



If this kind of space doesn't exist in your home or workplace, find another location. In fact, leaving your normal surroundings can help promote the kind of break from habitual thinking necessary for new ideas. When he was working on his last book, Duncombe found that the best place for him to think, write and be creative was in

cafes. But only certain cafes: they had to have weak, or no, Internet access so he wouldn't check his e-mail. They had to be far enough away from home and school so he wouldn't run into anyone he knew. And the cafe had to play music he didn't really like so he wouldn't hum along and be distracted. Then he could write.

Discovering *your* creative space will take time, and a lot of trial; and error. Experiment with different places and be attuned to what feels right for *you*.

Finding a new space can be a good idea when planning creative meetings with a group as well. Next time a meeting is called, instead of having it in your organization's office or a "meeting room," suggest having it in a place you normally wouldn't:

- a community garden
- a rooftop
- a gallery
- a children's playground
- on a hike

Sometimes just shifting the context from "the place where we work" to a place where we play, or can watch others play, is enough to loosen up thinking so that we can be creative in our planning. Most of your author's' early organizing work was done in the back rooms of local bars. This may not work for everyone.

CARVE OUT TIME

Our creativity won't thrive if the only time we make for it is an occasional weekend, or between phone calls, emails, and "important" meetings. We need to set aside blocks of time. Put it on your calendar if you need to, but give yourself a period of time for creative work.

Plus, it's fun to yell, "Cancel all my meetings!"

We've cleared some time, and some space, but there's more we can do to clear our heads. Try this: Write down everything that's on your mind. Everything that is pulling at your attention: the running list of groceries you need to pick up, the list of possible vacation plans, the phone call you need to make, and every miscellaneous to-do item that's banging around in your head. Don't be surprised if you can fill a page, or even pages, with this stuff. All of these items are taking up mental energy that draws off our creativity. Writing them down allows your mind to let go of them, temporarily, and create the void we need for new material. Get these miscellaneous scrap notes out of your head and on paper where they belong. Put the list aside; these reminders are not for now. This is your time to create.

CREATE A ROUTINE

In the 1990's, when Lambert was in art school, the experimental filmmaker Larry Jordan visited his film class and said the most important guidance he could give was to keep a regular schedule. "Artists have to train like Olympic athletes," he said. "An Olympic high-jumper needs to train every day. If she doesn't do the high-jump for four days, what's going to happen? She's not going to be successful." Jordan kept a strict five day per week schedule for his art practice and approached his creative work like he was training for the Olympics.



We all have our creative routines. Duncombe can only work in the morning, from the time he drops off his kids at school at 8:00am, until about 10:30am when his mind starts buzzing with all the pressing demands of the day. And he has to have one cigarette, on the sidewalk outside his cafe, before he starts

writing. Lambert will only drink coffee at his studio—a reward he gives himself for arriving. He puts on his special Work Jacket, enables the SelfControl app which locks out the Internet on his computer, and then he's ready to be creative. A creative routine also has other benefits: it provides our minds with little visual and tactile cues that "the creative work is about to begin." You might want to add other prompts as well. Enter a specific room or sit in a special chair. Change sweaters like Mister Rogers. Drink a cup of coffee from a specific cup. These become triggers for the start of our creative routines.



Experiment with when you feel most creative in the day—or the week. Maybe working a couple of hours each day or night works for you. Maybe you need to build up a big head of steam and then devote long stretches of time every weekend. Play around with what rituals you need to get yourself going, or rewards you'll give yourself after you've had your creative work time. You'll find the routine that works for you. At first it may be uncomfortable and not yield much, but operating on a routine will help train your mind to prepare for creative work. Like showing up at the gym in your sneakers at the same time every day, your mind and body will come to expect a workout. The routine makes it easier to start the work. You develop a creative habit.

TURN DOWN THE PRESSURE

Once you've made a habit of showing up for your creative work, don't expect to make masterpieces. Say someone was to hand you a guitar and some sheet music and demand that you play a

composition, perfectly, the first time. No mistakes. Could you do it? Of course not. It's too much pressure. Too high stakes. We need to practice, play, mess around, and make mistakes. George Bernard Shaw once said, "A man learns to skate by staggering about and making a fool of himself." We agree. In order for our creativity to progress we need to allow ourselves the freedom to make fools of ourselves.

We are often our own worst enemies when it comes to being creative. Artists and activists alike self-censor our ideas too frequently because they aren't clever, creative, or smart enough. Instead of striving to create masterpieces, we need to give ourselves permission to experiment in disasters: to muck about and test the ridiculous, absurd, silly and, above all, stupid things. Un-fundable things. Ultra-violent things. Insane things. Things that will make your boss, your board, your funders, or the police very nervous. We don't need to act on these ideas, but we need to be able to think them.

Working collaboratively presents new challenges to be perfect. Sometimes we succeed in turning down the pressure ourselves only to work with others who ramp it right back up. If you're working in a group, make a concerted effort to develop an atmosphere of creative acceptance. This isn't always easy, and it takes a lot of trust, but it is worth the struggle. We *all* need to be able to have silly thoughts and say stupid things and not be, or feel, judged.

BRING THE LOVE

When he was in his mid-eighties, the poet Gary Snyder, after decades of work as an environmentalist, was asked what advice he had for others. "Don't feel guilty," he answered. He then went

