

## CREATIVE THINKING: IDEA ORINATION TECHNIQUES FOR ART AND LIFE

### INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

One **definition**: the ability to diverge from traditional thinking, rules, patterns, relationships; to originate meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, or interpretations.

1. An **ability** we all have; the basis of human nature – to grow, learn, experiment, change, and express ourselves.  
*“Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.” – Bob Dylan*
2. An **attitude**; accepting newness and change, enjoying the good while still trying to improve upon it.  
*“When you’re finished changing, you’re finished.” – Benjamin Franklin*
3. A **process**; playing with [im]possibilities, leveraging enthusiasm and tenacity to discover new solutions.  
*“Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson*

This **process can be applied by anyone**, at any time, to any problem, issue or life question.

### DEFINING YOUR PURPOSE

1. Define your problem as a **question**, with noun, verb, adverb, object, adjectives. *Example: What do I want my next body of artwork to be about? MUST BE POSITIVE. MUST BE EXCITING TO YOU! MUST BE AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE!*  
*“Try to love the questions themselves...” – Rainer Maria Rilke*
2. Look up major words in the **dictionary**. *Examples: “body”, “artwork”, “about”...*  
*“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” – Mark Twain*

### EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES

3. **Mindmapping**: Generate the largest possible overview and potential parameters. Get all your ideas down as quickly as possible. Save judgement and organization for later. Use the whole page. Make a mess! Be big and colorful! Have fun! Make mistakes!  
*“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.” – Scott Adams*
4. Research **visual images** of your question and concepts.
  - Google images and online stock photo banks
  - Collage from printed materials and magazines*“The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to notice what we never expected to see.” – John Tuley*

*BREAK... move about, view others’ mindmaps, get acquainted*

### GATHERING NEW PERSPECTIVES

5. **Brainstorm** with others for solutions.
  - Present the problem and goals
  - Generate as many ideas as quickly as possible (set a quota in advance)
  - No judgment, no right or wrong (in fact, wrongness is good!)
  - Cliches... there for a reason
  - Include **negative**, inappropriate or destructive solutions too. They can lead to fresh thinking.*“The chief enemy of creativity is ‘good sense.’” – Pablo Picasso*

### MOVING BEYOND LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

6. Visualize and describe the **perfect solution** in the perfect fantasy world where absolutely everything is possible.  
*“Sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast”. – Lewis Carroll*
7. Describe the most fabulous person you could ever hope to emulate, a **mentor among the stars**, a wise and clever role model you greatly admire... Picture the results of their solution to your problem in detail.  
*“Admiration, n. Our polite recognition of another’s resemblance to ourselves.” – Ambrose Bierce*

## CREATIVE THINKING (cont'd)

8. **Foreign perspectives:** Explain your question to a Martian... they're from another planet, all is foreign to them.  
*"One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things." – Henry Miller*
9. **Rethink your purpose...** Has your question or issue changed? Is something not working? Can you narrow your focus or otherwise close in on a more useful direction?  
– Refine your question or issue so that it intrigues and excites your passion maximally.  
*If you never change your mind, why have one? – Edward de Bono*

*BREAK... move about, go outside, take a break*

## GENERATING NEW SOLUTIONS

10. **Practice synectics:** forcing comparisons and connections between those things which are apparently unrelated.  
– Put the question out of your mind  
– List irrelevant materials, such as items you see around you, objects from your childhood, places you've visited...  
– Improvise connections between your listed objects and your problem/issue  
*Examples: "This favorite keychain is like my dilemma question in that both require me to make a decision before I can proceed." or "This fork answers my artwork question in that I could create functional pieces."*  
*"Creativity is the ability to see relationships where none exist." – Thomas Disch*
11. **Applied synectics:** forcing combinations of ideas you've already generated  
– Select pairs or groups of previously listed concepts and possibilities at random  
– Improvise scenarios that combine and utilize all the concepts, no matter how unrealistic or impractical  
*Examples: "By combining my interests in beet juice, lucid dreaming and recycled wastepaper, I could create drawings of my dreams on old newspapers." or "By combining my writing block and fear of flying issues with my interest in family lineage, I could fly across the country visiting family and documenting my personal and historical discoveries."*  
*"Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought." – Albert Szent-Gyorgyi*
12. **Share and discuss with others** one thing we've learned about our question today.  
*"History is Philosophy teaching by examples." – Thucydides*

## EXTRA CREDIT

13. Select one aspect of your question and **form a new one**; create new mindmaps.
14. Go on **field trips** to gather synectic material: the zoo, galleries and museums, ethnic markets, gardens and parks...
15. Research **what other people have done** in your circumstances, their biographies and autobiographies. List their successful ideas and concepts, apply to your question/dilemma.
16. **Push it further.** How can you go beyond your own assumptions and limitations? Ask friends to describe their fantasy dream world. Check out the lives of famous inventors and innovators, who changed our history in unexpected ways.
17. Above all, take left-brain activity **breaks**: walking, routine tasks, knitting, whatever will let your mind relax and coast in neutral. **Sleep on it.**
18. **Rinse and repeat.**

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. How to recognize and accept the natural human creativity in each of us.
2. How to select and define a meaningful question that brings you excitement and enthusiasm.
3. How to gather visual and conceptual material for the mind to play with.
4. How to get past unproductive assumptions and precepts.
5. How to pull it all together for maximum results.