

[See this page in the course material.](#)

## Learning Objectives

- Identify the value of creative thinking in education

Think about a time when you visited a museum or a sculpture garden, or you attended an orchestral performance or a concert by a favorite performer. Did you marvel at the skill, the artistry, and the innovation? Did you imagine how wonderful it must feel to have those abilities?

If you've ever had thoughts like this, you must know you're not alone. It's hard for anyone to behold a great work of art or performance and not imagine standing, even briefly, in the artist's shoes.



But when you've admired creative works or creative people, have you acknowledged the seeds of creativity within yourself?

You might be surprised to know that everyone has creative abilities: it's true of everyone who fully expresses creative abilities as well as those who express them very little or not at all. All humans are innately creative, especially if creativity is understood as a problem-solving skill.

Put another way, creativity is inspired when there is a problem to solve. For example, when a sculptor creates an amazing sculpture, it's an act of problem-solving: perhaps she must determine which artistic style to use in order to create the likeness of an object, or perhaps she is deciding which tools will most suit her purpose or style, perhaps she is assessing how best to satisfy a customer's request or earn income from her art—you get the idea. In every case, the problem sparks the sculptor's creativity and she brings her creativity to bear in finding an artistic

solution.

Considered as an act of problem-solving, creativity can be understood as a *skill*—as opposed to an inborn talent or natural “gift”—that can be taught as well as learned. Problem-solving is something we are called upon to do every day, from performing mundane chores to executing sophisticated projects. The good news is that we can always improve upon our problem-solving and creative-thinking skills—even if we don’t consider ourselves to be artists or “creative.” The following information may surprise and encourage you!

- **Creative thinking** (a companion to critical thinking) **is an invaluable skill for college students.** It’s important because it helps you look at problems and situations from a fresh perspective. Creating thinking is a way to develop novel or unorthodox solutions that do not depend wholly on past or current solutions. It’s a way of employing strategies to clear your mind so that your thoughts and ideas can transcend what appear to be the limitations of a problem. Creative thinking is a way of moving beyond barriers.<sup>[1]</sup>
- As a creative thinker, you are curious, optimistic, and imaginative. You see problems as interesting opportunities, and you challenge assumptions and suspend judgment. You don’t give up easily. You work hard.<sup>[2]</sup>

Is this you? Even if you don’t yet see yourself as a competent creative thinker or problem-solver, you can learn solid skills and techniques to help you become one.

## Creative Thinking in Education

Now that you have taken the creative problem-solving self-assessment test, do you have a better sense of which creative thinking skills and attitudes you have, and which ones you might want to improve upon?

College is great ground for enhancing creative thinking skills. The following are some college activities that can stimulate creative thinking. Are any familiar to you?

- Design sample exam questions to test your knowledge as you study for a final.
- Devise a social media strategy for a club on campus.
- Propose an education plan for a major you are designing for yourself.
- Prepare a speech that you will give in a debate in your course.
- Develop a pattern for a costume in a theatrical production.
- Arrange audience seats in your classroom to maximize attention during your presentation.
- Arrange an eye-catching holiday display in your dormitory or apartment building.
- Participate in a brainstorming session with your fellow musicians on how you will collaborate to write a musical composition.
- Draft a script for a video production that will be shown to several college administrators.
- Compose a set of requests and recommendations for a campus office to improve its

customer service.

- Develop a marketing pitch for a mock business you are developing.
- Develop a comprehensive energy-reduction plan for your cohousing arrangement.

## How to Stimulate Creative Thinking

The following video, *How to Stimulate the Creative Process*, identifies six strategies to stimulate your creative thinking.

1. Sleep on it. Over the years, researchers have found that the REM sleep cycle boosts our creativity and problem-solving abilities, providing us with innovative ideas or answers to vexing dilemmas when we awaken. Keep a pen and paper by the bed so you can write down your nocturnal insights if they wake you up.
2. Go for a run or hit the gym. Studies indicate that exercise stimulates creative thinking, and the brainpower boost lasts for a few hours.
3. Allow your mind to wander a few times every day. Far from being a waste of time, daydreaming has been found to be an essential part of generating new ideas. If you're stuck on a problem or creatively blocked, think about something else for a while.
4. Keep learning. Studying something far removed from your area of expertise is especially effective in helping you think in new ways.
5. Put yourself in nerve-racking situations once in a while to fire up your brain. Fear and frustration can trigger innovative thinking.
6. Keep a notebook with you so you always have a way to record fleeting thoughts. They're sometimes the best ideas of all.



[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

You can view the [transcript for “How to Stimulate the Creative Process” here \(opens in new window\)](#).

## A Brainstorm of Tips for Creative Thinking

The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas. —Linus Pauling, double Nobel Laureate, chemist, biochemist, and peace campaigner

Below are some additional tips to help you tap into original and creative thinking in your college assignments and endeavors:

## **Sensing**

- Use all your senses—see, taste, smell, touch, hear, think, speak.
- Be a good observer of people, nature, and events around you.

## **Thinking**

- Engage thinking on the right side of your brain (intuition, open-mindedness, visual perception, rhythm . . .).
- Change your interpretation of an event, situation, behavior, person, or object.
- Allow ideas to incubate.
- Be open to insight as ideas pop into your mind.

## **Imagining**

- Brainstorm by generating ideas with a group of people.
- Ask, “What would happen if . . .”
- Ask, “In how many different ways . . .”
- Develop ideas and expand their possibilities.
- Envision the future.

## **Speaking and Writing**

- Use your words and your “voice” when conveying your original ideas.
- Avoid using clichés or overly familiar responses to questions or problems.
- Explain how your ideas move beyond the status quo and contribute to a discussion.
- Take notes.

## **Drawing**

- Use mind-mapping to capture ideas; start with a key concept and write it in the center of your page; use connecting lines, radiating from the central concept, and write down any connected or related ideas that come to you.
- Create pictures or drawings of situations (“rich pictures”) to show them in a different way.

## **Learning**

- Find ways to demonstrate your personal investment in projects.
- Gather knowledge and conduct research.
- Have more fun learning!

## Moving

- Do physical activities to engage the creative areas of your brain and think differently.

## Resting

- Take breaks.

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1. Mumaw, Stefan. "Born This Way: Is Creativity Innate or Learned?" *Peachpit*. Pearson, 27 Dec 2012. Web. 16 Feb 2016. [\\_](#)
  2. Harris, Robert. "Introduction to Creative Thinking." *Virtual Salt*. 2 Apr 2012. Web. 16 Feb 2016. [\\_](#)

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