

“To have a usable answer, you need a good question”

Creative Focus is a method for formulating assignments and problems in such a way that it appears to generate ideas in the following creative process.

The specific formulation of the assignments is decisive for what ideas then occur.

The usage presupposes a joint conception of the assignment or problem.

Method

1. Formulate the assignment as a question – begin with how/what/when/why etc.
2. Formulate the assignment as brief and open as possible, preferable only one sentence.
3. Formulate the assignment from different viewpoints/angles. Ask the question in different ways.
4. Choose the preferred formulation.

Backward Forward Planning



Take Off Market User **Idea** Concept Evaluation

Backwards forwards planning is a process to help you define the problem, and make sure you are not in tunnel vision where you can't see the real problem because of the close problem you think is biting you. The process has three stages.

1. Write down the short version of the problem, preferably starting with "How to..."

2. If you were to solve the problem in statement 1, what higher level problem would it also solve? Write this down. Continue asking what higher level problem it solves and writing them down. Try to obtain at least 3 statements.

3. Going back to statement 1, ask what other benefits would flow from it, if it were a solution. Make sure these are different from those in stage 2.

You can then look at the various definitions and decide which is the most appropriate statement of the problem.

As an example, you are at home, your car is at the garage for repairs and you feel you really need to go and do the food shopping. Your first statement might be;

"How to get into the shops."

If you were to work down the list of additional problems this would solve you might write down

"I could get all the food and drink for the week"

Followed by

" I could relax and not worry any more about where the food was"

Which may lead you to

" I could finish that painting I want to hang in the living room"

Working the other way, what benefits would you also have if you could get to the shops may lead to;

" I could have a look at some clothes whilst I was there."

" I could enjoy some retail therapy" and

" I could call in on my friend for a chat since they live near the shop."

You now have 7 potential problem statements to choose from, it may be that your original statement is the problem to be solved, or it may be that "How to find time to complete the picture I'm painting" is more important to you.

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Examining Borders



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Boundary examination offers a refinement of problem definition. Defining a problem gives a clear task to focus on. The definition highlights some features of the situation as being particularly relevant, and plays down others as largely irrelevant. The problem boundary is the notional 'container', which separates highly relevant features (inside the boundary) from less relevant ones (outside the boundary).

The problem definition, and what is relevant or not, often evolves as your understanding of the situation develops. If the boundary has been provided for you (e.g. because someone else has defined the problem for you) it will reflect their biases and concerns as well as your own, and the boundary setting may itself be part of the problem. It is easy for the area outside the boundary to become ignored 'background'. This simple method is designed to bring potentially relevant aspects back into awareness.

1. Write down an initial statement of the problem.
2. Underline key words
3. Examine each key word for hidden assumptions. A good way to do this is to see how the meaning of the statement changes if you replace a key word by a synonym or near synonym.
4. Having explored how the particular choice of key words affects the meaning of the statement, see if you can redefine the problem in a better way.
5. The aim is not necessarily to change the position of the boundary but rather to understand more clearly how the wording of the problem is affecting our assumptions about the boundary.

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1. Arrange the meeting for a group of the right size and make up (typically 4-8 people)
2. Write the initial topic on a flip board, white board or other system where everyone can see it. The better defined, and more clearly stated the problem, the better the session tends to be.
3. Make sure that everyone understands the problem or issue
4. Review the ground rules
 - Avoid criticising ideas/suspend judgement. All ideas are as valid as each other
 - Lots, Lots & Lots - a large number of ideas is the aim, if you limit the number of ideas people will start to judge the ideas and only put in their 'best' or more often than not, the least radical and new.
 - Free-wheeling. Don't censor any ideas, keep the meeting flow going.
 - Listen to other ideas, and try to piggy back on them to other ideas.
 - Avoid any discussion of ideas or questions, as these stop the flow of ideas.
5. Have someone facilitating to enforce the rules and write down all the ideas as they occur (the scribe can be a second person)
6. Generate ideas - either in an unstructured way (anyone can say an idea at any time) or structure (going round the table, allowing people to pass if they have no new ideas).
7. Clarify and conclude the session. Ideas that are identical can be combined, all others should be kept. It is useful to get a consensus of which ideas should be looked at further or what the next action and time scale is.

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Negative Brainstorm



Take Off Market User **Idea** Concept Evaluation

Positive question

Describe your task as a question - like "how do we solve problem X?"

Negative question

Reformulate the question to a negative question - the opposite of the positive question.

Examples:

- How do we create a solution, that the users won't use?
- How do we create a solution, that we can't make a profit on?
- How do we create a solution, that no distributors will take in?

Negative ideas

Create ideas from the negative question. It will be a kind of reverse and distorted ideas.

Positive ideas

Go through each negative idea and try to change it into a positive idea. That will not be possible for all ideas, but it may lead to surprising and original ideas.

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Trigger Sessions



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Trigger Sessions are a good way of getting lots of ideas down from un-trained resources.

- The Problem owner defines the problem
- Each member of group writes down his ideas in shorthand (2 minutes only)
- One member reads out his list - others silently cross out ideas read out and write down "Hitch-hiked" ideas
- The second member reads out his list of ideas not already covered, followed in turn by other members
- The last member reads out his original list and his "Hitch-hiked" list and procedure is repeated counter current (i.e., if there are 6 folk, the order goes 1,2,3,4,5,6,5,4,3,2,1,2,3,4,5,6...)

A good group will be able to manage seven passes. Everyone's paper is then collected and can be typed up into a single list of ideas - all duplicates should have been crossed out during the session.

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Brainwriting Pool



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Each person, using Post-it notes or small cards, writes down ideas, and places them in the centre of the table. Everyone is free to pull out one or more of these ideas for inspiration. Team members can create new ideas, variations or piggyback on existing ideas.

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Brainwriting 6-3-5



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The name Brainwriting 6-3-5 comes from the process of having 6 people write 3 ideas in 5 minutes. Each person has a blank 6-3-5 worksheet (below)

Problem Statement: How to...

Problemformulering: Hvordan.....?			
	Idé 1	Idé 2	Idé 3
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

Everyone writes the problem statement at the top of their worksheet (word for word from an agreed problem definition). They then write 3 ideas on the top row of the worksheet in 5 minutes in a complete and concise sentence (6-10 words). At the end of 5 minutes (or when everyone has finished writing) pass the worksheet to the person on your right. You then add three more ideas. The process continues until the worksheet is completed.

There will now be a total of 108 ideas on the 6 worksheets. These can now be assessed.

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Brain Writing Game



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This method is set in the form of a light-hearted competitive game. Creativity methods normally avoid competition because it tends to be divisive. However, as long as the game atmosphere is fun rather than overly competitive, and the facilitator ensures that there are no significant losers, the game format might be useful, particularly in training contexts where winning and losing are likely to be less of an issue and both can be used to provide teaching material.

The game will take a little longer than some other brainwriting techniques. Very little facilitation skill is needed. The structure is as follows:

1. Display the problem statement, and explain that the winner of the game is the one who devises the most unlikely solution.
2. The facilitator sells each group member an agreed number (say 10) of blank, serially numbered cards at, say, 10 cent each, pooling the money to form the prize. Each group member signs a receipt that records the serial numbers of their set of cards.

3. Members try to think of utterly implausible solutions, writing one per card. The cards are then put up on a display board.
4. Members now have (say) 15 minutes to silently read all the solutions, and to append to them (on further un-numbered cards or Post-its) ways in which they could be converted into a more practical way of solving the problem (so reducing that ideas' chances of winning).
5. Each member then has two votes (e.g. two sticky stars) to vote for what s/he now considers to be the most improbable idea on the numbered cards. The idea that attracts most votes wins the pooled money.
6. Form two sub-groups, give half the cards to each, and give each group (say) 15 minutes to develop six viable solutions from their cards.
7. Each sub-group tries to 'sell' their ideas to the other sub-group.
8. Everyone comes together and agrees on the best ideas overall.

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Bonfire of ideas



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Focus question

Write down the focus question with a big felt-tip pen.
Place the question in the middle (usually on the floor)

Variation: Place the ideas on the floor gradually as you write them. This can give inspiration amongst the participants.

Individual idea generating

Brainstorming (work-yourself)
The individual writes down own ideas on a sheet of paper (one idea per sheet, big letters)

Organizing

The ideas are organized by the participants after groups/types and headlines are produced accordingly.

Present ideas

All ideas are hereafter presented - preferably shifting between participants - and are placed on the floor surrounding the focus question (wood on the fire)

Idea development

The idea development is made from each headline.
Focus on the ideas. Use other techniques to sophisticate a special idea.

It is allowed to write down new ideas, if you get inspired by the other ideas during the presentation round.

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Association Technique



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Chain of words

Create a random chain of words by choosing a random startword. Fx by random loop up in a dictionary and taking the first noun.

Write the words, that spontaneously come into mind. Write a chain of words of fx 20-25 words.

Problem

Write your problem as a question. Start by asking "How can we....?"

Write the problem in a short and open way.

Write different versions of the problem from different angles.

Chose the most relevant and idea-creating version.

Idea Creation

Generate ideas from the inspiration you get from each individual word in the chain.

Write each idea on a sheet of paper.

Be open to crazy ideas and avoid criticism.

Some words generate more ideas than others. Move on, if some words don't give you much and stay a little longer if they are very inspiring.

Be specific

Make the individual idea more specific:

How can it be made?

Write specific details on each idea sheet.

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Extended association technique



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Chain of words

Make a random chain of words without relation to the assignment. Randomly choose a starting word, e.g. by looking up a dictionary. Note down the word that spontaneously comes to mind and form a chain of words of 20-25 words.

Action words

The words in the chain of words are changed into action words (verbs) e.g. book = read, paper = drawing, sales contract = buying etc.

Focusing

Formulate the assignment as a question, begin with what/how/why/when etc.

Formulate the assignment from different viewpoints.

Choose the most relevant and idea generating formulation.

Idea generating

Confront the action words in the association chain one by one and generate ideas based upon these. Be open to crazy ideas.

Elaboration

Go through the ideas one by one and try to elaborate upon these:

How can this be done/combined/adapted etc.?

The ideas that can be elaborated upon can be used for further development and improvement of the initial idea.

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Role Storming



Take Off Market User **Idea** Concept Evaluation

RoleStorming is an evolution of Brainstorming, whereby you take on another identity.

Viewing problems and solutions from a different standpoint. Unusual 'off the wall' ideas may seem radical/'silly' if 'you' present them, however, generated by a nameless person removes any embarrassment.

- Use traditional brainstorming or other idea generating technique as a start point
- Invent an identity or use that of someone you know
- Assume that identity or refer to the fictitious person as 'this person would suggest.....'
- Brainstorm (or use other idea-generating techniques) in separate identity
- Change roles. Now try another identity obviously this can be done many times for many different characters.

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Critique Method



Take Off Market User **Idea** Concept Evaluation

The critique method is good for solving existing assignments or known problems where improvements or further development of the original ideas is needed.

Focusing

Formulate the assignment as a question; begin with what/how/why/when etc.

Formulate the assignment as brief and open as possible, preferable in one sentence only.

Formulate the assignment from different viewpoints.

Choose the most relevant and idea generating formulation.

Stakeholders

Find possible stakeholders by asking:

Who has the professional interests? – business interests? User interests? Or other forms of interests?

Also conflicts of interests can be desirable to include, so try to find these as well.

Critique points

Use every stakeholders in step 2 to find criticism points in the existing solutions by asking?

- What would this stakeholder criticise by...?

It is not important if the criticism is fair or not, the more points of criticism the better.

Redress

Seek ideas of how to avoid or redress all these points of criticism we have found in step 3.

Correct following question on each critique point:

- How do we redress or avoid these flaws and deficiencies?

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Summarizing



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Summarizing is used to create an overview when a large amount of ideas have been produced.

Grouping

Sort the ideas by topic or in groupings with natural affiliations. (This might cause some debate)

Overlapping

Screen the individual ideas, search for overlaps, by assessing if the idea is a copycat of some of the other ideas (like a sub idea to a main idea), if this is the case it should be deleted.

Combination

Screen the individual ideas again and see if there are natural affiliations or combinations that can be compiled as one idea. Do this combination of ideas when/if you find this.

Elaboration

Is the individual idea clear and concrete so everybody understands it, otherwise the idea must be elaborated by asking how, if you cannot elaborate on the idea, then delete it.

Relevance

Clear out ideas that has no value for a solution to the problem or assignment. Ask for each idea:

- Is this idea relevant for the purpose? (Your problem definition). If not, delete it.

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The idea sieve is a method for fast prioritising of a large number of ideas.

The techniques Summarizing and The idea sieve are supplementing each other and are useful tools if you first use the Summarizing followed by The idea sieve.

The idea sieve is a method for assessing and prioritising the ideas, NB! This method also works on its own.

Choice of criteria

Choose 1, 2 or 3 simple assessment criteria that fit this specific task.

Examples:

- Is the idea feasible?
- Is the idea useful?
- Is the idea new?
- Is the idea competitive?

Individual assessment

Every group member must individually make up their mind of how he/she would assess every idea based upon the assessment criteria agreed upon in the group.

Based upon this personal assessment he/she appoints each idea with points according to the following scale:

Criteria are met:	2 points
In doubt:	1 point
Criteria are not met:	0 point

Count and prioritizing

Chairperson makes a counting of the points. When the points are counted, the ideas are prioritized based upon the score of each idea.

Circle Technique



Take Off Market User **Idea** Concept Evaluation

The circle technique is a method, where you individually and independently develop further on ideas or improve suggestions.

Basic idea

First phase presupposes that you have already generated a number of ideas or suggestions.

Every participant describes the ideas or suggestions which he/she finds most interesting .

Preferably the one chosen should be one of his/her own, but it is not a must.

Describe the chosen idea briefly in cue, you can supplement the description with sketches.

The different working schemes are hereby after circulated in the group.

Idea development

The working schemes are in circulation, add improvements to the basic ideas.

Ask: - how can this basic idea be improved and developed further?

Add suggestions for improvements in the scheme and pass it on to the next group member.

Summarize

Summarize the original ideas with suggestions for improvement written in the schemes.

Evaluate whether each suggestion actually improves the idea. If they do, integrate them in the basic idea in your summary.

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1. Idea description

All members of the group must have the same clear picture of what the idea is.

Therefore start by making a description of the idea, continue until everybody has the same perception of the idea.

2. Strengths

Find all strengths of the present idea.

3. Weaknesses

Seek for weaknesses of the idea, find all problematic qualities of the idea.

4. Idea development

Look at the strengths in Step 2 and search for improvements or developments.

5. Idea development

Look at the weaknesses in Step 3 and search for ways to alter or avoid these weaknesses.

How can this be done?

6. Summarize

Assess the individual ideas and suggestions from Step 4 and 5.

The ideas and suggestions which can be utilised, recapitulate these with the basic idea.

Idea Assessment



Take Off Market User **Idea** Concept Evaluation

A method for assessing the emerged ideas and choosing the idea/ideas that you want to bring forward.

The method has five steps:

- 1. Requirements** , formulate the requirements for the solution that you are seeking
- 2. Prioritize** , put up the chosen requirements in order of priority.
- 3. Assess** , how well do the ideas meet the requirements (scale from 1-5). Write the assessment in the scheme shown below.
- 4. Extra advantages** , note possible advantages by every idea, additional to the formulated demands
- 5. Overall assessment** , make an overall assessment of each idea using the scheme.

	Idea number								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1st requirement									
2nd requirement									
3rd requirement									
4th requirement									
5th requirement									
Extra advantages									
1.									
2.									
3.									

FOCUS GENERATE SORT DEVELOP **EVALUATE**

The Idea Advocate method has an Idea Champion to offer continual support and enthusiasm for a project in the development stage. Assume that the group of original ideas for solving some issue has already been concentrated to a small number, say 3 – 6 of strong contenders:

1. A participant (the 'idea advocate') is allocated to each idea to present a case for that idea. Someone already familiar with the idea, or who initiated it, or who would have to implement it would be ideal choice.
2. If required the 'idea advocate' is permitted a set amount of research time to prepare their case.
3. Ideas advocates then make presentations of their assigned cases to the relevant decision makers and other idea advocates.
4. Each case is then discussed and decisions made. If a particular case was illuminating then a straightforward selection can be made, however, if there are several strong cases several rounds of elimination will take place.
5. Ensuring there are no differences in power and status amongst the idea advocates is essential. The more sophisticated approach outlined in Dialectical approaches handle the balance between positive and negative evaluation better.

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This is a simple way of scoring / assessing potential solutions to a problem. Give a score out of 10 for each of the three items:

Novelty How novel is the idea? If it isn't novel for this situation, it probably isn't very creative

Attractiveness How attractive is this as a solution? does it completely solve the problem? Or is it only a partial solution?

Feasibility How feasibly is it to put this into practice? It may have been a really attractive solution to use a time machine, but is it really feasible?

Once you have the mark out of 30 for each potential solution, you can easily rank them to then refine the top few.

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Dot Voting



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A popular, quick method for determining priorities by voting.

- Ideas are itemised clearly on a flip chart (or similar aid).
- Nameless voting tends to work best.
- Give each group a different coloured set of dots, i.e. group A have red dots.
- Give each individual or group a number of dots (say 10 each)
- Allow the group time to deliberate over the ideas they wish to vote for.
- Once all the groups are ready, one person from the group sticks their dots by their preferred top ideas.
- In some variations, there is no maximum number of votes an individual / group can give to one idea.
- Once all the dots are placed, all the groups enter into a discussion on any patterns, and general observations.
- A short-list of the top 5 is made

This is not a deeply analytic method, but a short, sharp measure of the current thinking of the task in hand.

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