



# The Exam

Excerpted from the upcoming book *How To Win: The Art of Activism* by Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert

*SENTIMENT WITHOUT ACTION IS THE RUIN OF THE SOUL.*  
— EDWARD ABBEY

**TIME: A MORNING, AFTERNOON OR EVENING.**

## STEP 1: Pepeare

You'll want to do a few things to get ready for this exercise. For one, you should set aside 2.5-4 hours to focus on this. If you can gather some trusted friends you'll have a group of people that can help. Have some snacks and drinks around so you can stay fresh and alert. Use a location where you won't be interrupted or distracted, and that allows you to hang your giant notes on the walls. Have this guide and your sketchbook handy. You'll want to be able to draw upon your notes from previous chapters as well as make new ones.

You'll also need these materials:

- Large sheets of paper, at least 2 by 3 feet, or a whiteboard or chalkboard
- Multi-colored pens, pencils or chalk. Nothing fancy -- use what you have. We use large children's markers.
- Space to spread out. A large table will work, or even the floor.

Last, assign 1 or 2 people -- or yourself -- the job of taking notes. You'll be making a lot of lists.

Once you've got yourselves together, you can begin gathering and loosely organizing your research.

## **STEP 2: Map the Terrain**

**TIME: 30-60 MINUTES.**

Just as all good Artistic Activism is local, so too with Artistic Activist campaigns. We need to outline the context within which we are working and the resources we have at our disposal.

Write your answers to the prompts below on one of your giant sheets of paper – one category per sheet. When done, hang each sheet on the wall around the room. This way you can get everything out of your heads and on paper, from the seemingly obvious (for some) to overlooked assets. When you're done you will have, close at hand and top of mind, an informational map of the local terrain for your pieces and your campaign. As you're working on the later steps, your collective knowledge will be on the surrounding walls for easy reference.

Spend only 5 to 10 minutes on each category – you're not writing an encyclopedia.

### **GENERAL GOALS:**

Where are we now and where do you want to go?

What is the issue you are working on? Where do things stand now? Where are you starting from? • Where do you want to go? What is your Utopia?

### **MATERIAL SETTING:**

What is the material setting in which you'll be operating?

- Physical: Nation or neighborhood? Dense urban concentration or suburban sprawl? What is the geography of the region?

- Demographic: What is the ethnic, gender, age, educational, occupational, religious, national, fill-in-the-relevant-blank composition of the people who live in the area you are targeting?
- Political: What are the commonly held political beliefs? Do most people lean Left or Right? Are people engaged or apathetic? Does political preference divide according to demographics or physical location?

### **CULTURAL CONTEXT**

What signs, symbols, stories, and media are part of terrain?

- Big C culture: What are the artistic representations and expressions, from museums to street murals to folk tales?
- Little c culture: What are the languages, patterns and myths of everyday life?
- PopCulture: What popular forms of entertainment do people enjoy?
- AltCulture: Are there alternative forms of culture that people create?
- Media: Culture is transmitted through media, so what media -- both mainstream and alternative -- do people rely upon for information, including print, radio, TV, internet, word-of-mouth, etc.

### **CREATIVE RESOURCES**

What creative resources can you draw upon for help in your campaign?

- What creative individuals: painters, musicians, DJs, costume designers, carpenters and so on do you know?
- What arts organizations, social justice institutions, or other groups might lend a hand?
- Who do you know in the media who might be sympathetic and willing to work with you?

### **POWER MAP**

Who, or what group, has the most decision making power when it comes to your issue?

- Are their specific people who hold this power, be it mayor, police commissioner, or board of directors of a corporation?
- Are their offices and institutions that wield this power, like city council, parks department, or UN Security Council?
- Who or what are these individuals and institutions accountable to, for example: voters, customers, workers, bosses, public opinion, peer pressure?

### **AUDIENCE**

Who are we speaking to?

- Who is our primary audience?
- Who is our secondary audiences?
- Who might be unintended audiences?

With each of these audiences,

- What are their beliefs about your issue?
- What are the benefits and costs for this audience?
- What stage are they at between awareness and action?

Brainstorm ideas from these prompts and put all your ideas up onto those big sheets of paper.

You may have to move back and forth a bit between the categories. Once you know your audience, for example, it'll help you focus the material setting and cultural context. The important part is to get all this data out there as a rich pool you can draw from for the next steps in building your campaign.

Now you've collected your research: gathering what you know, what you needed to be reminded of, and hopefully a few helpful new items. You'll be able to refer back to this Research when you move into the Sketch phase.

## STEP 3: Set Objectives

**TIME: 10 MINUTES**

You know what your goal is and you know the terrain you are operating upon, so now you need concrete objectives that will let you know if you are moving in the right direction and getting closer to your Utopia. Objectives, as you'll recall, are our demonstrable, measurable milestones -- mini-goals like holding a public meeting or getting 10% more people to vote in the next local election. Now you are going to come up with 3-5 of them.

Take 10 minutes and brainstorm objectives. Think about what -- concretely -- can be accomplished to move forward to your ultimate goal. Don't sweat these too much at this point, the most important thing is to get them down on paper quickly. You can edit, improve, and organize them later.

Got 3-5 objectives down? Good, you are ready to...

## Step 4: Refine Your Objectives

**TIME: 30 MINUTES**

Now, for the next 30 minutes move into Evaluation phase and work on the following questions.

Are your objectives S.M.A.R.T.?

- **Specific:** Does each objective identify a particular thing you want to do, change or impact?
- **Measurable:** When you meet each objective, will you be able to determine, with a certain degree of surety, whether you've accomplished what you set out to do, or made progress toward it?
- **Achievable:** Is each objective do-able; something you can realistically hope to attain?

- **Relevant:** Does each objective make sense given your overall goal; is it in alignment with what you have accomplished before and what you hope to accomplish after?
- **Timed:** Do you have a time-frame for accomplishing each objective; when will it be done?

Order your objectives logically. Which one can/needs to happen first in order to pave the way to the next? Does your second objective build from the first and lead to the third? And so on, until you have a string of objectives that hold together in a sequence that makes sense. It's an old rule of activism to start with an easy win – to build momentum and morale – and then progress to more ambitious objectives throughout a campaign. Is your first objective an easy win? Is your last objective ambitious enough?

If any of your answers to these questions reveal that you need to do more work, you can practice slipping, with grace and kindness, back in forth between the Evaluation to Sketch phases until you're happy with your objectives. Once you've settled upon your objectives, make a sheet for each and hang these on the walls around you.

## **STEP 5: Design Creative Tactics**

**TIME: 30 MINUTES**

This is where you are going to draft the creative tactics that will help you achieve your objectives.

To create æffective pieces you should reference back to the terrain you mapped out in Step 3, making sure that whatever pieces you create take into account the material and cultural setting, leverages the creative resources at your disposal, engages those with power and speaks to the most relevant audiences. You will also want to make sure that your tactical pieces help achieve a particular concrete objective, yet also resonates with the Utopian dream you set out as your goal.

All the brainstorming you did earlier and the notes that surround you will now make what could be a difficult process to balance come much more easily and naturally. You've primed yourself to come up with some great, creative, ideas.

Ready? Here's what you're going to do: Come up with 10 ideas for Artistic Activist pieces for each objective.

If you are working with a group, break into smaller groups and assign each sub-group one objective to work on. It works best for brainstorming purposes if each sub-group has no less than 3 but no more than 5 people. If you are working alone or in a smaller group, pick only one of the objectives you came up with and plan 10 pieces for that objective. (Later you can go back and repeat this process for the others.) Using the sheets of paper with your objectives, sketch out your ideas for pieces -- in words, or better yet: as drawings.

Constraints, paradoxically, makes creativity come easier, so here's three mandatory conditions to help you along.

- You have only 15 minutes to come up with all five ideas for Artistic Activist pieces. Yes, 15 minutes. No extensions!
- 7 of the 10 ideas have to be impossible. Yes, impossible, meaning they cannot be done. These are pieces which would be too expensive, take too long, require too many people, or require a suspension of laws of nature. At this point, you know the drill.
- You must come up with the 3 impossible ideas before the 2 possible ones. This is important, no switching!

When your timer runs out, come back as a group (even if that group is yourself) and share your ideas for tactics.

We had you start with the impossible ideas first because, having done this exercise for years, we've learned it can be done wrong. At one workshop, we asked the participants to come up with 7 impossible and 3 possible tactical pieces, but we forgot to mention the order. At the end of the 15 minutes, the ones who had started with impossible ones came up with 10 (and sometimes more) pieces quickly and easily while those who

started with the possible ones were still stuck with no more than a couple. As you hopefully noticed, starting with the impossible gets ideas flowing and frees up your creativity for both challenges. By starting with the impossible we also discovered something else: in coming up impossible pieces first, people then found ways to make their impossible pieces possible. Maybe this happened to you too.

Can you make your “impossible” ideas possible? Can you stretch your “possible” ones so they are more creative? Spend an additional 15 minutes exploring the possibilities.

## STEP 7: Chart the Campaign

**TIME: 30-60 MINUTES**

Now you are ready to put all this together in a long-term creative campaign that includes tactical pieces, objectives, and goals. It’s going incorporate all the work you’ve done above.

Things may change over time. No worries. Remember, creativity happens in iterations. Look at what you’ve done so far. Over the past few steps you’ve figured out the landscape, devised objectives, refined those objectives, and conceived of several tactical pieces to move you forward. Now it’s time to organize your work in a plan that you can carry out. The results aren’t committed to stone – you can, and should, adapt and change as new information becomes available and you test these ideas in the field. The results can be imperfect and flawed, but you need something to improve – you can’t make a second draft without a first. So let’s get a first draft of your campaign down on paper:

1. Take out a new sheet of paper. In the lower left sketch where you are now and, on the top right, your final goal.
2. In a horizontal line between these two poles lay out and order your objectives, starting with the easy win first and progressing to the most ambitious. While you may be working on multiple objectives simultaneously, aim to have each follow logically from what came before. For example, you can’t repeal a law before you’ve planned and carried out an organizing meeting of people who are going to work with you.

3. Clustered in proximity to each of these objectives, put down 1 or 2 of your best tactical pieces for that specific objective. What makes it the best? It should be creative, but also realistic enough so you can do it. It should speak directly to the objective at hand, yet carry within it a kernel of your ultimate Utopian dream. No one piece can likely do all of this, and that's OK.
4. Because we're planning to be imperfect humans, add in some places to have more formal evaluations of your progress. While you'll likely have frequent, short, informal evaluations, you'll need to set aside time to within your campaign -- especially as you move into Production -- to critically examine your effectiveness and your progress. In the process, you may find you need to do additional research and sketches in order to improve your campaign, and then re-evaluate these.

Done?

Pencils down!

You now have a complete plan for a creative campaign.