gap exercise identified this as the evidence moment: harder to dismiss than any product claim, because it is their own skin, tracked over their own time., Handle setbacks and slow periods with language that protects the user's sense of competence. When progress is slow, when a breakout arrives, when a streak breaks, the product's response should be steady and specific rather than silent or clinical. "Skin naturally fluctuates, this doesn't undo what you've built" is a different message to a broken-streak graphic. The Heartbreak Scale was explicit: frame setbacks as data, pair every negative observation with a next step, and never leave a difficult moment as just bad news., Give users something worth showing a dermatologist or sharing with someone they trust. The Heartbreak Scale noted that a skin summary could be worth showing to a dermatologist, but is not currently built with that purpose in mind. A well-structured summary of tracked conditions, product history, and observed patterns is genuinely useful in a clinical conversation. Building toward that output repositions the user as someone with knowledge worth sharing, which is a meaningful shift from someone who is just using an app.

## The Emotional Arc

The emotional arc that runs through SkinSync is not complicated, but it is specific. A person arrives feeling uncertain about their own skin, hopeful that something might finally make sense of it, and quietly braced for disappointment. They move through a period of building habit without yet having proof that the habit is doing anything. And if the product holds them through that stretch with honesty and steadiness, they arrive somewhere meaningfully different: settled, capable, and in possession of something they did not have before. Not a better complexion, necessarily, though that may come. A genuine understanding of their own skin, built from their own data, in their own time.

That arc was not constructed from outside the workshops. It surfaced consistently across every exercise. The Aspiration Gap named the emotional starting point with precision: curiosity mixed with self-consciousness, mild scepticism from previous products that promised more than they delivered, and a quiet hope that this one might be different. The Identity Shift exercise named the end point with equal clarity: someone who used to feel reactive and confused about their skin, now capable of explaining why they use what they use and trusting what they observe. The First 60 Seconds exercise connected the two ends and identified where the thread currently breaks, in the unglamorous middle weeks, when novelty has faded and results have not yet arrived, and the product has nothing to offer but another log entry. The Heartbreak Scale gave that risk a number. Trust at two out of five. Anxiety at three. Delight at two. Not a hostile user, but an unserved one.

The arc as a design tool works like this. For any proposed feature, any piece of copy, any structural decision about what the product shows and when, the question is whether it moves the user along this arc or sits outside it. An onboarding flow that asks for account creation before demonstrating value sits outside it. A streak mechanic that reads a missed day as failure sits outside it. A skin insight delivered as a data point, without context or connection to something the user actually did, sits outside it. None of those decisions are necessarily bad in isolation. They become costly because they interrupt a journey that depends on continuity. The arc is fragile in the middle, and anything that introduces friction, guilt, or confusion during that stretch gives the user a reason to stop. Once they stop, the data thins, the insights weaken, and the identity shift that the product exists to create becomes unreachable.

What the workshops pointed toward, consistently, was a product that earns the user's trust by being honest about what it does not yet know, surfaces understanding gradually and only when the data genuinely supports it, and treats every setback as information rather than evidence of failure. That is a quiet kind of ambition. It does not rely on a dramatic reveal or a single transformative feature. It relies on a long sequence of small decisions, each of which communicates, in its own way, that SkinSync is on the user's side. The person who finishes their first month with the app should feel, above all, like someone who now knows their own skin in a way they did not before. That belief, once formed through lived experience rather than marketing, is what retention is actually made of.

## What This Means In Practice

The three layers produce a specific brief. Every design decision, every piece of copy, every structural choice about what the product shows and when, should be tested against what it asks of the user and what it gives them in return. The table below makes that test explicit.

Layer	The Test
First Impression	Does this make the user feel immediately understood, or does it ask something of them before it has offered anything?
The Journey	Does this hold the user through a period without visible results, or does it create silence, guilt, or confusion when the experience gets hard?
Identity Transformation	Does this leave the user feeling more capable and more knowledgeable about their own skin, or does it leave them feeling like someone who has simply followed instructions?
The Arc	Does this move the user from overwhelmed and uncertain toward calm and in control, or does it interrupt that progression at any point?

A product that passes all four tests at every moment is not a product that tries harder. It is a product that has made the right decisions quietly, in the places where most products make the wrong ones by default. For SkinSync, that means an opening that earns trust before asking for anything, a middle that sustains motivation without manufacturing it, and an endpoint that reflects real understanding back to the person who built it. The result is not a tracker. It is the experience of becoming someone who knows their own skin.