

These 11 Little Habits Are Blocking Your Creativity

Experts say everyone has the capacity to be creative, but many of our daily thoughts and actions may subtly sabotage our brain's creative thinking.



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You sit during meetings.

Cramming chairs around a conference table may keep your team's best ideas at bay, new Washington University research suggests, while standing during work meetings can lead to more creativity. In a study, employees were given 30 minutes to create a university recruitment video; the group without chairs suggested more inventive ideas and produced better videos than the team that was more sedentary. Standing might make you more physically energized and less territorial of your ideas, which can promote creative collaboration, [Inc.com](#) reported.



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You're chained to your desk.

Walking may foster creative thinking, researchers at Santa Clara University found. In a recent study, volunteers were asked to come up with as many unique uses as possible for common items like a tweezers or a tire, while sitting at a desk and then while walking on a treadmill. Creative output improved by more than 81 percent when people brainstormed while hoofing it.



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You go it alone.

It's inaccurate to hail visionaries as Steve Jobs, Martin Luther King, or Sigmund Freud as solo creative geniuses, argues Joshua Wolf Shenk in his book *The Power of Two*, who says "creativity is most commonly the result of two people interacting in a variety of ways: complementary collaboration, mutual inspiration, creative rivalry, whatever you want to call it," [NPR](#) reported. To juice your brain, develop a personal "board of advisors," suggests communications expert Preston Ni on his [Psychology Today blog](#). First, think of six inspirational, creative people you admire—friends or acquaintances, historical figures, current celebrities, or even fictional characters like Yoda. How would each one solve your problem? "You may be surprised at the quality and creativity of the answers that emerge," Ni wrote. "Of course, these brainstorms are really coming from you, but from a fresh perspective."



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You think it comes easy.

The best ideas are not always flashes of genius. "You must have passion and the determination to immerse yourself in the process of creating new and different ideas," writes Michael Michalko on [The Creativity Post](#). "Then you must have patience to persevere against all adversity. All creative geniuses work passionately hard and produce incredible numbers of ideas, most of which are bad." Remember, Thomas Edison created 3,000 different ideas for lighting systems, Picasso made more than 20,000 works, and Mozart created more than 600 pieces of music.



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You don't ask questions.

Buffalo State College, which has been offering courses in creative studies since 1967 (the oldest program in the country), teaches a four-part method to produce and execute creative thinking, [The New York Times](#) recently reported: clarifying, ideating, developing, and implementing. Clarifying, or asking the right questions, is a key and perhaps under-recognized part of that process. “If you don’t have the right frame for the situation, it’s difficult to come up with a breakthrough,” Gerard J. Puccio, chairman of Buffalo State College’s International Center for Studies in Creativity, told the *Times*.



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You shoot down new ideas too soon.

Buffalo State College Professor Cyndi Burnett teaches students “not to instinctively shoot down a new idea,” according to *The New York Times*. She asks that people first find at least three positives. In a group setting, this attitude can foster a more open forum where people aren’t afraid to share ideas. When you’re working solo, you’ll spend less time criticizing and overanalyzing and more time on productive thinking.



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You think you’re not a creative type.

“There’s this common perception among managers that some people are creative, and most aren’t. That’s just not true,” Harvard Business School professor Teresa Amabile told [Fast Company](#). She continued, “Almost all of the research in this field shows that anyone with normal intelligence is capable of doing some degree of creative work.” In fact, various psychology studies have shown that people who take creativity training programs can boost their idea development and problem solving skills, creativity researcher Mark Batey, PhD, noted on a [Psychology Today blog](#).



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You set intense deadlines.

In her research, Harvard's Amabile found that people thought they worked best when under a crazy deadline, yet the opposite was true. "People were the least creative when they were fighting the clock," she told *Fast Company*. "In fact, we found a kind of time-pressure hangover—when people were working under great pressure, their creativity went down not only on that day but the next two days as well." Why? Amabile explained that limiting your time doesn't give you enough space to consider and sort out the problems, nor to try out different ideas before choosing a direction.



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You fuel with caffeine.

Stimulating your brain with caffeine may allow you to hyper-focus, but that might not lead to unique ideas and solutions. "Much of what we associate with creativity—whether writing a sonnet or a mathematical proof—has to do with the ability to link ideas, entities, and concepts in novel ways," Maria Konnikova wrote in the *New Yorker*. "This ability depends in part on the very thing that caffeine seeks to prevent: a wandering, unfocussed mind."



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You avoid boredom at all costs.

It sounds counterintuitive, but giving your brain the chance to feel bored—and, daydream—may actually spark creative thinking, according to 2013 British research. The study's authors found that people who did a boring task, like copying numbers from a phone book, brainstormed more creative uses for a Styrofoam cup than those who didn't perform the repetitive actions. Perhaps this explains "Eureka" moments that come while folding laundry or emptying the dishwasher.



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You work when you're in a bad mood.

A 2010 Canadian study found that people were able to learn and think more creatively when they were in a positive mood (in this case, they listened to lively music and watched a video of a laughing baby) than people who were in a sad state (here, they watched the movie *Schindler's List* and a news report about an earthquake). "If you have a project where you want to think innovatively, or you have a problem to carefully consider, being in a positive mood can help you to do that," study author Ruby Nadler, then a graduate student at the University of Western Ontario, said in a press release.

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