

CREATIVE SPARKS

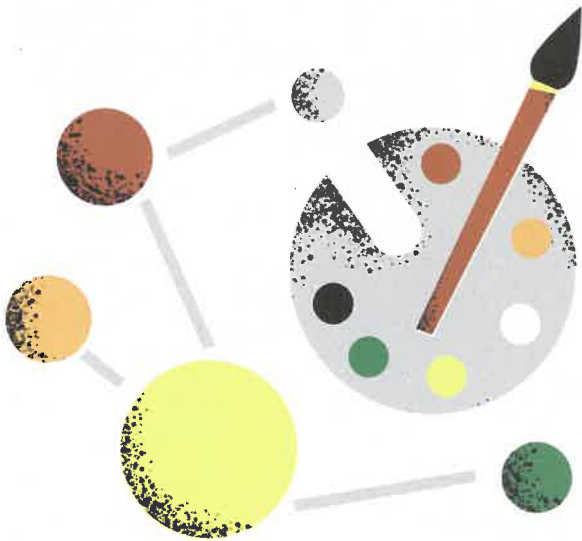
How to find inspiration in the everyday and be a super idea generator

Have you ever found yourself stuck for inspiration? Whether you need an idea to fix a problem or write a school paper, one of the best ways to solve an issue is to think like a writer. They're people who need ideas all the time, but can't wait around until inspiration lands in their lap. Just like you, when you have an assignment due, writers have to turn in their work on time. Want to become a super idea generator? Here's how to think like a writer...



Make bubble charts

Let's say you'd like to earn money doing something creative, but you're not sure what. Take a blank sheet and write 'creative job' in the middle of the page. Now draw a circle around it. This is your main bubble. Next, think of things you like to do. This could be baking, woodworking and painting. Draw three lines sticking out of your main bubble, like sun rays. Add one activity at the end of each line and draw a bubble around it. What do you bake? Cookies, cupcakes, bread, pies? Add four rays to the baking bubble and create new bubbles for each word. What type of cookies? Add rays to the cookie bubble for each kind. Do the same for the woodworking and painting bubbles. There's no limit to how many bubbles you can add. Keep going until you run out of ideas. Once you're finished, study your chart. See if any job possibilities stand out, either from one branch or by combining several. Who knows, you might decide to sell hand-painted wooden cookie ornaments!



Observe

Look at objects, people, animals. Take in their shapes, colours, patterns. If possible, go somewhere you've never been before, indoors or outdoors. If not, take a closer look at the things you see every day. Pay attention to the questions that arise in your mind: do spiders see in the dark? Where does dust come from? No question is too silly. Write them all down. Keep going until you feel you've come up with enough topics you'd like to research further.

Turn over for more idea-generating activities



Get physical

Sometimes trying too hard to come up with ideas actually stops the flow. To reset your brain, work up a sweat. Go for a run or walk, try paddleboarding (see page 60), shoot some hoops, dance around the house. The only rule? Make it fun. If an idea pops into your head, great. If not, don't force it. Just keep moving. When you're spent, take a moment to catch your breath, then slowly allow your mind to drift back to the problem you were trying to solve. Let yourself play with it and see if you can look at it from a different angle.



Listen

Eavesdrop on people's conversations. Don't participate, just listen. It could be in a park, shopping centre, supermarket queue – anywhere people are hanging about. Write down what they say. If a song is playing, what are the lyrics? Are dogs barking, cars honking, sirens blaring? Once you're done, look at your notes and see if a story emerges.



Go for a stroll

Walking allows you to get the benefits from all three previous tips simultaneously: physical activity, observing and listening. Try walking in different places at different times of day (see page 56). Let your mind alternate between wandering and focusing and jot down any interesting thoughts.

Make a list

Write a title at the top of the page. This can be one word or a few sentences describing the issue. Next, list everything that comes to mind about your situation. Write as many things as you can think of. When you run out, take a break and go do something else. Keep your list handy and add to it as more ideas come to you. When you feel your list is complete, read it over and see if anything stands out.





Take a leaf out of their book

Authors all have their own methods for coming up with ideas, some more quirky than others. Famous writers from the past like Winston Churchill, Marcel Proust and Mark Twain preferred writing in bed, while Lewis Carroll and Virginia Woolf composed standing up.

Walter Scott, on the other hand, created poetry while riding on horseback. But the most relaxing might be Agatha Christie, who hatched murderous stories as she soaked in the bathtub, snacking on apples.

What about present-day writers? Stephanie Meyer created her *Twilight* series from a vivid dream and Suzanne Collins came up with *The Hunger Games* while channel surfing on TV.

However, Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code*, doesn't leave it up to chance. When he suffers from writer's block, he hangs upside down strapped to a piece of gym equipment!

Neil Gaiman, who penned *The Graveyard Book*, describes the process best: 'You get ideas from daydreaming. You get ideas from being bored. You get ideas all the time. The only difference between writers and other people is we notice when we're doing it.'

He also suggests the following prompts:

- What if...?
- If only...
- I wonder...
- Wouldn't it be interesting if...?

The best way to see which idea generators work best for you is to give them all a try. Some might be more effective than others depending on the situation. Keep a few in your toolbox, and you won't be left scratching your head for long.