



**DESIGNERS  
FOR  
HUMANITY**

# THE TOP 15 IDEA GENERATION TECHNIQUES



**FREE  
GUIDE  
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## The Top 15 Idea Generation Techniques used by Successful Creatives and Entrepreneurs

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As designers and creatives, a central part of what we do revolves around creating original and fresh ideas. Be it for a new business, a service, a new user interaction, a new product, a new logo, etcetera. Coming up with new ideas is crucial.

However, the creative process is not a formula and when we exert too much pressure and place too many rules, the result suffers and our ideas lack the impact they once did.

We all know exactly how it feels to be creatively blocked. We feel unmotivated, we judge our ideas harshly, we lack spontaneity. What we come up with is dull and unexciting.

So, in this report I want to share with you the top 15 brainstorming methods writers, designers, entrepreneurs use to generate fresh, unique and surprising ideas that can later become multi million ventures.

It all starts with an idea. If the idea is bad to start with, you have zero chances to make it great after. Sure, you can have an amazing idea but the implementation is bad, so the idea dies before it can reach for breath, but you always start with one idea. And it must be a good one.

Try all of them at least once, they are great ways to unblock the mind.

Remember, when you are brainstorming, anything goes. The critical mind stays out of this process.

Once you finish with your brainstorming, you can review and test your ideas, and I have a great post for that here, but for now, don't criticize your ideas, just let the flood door open and enjoy it!

## 1. Questioning Method



- What would you do if you were someone else?

Imagine you are someone else. It could be a character from history, a person you know or a character from a fictional book, like Sherlock Holmes. Put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine what they would do, say, think. What kind of ideas would they come up with?

- What if you change the variables: location, time period, different gender?

This method is similar to the last one. Imagine yourself in a different historical period, or in a different city in the world.

How does this change how you view your issue? What if you had the opposite gender? How would that affect how you perceive the problem? Would you have other considerations that would feed into the idea generation process? Would you know more or less about the issue?

- What if money, people, supply was no objection?

This method is actually a very powerful one because it forces us to think beyond our obstacles.

Ask yourself what would you do if there were no money, people or supply issues? What would your idea look like? I

know people that have used this method to find their true purpose in life and changed careers.

Once we begin thinking in an open way, looking at the possibilities rather than the obstacles, a whole new world appears.

## 2. Mind mapping



This method is well known amongst creatives and it involves creating a central 'bubble' with your main issue. From there you pull other bubbles that relate to that issue. You then create new bubbles that relate to each other and you begin to draw lines across bubbles in your map. *See [template and example by clicking here](#)*. This method helps you to see your issue visually and create new relationships that can generate new ideas.

## 3. The Renaissance Method



This method is all about merging disciplines that had previously been separate.

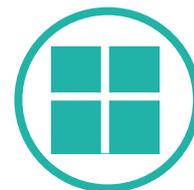
There were several factors that allowed the Renaissance to happen like the decline of feudalism and the power of the church, the rise of influential and progressive families and patrons like the Medici, new voyages to new lands, bringing exotic products and new ideas, but from them all the one that I feel was the most important was the invention of the printing press.

This allowed ideas to disseminate and propagate all over the world, giving people completely new ways to see.

One example of this method being used today is the SPARK shaker, made by Shake Your Power. This device joins music and clean energy. These two previously unrelated areas were joined to create a social enterprise that provides clean energy and education through music, and in the process created a completely new category of products.

This is also known as a Blue Ocean. There are Red oceans and Blue oceans. A red ocean refers to a market that is extremely competitive, where similar products compete against each other with ever better features, lower pricing, and more surprising marketing campaigns. The red ocean referring to an ocean filled with sharks. The Blue Ocean, on the other hand, is one where the product is so new, there is no direct competition yet, so the ocean is blue and calm. As time passes and other businesses catch on to the potential of that newly created ocean, the ocean will become red with competition. But an innovative company will, by then, be on to creating another blue ocean. This is a powerful strategy for new, small businesses.

#### 4. SWOT analysis



This method is a great brainstorming technique and I find it incredibly useful for entrepreneurs that want to start a business but don't know where to begin.

You begin by creating a quadrant: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Inside each quadrant write what are your Strengths (skills, specialized knowledge, qualities that give you an edge, experiences that make you unique..), your Weaknesses (procrastination, scatterbrains, lack of focus...), your Opportunities (new technologies, potential to build a business with your expertise, large network...) and finally the Threats (new regulations, keeping a team engaged, potential new competitors...).

Once you have completed the quadrants you'll have a better idea of where you stand and it will give you lots of ideas to use your strengths and opportunities to generate business ideas, whilst being aware of threats and how your weaknesses might impact. [See template here.](#)

In regard to your weaknesses, ask the following: How can I turn this 'weakness' into a strength? For example Arnold Schwarzenegger's thick Austrian accent was seen by many as a weakness, however, he turned it into such a part of his character that we all know exactly how 'I'll be back' sounds like....

## 5. Exquisite Corpse



In the 1920's, the group known as the Surrealists in Paris, began doing some playful creative experiments. One would

write a sentence, fold the paper over it and pass the folded paper to the next person, this person would write the continuing sentence and fold it again, this continued until a whole sheet was finished and then it would be fully unfolded to reveal the story. The results were, well, surreal.

This technique has been also applied to sketching and it's a great way to unleash creativity and the whole point is to create a result completely outside of the norm. As an innovation exercise it can be highly productive.

Another similar method was used by William Burroughs. This method is called the cut-up technique. Grab a newspaper, cut out sentences and then put it back together to create a whole new text. This technique cross-pollinated to music, and David Bowie used it in the 70's to create ground breaking music.

## 6. 99 Brain Dump



This method requires you to write or sketch at least 99 ideas. You cannot get up until you have 99 ideas. It's medieval torture meets stream of consciousness. At the beginning it will be hard, but you must go on.

One of my tutors at Central Saint Martins always said to me: the first 30 ideas will be crap, the next 30 will be done already, the next 30 will be a gimmick, the last 10 might be good. So do 100 and don't miss out on that last 1 idea.

## 7. Creative Meditation



I practice this method quite often. This is very similar to breathing meditation, but you can use it to access your creative unconscious.

Sit down in a comfortable place. You can do this in your desk. I would advice you cancel out any noise, so put a headset on to avoid any distractions.

Breathe deeply and evenly a few times to relax your body and release tension. Do a body scan, starting from your toes all the way up to the top of your head. Focus in the feeling of your body as you go through. Thoughts will constantly come up, so don't try to silence them, just don't let them take you on their ride. Let them pass.

Ayahn Nyanarato, a Buddhist monk, advises: *think of your mind as a train station, and your thoughts as trains that are passing through the station. None of them stop, they just pass through. Watch your thoughts like this, and don't try to get on the trains!*

After you have done this for about 5-8 minutes, slowly bring the issue you want to brainstorm around up. Let it float there and slowly unravel. Visualize the issue as a hard ball that as you breathe through it becomes soft and malleable.

Begin to let the ideas flow.

## 8. Arranged Marriage



This method requires you to force the relationship between words or concepts.

Create two columns.

On the first column, for example, if I want to create a new coffee-related product, write the main coffee variable, so it could be just ground coffee, or coffee beans, luwak coffee, etc.

On the second, write all of the products you can think of, anything goes. So, body lotion makeup, tissues, inhalers, paper, etc.

Then what you do is you trace a line between one of the items in column 1 and column 2 and you begin brainstorming ideas that link those two ideas.

## 9. Storytelling



This method is very interesting because it allows you to practice empathy, a great skill to have for problem solvers.

Begin by thinking about the issue or central idea you are dealing with. This is your story central point.

Then begin creating very detailed characters around your central point. Imagine you are building the outline for a novel and you are getting acquainted with the characters that

will inhabit it, so imagine everything about your characters, personality, desires, where they live, how they dress, etc.

Then imagine them interacting with your central issue or point. What do they think about it, how do they engage with it, how does the central story point impact their relationships, how do they relate to each other?

This method is a user centered approach that will make you imagine your solutions, products or business ideas from the starting point of the user. Great exercise!

## 10. Trend Analysis



For this method you need to do a bit of research.

You must understand what is happening in the world today, especially in the areas that relate to your issue, but also in the general state of the world.

For example, I would like to brainstorm a new concept for small, boutique hotels in urban areas.

So I would research what other hotel concepts are out there, what are the features, pricing, etc., but in addition to this you must think about other global trends that you could cater for example, young people can't afford to buy houses in large cities and they are having to move outside of the city, yet they work in the city. Can I cater for that niche?

Another example: middle aged successful entrepreneurs and executives that are tired of the city life and work are deciding to rent their flats and live nomadically. This is a trend now...

So, How could a new concept for hotels cater for this trend? These nomadic ex-executives still need a place to store their things as they are renting their properties and living nomadically... can your business cater for that?

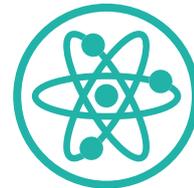
## 11. Opposite Thinking



As the name suggests this method involved flipping the way you view the issue or problem. Write the central issue and as you begin to brainstorm ideas in the regular way, try flipping them.

Create the new ideas out of transforming the old ideas into their exact opposites. This exercise is very useful and liberating!

## 12. Sci-fi Prototyping



Developed by Intel futurist Brian David Johnson, and taken from the book [Science Fiction for Prototyping](#).

This method is a combination between Trend Analysis and Storytelling, and world very well for developing new products and services. You begin by taking an emerging trend in technology, and you create short stories around it, exploring how the technology will affect our lives in the future.

This method requires you to extrapolate some of the elements

of a technology far into the future to see how they will evolve and what kind of side effects they might have.

Lots of ideas come up as a result of creating characters that engage with the technologies that are today in diapers but that in your story are fully developed. It's a really fun experiment and you can dust off your writing skills!

### 13. Extremes Method



This is a really playful method and can make you feel you are stepping into Alice in Wonderland. Imagine your issue, product, problem, etc. and make it twice as big, or bigger. Or make it tiny, nano size. Or make thousands of them, like bees or ants.

### 14. Why? Why? Why?



This method is all about becoming a small child again. You know how small children, as they are discovering the world, and learning to talk, they ask why all the time? Why this? Why that?

So this method is all about you doing that all over again. Write down all the assumptions you have around the central issue or problem. By asking Why all the time you begin to break down all the blocks that keep you thinking inside the box.

## 15. Group Therapy



This method requires a group of people getting together and brainstorming about the issue. This is the most widely used method in consultancies and design studios as it brings people from different backgrounds and often different disciplines together to offer as many points of view as possible. The more diverse the group, the richer the results.

So these are the best brainstorming methods I have found. I advise you to mix n' match and make them your own, play and experiment to make them fit the way you work.

For more information and resources visit us at

[www.designersforhumanity.com](http://www.designersforhumanity.com)

Hi there! I'm Diana Simpson Hernandez and I am the founder of Designers for Humanity. I am a Product Designer from the Royal College of Art and a fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (RSA)



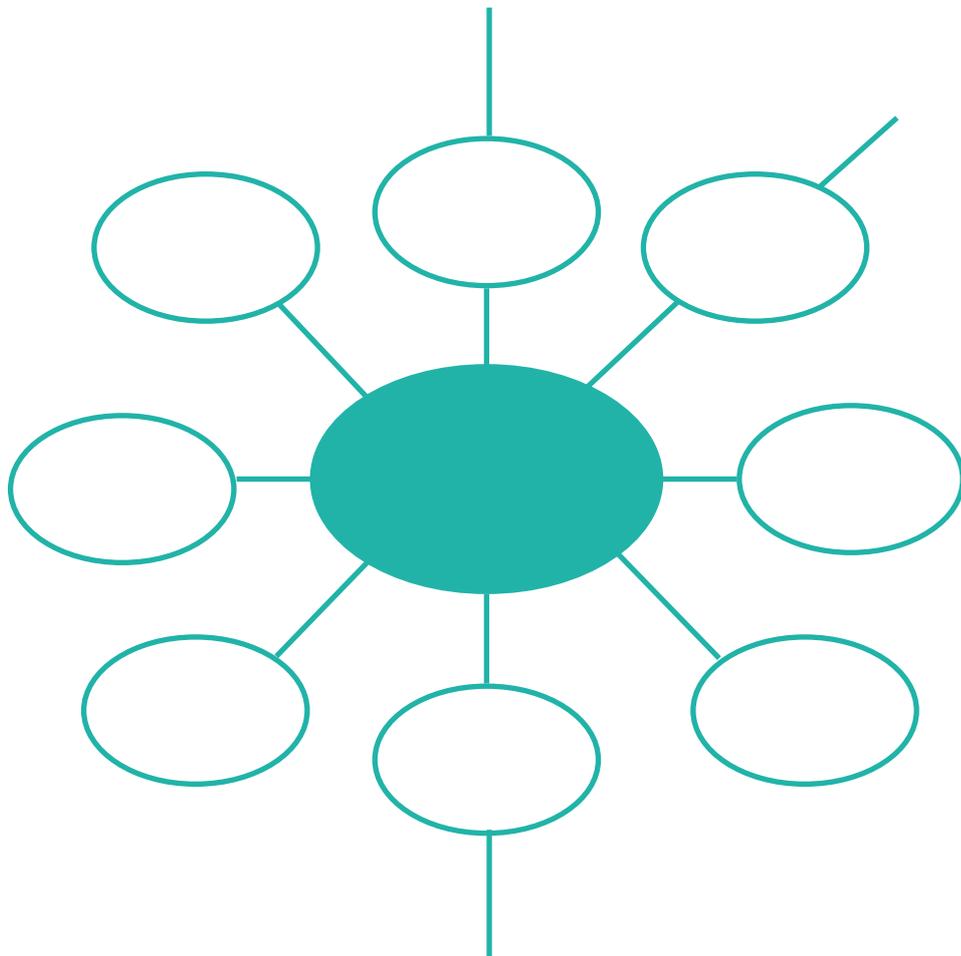
My products have won the London Design Awards for two consecutive years (2014 & 2015) and my work has been featured in the Guardian, Huffington Post, Daily Mail, Business Week, ITV, Wired & more.

If you want to know more join our [Designers for Humanity Facebook](#) page. You can also find me on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and our [You Tube Channel](#).

Min-map example



Fill in the mind map template with your main issue in the middle. Fill in the connected bubbles with the keywords that relate to your main issue.



## SWOT analysis template

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>