

Cultivating Creativity Series

How to Be More Creative [Part 1: Your Actions]

How to Inspire Creativity [Part 2: Your Environment]

How to Increase Creativity in the Brain [Part 3: Your Subconscious]

How to Be More Creative- Part 1: Your Actions

The Importance of Creativity

Creativity is arguably *the* most important skill in today's world.

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) Future of Jobs report, **creativity ranks third on the list of top 10 skills employers will want in 2020.**

Skills associated with creativity like problem solving, adaptability and "thinking outside the box" are also coveted in the workforce now more than ever.

And as modern technologies continue to emerge, "human" skills like empathy and communication will be more in-demand.

Top 10 Most Desired Work Skills by 2020 (WEF Future of Jobs Report)

1. Complex problem-solving
2. Critical thinking
3. Creativity
4. People management
5. Social skills (coordination/collaboration)
6. Emotional intelligence
7. Sound judgment
8. Service orientation (helpfulness)
9. Negotiation skills
10. Cognitive flexibility

How Can You Be More Creative?

Like the confidence to pursue your dreams and the mindset you need to succeed, creativity is a skill that can be learned and improved.

Creativity Lives in Us (it just might be dormant)

When we were children, most of us didn't have any problems being creative.

We played pretend, created fantasy worlds and imagined adventures with abandon.

We weren't concerned with what others would think or whether it made sense or how silly we looked. We just created... and that's part of why we were so creative!

So, **remember** what it was like to be a child. What it was like to be curious, to dream, to explore.

Creativity is inherent.

It's in you. It's in all of us.

We just need to tap into it.

It may help you to get to know yourself a little better.

Our experiences, personalities, temperaments, and other factors are all useful material.

Gaining insight into your personality can help you **understand your unique genius** and recognize the ways in which you can **tap into your creativity**.

What Exactly Does It Mean to Be Creative?

I used to think creativity was about making something entirely new from scratch.

Inventing something that had never been thought of before in any way, shape or form.

Essentially, ***creating something out of nothing***.

But now I know that could not be further from the truth!

Creativity is not about creating something completely new in all its components.

That's impossible.

Rather, it's about **creating something out of what already exists**.

It could be in the form of a personal spin on an existing philosophy.

Or the application of a gadget in a new context.

Or the use of a medium in a particular type of art.

Anything that brings a useful and unique perspective to something that already exists (albeit in another form) is creative.

So, how can you spark your creativity?

Here are some suggestions:

Do These Things to Be More Creative

One of the ways in which you can improve your creativity is through **your actions**.

There are both short-term strategies to boost your creativity and habits of success that you can adopt for more steady, long-term results.

5 Unusual Tips to Boost Your Creativity

1. Drink tea

New experiments published in the *Food Quality and Preference* journal connect drinking tea to divergent thinking (the process of generating multiple creative ideas as possible solutions for a problem).

In one experiment, **participants who drank black tea created more innovative structures** out of building blocks **and came up with more clever names** for a ramen shop than those who drank hot water.

2. Remove yourself

According to a paper published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, **people come up with more creative solutions for other people's problems than for their own**.

So, if you want to be more creative try pretending it's someone else's problem!

3. Dart your eyes back and forth

A study published in the journal *Brain & Cognition* provides a weird creativity-boosting tip. According to researchers, **darting your eyes back and forth for 30 seconds results boosts creativity for 9 minutes.**

This is because it encourages connection between the two hemispheres of the brain – which leads to improved creativity.

*(*If you're ambidextrous, lucky you! You are already reaping the benefits of hemispheric connectedness – no eye shifting necessary.)*

4. Work when you're tired

According to a new paper in the *Thinking & Reasoning* journal, **working at your least optimal time may make you more creative.**

Researchers reported that when students who were night owls performed creative tasks, they performed better in the morning than at night (and morning people performed better at night).

5. Do open-monitoring meditation

Another way to promote divergent thinking (which allows you to be more creative) is through open-monitoring meditation.

The goal of open-monitoring meditation is to **observe without judgment.** Observe your thoughts as if they are separate from you. Let them pass while staying grounded in and focused on the present moment.

If you've never done this before or if it sounds difficult, don't worry! A study published in the journal *Mindfulness* suggests that **open-monitoring meditation improves ingenuity**, even for beginners, and the positive effects are surprisingly long-lasting.

5 Tried and True Ways to Be More Creative

1. Get into the flow

Flow is a term coined by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in his 1975 book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.

When we feel and perform our best, we may reach a heightened state of creativity and productivity, otherwise called "flow". According to a recent study at USC, three things need to happen in order to experience flow:

- you must be focused intently on the task at hand with no distractions
- immediate and frequent feedback must be given

- there must be a balance between challenge and skills (it should be challenging but not so challenging that you cannot complete it)

2. Have new experiences

Our brain needs new experiences to “chew on” in order to be creative.

The more new experiences you have, the more neural connections you create and the more creative you will be.

Studies show that **one of the best ways to have new experiences is to travel**. According to a paper published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, living abroad helps us learn problem-solving skills and coping techniques that help us to realize our best creative selves.

3. Read

Not everyone can pick up and go at the drop of a hat. Finding the time and money often required to travel is just not possible all the time.

But, there are ways to feed your brain the creative building material it craves! One of the best ways (and one of my favorite hobbies) is by **reading**.

When you read, you are introduced to new words and new concepts, you are transported to different places, different times. You have to imagine the characters and the setting in your mind based on nothing more than the author’s description and your imagination.

4. Spend time in nature

Another way to get those creative juices flowing is to **spend time in nature without technology**.

When we unplug and connect to the world around us, it spurs our creativity.

The longer you are outside in nature, the greater the impact on your creativity. As I learned from my 3-month long [digital detox](#), our brains function differently when we’re away from our phones and TVs.

But, you don’t need to unplug for long. Studies show that even going for a short walk outside has benefits and just 30 minutes in nature is enough time to help you be more creative.

5. Adopt creative hobbies

This is perhaps the most obvious way to be more creative – do creative things!

Adopting a creative hobby like photography, music, painting, cooking, writing, gardening, DIY projects, etc. can really help you to flex your creative muscle.

As with any skill, the more you practice, the better you will get.

How to Inspire Creativity [Part 2: Your Environment]

Unlike productivity, creativity does not thrive in order.

It is not the result of careful planning, meticulous preparation and concerted effort.

Rather, creativity can blossom in the most unlikely environment, at the most unexpected times, in the ways we least expect.

It can be borne from seemingly mundane, ordinary things - being creative does not mean inventing something completely new out of nothing.

And it's not a talent that some people are born with and others are not.

We are all inherently creative and we can learn to inspire creativity in ourselves.

One of the best ways to be more creative at work or enhance your creativity when it comes to art, music, writing, thinking, or just *life* in general is by controlling your environment.

Things like sound, light, color and clutter can either make or break your flow.

So, why not design your space to inspire creativity?

Here's how to make your environment an inspirational space in which you can do your best creative work!

Pick Your Place

The first step to designing a creative environment is picking your place.

Think about where you do your best work.

Would you prefer to sit outside or in an office?

Do you want to be secluded or surrounded by activity?

Also, consider things like the placement of the room.

Where, and at what times of day, does the light come in?

What's the view like from the window?

How's the flow of traffic through that area?

Is it likely that you will disturb anyone by working in your chosen place?

Will anyone be able to interrupt you?

Whatever suits you, **pick your place and make it your own.**

Inspire Creativity with Chaos and Clutter

Although it sounds counterintuitive (especially if you love to keep things organized like me!), it's true.

According to a University of Minnesota study that was published in the journal *Psychological Science*, creativity often comes at the expense of order.

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Having a perfectly organized environment tends to promote following tradition and convention, whereas disorderly environments encourage creative thoughts and behavior.

But, **the trick is to choose the right things to fill the space.**

You don't want to have a hoarder-sized collection of objects, but you do want to have some things to spark creativity.

So, choose some objects that reflect your focus. Things that inspire creativity.

If you're working on a novel, maybe have some of your favorite books in view. If you're an artist, maybe surround yourself with fabrics, artifacts, artistic mediums, antiques or oddities.

But, you don't have to pick only things that make sense or things that are connected to your work. It can be anything that inspires you.

Choose things that make you comfortable and happy and things that put you in the right mood for what you are trying to accomplish.

**I have an assortment of healing crystals, wands, worry stones and orgone pendants that I always keep on my desk. I'll rotate out different ones depending on my mood.*

Enhance Your Creativity with Background Noise and Classical Music

In law school, I used to work at a picnic bench out by the pool in the quad where there were always lots of people and loud music.

And now I know why!

According to a study published in the Journal of Consumer Research, a certain amount of ambient noise is conducive to creativity.

Contrary to popular belief, secluded/soundproofed rooms are not the best place to focus.

It actually *helps* to have moderate levels of distraction.

There are some free apps available such as Coffitivity that help inspire creativity by playing the ambient noises of a coffee shop.

Another beneficial sound to have in the background is **classical music**.

According to a study by professors from Radboud University and the University of Technology Sydney, happy classical music enhances creativity.

Study participants who listened to upbeat classical music outperformed those who listened to sad, anxious or calm music before starting a task that required creative output.

**Do you listen to classical music? Some of my favorite "upbeat" ones are: Mozart- Divertimento in D Major & Symphony #40 in G Minor, K 550 Molto Allegro, Vivaldi- 6 Violin Concertos for Anna Maria & Violin Concerto in A Minor RV356, the Brandenburg concertos, and Albinoni - Oboe Concerto #2 in D Minor Op. 9.*

Inspire Creative Thinking with Light and Color

I've always hated the bright, fluorescent lighting of offices.

And apparently, **so does creativity**.

According to a series of studies published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology, darkness and dim lighting are more likely to inspire creativity.

Softer light helps us to feel free from traditional constraints (like work) and nurtures a more creative environment.

I absolutely love working in cold, stormy, overcast weather. There's something about it that I find so exciting yet soothing at the same time!

However, you may find that your creative inspiration comes in the height of summer with the sun ablaze.

Whatever works for you, use it! There are tons of lighting options to choose from and ways to enhance the natural light (or other features) of a room.

Another thing to consider if you want to inspire creativity is color.

A lot of people are afraid of color and tend to stick to neutrals. But, that's just leaving a whole bunch of untapped creativity on the table!

Plenty of studies have noted color's ability to influence mood, state of mind, creativity, and induce other physiological changes.

Some studies suggest that the color blue encourages creative thinking, while others suggest purple or green are most impactful.

Once again, I think it's best to see what works for you personally.

I love lots of color but you may find that crisp, white surroundings with minimal color sparks your creativity.

Try playing around with color or adding some accent pieces to your environment.

Your space should be one that is uniquely yours and one that inspires creativity *in you*.

How to Increase Creativity in the Brain- Part 3: Your Subconscious

We've already gone over how be more creative by:

1. doing certain things, and
2. making some adjustments to your environment.

Now it's time to discuss the third and (*in my opinion*) most fascinating strategy!

How to Increase Creativity in the Brain

Your subconscious mind is a powerhouse. It's like a giant storage locker for your conscious mind.

Your subconscious helpfully stores your memories, thoughts, skills, beliefs, events – basically, *everything that has ever happened to you*.

Since there's way too much information for you to focus on everything at once, it only brings information into focus at the direction of the conscious mind.

The subconscious obeys the conscious mind without question.

That's why you can reprogram your subconscious mind by consciously repeating positive affirmations or reading inspirational quotes.

The subconscious mind is also one of the most valuable resources to inspire creativity and innovation.

By tapping into it, you can gain some deep insights into who you are and what you are struggling with.

When you harness the power of your subconscious mind, you will be able to make a conscious difference.

You will think more creatively and *be more creative*.

You may even find yourself realizing profound life lessons or coming up with creative solutions to your problems seemingly out of the blue!

So, where to begin?

With something we all do every day– **sleep**.

How Does Sleep Improve Creativity?

There are times when we can be creative through conscious deliberation.

We think about a problem and eventually the answer becomes clear.

Other times, it's not so simple.

If you can't seem to come up with a creative solution after struggling with the same issue for some time, try a different approach.

Let it go. Turn it over to your subconscious.

You might be surprised what the unfiltered part of your mind comes up with!

Surprisingly, the best way to fuel your mind and increase creativity in the brain is by doing something that requires minimal effort – sleeping.

What Your Brain Does During Sleep

We all need adequate sleep in order to function properly.

Although we are taking a break from conscious thought and activity, our brains are busy working while we sleep.

When we sleep, our bodies are able to perform so many important functions that they cannot complete while we are awake, including:

- Cleaning out toxins
- Creating and consolidating memories
- Repairing injuries
- Reducing inflammation
- Storing and organizing information
- Regulating hormones
- Bolstering the immune system
- Making creative connections

How Shuteye (or Lack Thereof) Affects Your Mind

There are many studies supporting the assertion that a good night's sleep increases creativity in the brain.

According to a study by the University of California at Berkeley, sleep can help to bring about "aha" moments.

The study found that those waking from sleep are 33 percent more likely to make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas.

In another study by Baylor University's Sleep, Neuroscience and Cognition Laboratory, interior design students who slept more scored better on exams.

On the other hand, students who skimmed on sleep or who slept erratically were less creative and had worse memory recall.

So, if you're not getting enough sleep you are not providing your brain with the time it needs to process information and come up with creative solutions.

How much time do you need? The American Sleep Association recommends that most adults get at least 7 to 8 hours a night.

Tap into Your Brain Power While You Sleep

We spend a third of our lives sleeping so we might as well get the most out of it!

There are things you can do to make sure you are squeezing all the value out of those precious hours of sleep – here are a few tips:

Do a Brain Dump

A lot of people (myself included) find it difficult to fall asleep at night because of all the thoughts they have swirling around in their head.

If you're a ruminator, you might find yourself thinking about all the things you have to do, analyzing an interaction that happened earlier in the day, pondering the plight of the oppressed or all of the above.

If this sounds like you, I actually have the perfect solution.

It's called a brain dump.

Basically, you dump the contents of your brain onto paper – your to-do list, nagging thoughts, long-lost goals, upcoming appointments, burning questions, *anything and everything* that's on your mind.

Once you have everything listed, you can then separate like items into categories. And from there, you can prioritize, plan and take action.

I do brain dumps regularly because it helps me to reduce stress and overwhelm.

And, according to neuroscientist and director of Baylor University's Sleep, Neuroscience and Cognition Laboratory, Michael Scullin, writing this sort of to-do list before bed helps people fall asleep 30% faster than normal.

**Check out this post for free, downloadable Brain Dump printables!*
<https://3dsuccess.org/how-to-declutter-your-overwhelmed-mind-with-a-brain-dump/>

Wonder, Don't Worry

Psychologist, creativity coach and author of *The Magic of Sleep Thinking: How to Solve Problems, Reduce Stress, and Increase Creativity While You Sleep* says that when we replace worry with wonder, we increase creativity in the brain.

So, instead of thinking, "I'll never figure out the ending to my novel", think "I wonder what Sam will say to Casey in the last chapter".

Document Your Sleep Thoughts

Ever notice how your best thoughts come right before you fall asleep?

I often think up creative ideas or solutions when I'm just falling asleep– so much so that I now keep a notebook and pen by my bed so I can write things down when they come to me.

Turns out, there's a scientific explanation for the "aha" moment.

Theta waves amplify creativity, boost intuition and improve mental performance.

But, we typically only produce theta waves when we are in either a flow state, a meditative state or hypnagogia (the period of drowsiness right before you fall asleep).

**Thomas Edison purposefully accessed the hypnagogic state by holding a steel ball in each of his hands before going to sleep. When he started to drift, he would drop the balls and wake himself up. He would then run to his desk write down the deep insights he had gleaned.*

Get Creative Insights from Your Dreams

Keep a Dream Journal

We can increase creativity in the brain by documenting our dreams.

Most of us forget our dreams immediately upon waking up or shortly thereafter.

But, if you're not studying your dreams, you're missing out on some valuable creativity-boosting insights!

Keep a dream journal in a way that works for you – writing or voice recording are both great options.

Don't worry if you can't remember much at first.

Your recollection will improve. You will start to notice recurrent themes, images, settings and characters. You'll gain perspective and see new opportunities.

These realizations will help you to understand the messages your subconscious is trying to send you.

Use It or Lose It: Apply Your Creative Ideas

Finally, as the saying goes, use it or lose it.

Once you have tapped into your subconscious mind and increased creativity in your brain, put those ideas into action.

Here are some motivational quotes to inspire you to take action on your creative ideas:

"Often the difference between a successful person and a failure is not one has better abilities or ideas, but the courage that one has to bet on one's ideas, to take a calculated risk – and to act." –Andre Malraux

"I know quite certainly that I myself have no special talent; curiosity, obsession and dogged endurance, combined with self-criticism, have brought me to my ideas." – Albert Einstein

"An idea not coupled with action will never get any bigger than the brain cell it occupied." – Arnold H. Glasgow

"For all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been'." - John Greenleaf Whittier

"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." -Wayne Gretzky

~ Thanks for reading! ~

