

HOW TO ENCOURAGE MORE CREATIVE THINKING (1)

Creative individuals are remarkable for their ability to adapt to almost any situation and to make do with whatever is at hand to reach their goals. Of all human activities, creativity comes closest to providing the fulfillment we all hope to get in our lives. Call it full-blast living.

When it comes to creativity, one of our biggest concerns is usually how we can be more creative, or how to come up with better ideas. Research in this area is all over the place, but I've gathered some of the most practical studies out there to help you utilize specific techniques that can boost your creativity. All of these studies are useful for everyday creativity in daily life, so try a few out for yourself and see which ones work best for you.

Have you ever wished you were more creative? If you do creative work, have you ever suffered from a creative block and been stuck wondering what exactly is wrong, and how you can get yourself out of it? *Of course you have*, I mean, who hasn't!

Today, you're in luck — you are about to read one of the most comprehensive posts on understanding creativity and spurring on creative thinking that's ever been compiled. With over two-dozen research studies and academic papers cited, you'll finally get a clearer view on the creative process out of the muddy advice often found on unscientific takes on the subject.

Let's dig in!

How to Boost Your Creative Thinking

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1.) Restrict yourself

Later on I will show you how external restrictions can hurt creativity, but right now I'm talking about *internal* restrictions, which can actually be used to boost creativity!

The research shows that an insidious problem that many people have is that they will often take the path of "least mental resistance," building on ideas they already have or trying to use *every* resource at hand.

The thing is, the research also suggests the placing **self-imposed limitations** can boost

creativity because it forces even creative people to work outside of their comfort zone (which they still have, even if they are a bit "*weirder*" than most).

One of the most famous examples is when Dr. Seuss produced *Green Eggs & Ham* after a bet where he was challenged by his editor to produce an entire book in under 50 different words.

I'm no Dr. Seuss, but I've found (and I'm sure other writers can relate) that when I'm suddenly restricted to writing something in 500 words when I had planned to write it in 800 words, it can lead to some pretty creative workarounds.

Try limiting your work in some way and you may see the benefits of your brain coming up with creative solutions to finish a project around the parameters you've set.

2.) Re-conceptualize the problem

One thing that researchers have noticed with especially creative people is that they tend to re-conceptualize the problem more often than their less creative counterparts.

That means, instead of thinking of a cut-and-dry end goal to certain situations, they sit back and examine the problem in different ways before beginning to work.

Here's a candid example – as a writer who handles content strategy for startups, my "*cookie cutter*" end goal is something like "*write popular articles.*" The problem is, if I approach an article with the mindset of, "*What can I write that will get a lot of tweets?*" I won't come up with something very good.

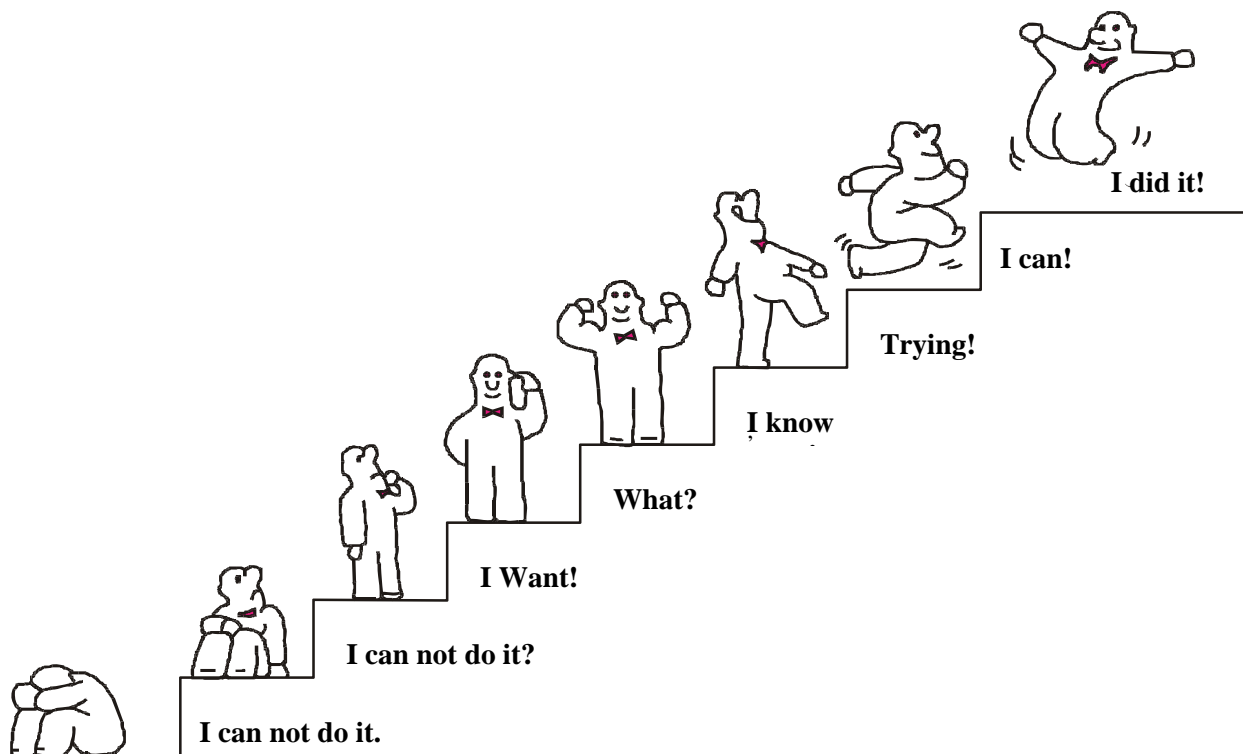
However, if I step back and examine the problem from another angle, such as: "*What sort of articles really resonate with people and capture their interest?*" I'm focusing on a far better fundamental part of the problem, and I'll achieve my other goals by coming up with something more original.

So, if you find yourself stagnating by focusing on generic problems ("*What would be something cool to paint?*"), try to re-conceptualize the problem by focusing on a more meaningful angle ("*What sort of painting evokes the feeling of loneliness that we all encounter after a break-up?*").

3.) Create psychological distance

While it's long been known that abstaining from a task (again, more on that later) is useful for breaking through a creative block, it also seems that creating "*psychological*" distance may also be useful.

Subjects in this study were able to solve **twice** as many insight problems when asked to



think about the source of the task as distant, rather than it being close in proximity.

Try to imagine your creative task as being disconnected and distant from your current position/location. According to this research, this may make the problem more accessible and can encourage higher level thinking.

4.) Daydream... and then get back to work!

Although study after study confirms that daydreaming and napping can help with the creative thought process, there is one piece of research that everybody seems to leave out...One study in particular shows that the less work you've done on a problem, the less daydreaming will help you.

That is, daydreaming and incubation are most effective on a project you've already invested a lot of creative effort into. So before you try to use naps and daydreams as an excuse for not working, be honest with yourself and don't forget to hustle first!

5.) Embrace something absurd

While I'll be covering the case for "weird" experiences in more detail later on, for now you need to know that the research suggests that reading/experiencing something absurd or surreal can help boost pattern recognition and creative thinking. (Subjects in the study read Franz Kafka, but even stories like Alice in Wonderland have been suggested by psychologists)

The conclusion was that the mind is always seeking to make sense of the things that it sees, and surreal/absurd art puts the mind in "overdrive" for a

short period while it tries to work out just exactly what it is looking at or reading.

I like reading interesting short stories like The Last Question or browsing absurdist art at places like r/HeavyMind when I'm looking for some inspiration.

6.) Separate work from consumption

Also known as the "absorb state," this technique has been shown to help with the incubation process (*much* more on that later) and is far more effective than trying to combine work with creative thinking. It makes sense too — we are often in two very different states of mind when absorbing an activity and when we are trying to create something.

I've found that my writing breaks down when I try to handle research + writing at the same time, and I'm much better off when I just turn off my "work mode" and consume more inspiration in the form of reading, watching, and observing.

7.) Create during a powerful mood

For a long time, the research has pointed to *happiness* as being the ideal state to create in. Recently though, a relatively new study (2007) on creativity in the workplace made this bold conclusion:

Creativity increased when both positive and negative emotions were running high...

The implication seems to be that while certain negative moods can be creativity killers, they aren't as universal as positive moods (joy, being excited, love, etc.) in that sometimes they may spur creative thinking rather than hinder it.

I don't want you to put yourself in a bad mood to create something, but next time you're in a strong emotional state, try to sit down and focus that energy on creating something, the end result could be worthwhile.

8.) Get moving

Is there any wonder that 'Exercising more' is one of the most desired good habits in the entire world?

Some research even suggests that exercise can actually boost creative thinking as well, due to its ability to get the heart pumping and put people in a positive mood. It's similar to how other research shows that thinking about love can produce more creative thoughts; it's not necessarily the act, it's the change in mood.

If you're stuck in a creative rut and want to take a break, try including exercise while your brain is subconsciously at work, it may help to speed up your "Aha!" moment.

9.) Ask, "What might have been?"

According to the research surrounding the process of counterfactual thinking, looking at a situation that has already occurred and asking yourself, "What could have happened?" can boost creativity for short periods of time.

According to an analysis by Jeremy Dean:

- *Analytical problems* are best tackled with a subtractive mind-set: thinking about what could have been taken away from the situation.
- *Expansive problems* benefited most from an additive counterfactual mind-set: thinking about what could have been added to the situation.

References

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