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Thirty Seconds Looking on the Sky that Moved Me: A Reflection on Jets, Time, and Awe

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1. Abstract

Watching two jets at sunrise on 19 and 22 August in Kuala Lumpur, their contrails as they crossed the sky in what felt like half a minute have been observed. The physics is ordinary and still beautiful. The objective of this note is to use a brief sky event to test a FIKR-based reflective method that turns perception into explanation and into small, durable actions before retirement. The psychology is the heart of this reflection. Time does not only pass; it is felt. Attention, novelty, awe, and memory shape that feeling. A luminous contrail at a red light widened the present, made me kinder to the day, and stirred a useful nostalgia that tied earlier field mornings to the one I was standing in. I read the moment through FIKR. Facet trained my noticing with a short sky log. Insight asked which work empties hours and which restores meaning. Knowledge named the science so that I can teach it and share the wonder. Resilience turned the lesson into steady habits of mentorship, field routes, and long term goals. Two short flights became a mirror for the years before retirement. I want minutes to become meaning. The plan begins by looking up and then acting on what I see today.

2. Introduction: Two Mornings That Would Not Let Me Look Away

On 19 August and again on 22 August I stood at traffic lights and tilted my head to the Kuala Lumpur dawn. At Taman Maluri (Figure 1) the contrail arrived like chalk on clean glass. Two bright white lines, then a softening tail that bent a little as the air tugged it. Three days later near Times Square I watched a blade of orange slice the blue beside the TRX tower (Figure 2). It looked as if someone stitched a glowing thread across a quiet cloth. I pressed the shutter in small steps, A to F, because the scene felt fast and full. The whole sweep seemed to pass in half a minute. The road was still. My heart kept its pace. Yet my mind ran forward, as if the day had started sprinting before I did. (A) The red traffic signal anchors the foreground. A very thin, newly formed contrail is visible high above the intersection, running diagonally from upper left toward lower right. The line is faint and cool white, indicating the earliest stage of ice-crystal formation. The lamppost and cables establish scale and direction. (B) The jet's twin exhaust plumes resolve into two bright, parallel "rails." The contrail is sharper and more luminous than in A, with a slight diffuse veil forming on the leeward side, suggesting the beginning of lateral spread. The diagonal crossing of the cables helps show the angle of travel and the rapid angular sweep across the observer's field of view.

(C) The twin rails thicken and begin to feather at the edges as turbulent mixing enlarges the ice plume. Brightness remains highest near the leading segment while the downstream portion fades and widens, consistent with advection and dilution aloft. The unchanged foreground cable confirms that all three panels were captured from a fixed position within roughly one minute.

(A) A newly formed, narrow contrail enters diagonally from upper left toward the TRX tower. The trail is sharp on both margins and brighter toward its leading segment, indicating recent ice-crystal formation. Rooftop lights remain visible, confirming civil-twilight conditions.

(B) The contrail lengthens toward the upper right edge while maintaining a nearly straight axis. Colour saturation increases under low-angle sunlight, and a faint feathering begins along the leeward edge, suggesting gentle wind shear aloft. The TRX tower and adjacent blocks fix the viewing geometry and reveal the rapid angular sweep.

(C) With the aircraft exiting the frame, the plume persists as a continuous orange streak. The downwind margin shows slight broadening and softening, consistent with mixing and advection

at upper levels, while the upwind margin remains comparatively crisp. The unchanged skyline confirms all three panels were recorded within ~1 minute from a fixed position.

The objectives of this note are: first, to read two brief sky events in Kuala Lumpur through both physics and lived feeling so that explanation and wonder can stand together; second, to apply the Facet, Insight, Knowledge, and Resilience (FIKR) lens. I hope to offer a small, teachable script that students and colleagues can use to convert everyday environmental encounters into ethical attention and practical steps.

2.1. Why It Looked Fast and Why It Felt Faster

The physics is simple and it does not take away the beauty. Most commercial jet aircraft typically cruise around Mach 0.78 to 0.85, which is roughly 800 to 900 kilometers per hour, depending on altitude, winds, and the specific aircraft (Figures 1 and 2). At that speed the aircraft covers about 250 meters each second. If the jet is around 10 to 15 kilometers away in slant range it shifts across our field of view by roughly a degree a second. That is plenty to sweep a big slice of sky in under a minute. The bright line is a contrail. Hot moist exhaust meets very cold and humid air in the upper troposphere around 8 to 13 kilometers altitude. Water vapor freezes into tiny ice crystals and a thin man made ice cloud forms. At sunrise the low sun warms those crystals with orange light so the trail beside TRX glowed like copper wire in the air. None of this breaks the spell. Naming a thing can deepen the touch it leaves behind.

The feeling of speed is a different story. Our sense that "time is flying" in daily life is not the same as counting seconds on a clock. It depends on where attention sits and on the texture of memory we lay down. Novel scenes lay more anchors and feel longer in retrospect. Routines compress months into a thin strip [1-4]. Awe can even stretch the felt width of the present, make us breathe slower, and leave us a little more generous to the next person we meet [5,6]. A glowing contrail at a red light is a small dose of awe. It turns a stop into a start.

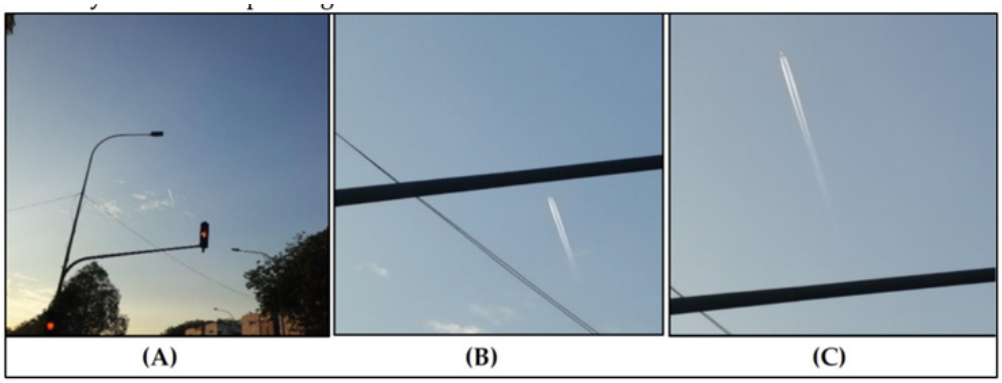

Figure 1: Sequence of a jet crossing the morning sky at a traffic light in Taman Maluri, Kuala Lumpur, on 19 August 2025 between 7:40 and 7:41 a.m. local time. Photographs were taken from the same standing position with a handheld mobile phone; the traffic signal, lamp post, and overhead cables provide a fixed frame of reference. The sky was clear with low-Sun illumination from the east.

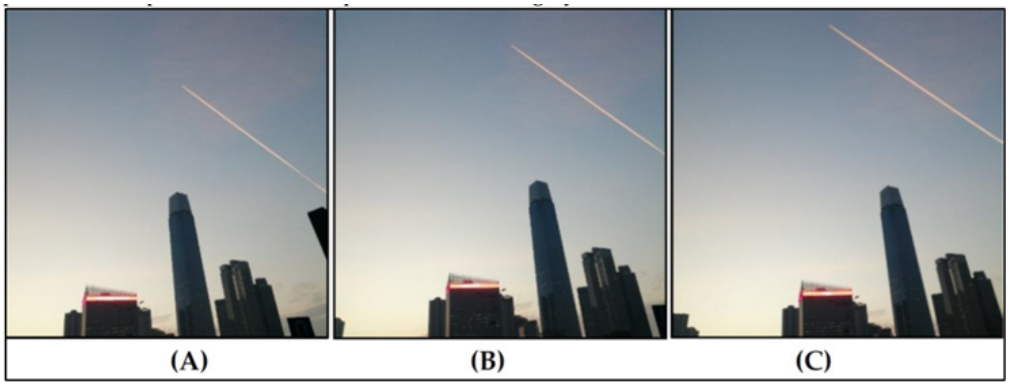

Figure 2: Sunrise sequence of a jet and its illuminated contrail over central Kuala Lumpur near Berjaya Times Square, with the Exchange 106 (TRX) tower as a fixed landmark, captured on 22 August 2025 between 7:02 and 7:03 a.m. local time. All frames were taken from the same standing position with a handheld mobile phone; the skyline provides a stable reference for scale and direction. Low-Sun lighting gives the fresh contrail a warm orange tint.

3. What The Two Streaks Told Me About My Time

I am getting older. That is a fact and also a lens. The sky handed me three gentle orders. First, let the remaining working years count for students, colleagues, and the coasts and rivers I study. I do not need to chase every task. I need to choose the ones that will still matter when the contrail has blown thin and the semester is gone. Second, put back good novelty. Not noise that drains. Real novelty that plants memory. A new walking route through campus. A new bird call learned by ear. A new site visited at lower tide. These take the same minutes but leave deeper marks and slow the felt rush of the year.

Third, keep space for awe and allow nostalgia to sit beside it. Nostalgia is not only a sweet ache. It ties older mornings in the field to this one and pushes me forward with a steadier hand. It gives self-continuity and energy for what comes next [7]. I often talk to myself in pictures. The jet is a needle. The sky is cloth. My plans are the seam I decide to stitch today. If I do not stitch, wind will still move the cloth but there will be no pattern with my name on it.

4. From looking up to living well: a small FIKR guide

The FIKR is a simple four-part framework and personality tool I use in research and teaching to connect what we notice with what we do next. In its fuller assessment form, FIKR organises twenty traits under these four pillars and can be paired with models such as Holland's RIASEC to study leadership, learning, and work preferences. In daily practice, I use FIKR as a personal script. Facet trains attention to concrete details. Insight turns attention inward to examine motives and choices. Knowledge anchors experience in the best available science so wonder and accuracy can coexist. Resilience converts insight into steady habits and adaptive action. Put together, FIKR helps me turn a small scene in the sky into an ethical and practical response on the ground [8].

For Facet, I will train the eye. One short sky log each morning for a month. A color. A shape. A bird call. One contrail. Seven lines only. This is how noticing becomes a habit.

Insight. I will ask honest questions. Which work makes hours vanish without meaning. Which practice enlarges the present and returns me to myself. I will trim the first kind and guard the second kind.

For Knowledge, I will name the science inside the scene. The physics is simple and it does not take away the beauty. Most commercial jet aircraft typically cruise at about 800 to 900 kilometers per hour at high altitude, leaving behind ice crystals that drift and spread under wind shear. The orange comes from low sun scattering. When I can say it, I can teach it. When I can teach it, I can share the awe without turning it into a trick [9].

For Resilience, I will turn moments into moves. One small act of mentorship each week. One fresh field route every two weeks. One step each month toward a goal that will outlast my title. I will keep the proverbs close. Jauh berjalan luas pandangan (Travel widens the view). These two streaks felt friendly and stern at the same time. Friendly because they invited wonder. Stern because they whispered a reminder: Masa itu emas (Time is gold), Secepat kilat (As fast as lightning), (Time flies like an arrow). I heard those lines and I also heard my own voice answering back, almost playful, almost pleading: "Look up. Do not miss this."

5. Conclusion

Two short flights above city lights gave me a mirror. The mirror says time does not wait and it also says time can feel wider when I look closely, learn the name of what I see, and use the feeling to guide what I do next. The jet shows how distance turns into angles and how speed can look like a few finger widths against the dawn. My heart shows how intention turns minutes into meaning. I want my remaining years before retirement to read like a clear seam across good cloth. I will keep looking up. I will keep stitching.

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