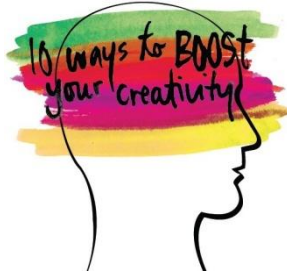


10 ways to BOOST  
your creativity



## Overview

Creativity is a wonderful quality, and it takes many forms: coming up with a thoroughly original plot for a Hollywood screenplay, solving Einstein field equations for coalescing black hole binaries on supercomputers, thinking outside the box during a work meeting, imaginatively improvising in the kitchen.

The important thing is being able to transcend the obvious and create something new and meaningful. It's a trait we admire in others and want very much to cultivate in ourselves.

Pablo Picasso, whose boundless creative powers made him one of the greatest artists that ever lived, once said: "Every child is an artist; the problem is staying an artist when you grow up."

Certainly there are factors that seem to inhibit our ability to think creatively as adults. One is that we know too much; the more we know, the harder it is to see things differently because we get locked into old ways of thinking. Another is that we self-censor because we're afraid of looking silly.

Fortunately, there's much we can do to unleash our inner creative genius. And it doesn't matter how old we are. Our brains are wired for change anytime we're ready to take action. So how about right now?

**To get you started, here are 10 ways to boost your creativity:**



## Colour your world blue

Next time you're working on a creative task and feeling uninspired, check out what the predominant colours are in your surroundings. If there's not a lot of blue, this could very well be the problem.

As reported in this [blog post](#), results from a year long Canadian study suggest that any hint of the colour blue, even if it's just in the pen you're using, makes you more creative.

In the experiment, 600 participants were asked to perform creative tasks on a computer such as thinking laterally about ways to use a brick.

When the background colour of the computer screen was blue – as opposed to red or white – there was almost double the creative output.

One explanation for this is that many of us tend to associate the colour blue with the sky and the ocean and that thinking about both creates a sense of openness, peace and tranquility. According to the author of the study, “The benign cues make people feel safe about being creative and exploratory. Not surprisingly it is people’s favourite colour.”

# 2

## Heed the experts

Plenty of creative greats have seriously pondered the reasons for and sources of their creativity. Here's what some of them have said on the subject:

"If you hear a voice within you say, 'You cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced."

**Vincent Van Gogh**

"Have no fear of perfection, you'll never reach it."

**Salvador Dali**



"Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people."

**Leo Burnett**

"You can't wait for inspiration, you have to go after it with a club."

**Jack London**

"Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will."

**George Bernard Shaw**

"Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while."

**Steve Jobs**

"Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can plan weird; that's easy. What's hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity."

**Charles Mingus**



## Pretend you're being creative on behalf of someone else

Our existing knowledge sometimes stymies our creativity. Consider songwriting and how challenging it is coming up with a melody you haven't already heard. Likewise if you're at work and trying to solve a problem, it's tempting to fall back on solutions that colleagues have used in the past.

It doesn't have to be this way. According to something called 'construal level theory' which is discussed [here](#) we tend to think about things that are near us in space or time in specific terms, but about things that are far from us in space or time in more abstract terms.

For example, if you're dreaming about your trip to Italy next year, your focus might be hanging out at a café near the Trevi Fountain and enjoying the *passaggiata*. But if you're going to Italy next week, you're probably more preoccupied with what you're going to pack and the current exchange rate.

What this effectively means is that your creativity may be enhanced simply by putting some distance between you and the problem you're solving, for instance thinking about another person while you're performing a task.

In one experiment to test this hypothesis, some people were asked to draw aliens for a story they would write later, others for a story that would be written by someone else. Intriguingly, the first group drew far less creative aliens than the second group, suggesting this really might represent a simple way of helping yourself to be more creative.

# 4

## Be discriminating in your use of digital technology

We don't normally associate neuroscience with creativity yet the study of the brain has much to contribute to this topic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century especially given the role the environment plays in our cognitive development. And today that environment is changing in unprecedented ways due to digital technology.

Susan Greenfield, writer, broadcaster and member of the House of Lords, presented on this subject at [Mind & Its Potential 2011](#).

She argues that when we're engaged in a stimulating enriched environment (i.e. *not* cyberspace), brain cells work harder and our neuronal connections multiply. "Then you see one thing in terms of something else. That's what we mean by understanding," says Greenfield.

Screen culture, on the other hand, is a world lacking in metaphor and abstract concepts, one not conducive to differentiating information from knowledge or to understanding what's happening.

Greenfield's concern is that we must have this understanding or meaning in order to be creative, and that this isn't being served by the computer environment.

To read our blog post about Greenfield's presentation, click [here](#).





## Remember these two words: ‘imagination’ and ‘association’

How many reckon their memory is getting worse as they get older? Who thinks they were more imaginative when they were little kids? Whose ability to fantasise has slowly but surely diminished with the passing of time?

Tony Buzan, inventor of Mind Mapping, posed these and other questions at the 2011 [Mind & Its Potential](#) conference. One of his main arguments is that many mainstream learning practices stifle our creativity and memory. That’s the bad news.

The good news is that in terms of our cognitive function, what’s considered “normal is NOT natural.” Which begs the question, what’s natural and indeed absolutely essential in this age of information overload where being able to gather data and make sense of it is so important?

According to Buzan, “the way our brains work is to remember by **imagination** and **association**.”

“Welcome to the human race because our prime language is multisensory images and the associations and colours they generate. It is imagination and association. That is the human language, the one we speak, the language of science, poetry and art.”

To read our blog post about Buzan’s presentation, click [here](#).

# 6

## Pray they commercialise the 'thinking cap'

We've all heard the term 'thinking cap'. It's the make-believe hat you put on when you need to concentrate your mind on an intellectually challenging problem.

The scientists who created it have for some time been amassing evidence of its effectiveness, including some compelling results from their latest study.

For more detail, click [here](#) to read the blog.



Believe it or not, scientists have devised such a cap, albeit one wired to pass a weak electrical current to the right side of the brain, the result being to improve the wearer's creativity and suppress their linear thinking.

What they proved was that a shot of electrical current to the brain boosts activity on the more creative right side of the brain while reducing it in the creativity-suppressing left side, liberating many of us from our existing cognitive biases and allowing us to think more laterally in order to solve complex problems.





## Take power naps



Sadly in Australia as in most western societies, only 20-25 percent of people nap more than twice a week. Conversely in France and many other siesta cultures, it's not uncommon for 80-90 percent of the population to grab some z's almost daily.

Fortunately, nap advocate [Thea O'Connor](#), the subject of this [blog](#) and a presenter at [Happiness & Its Causes 2013](#) is all about normalising the nap in our time poor and work weary world.

This is a very good thing because a new study suggests a power nap boosts creativity.

As reported in this [article](#), US researchers monitoring the brain activity of 15 snoozing subjects found that during naps, the brain's right hemisphere is incredibly active; it also regularly transmits information to the left hemisphere which, by contrast, isn't very active at all.

Given the role the brain's right hemisphere plays in creative endeavours such as visualising and big picture thinking, scientists surmise from the findings that a good ol' fashioned nanna nap helps the brain solve problems by enhancing our creative abilities.



## Be more introverted

Why is it that introverts, who make up one third to one half of the population, so often get a bum rap in our culture? This question was the subject of a talk given by author Susan Cain which inspired this [blog](#).

Cain distinguishes between the two personality types this way: "Extroverts really crave large amounts of stimulation whereas introverts feel at their most alive, most switched on and most capable when they're in quieter, more low key environments.

The difference would be neither here nor there if both groups were judged by society as having equal value. Yet many of our most important institutions, schools and workplaces favour extroverts and their need for stimulation.

Yet who are often the most creative people? You guessed it – the introverts, those who seek solitude in order to experience what are often profound and paradigm-shifting epiphanies and revelations.

Consider humankind's greatest exemplars of insight and wisdom, the mystics and sages in all the world's religions. They didn't discover what it is to be human carousing in a bar.



# 9

## Start young

Here at VI Conferences, we take very seriously the wellbeing and wisdom of young people. Our planet has so many problems; what will best equip today's youth mentally, physically and spiritually, to not just face as adults tomorrow's challenges but create a new and better world?

Specifically, how can we nurture and grow in our kids the quality of ingenuity that will most effectively help them in this quest?

Janet Etty-Leal, Marylou Verberne and Dr Judy Willis are interested in these very questions and have all spoken at our conferences about their work with young people.

Their presentations are the subject of the following blogs:

### [The mindful child](#)

Janet Etty-Leal is one of a growing band of mindfulness instructors for children. What's so transforming about mindfulness, says Etty-Leal, is that it "offers children the opportunity to pause and notice, and as this starts to happen, the mind begins to clear ... hopefully for inspiration and maybe even for revelation."

### [Child's play](#)

Marylou Verberne describes the work she's doing in schools through her organisation Play for Life to promote "happier, healthier lives and communities through play." She argues that today too many kids are suffering

'play deficit disorder' characterised by obesity, anxiety disorders and depression and stunted social, cognitive and creative development.

### [It's a wonderful life](#)

Dr Judy Willis is an authority on the neuroscience of how the brain learns best. She explains why educational engagement with infants, virtually from the time they are born, is so worthwhile in terms of their later life. "What's most important to a child is the sense that they are safe and can experiment and be curious and will be taken care of in a learning environment ... That's going to cause the most positive brain changes."



# 10

## Act on your ideas

It sounds obvious but unless you act on an idea, it isn't really much use.

Yet it's surprising how many of us do absolutely nothing with the ideas we have, usually because we don't trust that our idea is a particularly good one, or that even if it is quite brilliant, surely someone else has already made that movie/written that riff/designed that car prototype.

Or we're lazy and taking the necessary steps to actually manifest our stroke of genius requires too much effort. Besides, what if we go to all that trouble and no one recognises our achievement?

You're right in thinking this is a big disincentive when it comes to being creative. Why bother persisting on a path of wild imaginings if you reach a dead end?

In fact, many of our greatest artists, writers and scientists were (and are) also quite prolific despite at times receiving an indifferent or worse, hostile reception to their creations.

So, if you want to not just boost your creativity but sustain it over a lifetime ... take your cool idea and run with it.



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Sydney Town Hall

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