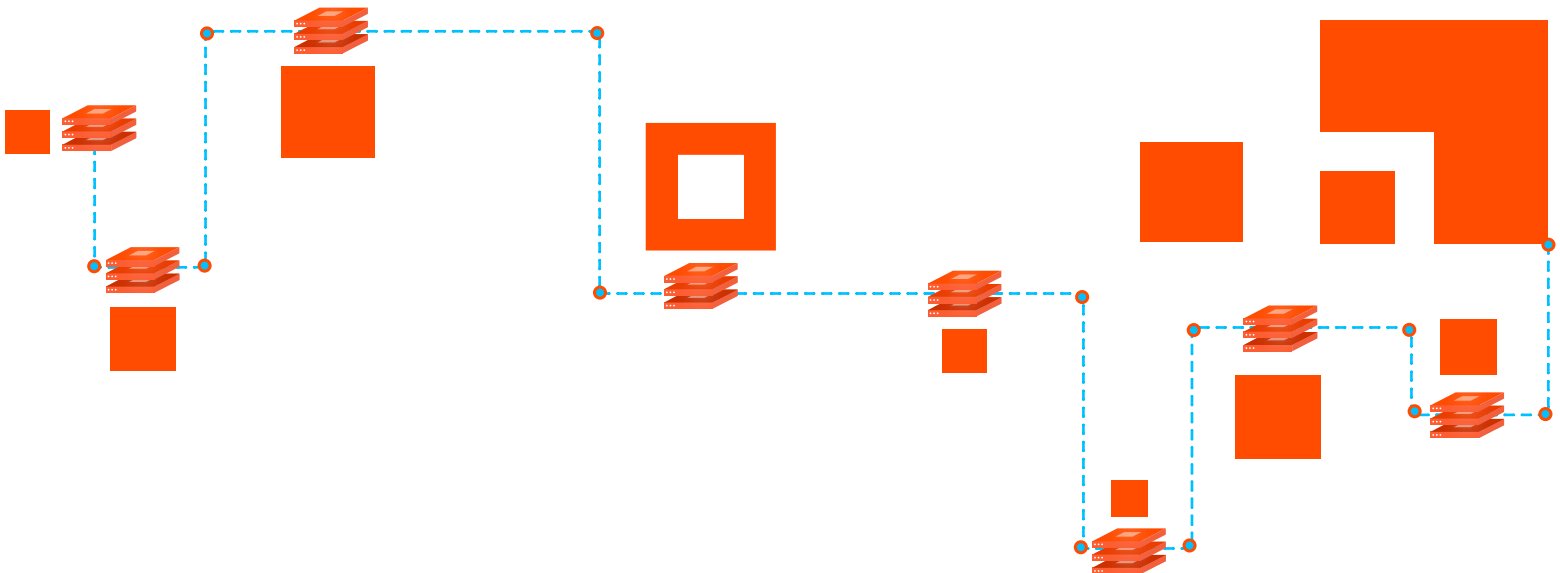


How to Become the Most Creative Person in the Room



10 Tools and Tactics for Building Creativity



Here's what I genuinely believe: How well you develop your creative capacities will be the single most significant determinant for how well you are able to take advantage of the unprecedented opportunities of the exponential age (2020s and beyond). And that applies to companies as well as individuals.

Creativity is both broader in application and more significant in impact than communication skills, time-management, and emotional intelligence. The spectrum of business functions that creativity enhances is tremendous:

- ▶▶ Product and feature ideation and development
- ▶▶ Corporate branding
- ▶▶ Messaging and advertising
- ▶▶ Acquisitions, partnerships, and JVs
- ▶▶ Collateral design
- ▶▶ Conference/tradeshow marketing
- ▶▶ Industry thought leadership
- ▶▶ Recruiting methods and channels
- ▶▶ Compensation, incentives, and Benefits packages
- ▶▶ Contracting and deal structures
- ▶▶ Product/solution betas and pilots
- ▶▶ Prospect engagement
- ▶▶ Work environment upgrades
- ▶▶ Funding strategies
- ▶▶ Training tools and tactics
- ▶▶ Shipping methods
- ▶▶ Packaging materials and design
- ▶▶ Client journey and customer experience
- ▶▶ Retail displays
- ▶▶ Sponsorships and brand placement
- ▶▶ Marketplace positioning
- ▶▶ Merchandise and swag
- ▶▶ New market segment development
- ▶▶ Waste management, recycling, up-cycling
- ▶▶ Leveraging assets (real estate, capital equipment)
- ▶▶ Lobbying
- ▶▶ Transportation
- ▶▶ Viral content development
- ▶▶ Supply chain and sourcing

- ▶▶ Personal and resource management and planning
- ▶▶ Reporting and data visualization
- ▶▶ Special promotions
- ▶▶ Employee recognition and events
- ▶▶ Community engagement and philanthropy

Every function listed above is significantly enhanced through creative thinking. Whether measured in cost reduction, production increases, market expansion, customer satisfaction or any other classic measure of business success, applied creativity gives businesses a significant leg up over their competition.

Research has revealed that creativity is an [essential requirement for success](#) in the 21st century. It [increases employee retention rates](#), [inspires collaboration](#), and converts disruption from business threat to business advantage. In a [study conducted by IBM](#) of 1,500 CEOs, it was determined that creativity is the number one factor for future business success.

Here's the best news about creativity: it's not just something that people are born with, it's something anyone can develop. Just as with physical fitness, one's creativity capacity can be built and honed over time. So, if you happen to be thinking that you or your staff aren't likely to earn any creativity awards any time soon, stay tuned. In this article I'll be giving you 10 powerful tips and methods for building creativity.



01 CREATIVITY IS ABOUT CONNECTING, NOT CONJURING



First off, people get the wrong idea about creativity. They think that it's about pure genesis - creating something from nothing (conjuring), but it turns out creativity is really just about **making new connections** between existing ideas.

In fact, [shocker] some of the points in this article were adapted from existing content (credit to Buffer and Inc. for inspiration). I've combined some of their ideas (which they also got from other sources) with other ideas that I've encountered in my life (along with a joke or two) to create the article you're reading now.

Once you let go of the daunting prospect of conjuring from nothingness, you'll find it's actually quite freeing. Making connections between existing things is so much less intimidating.

Steve Jobs, largely believed to be a creative conjuror, came right out and owned it: "Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something."

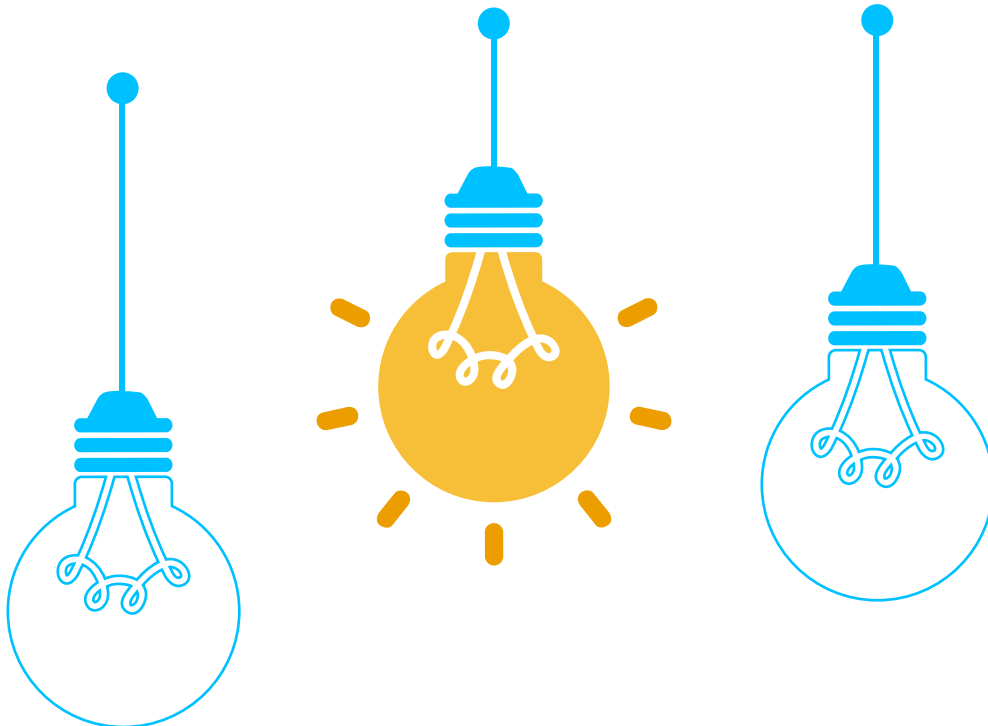
Arthur C. Clarke is credited with saying, "any technology sufficiently advanced is indistinguishable from magic." The same idea applies to creative thinking. Show me any idea that people think is an example of pure genesis and I will show you its component parts.

Any time you perceive that a new idea or invention is a work of pure genesis it's probably because some or all of it is based on highly specialized knowledge or skills. What was the first iPhone but an amalgam of things that came before it?

The point is to give yourself a break. Or, rather, give yourself permission to combine rather than conjure. It takes the pressure off and opens up literally infinite possibilities.

Practice making new combinations:

- ▶▶ 1 Look at the first two headlines in your favorite news feed and come up with a story that ties them together.
- ▶▶ 2 Pull any two recipes and think about how parts of them can be combined to create a better dish.
- ▶▶ 3 Look at the top items that Amazon lists under "Recommended For You" and ponder ways that two or more of them could be merged together.



02 STOP TAKING NOTES, START MIND MAPPING

Recent research on the brain has shown that “Several brain regions, and the connections between them, are what is most important to creative intelligence.”

So, if creativity is directly correlated with engaging more parts of our brain, how can we do that when we’re going about our day to day lives? Start by ditching classic note taking.

Left-to-right-black-and-white note taking engages only a narrow portion of your overall brain. Mind mapping uses shapes, colors, positioning, orientation, symbols, and literal lines to draw connections between concepts.



Every one of those additional dimensions engages more of the brain than does classic note taking. Mind mapping increases comprehension, retention and conceptual fluidity (meaning you are better at applying new knowledge). Plus, it’s more fun.

If you want to build your brain’s combinatorial “muscle” use mind mapping when you’re in meetings, learning new material, drafting plans or in any other circumstance where you’d ordinarily be taking notes.

There is plenty of info online to [get you started with mind mapping](#) (including a [TED Talk](#)), but if you want to talk to the Yoda of this stuff, [Brian Weller](#) is the guy you’re looking for.

Bonus points for preparing witty remarks to say to the people that look at you funny for bringing your colored pens to the board meeting.

03 YOUR BRAIN DOES BETTER CREATIVE WORK WHEN YOU'RE TIRED

In their new book, [The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World](#), Dr. Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscientist, and Dr. Larry Rosen, a psychologist, explain how paying attention involves two separate functions: “enhancement” (our ability to focus on things that matter) and “suppression” (our ability to ignore the things that don’t).

Interestingly, these functions aren’t opposite ends of a singular spectrum. They operate independent of each other, meaning they are often both in effect at the same time - unless you’re tired. The tired brain has a reduced capacity to filter things out.



Unlike analytical problem solving, creative insight comes when the brain wanders off on tangents and into areas that may initially seem unrelated. For that reason, creative thinking actually peaks when our brains struggle to filter out distractions and stay on task. There is some pretty solid [research](#) that backs this up if you want to check it out.

3 ways to leverage this knowledge to boost your creativity:

▶▶ Planning:

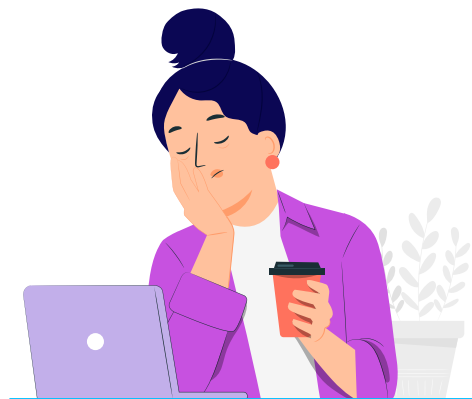
Take a look at what you need to get done throughout your day and deliberately schedule the tasks that require the most creativity for when you are likely to be more tired. Save your analytical, focused work for when your energy is peaking, like when your morning coffee is kicking in.

▶▶ Enhancements:

Speaking of caffeine, can you think of anything that has the opposite effect? No, I'm not talking about Ambien here, but substances that creatives and artist have been using for centuries to [bring a boost of creativity](#) to their work. If you're still not sure what I mean, maybe ask Spotify for a Bob Marley playlist and see where that takes you.

▶▶ Reminders:

Place reminders that you'll run into when you're tired. Do you take showers in the morning? Brush your teeth before bed? Put a Post-It note on the shower wall or the bathroom mirror with a one-word reminder of the creative task that you're going after.



04 BENCH PRESS FOR YOUR BRAIN? - EXERCISE BUILDS CREATIVITY

If you needed just one more little push to get your ass to the gym how about this: Studies have shown that [exercise can improve our ability to think creatively](#). Compared to the control group, researchers found that the study participants who exercised scored higher in terms of divergent thinking—or, coming up with [more possible solutions to a problem](#).



A 2014 Stanford University study showed that even just taking a walk significantly improves both convergent thinking (the ability to come up with solutions) and divergent thinking (coming up with new ideas). Other studies further back this up, finding that exercise improves convergent thinking in people that exercise three or more times per week.

The same cognitive science behind how mind mapping improves creativity applies here as well. Said simply, when you engage more regions of your brain, its capacity to form new conceptual connections increases. If you find that the creative juices just aren't flowing, get out and take a walk, ride a bike, or hit the weights. According to a [Lust For Life article](#) by Melissa Gray, studies show that around 30 minutes of exercise can boost creativity for as much as two hours.

Bonus tip: Here's a nifty trick to try the next time you need to memorize something: move around. Grab the content you need to commit to memory and take it for a walk (or hit the Stairmaster).

Bonus bonus tip: Capture a recording of yourself reading the piece and listen to it as you read along while moving around your living room (think Tai Chi). Engage your ears, eyes and body to maximize your memory banks.

05 SILENCE THAT SILENCE! FOR CREATIVE WORK, GET YOU SOME BACKGROUND NOISE.

Yes, silence is helpful for times when we need to sharply focus on a task, but for creative endeavors **ambient noise levels have proven** to be the better choice. To be clear, I'm not talking about dropping the needle on the White Album (oh, how we age ourselves with what we write).

Music actually has a distractive aspect that negatively impacts creative work. Let me go ahead and age myself again with an illustrative metaphor. Magic Plasma Spheres (popular in the 80s and 90s) make a good visual representation for the ideal state the mind should be in for creative work: open, expansive and continuously branching out in all directions for new connections. True ambient noise helps to make this happen.



However, switching to your favorite music effects your brain in the same way that touching your finger to the side of the sphere effects the branches of plasma:



Your brain gets captured and oriented on the music. So, the best move is to select something genuinely ambient: lacking the beats, melodies and lyrics that grab your mind's attention.

Given that we already learned that creativity peaks when we're tired, it can also help to choose something that you find calming and soothing. Maybe a thunderstorm, ocean waves or a crackling fireplace. Perhaps the sound of a cafe or public park. [The Guild of Ambience](#) has a great library of long-format YouTube videos to choose from.

06 CREATIVITY: YOUR NEXT TRAVEL DESTINATION



Expose yourself!

Well, to other countries and cultures, that is. So, I don't have a ton of research to point you to on this one, but for the winks out there (geez, get over yourselves) I have come across one [smallish study](#) showing that college students, who travelled abroad scored higher on creative thinking tests than those who stayed at their main campus. But frankly, this one seems so self-evident, I hardly think the research matters

Adam Galinsky's research, published by the American Psychological Association, shows that individuals who have spent time living abroad tend to be more creative and that the more countries in which someone has lived, the higher their degree of their creativity.

In another Galinsky study, looking at creative directors from 270 of the world's top fashion houses, he found that those who had spent significant time abroad produced more innovative and consistently creative fashion lines throughout their careers.

Yes, yes, I know, there's a fiberoptic data pipe feeding your house and you have the world (and a bag of Takies) at your fingertips, but there's nothing like physically getting out and seeing the world to open up creative thinking. More than anything, it gives you exposure to more things that your mind can later use to form new combinatorial possibilities.

If we rely on our screens to deliver the world to us, how is this sort of thing ever going to happen? (here I go aging myself again):



If you have no idea what that picture is (you adorable millennial, you) this YouTube video should give you sufficient context: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7oD_oX-Gio

Traveling has given me an opportunity to learn about different tools, trades, cultural norms and artistic forms; all of which I credit for increasing my creative capacities. I want to also encourage parents to support kids looking to take a gap-year to travel around the world. It gets a lot harder after college and few things are more rewarding. In many countries, such as Australia, taking a gap year for travel is the cultural norm, rather than the exception. Here's hoping that the U.S. catches up on the trend.

07 CREATIVITY - MORE OF A CANDLE THAN A LIGHTBULB

Yes, the lightbulb has become a universal symbol for new ideas, but it may not be instructive for how to actually be creative. Here is an interesting [bit of research](#) that covers six different studies all showing that dim lighting actually increases creativity.

So, if you've been feeling inadequate comparing yourself with creative giants like Shakespeare and DaVinci don't fret, as their genius may simply have been a function of poor lighting. Eat candle wax, Willonardo!



The researchers found that even without noticing a difference in visibility, if the lighting around them was dim, participants were likely to be more creative. Their theory is that in low lighting the subconscious feels more free to explore.

“

“darkness elicits a feeling of being free from constraints and triggers a risky, explorative processing style.”

”

This is great news for me personally, given how dark my son keeps his room, because I'm sure he'll be inventing something to secure generational wealth any day now.

But what about folks that work in offices with enough fluorescent light that Chad doesn't even need to go to the salon to get his frosted tips? Well, the utterly bizarre, but very good news for those folks is that apparently, you can just **think about being in the dark** and it could have an effect:

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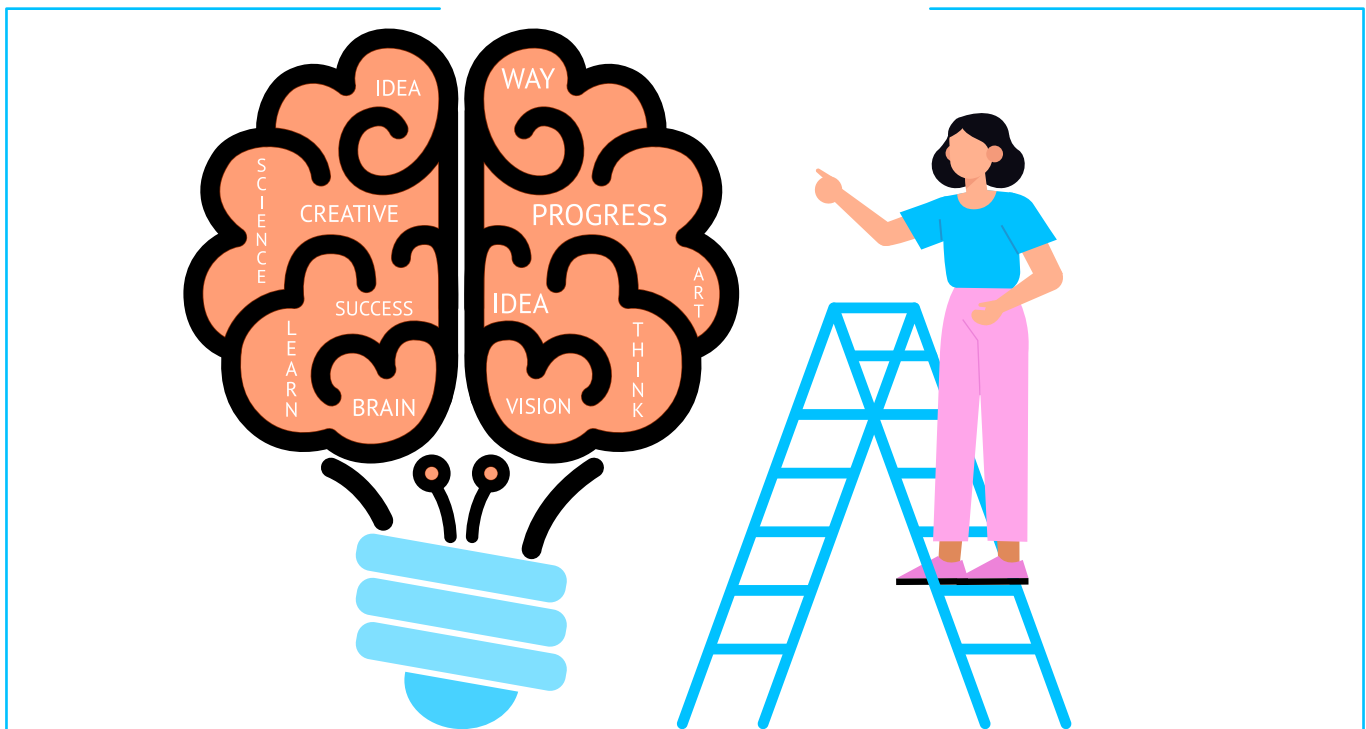
“Other experiments found that merely priming the idea of darkness—such as by taking five minutes to describe an experience of literally being in the dark, and recalling how it felt—was sufficient to boost creativity.”

”

Emo kids, your future is bright! Er, um... dark. Whatever.

Bonus tip: Get some RGB smart bulbs in your workspace. I use Phillips LIFX bulbs and Google assistant (still waiting for my commission check). It took me about 60 seconds in the Google home app, to program the voice command “Ok Google, let's get creative” to dim my lights and play ambient noise tracks of thunderstorms to help boost my creative capacities.

Side note: The same gear also works for setting the mood in the bedroom (low, red lighting and Berry White tunes) but, I'll save that for another post.



08 CREATIVITY - NOT COLOR-BLIND AFTER ALL

Ok, settle down people! That title was just for baiting the clicks. It turns out you can [get a boost in creativity](#) just by getting a brief glimpse of green. In another study, researchers have shown that that seeing red or blue yields different changes in our cognitive performance. Specifically, detail-oriented work is aided by red, whereas [blue enhances creative performance](#).



Got a creative project you need to tackle? Step outside for some time on the lawn. Soften the focus of your eyes and take in the green of the turf and the blue of the skies. Condolences for those of you in the western United States that recently replaced your lawns with drought resistant landscaping - we owe you a debt of candles and edibles.

Bonus tip: As I mentioned in the post about the relationship between light intensity and creativity, I use Phillips Hue RGB smart bulbs in my home office along with Google Assistant (nope, they're still not paying me). I just ask Google to set the desk lamp to green and boom, jokes making fun of millennials come streaming out of me (results may vary).

09 THE BEST WAY TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX - START WITH A BOX?

Ok, not a literal box. (If you've been to my [website](#) you know what I think about boxes.) It turns out, setting boundaries is good for more than just enforcing your personal space. We tend to think that the best situation for creativity to thrive is unbounded, free space where the only rule is that there are no rules (10 points to anyone that spotted that as a quote from Grease).

The truth is that's pretty much the most difficult situation for creativity to thrive. Dropping a blank canvas or a chunk of raw clay in front someone with nary an instruction can be quite stymying. Providing constraints actually increases creative output. Just simple parameters "like paint a tree" or "sculpt a face" unlock a creative flow that otherwise gets bound up in the overwhelm of having too many choices.

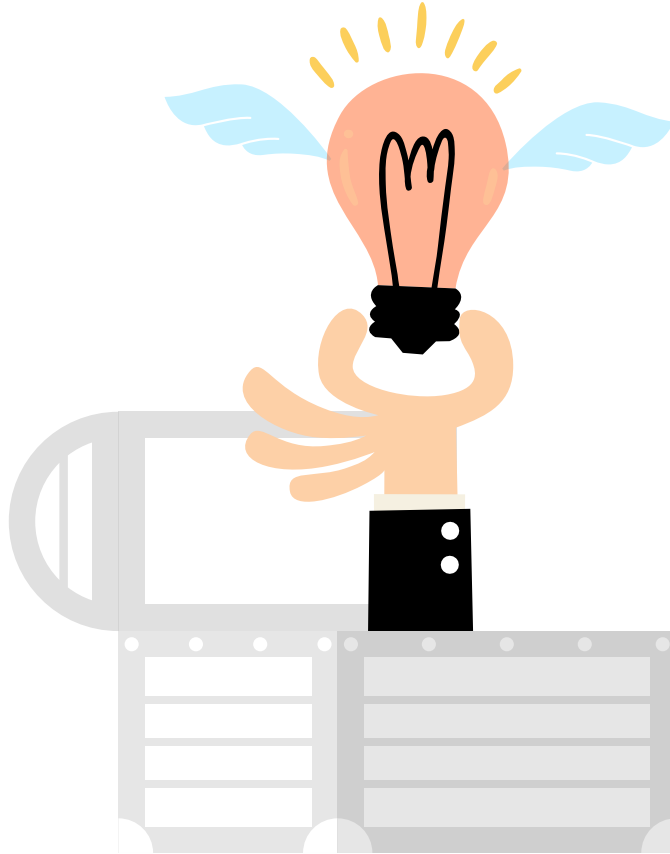


If you want to challenge yourself to exercise your creativity, make sure you give yourself adequate boundaries to work with. "Write a story" as an instruction is practically crippling to the creative mind. A much more effective instruction for fostering creativity would be "write a story about a neurotic porcupine" or "write a story with 7 words" (BTW [Hemingway did it with 6 words](#))

Here are [365 prompts for creative writing](#).
And [100 sketchbook prompts](#).

Bonus tip (from [Adobe.com](https://www.adobe.com)): Avoid the letter “e”

An exercise that will help you become a faster and more productive thinker is to have a conversation without using the letter “E.” You and your friend must carry on a regular conversation without any long pauses. Your brain is already a human thesaurus; this just makes you use it that way. Just five minutes will give your brain an excellent workout. Bored with not using “e”? Move on to other common letters like R, S, T, or A.



10 UNCLEAN YOUR ROOM, DAMNIT!



Well, unclean your office, that is. If you work in a space where everything is neatly tucked away how can you possibly expect any of it to prompt you to come up with new combinatorial possibilities?

When I set out to play with my Legos you better believe all 80 lbs. get spilled out on the living room floor (yes, I'm in my 40s and I still have 80 lbs. of Legos). Check out [This research](#) proving how a messy environment leads people to be more creative to be more drawn to new things.

On the other hand, the same study also revealed that those with more orderly workspaces tend to be more generous and choose healthier snacks than those in messy environments. In response to that I would like to point out that Cheese-It's are, in fact, made with real cheese and if you buy them at Costco there is usually enough to share as much as 10 or 12 of the tasty little squares with your friends. If they pitched in.

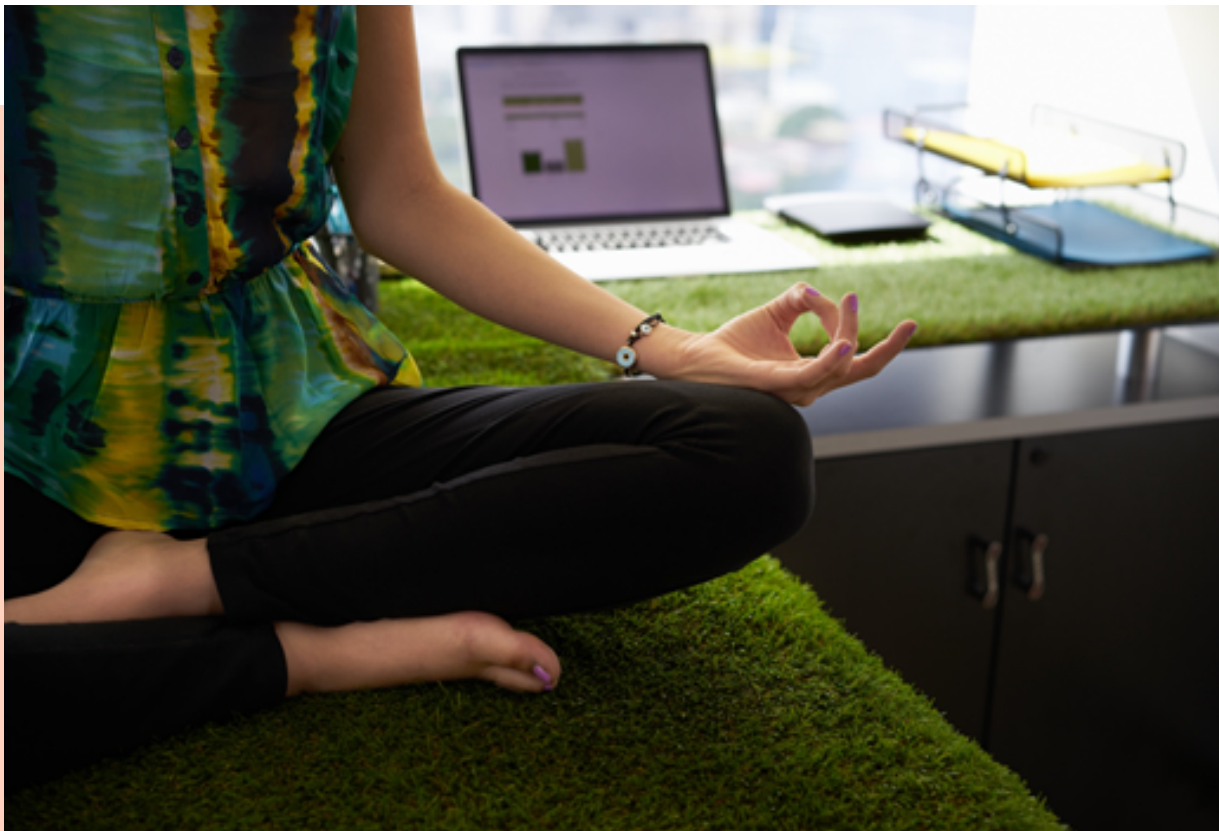
The bottom line here is to avoid “putting away” things that have potential to inspire you. Give your brain something to work with. And if you end up being featured on Hoarders, just tell your friends that whichever one of them ratted you out is no longer invited to sit on the only empty chair left in your house.

Bonus tip: If you're already heading to the hardware/crafts/fabrics store for a project, give yourself some extra time to cruise the aisles. Go idea shopping. Keep refreshing your mental inventory of what's out there for you to play with. And go buy a Lego kit for Pete's sake.

Bonus bonus tip - If you do have a collection of disassembled Lego kits, grab a random handful of parts and challenge yourself to create 10 different things with whatever you grab. If you prefer drawing, try a [dot-grid notebook](#) instead.

11 FOR IMPROVED CREATIVITY, START YOUR MORNING WITH A NICE HOT CUP OF MEDITATION

Meditation can help you gain clarity, quiet your mind, and quell the fears that hold you back, in as little as 15 minutes a day. It has the unique ability to bring the creativity that usually only occurs when the mind is tired (and diminished in its tendency to filter out “distractions” that would otherwise prompt new ideas) into more wakeful states.



A [2014 study from Leiden University](#) showed that Certain meditation techniques can promote creative thinking, even if you have never meditated before. Specifically, they found that [Open Monitoring Meditation](#) can have a long-lasting influence on human cognition, including how we conceive new ideas.

If you're new to meditation, here's VeryWellMind's list of the [7 Best Meditation Apps for 2021](#). Pick an app and find a quiet, comfortable place to sit for a few minutes before going about the rest of your day.

It's pretty much the best excuse for sitting down and doing "nothing."

So, there you go. 10 tools and methods for increasing your creativity. Just keep in mind, none of this matters if you don't actually do it. Just like with exercise, knowing how to work out doesn't do anything for your physical fitness. You need to get out there and actually do it. Make time for building your creativity. Set goals and hold yourself accountable. Before long you might just be the most creative person in the room.

Of course, if you'd prefer to pay for creativity versus developing it for yourself (or your company), ScrappyAF has plenty to spare. Click the link below to set up a time to talk about your creative needs.



<https://calendly.com/colt-briner/30min>

