

Lesson 4 Worksheet: How to Be (More) Creative

This worksheet will help you enhance your creativity by:

1. Making yourself a sponge – learning about your art form or industry
2. Practising!
3. Getting great feedback

1. Make Yourself a Sponge

(a) How well do you know your field?

Run through the following list and make a note of how well you know each category within your creative field of expertise:

- Classic works
- Contemporary works
- The avant-garde
- Works from your own country
- Works from other countries
- Critical reviews and studies

Now take one of the categories you know *least* well, and start adding to your knowledge by reading, looking, listening, learning and/or going to events – whatever it takes to become well-versed in that aspect of your field.

Watch out for avoiding works or artists you don't like. You don't have to like everything, but if you want to be more than a keen amateur, you need some knowledge of every aspect of your field. Even if you only confirm your negative judgment, it's better to do this from an informed position than dismissing things without getting to know them. And you might even surprise yourself, by finding some diamonds in the rough...

(b) Discover new works

i. Make it easy to discover new work by setting up subscriptions to have it delivered to you automatically:

- Clubs or societies that send you the latest works
- Magazine subscriptions
- Email newsletters
- Podcasts or YouTube channels

ii. Go to venues where you will encounter new work (and meet others with similar interests):

- Exhibitions
- Gigs and other live events
- Libraries
- Specialist shops
- Cafes and bars where people from your industry/art form hang out

(c) Look for 'human filters'

Find people who know more than you and who share your tastes, and use them as guides or 'human filters' to help you find the good stuff:

- Friends and fellow creators
- Teachers and mentors
- Leading artists and creators
- Critics and reviewers
- Bloggers and podcasters

(d) Stand up for your opinions

Don't just passively absorb works and opinions, like a dead sponge. *Living* sponges squirt water out as well as sucking it in! Put your opinions out there and test them in conversation with others. Don't be afraid to say what you think – but be prepared to listen to others and modify your views if you hear something new. There's no shame in changing your mind, only in having a closed mind.

Here are some options:

- Argue a position with a friend who is likely to take an opposite view
- Join to a class or discussion group
- Join an online forum and take part in the discussions
- Join the discussion in the comments on a relevant blog
- Write a blog post arguing a particular critical viewpoint
- Write a review for one of the magazines in your industry / artistic field

2. Practise, Practise, Practise

- i. Look at your diary for a typical week. Decide when and for how long you're going to practise. Be realistic: it's better to commit to 2 hours a week and stick to it than to promise you'll do it every day and never get round to it.
- ii. Decide on your criteria for 'doing enough' in each session. E.g. a set number of words/images/lines of code, or your gut feeling.
- iii. Make a list of all the excuses you are likely to give yourself, when it comes to the point of actually starting work. Keep the list handy in your workplace.
- iv. Each day you do your work, put a mark in your diary to show you kept your promise to yourself that day.
- v. If you choose to make an excuse, pick one from the list and record in your diary which one you used.
- vi. If you are prevented from working by an emergency or another *genuine* obstacle (not an excuse), that's fine – just make sure you make up the time by working an extra session within the next week.
- vii. Review your diary every month, to see how many times you practise vs making excuses. If the same excuse keeps cropping up, make it a top priority to get rid of that excuse.
- viii. If you're finding it hard to keep practising, pair up with a friend in the same line of work – encourage each other, share your monthly scores, and hold each other accountable!

3. Get Great Feedback

(a) Choose your critics

Who is in the best position to give you informed, constructive and useful feedback (not just tell you what you want to hear)? Choose as many as you like from the list below:

- **A mentor** – either an informal relationship or by applying to a formal mentoring programme
- **A teacher** – ask around, do some research and join a class where the teacher has a great reputation
- **Your peers**
- **Professional critics** – some organisations offer substantial critiques of creative work by experienced critics (for a fee)
- **Your audience** – perform live, show your work and/or publish it (online or through traditional channels) and listen to the audience's reaction.

(b) Don't take it personally

This is the hardest bit. Here are a couple of articles with specific advice on how to do it:

Three Ways to Assess Your Own Creative Work:

<http://www.wishfulthinking.co.uk/2007/12/09/three-ways-to-assess-your-own-creative-work/>

How to Deal with Stinging Criticism: <http://lateralaction.com/articles/deal-with-criticism/>

(c) Do something with the feedback

When you receive some feedback from a trusted source, ask yourself:

- What does this tell me about the work?
- Do I agree with it?
- What can I learn from it?
- What new options does it open up?
- Do I want to act on it or set it aside?