



ALTERNATIVE CHALLENGE: GET CREATIVE

The ‘core curriculum’ of challenges for The Kin Project focuses on what we can do for our planet and those we share it with. However, the alternative challenges focus on what we can do for ourselves. It’s hard to do anything for anyone else if you are burned out. These alternative challenges are here to refuel our tanks.

This particular challenge is about rediscovering our creative abilities. Most of us think of creativity as the ability to paint a stunning picture, write a bestselling book, design a beautiful building, or compose moving music. We believe that you are either born creative or not. However, natural talent is not the major component of creativity, so you don’t need innate talent in order to be creative.

Most creative people will admit that their creativity is 10% talent and 90% *hard work* — the practicing and polishing of their skills. Albert Einstein took this a degree further, stating that “*Genius is 1% talent and 99% percent hard work.*” Creativity is, in fact, a skill that can be learned and mastered at any age¹.

We’re all creative - if you’ve ever watched kids play, you’ve undoubtedly been impressed by their wild imaginations. Well, newsflash - you used to be a kid, too. That wild imagination is still there - you probably just haven’t used it in a while. This challenge is your opportunity to revive it.

¹<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-main-ingredient/201306/surprise-creativity-is-skill-not-gift>



PART 1: THE BENEFITS OF CREATIVITY

BECOME A BETTER PROBLEM SOLVER

We've all heard the tired extortion to 'think outside the box'. Creativity is what gets us outside the box. Flexing our creative muscles enables us to become better problem solvers in every area of life, not just in front of a canvas or lump of clay.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

When we create, we connect to other people doing the same and an instant sense of community is formed. The sense of connection experienced as artists is undeniable and deeply rewarding. Think of musicians riffing off one another while playing - they bounce off one another's creativity. It's the same with improv performers - each sentence uttered is an offering of creativity that becomes a step in the ladder of the performance. Even if you're just messing around with your friends down in the pub - there's a lot of creativity and quick wit required in banter.

SAVE MONEY

You know how sometimes you go to the pantry and start snacking on something, still feel dissatisfied, have a drink of water and realise that you were thirsty, not hungry?? Just me? Well, this sort of thing happens with shopping versus creating. When we get online or go to the shops and browse for something we don't really need, we're not filling ourselves up in any sense. Fulfillment comes from creating, not consuming. Happily, the more we learn how to make things ourselves, the less we need to spend money on buying them.



EXPANDED SENSE OF TIME

Countless artists have discussed the experience of timelessness that one encounters in the creative zone - it's been dubbed 'flow'. Time feels limitless when we are doing something that challenges us just enough - it's not too difficult, it's not too easy. Strangely enough, when we give ourselves time to creative pursuits, we gain time. Who doesn't want more of that?

SELF-AWARENESS

The more we create, the more we discover our habits, impulses, and desires. When we take the time and energy to develop our own ideas, we respect our inner nature and are better able to express ourselves to the world. Creating is just another way of getting to know yourself.

FREEDOM

There is no right or wrong way to be creative. When we create, we can do so without judging ourselves. Nobody cares if your canvas looks more like a toddler's efforts than Picasso's. Indulging in creativity gives us the permission to take risks, try new things, and strip away inhibitions in a healthy way.

STRESS RELIEF

Making art is meditative. Taking the time to use our hands, minds, and energy doing something we love is of utmost importance in life. Being creative makes us happy. Creating is fun, and doing anything that brings joy reduces our stress levels and improves our quality of life. What could be more important than that?



PART 2: HOW?

1. Simply start! Just get cracking on whatever creative activity you fancy doing and the inspiration will come as you relax into it. You might be grumpy, you might keep going over all the things you need to be checking off your to-do list, you might feel that you're just not in the mood, but set aside time to create anyway. Tell your inner critic to shut up and wait for the creative flow to start.

2. Remember there is more than one right answer. The number of ways you can solve a problem are often endless. Just because your painting of a flower doesn't really look like the flower in front of you, that doesn't mean it's wrong. It's just your interpretation of the flower.

3. Watch something funny. Laughing has been shown to help people think more broadly, associate freely, and notice complex relationships. One study found that people who had just watched a video of television bloopers were better at solving a puzzle long used by psychologists to test creative thinking.

Edward de Bono explains that humor is based on a logic very different from traditional logic. The significance of humor is that it indicates pattern-forming, pattern asymmetry and pattern-switching. Therefore, humor has the same basis as creativity and lateral thinking.

4. Combine ideas in a unique way; look for relationships between disparate things; make useful associations among ideas; look afresh at what you normally take for granted. Here are two examples:



- Wheels + gym shoe = roller skates
- TV + Music = MTV.

5. Look at your topic from many different perspectives. How would a ballerina approach this idea? How would a chef look at this? What would a child do? What would a very old person do? What would a really lazy person do? What would Donald Trump do? (Don't do that).

6. Be curious about everything. You never know when random, seemingly unrelated ideas will come together to form a new idea. Writers are often encouraged to keep a writer's notebook to capture any disparate ideas or conversations they hear throughout the day. This notebook can then become the source of a character, plot or just dialogue in their writing. As Carl Ally says:

"The creative person wants to be a know-it-all. He wants to know about all kinds of things-ancient history, nineteenth century mathematics, current manufacturing techniques, hog futures. Because he never knows when these ideas might come together to form a new idea. It may happen six minutes later, or six months, or six years. But he has faith that it will happen."

7. Put yourself in the way of creativity. Go to museums and gallery openings. Go to the symphony and to rock concerts. Read great works of literature. Go to poetry readings. The more you're surrounded by creativity, the more you'll feel like being creative yourself.



8. Challenge your assumptions. A fat, round watermelon takes up a lot of room. Instead of just assuming that watermelons had to be round, Japanese farmers began inserting melons in square glass cases while they were still growing on the vine. The end result was a square watermelon which fits conveniently in the refrigerators in which they're transported². What assumptions are you making that are stopping you from finding a solution to your problem?

9. Listen to Baroque music. Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" and Pachelbel's "Canon" are examples of Baroque music which has been shown to synchronize brain waves at about 60 cycles per second, a frequency associated with increased alpha waves. In turn, alpha is a frequency of mind associated with enhanced creativity.

10. Exaggerate. What if you were a thousand times smarter? What if you were two inches tall? Make the colors brighter. Now see it in black and white.

11. Shift gears from whatever project you're working on. Take time off and put together a jigsaw puzzle. Follow Einstein's advice: take a nap. Isaac Asimov was quoted as saying that when he got stuck writing a book he would simply put the project aside and start writing a completely different book. Thomas Edison, a man with over 1,000 patents to his credit, would go down to the dock and fish.

12. Look to nature. Are there any analogies you can draw from nature? Velcro was inspired by nature. Georges de Mestral, inventor of Velcro, noticed how the sticky seed heads of burdock plants attached themselves to his pants and to his dog after walks in the woods. This observation led him to invent the product now called Velcro in 1948.

² <http://www.treehugger.com/files/2008/08/square-watermelons.php>



13. Avoid crowds. Take Hugh MacLeod's advice: don't try to stand out from the crowd. Instead, avoid crowds altogether. Mad Magazine's Al Jaffee conceived of his comic strip "Tall Tales" while going through a difficult time financially. Jaffee managed to break into the business of syndicated comics by doing something different than what everybody else was doing: rather than drawing a traditional horizontal strip that would compete with the existing material, he opted for a seven-inch-tall vertical strip, which gave editors a lot more flexibility as to where in the paper the strip would run³. What can you do that is different from what everyone else is doing?

14. Wake up your right brain. The right brain is your creativity center. Because the right brain hemisphere controls the left side of your body, you can activate this creativity center by breathing out of only your left nostril, jumping up and down on your left foot, and writing with your left hand. You can also wake up the right side of the brain by doing something artistic such as drawing, playing a musical instrument, creating mandalas, and so on. In addition, meditation stimulates the right brain hemisphere.

15. Use the Random Word Technique. Start by writing down a description of your problem, challenge or opportunity. Then, choose a random word—you can open a dictionary and choose the first word your eyes focus on—and write down any associations that it makes you think of. After jotting down a number of words or short phrases, review your associations and your problem statement, and determine if you could adapt any of your associations to your current problem.

16. Create a mindmap. Write a topic heading in the center of a white piece of paper and then start writing related ideas on branches linked to the main topic; then add more

³ <http://www.boingboing.net/2008/11/11/al-jaffees-tall-tale.html>



ideas as sub-branches. Create as many levels of ideas as you want. Use different colors and add illustrations.

17. Disrupt your habitual thought patterns. Take a different route to work, try food you've never eaten before, listen to a music genre you normally don't listen to, read different magazines, and so on. Explore something new, try something you've always wondered about.

18. Reconnect with your inner child. Buy crayons and a coloring book—the big thick kind filled with all kinds of images that you loved as a child—and sit down for an afternoon of coloring. It's OK if you color outside the lines. Play jacks, draw with chalk on the sidewalk, build a fortress, go to the playground and climb on the swings . . .

19. Break it down. Break a problem down into its smallest components and rebuild it from the ground up, questioning at every step whether that's the best way to do it.

20. Ask lots of questions. Constantly ask: "What if . . ."; "Why not . . ."; "How else can this be done?"; "How can this be improved?"; "What other alternatives are there?"; "What am I missing?"

21. Focus. Great creative breakthroughs usually happen only after we have focused sufficient attention on our subject matter. That is, AHA! moments normally come only after much intense conscious effort. In 1816, Mary Shelley spent the summer with her husband, the Romantic poet and philosopher Percy Shelley, the poet Lord Byron, and others in Switzerland. It was raining a lot, so they would entertain themselves by reading ghost stories. Then, they decided that they would each write a horror story and share it with the others. Mary spent her days trying to think of a horror story to share



with the group. Then, in a waking dream, the idea for Frankenstein came to her. That is, although the idea for Frankenstein came to Mary in a flash, it came to her as a result of focusing intently on trying to think of a horror story.

22. Set a quantity quota. Instead of telling yourself that you're going to find a solution to a problem, tell yourself that you have to come up with 100 possible solutions. That is, emphasize quantity over quality. This allows your inner perfectionist to relax and to allow the ideas to flow.

23. Make it visual. Learn to draw, even if it's very rudimentary sketches. Use Betty Edwards' book "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" to teach yourself to draw.

24. Practice being in a receptive state of mind. Instead of constantly having the television on, listening to your iPod, and surrounding yourself with noise and other distractions, practice being in a relaxed, contemplative state of mind. This state of mind is the one most conducive to allowing creative thoughts to slip into your mind.

25. Avoid Disruptions. It's difficult, if not impossible, to enter your creative zone when you're constantly being interrupted. Jonathan Franzen wrote his 2001 novel "The Corrections" at times wearing earplugs, earmuffs⁴ and a blindfold. That might be too extreme for most of us, but at the very least try to find a quiet place, turn off your cell phone and other communications devices, and then get to work⁵.

26. Daydream. Matthew Killingsworth, PhD, an expert in the nature of human happiness, contends that mind-wandering (daydreaming) is an ability unique to humans that

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/02/magazine/jonathan-franzen-s-big-book.html>

⁵ <https://daringtolivefully.com/ways-to-be-more-creative>



“allows us to learn, plan and reason in ways that no other species can⁶.” When you daydream, your mind is unconstrained. You can’t change your physical reality but you can go wherever you please in your mind.

Research confirms that daydreaming causes measurable changes in the brain linked to greater creativity and problem-solving abilities⁷. Most of us at one time or another have come up with a great new idea while taking a walk or a shower. Sriniv Pillay, MD, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, coined the phrase *positive constructive daydreaming* (PCD) to describe an optimal form of daydreaming⁸. He explains that it involves letting your mind wander, but “on a leash” so that you don’t use that time ruminating over old worries.

Here’s a four-step process that Pillay recommends to get the most from your daydreams:

1. Set aside a time every day to daydream.
2. Reduce outward distractions and sensations. (Closing your eyes can help.)
3. Relax and do nothing or engage in a low-key task like knitting or pulling weeds. Repetitive tasks can inspire new ideas too.
4. Don’t judge your ideas, just let them flow. Sometimes good ideas arise from bad ones.

27. Doodle. A doodle is just a rough drawing made absent-mindedly. Some of the most creative and innovative people in history have left behind a trail of doodles, including Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, Federico Fellini, and Steve Jobs⁹.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qy5A8dVYU3k>

⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797612446024>

⁸ <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/this-is-the-correct-way-to-daydream-according-to-a-harvard-psychiatrist.html>

⁹ <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/scrawl-picture-view-1515202>



Even 26 of the American presidents have been doodlers. Historical doodles, especially those made by artists, are being studied because they provide a window into the psychology, as well as the personality, of the doodler¹⁰. The most thorough investigation of doodling involved the analysis of 9,000 doodles submitted by the public¹¹.

When people doodle, their brains can subconsciously solve problems or generate original ideas. For many, especially artists, doodling is indispensable to the creative process. For others, doodling is simply a relaxing or entertaining activity that also encourages creative thought. An easy way to be more creative is to take a piece of paper and, while listening to music or a podcast, draw whatever comes to mind. Doodling is one of the easiest and simplest activities you can do to boost your creativity.

28. Admire surrealism, a 20th century art movement that “explored the hidden depths of the unconscious mind¹².” The Surrealists rejected the rational world and searched for a new reality, which was discovered in the imagination and in dreams. They created *surreality* by combining something familiar with something strange and showed ordinary objects in extraordinary ways. The basic assumption of the movement was that creativity can be unleashed by letting go of the conscious and giving free rein to the unconscious¹³.

In our daily lives, we usually seek to avoid or eliminate uncertainty. But, to be creative, you need to seek out uncertainty instead. Admiring surrealism makes you question all that is real and look at the world from a different perspective. If it's not convenient for

¹⁰ <https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140673611614967.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2076785/>

¹² http://www.artfactory.com/art_appreciation/art_movements/surrealism.htm

¹³ <https://www.ideo.com/blog/5-creative-exercises-from-the-surrealists>



you to see surrealist art in museums or art galleries, you can find it online at [Google Arts and Culture](#).

29. Of course, *creating* art also has a significant positive effect on your creativity. Creating art helps you relax, reduces stress, and improves [critical thinking skills](#) and concentration. While you might think that creating art means painting, drawing, or sculpting, you don't have to produce fine art to reap the benefits of creating. Creative hobbies of all kinds — coloring, knitting, quilting, photography, woodworking, gardening, and do-it-yourself home repair— will also fit the bill¹⁴.

All of these activities force you to use and expand your imagination. If you don't currently engage in any creative pastimes, a simple way to get started is with adult coloring. All you need is a blank drawing to color and a set of colored pencils, pens, or markers. You can buy adult coloring books or print free images at websites such as [Super Coloring](#). Don't obsess over whether your creations are any good. Keep in mind that it's the *process* of creating that's important, not the end result.

30. Learn a new language. Learning another language expands your horizons and gives you a new way of seeing the world¹⁵. It exposes you to new cultures and customs which can have a big impact on your creativity. When learning a language, your way of thinking will change, making you more open to novel ideas. Divergent thinking is a thought process used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions. Mastering a foreign language has been found to enhance the four components of divergent thinking ability: fluency, elaboration, originality, and flexibility¹⁶.

¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17623380/>

¹⁵ <https://www.fluentin3months.com/creativity/>

¹⁶ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1079041.pdf>



31. Write... anything. The act of recording your thoughts can significantly increase your creativity. Writing encourages you to think more deeply which generates novel ideas¹⁷. Author Terry Tempest Williams worded it beautifully in *Why We Write*:

“I write to make peace with things I cannot control. I write to create a fabric in a world that often appears black and white. I write to discover. I write to uncover. I write to meet my ghosts. I write to begin a dialogue. I write to imagine things differently and in imagining things differently perhaps the world will change.”

It really doesn't matter what you write. Any kind of writing can boost creativity. You can write for yourself or write for others. A simple way to write for yourself is to adopt a daily habit of journaling.

31. Play video games. Researchers at Michigan State University found a link between video game playing and greater creativity¹⁸. When they examined nearly 500 pre-teens, they found that the kids who played more video games were also more creative when drawing pictures and writing stories. But how do video games actually enhance your creativity? According to the academic research book [Video Games And Creativity](#), playing video games has the following effects:

- Better concentration
- Better neural processing and processing efficiency
- Better problem-solving skills
- Better social skills
- Brain changes that lead to behavioral changes

¹⁷ <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/250539>

¹⁸ <https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2011/video-game-playing-tied-to-creativity/>



- Enhanced motivation
- Enhanced spatial skills
- Improved performance
- Improved mood, greater inspiration, and self-esteem

31. Get your workspace in order. Too much physical clutter can make you feel stressed out, overload your senses, and make it harder to think creatively¹⁹. But the right amount of clutter can help you think and solve problems more creatively²⁰. Steve Jobs famously lived in an austere home, yet [pictures of his home office](#) reveal his workspace was a mess. Other brilliant people with messy desks include Albert Einstein, Mark Twain, and Mark Zuckerberg. Everyone's tolerance for mess is different. You'll have to find a balance between chaos and order that helps you think creatively without sacrificing productivity.

32. Read absurdist fiction. Our brains, which have been called “*meaning-making machines*,” are driven to make meaning from any experience we have. When you experience absurdity, which can be described as “*a meaning threat*,” your brain is stimulated, delivering a creativity boost. One predictable way to encounter things your brain has trouble making sense of is by reading [absurdist fiction](#). This kind of fictional narrative presents characters in situations where they are unable to find meaning or purpose in life. Good absurdist fiction should make you question existing concepts, truths, and values. Immersing yourself in these stories makes you use your brain in different ways. It makes you think more deeply while stimulating your imagination. If you're interested in reading some absurdist fiction, check out these masterpieces:

- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll

¹⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3072218/>

²⁰ <https://www.canva.com/learn/creative-desks/>



- *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller
- *The Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka
- *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Lemony Snicket
- *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut

33. Be curious about everything. When you discover new things, learn interesting facts, and investigate the world, you spark your creativity and increase your imagination. Children are naturally curious and imaginative because they want to understand the world around them. It's not uncommon for curiosity to subside as you grow older. You can encourage your curiosity by asking questions, especially the simple question "why." This little question can spark big ideas.