

# THE CREATIVE PROCESS

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It can be helpful to understand how creative processes generally work before making a creative campaign. Once you know the steps, it's much easier to understand how to move through them and pinpoint potential obstacles that may have impeded your progress in the past.

## 1. OBSERVER: RESEARCH

No one creates new things — we just create new combinations of things that came before. Even the most innovative thinkers aren't thinking entirely "new" thoughts; they are curious about the world, collecting inspiration, and making new connections between what already exists.

In order to make new combinations, we need to seek out and gather inspiration from diverse sources. We must observe and explore.

**Creative exploration means moving through the world with wonder and observing without judgment.** We all collect things that capture our imagination, that we draw upon and refer back to — the books on your shelf, photos on your phone, notebooks you keep, and people you meet. Your discoveries when observing the world include everything you take notice of: movies you went to (and hated) or TV you feel guilty about watching (and more guilty about enjoying). Experiences of all types serve as points of inspiration we can draw from in the next step of the creative process.

## 2. INVENTOR: SKETCH

Inventors are always trying to find novel ways to solve problems, and we do the same in the creative process. **We use what we collected as an explorer and make new combinations — still without judgment —** because we're not yet evaluating if and how these work, or if they're even feasible! We're allowing a crucial period for new combinations to emerge and merge into other new combinations.

We do this because when we combine elements they react with one another in new ways, but we don't truly know how they will react until we do it. **Every experiment won't lead to wild success, but each experiment is an essential step** as we refine an idea: the early drafts, the underpainting, the pencil sketch on the back of an envelope. These drafts give us information that increases our odds of success. Every note in a notebook will not become a poem. But the surplus is required for innovation — and sometimes the "scraps" left behind come in handy in the future.

**Don't force yourself to think of innovative ideas while also factoring budgets, timelines, and approvals.** Allow yourself time apart from spreadsheets and calendars to dream, play, experiment, and see what you discover.



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## 3. CRITIC: EVALUATE

A good coach gives valuable feedback that makes the whole team perform better. They're honest when you're falling short and suggest how to train to improve. When you are ready, they put you in the game and cheer you on as they send you out onto the field.

At this point in the creative process, we've done experiments wherein we deliberately set aside practical concerns to open up the possibilities. **Now it's time for the critic and coach to check our combinations against reality.** Which plans are we ready to move forward with? Which have potential but should return to the lab for more development? Are there improvements we need to make to increase the likelihood of success? Our duty in this stage is to look at what's been made so far and ask: **Will it work for what we want to do?** Looking over our ideas we ask questions like:

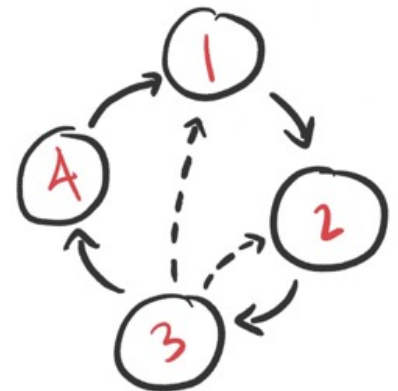
- Do we need to return to Step 1 and do more research?
- Do we need to return to Step 2 and generate more ideas? Or a different combination of them?
- Is this plan practical enough? Is it ambitious enough?
- Is it legible to our audience? Will the connections being made be understood by others? Or is it speaking too much only to our own perspective, experience, and ego?
- To what end are we working? Are we still on track? Will this move us toward our goal? Will it be effective? Will it be affective?
- Wait a minute, maybe... is this just wild enough to work???

## 4. WORKER BEE: ACT

After we get approval from the critic, it's time to put the plan into action. Now **we do whatever it takes to get the job done.** Long days, late hours. Calling in friends, using all 17 rolls of duct tape, breaking open the piggy bank, or breaking — er, bending — some laws: we make it happen.

### And the process repeats.

You'll see in the diagram that the process is a circle. Everything we create through the worker bee role becomes part of our exploration in our next observer role, and so on. **The successes, failures, and lessons learned become material we use in the next creative cycle.**



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## Check in: Using the creative process in my campaign

Get your colleagues and collaborators together and discuss how you move through the steps of the creative process. Ask yourselves questions like:

- **What are we good at?** Each person and team will have roles that suit them more than others. Where do we shine?
- **What do we spend too much time on?** Where do we linger, or maybe even get stuck? E.g., Do we spend more time than we need on initial research? Do we spend too much time on critical feedback?
- **What could we give more time to? What do we tend to rush past?** E.g., Do we jump to critique before letting ideas really bloom? Do we steamroll through the steps in an attempt to get to an action as quickly as possible? Is all the feedback that's offered negative because there's no time allowed for a more full, constructive conversation?
- **What do we get out of order?** Getting the process balanced and in order allows for all kinds of innovation. But let a critic into your brainstorming session and you'll see how that voice can quickly stifle new ideas before they take shape. Or taking action before you've received enough feedback means you can't take full advantage of insights that could have made the project more successful.
- **What do we not do at all?** You may find you're completely overlooking a step. Some groups don't give any time to explore and discover. Some don't try to make new combinations and simply repeat the old ways over and over. Do a quick check — could your team be overlooking a part of the process?

