

HOW TO THINK CREATIVELY



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BITESIZE

Come up with ideas, see new possibilities and drive innovation.

A CREATIVE MIND

Creativity is a serious business. The ability to find solutions drives social progress and has given us the technologies we rely on. Employers recruit for it, schools nurture it, and most of us like to think we have it.

Creative ideas involve more than just novelty: they are also surprising, they add value and improve our lives. They can seem obvious in hindsight and make us wonder why we didn't think of them before.

So how can we see new possibilities and find better solutions? The key is to understand how our minds make connections, solve problems and come up with new ideas.

"The key to intelligence and creativity is the ability to flexibly switch between different modes of thought depending on the task demands." Kaufman & Singer



Your unconscious mind makes connections and sees possibilities. You rely on this part of your mind to come up with options and generate ideas.

It often does this when you aren't consciously focussing on the problem, when your conscious mind is taking a rest.

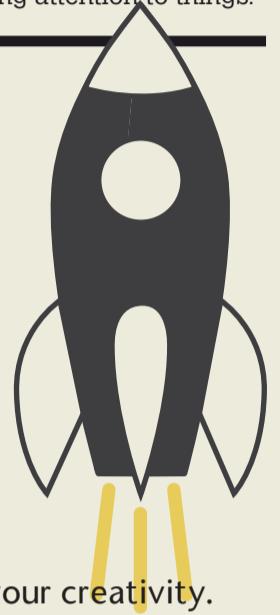


Your conscious mind analyses information and thinks through problems. You need this to evaluate options and assess the merits of different ideas.

You can't force your mind to come up with ideas. There is more to "working on it" than consciously paying attention to things.

BOOSTING YOUR CREATIVITY

Creativity doesn't come from a single type of thinking, but a mix of open, associative thought and focussed, analytic thought. There are many ways to harness these different types of thinking. Creativity is a process, and it can be learned.



A creative environment

Your context affects your state of mind, so you can boost creative thinking by seeking out relaxing and inspiring environments. Nature and greenery seem to help, and so does gentle background noise and chatter.

Check your assumptions

Before you can think about a problem consciously, your unconscious mind has already formed judgements about it. Sometimes these assumptions limit our thinking and stop us solving problems. Question your assumptions and spot when your mind has leapt to conclusions, particularly when things appear familiar.

Play with possibilities

Edward de Bono argued that we can boost creativity by playing with silly, implausible ideas. The final idea you pick needs to be sensible, but the route you take to get there doesn't have to be. Shake up your thinking.

A creative mood?

Your inner world affects your creativity. Positive moods help us spot possibilities, whilst negative moods focus our minds on problems. Try not to get stuck in stressed or anxious moods as they limit new ideas.

Turn off your mind

We instinctively think "working on something" means paying conscious attention, but creative thought often happens when we let our minds wander, think about something else, or allow our minds to rest and sleep. Focus on the problem, then forget about it and trust your mind to keep working on it.

Mental distance

We find it easier to solve other people's problems than our own. Any situation that we think is unlikely to happen to us any time soon is easier to think about and find unusual solutions. Try swapping problems with a friend or colleague.



PROBLEM-SOLVING CHECKLIST



Try this checklist for solving problems and thinking more creatively:

- Find a relaxed and stimulating environment
- Keep yourself healthy and well-rested
- Manage your moods and emotional states
- Keep a healthy distance and perspective
- Redefine and re-state the problem
- Write down and check your assumptions
- Play with stupid, impractical ideas
- Let your mind wander, or even sleep on it

FROM CREATIVITY TO INNOVATION

CREATIVE TEAMS

Innovation is a collective endeavour. We inspire each other to come up with better ideas and improve each others' thinking. A few characteristics can help teams be more creative:

Diversity: seek out people with different experiences and perspectives to yours.

Resources: we need time, and sometimes money, to try ideas and create space to fail.

Safety: we need to feel safe to say what we really think, take risks and share our ideas.

Creative people can disagree, but they are always curious.

If creativity is the process of coming up with ideas, innovation is the process that makes them a reality.



IDEAS INTO ACTION

Creativity doesn't stop when you have an idea. You also need to turn that idea into action, and try it out in the real world. We call this process "innovation".

Test out your ideas early, even in small ways, and keep trying new things. Be prepared for your ideas not to work too. Giving yourself space to fail means you are free to learn and explore.

Above all, keep reflecting and playing with ideas and asking what you could do differently. Innovation comes from staying playful and flexible, even under pressure.

This free tip sheet was created by Mindapples to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic. To find out more about our apps, elearning, webinars, face-to-face training and charitable work, visit www.mindapples.org.