

## Lesson 5 Worksheet: Creative Thinking

This worksheet will help you enhance your creativity by using four powerful types of creative thinking:

- Reframing
- mind mapping
- insight
- creative flow.

## 1. Reframing

### ***(a) Look out for reframes in everyday life***

Start to notice that reframes that are part of everyday conversation and communication: in jokes, advertising, discussions and arguments.

Here's a clue: look out for comments that provoke a strong emotional reaction, either positive (the punchline of a joke or a thoughtful compliment) or negative (in a political debate or a lovers' argument).

The more you do this, the more you will realise how much human beings make themselves happy, sad anxious or plain miserable over their *interpretation* of events, rather than the events themselves.

### ***(b) Spot limiting frames***

It's often easier to spot limiting frames when they are used by other people. When you see other people getting stuck in problems, ask yourself: "What limiting frames are they applying to this situation?" and "What other frames would give them more options?"

E.g. A business owner with disappointing sales who keeps tweaking the copy on the sales page of his website, unaware that the problem isn't with his sales pitch, it's the product itself that is flawed.

Once you get used to this, try raising the bar and spotting the limiting frames that *you* are applying to situations where you habitually get stuck.

**(c) Look for alternative frames**

When confronted with problems, opportunities and other interesting situations, get into the habit of looking for alternative frames to the most obvious ones. Here are two very useful questions for doing this:

*i. "What else could this mean?"*

This is known as a **content reframe**, as it reframes the thing itself, whether a behaviour, person, event or object. Here are a few examples:

- Is that noisy person's behaviour charmingly enthusiastic, or annoyingly boisterous?
- Is that presenter admirably confident or merely arrogant?
- Was the rock festival a fantastic weekend of fun, or a blight on the peaceful countryside?
- Is Bob's new sports car a symbol of his success or a sign of a midlife crisis?

*ii. "Where else could this be useful?"*

This is known as a **context reframe**, as the meaning of the thing itself doesn't change, but a change of context can change it from a positive to a negative (or vice versa).

- Nobody wants a reputation for clumsiness – unless it's time to wash the dishes.
- Winston Churchill's fighting spirit won him admirers during the Second World War, but when the war ended, the British public decided they wanted a different kind of leader for peacetime.
- The start of the football season divides many households between those who have been *waiting for it all summer*, and those who *can't believe it's come around again so soon*.
- Driving a 4x4 truck in the city is environmentally irresponsible; in remote countryside it's a basic necessity.

***(d) Useful frames for problem solving***

Think of a problem or creative challenge that you are currently trying to solve. Run through the list of creative frames from the lesson, asking yourself each of the questions in turn, to see what new options they bring to mind.

If you're still stuck, do the activity with friends or colleagues. The more people you involved, the more different perspectives (frames) you will generate, and the more chance you have of finding a workable solution.

Keep this list handy for dealing with future problems – and add any new frames and questions that you discover along the way.

- **Meaning** — what else could this mean?
- **Context** — where else could this be useful?
- **Learning** — what can I learn from this?
- **Humour** — what's the funny side of this?
- **Solution** — what would I be doing if I'd solved the problem? Can I start doing any of that right now?
- **Silver lining** — what opportunities are lurking inside this problem?
- **Points of view** — how does this look to the other people involved?
- **Heroes** — how would one of my creative heroes approach this problem?

## **2. Mind Mapping**

Next time you have to write an article, prepare a presentation, or plan out a complex project of any kind, start the process by drawing a mind map. This will free you from having to get everything down in a logical order, and allow you to focus on generating the ideas themselves. As you draw the mind map, you will start to see relationships and patterns emerge as if by themselves, which will help you order the material later on.

Remember Tony Buzan's advice on drawing mind maps:

- Start in the centre of the page
- The lines should be connected and radiate out from the central concept
- Use different colours for different branches of the mind map
- Use images and symbols to bring the concepts to life and make them easier to remember

I find it also helps to draw the mind map quickly, without pausing to think. You might like to put some music on, to help you get into the flow of pouring ideas onto the paper.

Sometimes mind maps turn out pretty messy, with crossings-out or ideas clustered in one corner and white spaces elsewhere. If this happens, you might want to redraw a neater version of the mind map afterwards. You might even want to use mind mapping software (see the Resources for this lesson) to create a version for public consumption. Knowing you have this option will reduce any pressure to 'get it right first time', and allow you to scribble the ideas down freely.

### 3. Insight

There's something mysterious about the way an insight pops into your mind is if from nowhere. While you can never perfectly predict when insight will strike, you can use the structure outlined by James Webb Young to make it happen more often:

1. **Gather knowledge** — through both constant effort to expand your general knowledge and also specific research for each project. Make sure you allow time to do this properly, and don't give in to the temptation to start work before you have all the information you need.
2. **Work hard on the problem.** Depending on the nature of the problem, this could involve hard thinking, writing, drafting, rehearsing or building a prototype. According to Young, it's important to work yourself to a standstill, when you are ready to give up out of sheer exhaustion. Whether or not you go for complete exhaustion, pay close attention to the signals that let you know you've done as much as you can do on the problem – for now.
3. **Take a break** and allow your unconscious mind to work its magic. Rather than simply doing nothing, Young suggests turning your attention “do whatever stimulates your imagination and emotions” such as a trip to the movies or reading fiction. Again, notice what works best for you. For Archimedes it was a nice hot bath, for Newton it was a stroll in the orchard. For you, it might be a trip to the gym, a drink or dinner with friends, or mowing the lawn.
4. **The Eureka moment** — when the idea appears as if from nowhere. There's not much use for you to do at this stage, except marvel at the powers of your unconscious mind!
5. **Build on the idea.** An idea is only as good as what you do with it. Keep working to tease out its implications, critiquing for weaknesses and translate it into action.

#### **4. Creative Flow**

##### ***(a) Notice what triggers your creative flow***

Make a note of the things that make it easy for you to get into creative flow. These can include:

- times of day
- places
- people
- type of work
- background music
- coffee or other drinks (don't overdo it if you decide that whiskey hits the spot!)
- rituals and warm-up routines
- smells and scents
- furniture and equipment (your favourite desk, chair, guitar etc)

**(b) How to find your creative flow**

- 1. Set yourself a meaningful challenge.** You can only commit 100% to something you find important, meaningful or at the very least interesting.
- 2. Make it difficult but not impossible.** Learn to recognise when you are idling in your comfort zone (and need to push yourself harder) and when you are trying too hard (and need to slow down and take things one step at a time).
- 3. Minimise distractions.** Things like e-mail, the Internet, instant messaging, and your phone will cut your concentration to shreds. When it's time to work, switch them off. And do everything you can to minimise interruptions from other people. If necessary, schedule focused work time in your diary.
- 4. Use triggers to alter your state of mind.** Make use of the triggers you identified in the previous question. Remember, the association between the trigger and your creative flow state will be stronger if you only experience the two together. E.g. save your 'writing cafe' for writing; don't wear the same clothes to the gym as you do to your dance rehearsal; have a special meal you only eat on the day of performance.