

Design toolbox

STEPS & TOOLS

Adding structure and tools
to my creative process

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STEPS & TOOLS

Contents

This toolbox compiles ideas and exercises from a variety of useful sources found in the bibliography and compiling in one space for easy access during the creative process.

Solving creative projects involves gathering or generating content, problem solving, elaboration, working within or setting parameters and ultimately presenting. These depend on creative thinking skills which this toolbox should help you develop.

Enjoy the design process!

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“Good design is as little design as possible.”

DIETER RAMS

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1

FIRST LOOK

Define the problem

Client brief / Project outline / Timeboxing

Client brief

1. FIRST LOOK

Define the exact problem

Client brief

Project outline

Timeboxing

WHY YOU WANT A GOOD BRIEF

A good brief is extensive and makes the creative process easier since you're no longer expanding the problem during the solving.

- Ensure a client knows what they want
- Use the brief as a point of reference
- Use it to understand the who, what, where, when, why, how

Invest time in a good brief!

One of the functions of creative thinking is not just solving the existing problem, but also discovering and providing deeper questions to answer from the brief.

SHOW THE CLIENT WHAT'S IN A GOOD BRIEF

<i>1. The scene</i>	Introduce your business. Who are you and what you do? What is your history, how long have you been going? Do you have a website or any other relevant information?
<i>2. Challenge</i>	Give background to the project. How has the project come about? What are the objectives of the project? What is the message trying to be conveyed? Budget?
<i>3. Audience</i>	Who is your target audience? Who are your competitors? What do they do well? Demographics – age, gender, income, employment, geography, lifestyle.
<i>4. Deliverables</i>	The client should sign these details off before going further: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single most important message • what do we want the audience to do – buy, subscribe, feel, think etc. • what specific info from the client will assist in this • what media will best facilitate the goal – flyers, app, ad campaign etc. • critical executional elements – logo, text, web address, promotion etc. • specifications or sizes the designer needs adhere to
<i>5. Impact</i>	Outline what impact you want to make with the project. Do you have targets? These can be numbers or goals. Are they quantifiable results?
<i>6. Deadlines</i>	Do you have any key milestones and deadlines?

Project outline

1. FIRST LOOK

Define the exact problem

After communicating with the client and deciphering the brief you can create a project outline. It will provide you and your client with structure when discussing and creating the pages and elements of a project.

Client brief

Project outline

Timeboxing

WHAT TO INCLUDE

Website design

Include each section of the site with a detailed description of the content and pages. It is important to know how many unique designs and layouts you need to provide. Any technical specs and functionality (shop, blog etc.).

Print design

Approximate number of unique page designs and standard page layouts you will be providing, as well as additional elements such as the book cover and jacket. Include what content needs to be presented and in what format and dimensions.

HOW TO USE THE OUTLINE

The graphic design project outline has several uses.

Help to determine the estimate and timeframe

It is a good idea to get an outline approved before quoting a price, as it will help you determine the time necessary to complete a job through using it with the timeboxing technique (on page 7).

Include it in your proposal

Once approved, the outline can be part of your final contract or proposal so the scope of the project is officially agreed on.

Keep the project on target

As you work on the project, you can refer to the outline to stick to the original plan. If the amount of content changes, this may affect the budget or timeframe.

Timeboxing

1. FIRST LOOK

Define the exact problem

Client brief

Project outline

Timeboxing

In time management, timeboxing allocates a fixed period, called a time box, to each planned activity. The critical rule of timeboxed work is that work should stop at the end of the timebox, and review progress: has the goal been met, or partially met if it included multiple tasks? This process should help keep you on track in terms of time which will impact your quoting.

Example.

20 mins	40 mins	60 mins	80 mins	100 mins	120mins
Brainstorm big idea	Evaluate Determine app content	Rough wireframes	Evaluate Refined wireframes	Visual design thinking	Evaluate Final clean sketches

“The use of short, structured sprints to achieve stated idea generation goal.”

DAVID SHERWIN

2

SATURATION

Collect information & inspiration

Information / Inspiration / Observation

Information

2. SATURATION

Collect information

Saturation is recognised as a phase in the creative thinking process whereby we collect as much information as is useful to find a solution for a problem.

RESEARCH

Research competitors, market trends, product/service differentiators, history of the business, future of the business.

Analyse research gathered and decide on design and functionality criteria. Could be as simple as a theme carried across all marketing materials. This can be presented to the client.

This information often includes other design solutions, tutorials, books you've read but also general things which inspire you.

This remains quite a strange aspect of creativity, you often need to know how other people have solved similar problems, before you're able to deliver your own solution.

Information

Inspiration

Observation

Inspiration

Inspiration is everywhere and anything can inspire you. Certain music inspires. Looking at nature gives beautiful colour palettes. It's a matter of observing the world around you in such a way that you can draw inspiration from it.

Drawing on the information gathered and your inspiration research, come up with the beginning of idea that can be used as starting points for the saturation phase.

1. Create a folder or Pinterest board and keep relevant inspiration (URL's, images, etc.).
2. Embrace all sensory information (ie. close your eyes and listen, create a colour scheme from sounds etc.).
3. Use a diverse a range of sources as possible (the observation links, magazines, conversations, galleries etc.) to push for more original creative connections.

*“Genius is 1% talent and
99% percent hard work.”*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Observation

2. SATURATION

Collect information

Information

Inspiration

Observation

ARCHITECTURE

<http://archidose.blogspot.co.nz>

<http://inhabitat.com>

<http://eyecandy-webcandy.blogspot.co.nz>

FASHION & STREET STYLE

<http://www.thesartorialist.com>

<http://nymag.com/thecut/>

<http://fashiontoast.com>

PHOTOGRAPHY

<https://www.flickr.com>

<https://www.flickr.com/groups/packaged/>

<https://www.flickr.com/groups/gamesboardandotherwise/>

<https://www.flickr.com/groups/board-games/>

DESIGN WEBSITES

<http://www.awwwards.com>

<http://designspiration.net>

<https://dribbble.com>

<http://imjustcreative.com/blog>

<http://ffffound.com>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/draplin/albums>

BOOKS

<https://books.google.com/?hl=en>

<http://bookcoverarchive.com>

MUSEUM

<http://design.designmuseum.org/design/christian-dior>

<http://designarchives.aiga.org/#/home>

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/libraries_and_archives.aspx

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online>

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/library-and-archives/archive-collections>

<http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/index>

<http://www.moma.org/collection>

NATURE

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com>

https://www.flickr.com/groups/_n_w_outdoors/

<https://www.flickr.com/groups/camera/>

https://www.flickr.com/groups/nature__wildlife_photographers_corner/

https://www.flickr.com/groups/spectacular_nature/

3

INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

*Develop concepts / Creative thinking tools /
Selecting ideas / Developing ideas*

3. INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

Develop concepts

Creative thinking tools

Selecting ideas

Developing ideas

Develop concepts

BEFORE STARTING THIS STAGE:

- Speak up if there is not enough info included in the brief!
- Check in at early stages and throughout concept development

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CREATIVITY

Primary creativity is defined by a real break-through.

Having collected enough information and inspiration in the brief and project outline, start thinking of possible solutions. Don't jump straight onto Google or Pinterest, spend some time thinking, mulling, rolling it around in your brain and sketchbook.

1. Don't jump into inspiration stage too quickly, think & sketch.
2. Experiment, use new Photoshop tools, random art supplies etc.
3. Use multiple sources for inspiration – the act of synthesising multiple sources will lead to more original works. Learn about an artist and their process.
4. Refine your process and skill set. Draw!

CHARACTERISTICS FOR CREATIVE THINKERS

Courage	Fear quashes creative risk taking
Receptiveness	Being open to different ways of thinking
Curiosity	Desire to know and explore allows one to grow intellectually, artistically and technically
Flexibility	Keep up with the times but also let go of a path that's not fruitful
Sharp-eyed	Pay attention to what you see every day
Seeking and recognising connections	Bring two related or unrelated things together to form a new combination

TYPES OF CREATIVE THINKING

Associative thinking – Recognising common attributes.

Metaphorical thinking – Identifying similarities between unrelated.

Elaboration /modification – Working out details and alterations.

Imaginative thinking – Forming images in one's mind.

Creative thinking tools

3. INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

Develop concepts

Creative thinking tools

Selecting ideas

Developing ideas

CREATIVE WARM-UP TIPS

- Keep the warm-up unrelated to the main brainstorm
- There should be no right or wrong ideas
- Use randomization and play

CREATIVE WARM-UP TECHNIQUES

1. Watch a funny video to get into a positive frame of mind.
2. Name 10: films linked to monkeys, famous Edwards, things you can drink out of, body parts with three letters in them, alternatives to toilet paper etc.
3. Alternative uses: The little plastic canisters that 35mm film comes in, a dishwashing brush, a newspaper, a child's paddling pool.
4. Sketch with your wrong hand.
5. Randomization: Every participant has to write down an activity and an object, then passes the activity to the right, and the object to the left. Then have each participants explain how their new combination would still make sense.
6. Electro Powered Something. Take an every day object and ask how it could be improved using batteries. (i.e. a book, a bottle).
7. A word game of opposites. Name a word, then all participants have to think of opposites until at least 3 opposites have been listed, before moving on to the next word.
8. 30 circles – transform 30 circles into something recognisable.

BRAINSTORMING TIPS

- Don't pre-judge any idea
- The more ideas, and the wackier the better
- A bad idea can inspire good ideas
- Freewheeling is allowed (stepping out of the problem context)
- Limit your brainstorm in time (usually between 15-30 minutes)
- The evaluation of ideas starts after the idea generation

<http://projectofhow.com> - this is a great resource for ideation tools.

BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

a/ Word listing

Mark the key words that distinguish the company/product and that you want in front of your eyes during the project phase, so not to lose the focus on what you have to represent graphically. Avoid complicated phrases and concepts, be organic: the more immediate you are, the more your mind can process the information quickly and easily.

b/ Idea inversion

The way to use the inversion technique is to look at a particular problem from the opposite direction. For example, if you want to be a better manager, then you would ask, "What would someone do each day if they were a terrible manager?"

c/ Design role playing

Identify a situation, add details, assign roles, act out the scenario.

3. INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

Develop concepts

Creative thinking tools

Selecting ideas

Developing ideas

d/ The Pomodoro technique

Define what you want to achieve. Browse for inspiration which is relevant to your goal. Stick to relevant and dedicated websites, for 25 minutes.

[Take 5 min. break]

Now use this inspiration and try to solve your problem, again limit yourself to 25 minutes. Take notes, make sketches, get your ideas on paper. Start with the obvious and keep writing.

[Take a 35 min. break]

Use your final 25 minutes to finish. Often, you'll have had new insights during this interval which, at least, provide progress to the final solution.

When you first do this, it might be hard to let go of your deadline, but practice makes perfect. It's advised you stay away from the internet and do something you enjoy (for example, cook your dinner, grab a book, go for a run outside).

e/ Reword the problem

Stating the problem differently often leads to different ideas. To reword the problem look at the issue from different angles. "Why do we need to solve the problem?", "What's the roadblock here?", "What will happen if we don't solve the problem?" These questions will give you new insights. You might come up with new ideas to solve your new problem.

f/ Engage in "Morphological Synthesis"

Artist and filmmaker Ze Frank has a method to his madness when brainstorming:

Morphological synthesis is a way of trying to segment your thinking process into parts. Take 4-5 adjectives or characteristics and then brainstorm in that direction.

Start with a sense of scale. Let's say Procter & Gamble has a new toilet paper. What happens if you have no toilet paper? What happens if you have way too much toilet paper? What's the smallest type of toilet paper that you would ever use? What would an incredibly large toilet paper look like? Who is someone that never uses toilet paper? Who is someone that uses it constantly? What can you do with 10,000 rolls of toilet paper? What would a world with no toilet paper look like? Flip back and forth between the extremes until something interesting comes out of it. Then repeat the process based on that new idea.

g/ Think in reverse

If you feel you cannot think of anything new, try turning things upside-down. Instead of focusing on how you could solve a problem/improve operations/enhance a product, consider how could you create the problem/worsen operations/downgrade the product. The reverse ideas will come flowing in. Consider these ideas – once you've reversed them again – as possible solutions for the original challenge.

3. INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

Develop concepts

Creative thinking tools

Selecting ideas

Developing ideas

h/ Express yourself through different media

We have multiple intelligences but somehow, when faced with workplace challenges we just tend to use our verbal reasoning ability. How about expressing the challenge through different media? Clay, music, word association games, paint, there are several ways you can express the challenge. Don't bother about solving the challenge at this point. Just express it. Different expression might spark off different thought patterns. And these new thought patterns may yield new ideas.

i/ Shift perspective

Get someone else's perspective. Ask people what they would do if faced with your challenge. You could approach friends engaged in different kind of work, your spouse, a nine-year old child, customers, suppliers, senior citizens, someone from a different culture; in essence anyone who might see things differently.

Play the "If I were" game: Ask yourself "If I were ..." how would I address this challenge? You could be anyone: a millionaire, Tiger Woods, anyone.

j/ Present the problem to someone else

Talking about the design problem can lead to ideas and insights. Having to present or explain the design problem to someone unfamiliar with it will force you to organise and articulate your thoughts, which might lead to a better understanding of the problem or insights and ideas.

k/ Thumbnail sketching (Not wire framing yet)

Sketch, scribble, jot down a couple of ideas, start tracing a kind of abstract design, outline the layout, put down a couple of notes, turn to a blank page – start again.

This first phase of sketching regards the elaboration of the information in a schematic and simple way.

- Small, quick unrefined drawings of ideas
- Think visually, explore, stay open to possibilities
- Do as many as possible (don't stop after a few!)

3. INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

Develop concepts

Creative thinking tools

Selecting ideas

Developing ideas

Selecting ideas

QUANTITY CREATES QUALITY

By having a lot of ideas, there will be many ideas which are bad or impractical, but there will also be ideas between them which are excellent. There's one simple rule while generating ideas and that is never scrap any.

The first priority is to be creative, not to judge.

The process of judging is usually faster. Scrapping a bunch of ideas is usually pretty straightforward – and more often than not you'll end up with a condensed collection of good ideas. The challenge is then in figuring out which of the remaining is the best solution for the problem.

1. CLUSTER

Group ideas by observing their characteristics. If your ideas have certain familiar characteristics then you can combine them into one group. This way you'll end up with a small number of tangible idea-groups and one rest group (comprising ideas that fit nowhere).

The selection of a small amount of abstract concepts behind a group of ideas is easier than comparing idea by idea. Once you've made a selection, you look at the different ideas within that group and make the abstract concept more concrete.

2. MERGING

The merging of different ideas to achieve the final solution is often the most difficult way to trim the amount of ideas. Fortunately, it's also usually the best solution if you are able to combine different possible solutions.

3. NAR-METHOD

It's better to wait with the NAR-method until you've selected a couple of ideas using the methods listed above.

Very simply, each idea receives a score out of ten for the following characteristics: new, attractive and realisable.

The idea is that you analyze every idea on each individual characteristic, instead of counting them together. After all, great ideas will achieve a good score on each component.

SELECTING TIPS

- It's far better to pick an idea that may be less than perfect than to pick no ideas at all
- Recognise multiple solutions
- Think about contradictions
- Look for relationships, analogies, similarities, and differences

Developing ideas

3. INCUBATION

Think of possible solutions

Develop concepts

Creative thinking tools

Selecting ideas

Developing ideas

After narrowing down the ideas, work on developing some of them using the following techniques if you need to.

- Substitute something
- Combine it with something else
- Think in opposites – often extremes present middle ground
- Adapt something to it
- Modify / magnify / minimise
- Put it to some other use
- Eliminate something
- Reverse or rearrange it
- Produce – don't be lazy (get out paint, pens, paper, scissors)
- Metaphor/similie
- Composition “polar contrasts” ex. big/small, long/short, straight/curved

DESIGN RANDOMIZER

- Make the logo twice as big
- Identify the main colour used, don't use that colour
- Add two more columns to your page grid
- If it's photography, use illustration (or vice versa)
- Start over with another concept from your brainstorm
- Use a handwritten font
- Cut the copy in half, then cut it in half again
- Cut your colour scheme to black and white
- Hard drive failed – complete your design without a computer
- Add twenty years to your target audience
- Tone it down, make the whole design more conservative
- Can the photography/illustration 'pop' more?
- I bet this would look good in 3D, give it more dimension
- Change the orientation of your design by 90 degrees
- Spend only 20 minutes finishing this design

NEXT STEP - ROUGHS

Flesh out some of your best ideas. Should be to scale/ proportion, sets out typeface, colour palette, imagery.

It is important to generate several workable design concepts – can show client multiple solutions and have backups.

4

RELIEF

Your sudden stroke of genius

Reaching a solution / Know when to stop /

Presenting / Artwork checklist

5.

RELIEF

Your sudden stroke
of genius

Reaching a solution

Knowing when to stop

Presenting

Artworking checklist

Reaching a solution

Your solution meets all conditions and is achievable! This leap forward in thinking can be difficult, as it requires the incubation of the information you've processed.

However, you can train yourself in reaching the relief phase faster, by working on your creativity in general.

THE DESIGN CONCEPT

The creative reasoning underpinning a design. Formulating a concept necessitates analysis, interpretation, inference, and reflective thinking.

EXAMPLE

The square format is used because Poul Kjaerholm based many of his furniture designs on the square. The use of Futura type reinforces the mid-century look of the furniture. The photographs used throughout the book were taken by Keld Helmer-Petersen, Kjaerholm's friend and sometime collaborator. The all black-and-white catalog reinforces the sparseness and elegance of Kjaerholm's designs.

Knowing when to stop

To find balance in something, you can't be timid. You have to go all the way, then pull back. How can you know what's just right without experiencing what's too much? So next time you're laboring over design, ask yourself "is it over-designed?" If every element has a purpose and a future, it's a good sign. Then, step back and take one thing away.

“When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I only think about how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.”

BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Presenting

5. RELIEF

Your sudden stroke
of genius

Reaching a solution

Knowing when to stop

Presenting

Artworking checklist

DON'T DESIGN PIXEL-PERFECTLY FOR PRESENTING

Rather, get your idea and the mood of your idea across. The power of moodboards are incredible. They are low-effort and give clients visuals. Clients love visuals. Always provide them together with your concepts.

ALWAYS MAKE SURE THAT YOU LIKE THE CONCEPTS YOU ARE ABOUT TO PRESENT

You should be excited yourself. It's far easier to sell something which you believe is really amazing and would be fun to work on. Don't provide one amazing concept and two bad ones in the hope that the client will select the amazing one. Even in this very early stage of your project, deliver gold.

HAVE VARIED CONCEPTS

Don't offer clients variations, rather select which variation is best as a designer. Three variations of one idea is still just one concept. Have a good discussion with clients how you came to these and how they can solve the clients problem. Choose a concept together and blow their mind.

ALWAYS READ YOUR BRIEF AGAIN BEFORE PRESENTING TO A CLIENT!

HOW TO PRESENT/PITCH AN IDEA

1. Start with a question
Ask yourself "what does my audience need to hear from me?" This helps you tailor your message to your audience, and also reminds you that they are the ones in the spotlight. When writing your next outline, create a list of questions to serve as prompts for what you intend to say.
2. Structure your pitch What?-So what?-Now what?
Good for leading people to a call to action. Start with your central claim, then explain its importance or value, conclude with a call to action or next steps.
3. Use variation to keep audience interested
Diversify your material to keep people's attention, with variation in your voice, variation in your evidence, and variation in your visuals. Ask questions.
4. Practice
Focused practice involves taking one aspect of your presentation, ie. the introduction, and delivering it repeatedly until you become highly familiar and comfortable with it (NOT memorised word for word).

5.

RELIEF

Your sudden stroke
of genius

Reaching a solution

Knowing when to stop

Presenting

Artworking checklist

BEING HEARD IN MEETINGS/FEEDBACK ROUNDS

Strategy #1: Get your voice in the room in the first few minutes

Challenge yourself to put your ideas on the table in the first few minutes. The vibe of the meeting is set early, and by contributing then, you're establishing yourself as an active participant.

Strategy #2: Ask important questions

Asking questions can be easier than sharing ideas, especially if you don't feel they're ready to be discussed or accepted.

Strategy #3: Be a synthesizer of ideas

Most introverts have a knack for listening and reflection. This is a major asset. In the rush to be heard, meeting participants can talk over each other, contradict, or even be in total agreement without realizing it. Being able to synthesize what you're observing, and find common threads is helpful, i.e. "What I hear Jane and Bob both say is that our product is out of date. Now what will we do about it?"

Strategy #4: Call out the elephant in the room.

One aspect of being an introvert is that it's associated with low assertiveness. This is not necessarily true, just assert yourself when needed, and are okay to hang back if we don't.

Be the person to call out the elephant in the room — to be willing to say what needs to be said.

If there's an issue everyone is avoiding, see that as an opportunity. Bringing it up with your signature thoughtfulness could be the perfect way for you to be heard — and make a memorable impression.

HOW TO RESPOND TO NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Have a good attitude

Set the right expectations, understand the benefits, remove yourself from the equation and, remember, attitude truly is everything.

Check your reaction

Take time to develop the habit of taking a deep breath and counting to 10 before responding.

Separate wheat from the chaff

Unfortunately, not all criticism is constructive. Some people are in a bad mood, bitter or just plain negative and will take any chance to put others down. Some are also inexperienced or unqualified to give you valuable feedback. While design is subjective, being able to separate useful feedback from cheap shots and misinformation.

Learn from the feedback

Dig deeper when necessary

At some point, everyone has received vague, unclear or unactionable feedback. It's a part of life. Unfortunately, unless you take the initiative, this type of feedback is more or less useless to everyone involved. However, if you're willing to dig a little deeper, you may uncover things that no one else was willing to tell you. Start by asking open-ended questions that get to the core of the issue,

Thank the critic

Whether the criticism you receive is genuine or downright rude, make a point of saying "Thank you."

Artworking checklist

5. RELIEF

Your sudden stroke
of genius

Solution meets conditions

Knowing when to stop

Presenting

Artworking checklist

FILE SPECS

Final file matches brief
(includes new logos, website etc.)

Check document size

3mm bleed

TYPOGRAPHY

Proof read

Correct font and sizes

Line breaks, spacing and kerning

Spell check

Double spaces

Double full stops

En spaces instead of hyphens

Widow/orphan check

Unusual fonts outlined

Minimum point sizes

IMAGES

Check if any images need
final photoshopping

Images at least 300dpi

Images CMYK

Image links all there

COLOUR

Remove any unused colours
from palette

Black text to be 100% black
(not made up of CMYK)

STYLE

Check alignment

Document grid

Margins / safe area

Check made all changes
from previous version

EXPORTING

Preflight artwork

Export PDF to correct settings

Get final client approval

5

VERIFICATION

Test your solution

6. VERIFICATION

Test your solution

Success isn't always easy to measure; does the problem desist when the client is happy? When the needs of the users are met? In general, it's good to assume that your first design is never perfect. Dare to be critical of your own work as it will only make things better.

Does it stop after this phase? It might, but usually you'll repeat certain phases during creative thinking. After verification, you might conclude that your solution is not really suited and you fall back to the incubation phase, for example. Even worse, you understand that you are approaching the problem in the wrong way and you start again from the beginning. It is important to realize is that there is never a useless phase. You always learn something from every step you take.

EXAMPLE

One example could be that you deliver a website that makes both you and your client happy, but that users have some problems finding specific content. In that case you have failed to provide the full solution, as providing the needs of the users is a requirement. Once you notice this, you restart with thinking how you could improve the navigation of your website. In other words, you return to the incubation phase.

6

CREATIVE BLOCK

Define & overcome creative block

Define and overcome creative block

4. CREATIVE BLOCK

- Observational block
- Environmental block
- Emotional block
- Intellectual block

IDENTIFY YOUR BLOCK

Defining what's caused your creative block is your biggest help in defeating it. For example, you might realize you're having trouble during the incubation phase because of an environmental block that you're focusing too much on left-sided (creative) thinking.

1. Write down the phases of the creative thinking process you have been through so far and summarize what the results of these different phases were.
2. Try to figure out in which phase you are stuck and what possible type of creative block you are suffering from.

3. Once you've figured out the type of problem, make the problem as specific and concrete as possible (eg. I'm completely out of inspiration and I have no ideas anymore).
4. Afterwards write down all possible solutions which spring to mind (eg. taking a break, find inspiration, get back to the saturation phase).
5. Figure out what the best solution is to attempt first, if it doesn't work try another approach.
6. Repeat the process until defeated the block. If in a position where nothing seems to work at all, stop with the project for a day or two then afterwards analyze creative thinking process step by step to figure out what went wrong. A fresh mind is usually the best solution when you're completely stuck.

4. CREATIVE BLOCK

Observational

Environmental

Emotional

Intellectual

Observational block

One reason we sometimes suffer creative block is that we have difficulties defining the exact problem, or we fail to obtain enough information to be able to solve the problem.

Properly defining the problem is crucial for furthering development of your creative project. Always look beyond the initial problem and formulate a correct, complete brief which satisfies both you and your client.

CONSIDER FROM DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

It's advisable to work with people from a different industry, or simply a potential user, to think of a possible solution for your problem, or even test a potential solution which you have designed. Their input is invaluable. By working together, you increase the amount of viewpoints, so you increase the quality of your solution.

STEREOTYPICAL PERCEPTION

The problem with stereotypical perception is that it limits your creativity, so attempt to step away from this.

SATURATION

The fact that we quickly reach information overload may be a cause of having difficulties to think clearly.

Sometimes we think we have enough information, but we fail to use it when we need it. On the other hand, sometimes we ignore far too much information and we fail to create context to design in.

- Give the problem time
- Collect qualitative information

UTILISE ALL SENSORY INFORMATION

A creative should attempt to embrace all sensory information.

One technique which is often used is to temporarily close certain sensory information. For example, close your eyes and listen to what's around you, you'll hear more (and better) with your eyes closed.

4. CREATIVE BLOCK

Observational

Environmental

Emotional

Intellectual

Environmental Block

TABOO

Question everything and avoid being critical. Don't analyze your ideas to begin with; aim to collect as many as possible.

HUMOUR

Analyse the context you are being creative in, to see if humor fits.

INTELLIGENCE AND INTUITION

A potential block you might experience is in focusing too hard on being creative, forgetting logical thinking. Remember that in the end your creative solution has to be functional.

LEFT AND RIGHT-SIDED THINKING

Don't just be creative, also research and think to avoid this block!

TRADITION AND CHANGE

Try convincing clients with great motivation. There's a reason why you love your solution, tell your client why you love it and why it will work. Improve your persuasion skills and become a better speaker.

YOUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Create your creativity space and see if it works. An environment influences everyone in a different way.

LACK OF COLLABORATION AND TRUST

Collaboration is crucial. If there's a lack of trust between you and the people you work with during a project you will run into problems. Communicate, communicate and communicate.

PROBLEMATIC BOSS OR CLIENT

The first step is to understand when the client or boss is the real problem and not your design or idea. Try to step away from your position as designer and look at the situation from a broader perspective. If you realize that the problem is truly your boss or client, communicate and convince. As a designer it's not only important to be very creative, you need also to become better in selling your ideas.

DON'T TAKE GUESSES

If you're missing something (like information for example), you should acquire it. It's very important to make sure you have the correct information. Always ask if you aren't too sure, and reflect throughout the creative process to make sure you are not missing out on anything.

4. CREATIVE BLOCK

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BEING SCARED TO TAKE RISKS

If you usually find yourself in a situation where you're afraid of taking a risk and trying something new, try to overcome this situation by asking yourself what possible realistic negative consequences your choice would have and how you could solve that. Write down some catastrophic expectations (assume that everything goes wrong), which often leads to the conclusion that calculated risk isn't so bad after all.

BEING AFRAID OF CHAOS

Whenever we are creative, we often deal with misleading or bad information, vague ideas and concepts, or the inability to come up with a solution. A desire for some order is necessary, but the ability to tolerate chaos is crucial to be creative.

After all, providing a good solution is like making a puzzle. Even though everything is chaotic in the beginning, you'll slowly create order. Simply put; don't be afraid of chaos as it will make your creative block even worse.

CREATE, DON'T JUDGE

A potential block you might suffer during the incubation phase is that you're judging yourself too harshly. Try avoiding judgment until you believe you have a good solution, then start with being critical on your idea.

INABILITY TO GIVE AN IDEA TIME

It's important to relax your mind from time to time, as a saturated mind will make the incubation of a solution far more difficult. Time and relaxing your mind is often the big solution when you're stuck in the incubation phase.

TOO ABSENT OR TOO INVOLVED

Whenever you're working on something, you should always feel somewhat challenged to keep looking for that great solution, but on the other hand, a great drive to succeed quickly might make you too fast in your creative process. It's important to be challenged and patient.

REALITY AND FANTASY

Having a vivid imagination is great for your creativity. Don't be afraid to use fantasy, especially in the saturation phase.

Imagine how you could solve something and don't take anything for granted. Find crazy solutions. As always, the bad or unrealistic ideas can provide inspiration for the great ideas!

Intellectual Block

4. CREATIVE BLOCK

Whenever we speak about intellectual block, we mean that someone has a problem with their strategy (the way a person works), their persuasion (the way a person sells his idea) or their expression (the way a person acts and talks).

THINK LOGICALLY

Finding the right thinking language isn't an easy job and depends on the problem you have to solve, but some logical thinking to start with is never wrong. After all, you always need to start from a context before you can get creative.

COMMUNICATE WITH IMAGES

Often, language is inadequate for expressing an idea properly. This is why mock-ups, wireframes, moodboards and so on are important when pitching.

BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR STRATEGY

If you ever find yourself in a situation where you notice that you have trapped yourself, it's important to remain rational and see what your possibilities are. Write them down and list the good and the bad aspects of each solution.

Never completely throw away a possible solutions and don't cut too many possible solutions in the very beginning. It's smarter to narrow down during the relatively late phases of a project.

Observational

Environmental

Emotional

Intellectual

7

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Recommended reading

Books / Journals / Websites

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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