

SERIOUS PLAY

FIELD GUIDE TO FIGHTING AND SURVIVING BANALITY

OFFICE OF ENROLLMENT &
STUDENT ADVANCEMENT



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

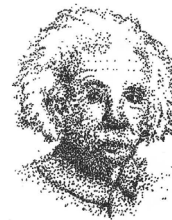
CREATED AND COMPILED BY D.GOEBEL
FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF OUTREACH

Creativity: The What

The words "creative" and "creativity" have long had an unfair connotation. Dancers, painters, musicians, and sculptors are considered "creative" while bank tellers and stockbrokers . . . yeah, not so much.

It's time we stop thinking about "creativity" in the classic sense of doing or making something "artsy." Creative work can happen in any field, in any profession, and at any institution.

If you've ever been to Karaoke night, chances are you didn't experience a lot of "creativity." Conversely, if you knew accountants working at Enron in the late 90s, there was no shortage of it! (A-OH!)



"Creativity is seeing what everyone else has seen, and thinking what no one else has thought."

-- Albert Einstein

"Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power to that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared." -- J.K. Rowling



Creativity: The Why

But why is creativity so important? First, let's start with a little exercise. List everything you do in your job; A step by step, line by line, instructional document. Get as detailed as you like. Write it so someone could walk into your office tomorrow, pick up, and take over. Granted not to your level of skill and aptitude (at least not immediately) but so they could get the work done.

Are you able to do this? If so, the future of your job looks bleak.

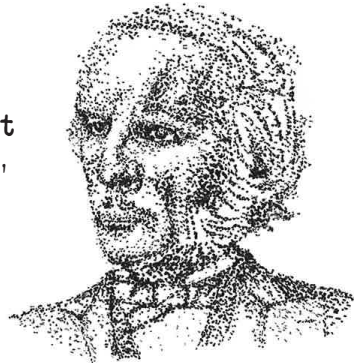
Surprised? Consider the exponential growth in complex algorithmic processing (and the machines that run them) and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence -- these are affecting the ways in which work is done.

Any vocation that can be put into a list of steps, no matter how complex or detailed, will be eliminated or replaced by a less expensive, less time consuming alternatives. It's not a question of if, it's a questions of when.



"Every child is an artist, the problem is staying an artist when you grow up."
-- Pablo Picasso

"A ship is safe in a harbor. But that's not what ships are for."
-- William Shedd



MACHINES

1997

IBM's Big Blue beat chess-master Garry Kasparov, long considered the best to play the game.

2011

IBM's Watson beats Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter on Jeopardy.

Today

The iPhone of today has as much processing power as a "supercomputer" had only 25 years ago. In 25 more years a device with this computing power will be the size of a blood cell.

Today and ongoing

Google's DeepMind is a self-teaching machine that grows more intelligent the more it is put to use.

-- v\$ --

HUMANS

Most 5-year-olds have greater abilities than our most advanced artificially intelligent machines.

As individuals, we can come up with more ideas than a computer. And as a group of individuals, even more.

Computers can be programmed to churn out painting after painting after painting. But it can't differentiate the aesthetically pleasing from the aesthetically queasy-ing™.

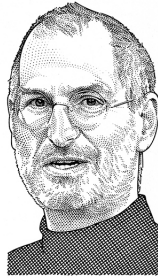
But before you start stockpiling munitions for the war with Skynet's Cyborgs (see Terminator, Cameron, 1984), relax. The human mind will always have the advantage. Machines thrive in stable environments where steps are repeatable and predictable. Beyond this, things get very complicated . . . in a hurry.

Imagination, the ability to see new connections, the vision to synthesize disparate parts into "the new" and awe-inspiring, the ability to innovate in the most constrained conditions--this is where the human brain prevails and ones and zeros fail.

The ability to look beyond a single "right" answer and find a way of re-framing the question for a new/better outcome --this is a uniquely human ability. No algorithm can work like the human brain can.

Creative thinking is the future. In fact, it's really the only future. Shocking? Can choreographers really design a better interface for a smart phone? Perhaps a deep understanding of human movement and interaction is the thing that made Apple succeed where Motorola faltered.

“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.” -- Steve Jobs



Creativity: The How

If creativity is the future, how do we secure our place in it? One does simply not crawl out of bed and decide to “be creative.” It takes effort. It takes patience. And it takes a lot of hard work. Most of all, it takes practice.

Creativity is not unlike a muscle; a muscle that needs continuous practice and continuous "play" in order to maintain and strengthen. The more practice you have, the better you'll get, and the stronger your creativity will become.

The following pages are exercises to do just that. Don't worry about getting things perfect, or right, or polished. There's no such thing. This is about the exercise, the practice, the "play". Have fun!

NOTE: Just like exercise, you can't work out one muscle and not expect "injury." You must "cross-train" your creativity.

Think you can't draw? Phoey! Everyone can draw. If you can make these 12 symbols, you can draw anything. Really!



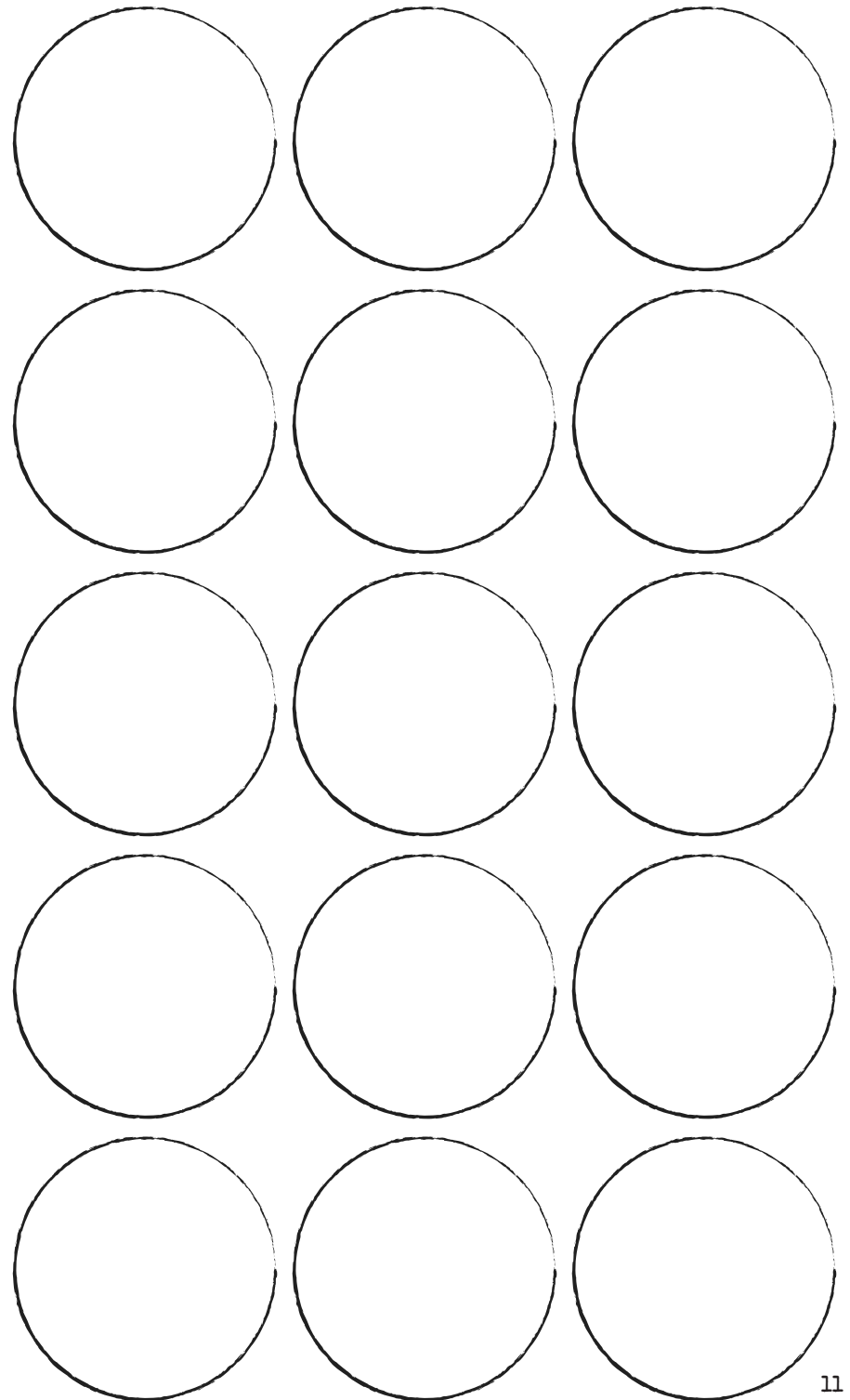
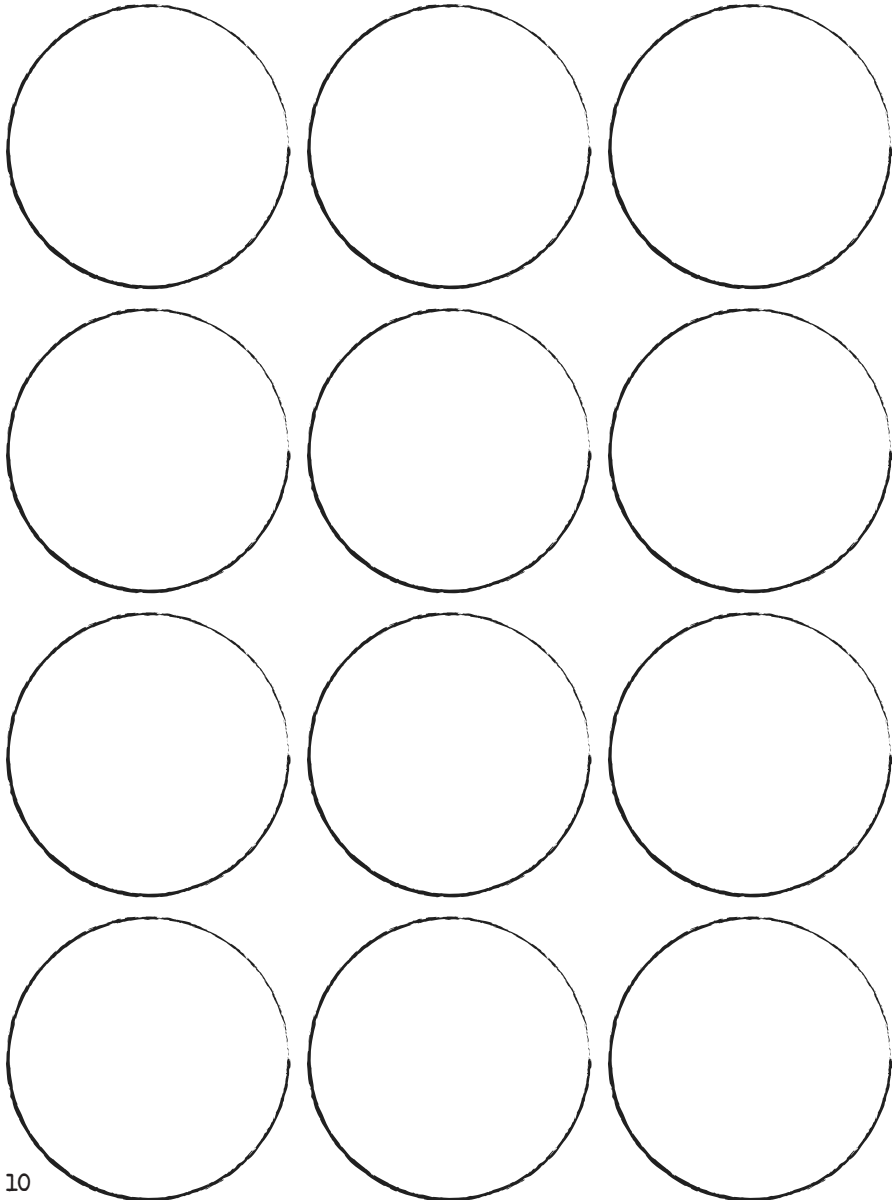
Beethoven, whose bust has become a meme for “genius”, was known to have written melodies 70 times or more before getting the “right” one.

“Creativity is a wild mind and a disciplined eye.”
-- Dorothy Parker



27 Circles

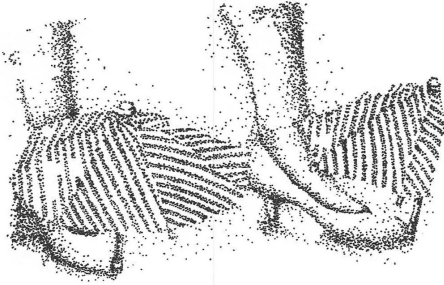
Set a timer for 3 minutes and turn as many of the circles below into different, recognizable objects.



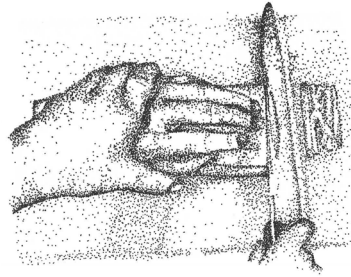
Tools of the Trade

Chindogu is the Japanese art of inventing ingenious everyday gadgets that seem like an ideal solution to a particular problem, but are, in fact, useless.

Examples:



Shoe Umbrellas--keep your shoes dry



3rd Hand--for chopping veggies

Dream up your own Chindogu:

Transhumanist-ylvania

Transhumanists believe humankind's purpose is to accelerate evolution beyond the current biological limitations to increase intelligence, complexity, and love throughout the universe. They see today's humans as midwives in this process. The life forms that will take it from here (in the transhumanist view) will be human-machine combos and human-made biological beings.

Limit yourself to one special cyborgian skill and create your very own "transhumanist self." What is your skill? How is it used to benefit the community in which you live? For example: perhaps you're a remarkable bike mechanic. You can fix any problem on any bike with minimal time and effort.

Next, create the other members of your utopian, transhumanist village and talk about their special skills. Draw or write about your collective:



"If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original." --Ken Robinson

Perfect* Pottery

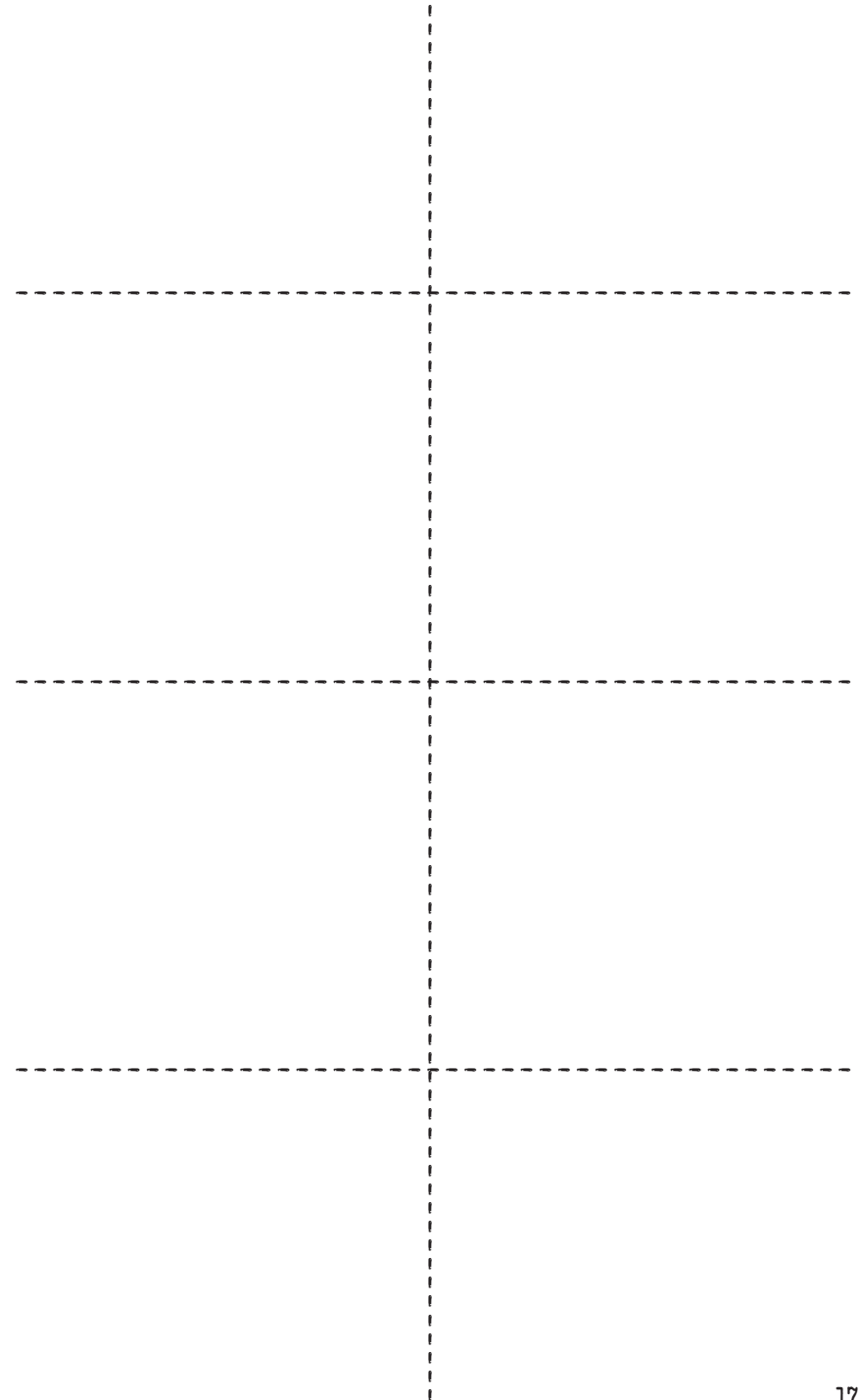
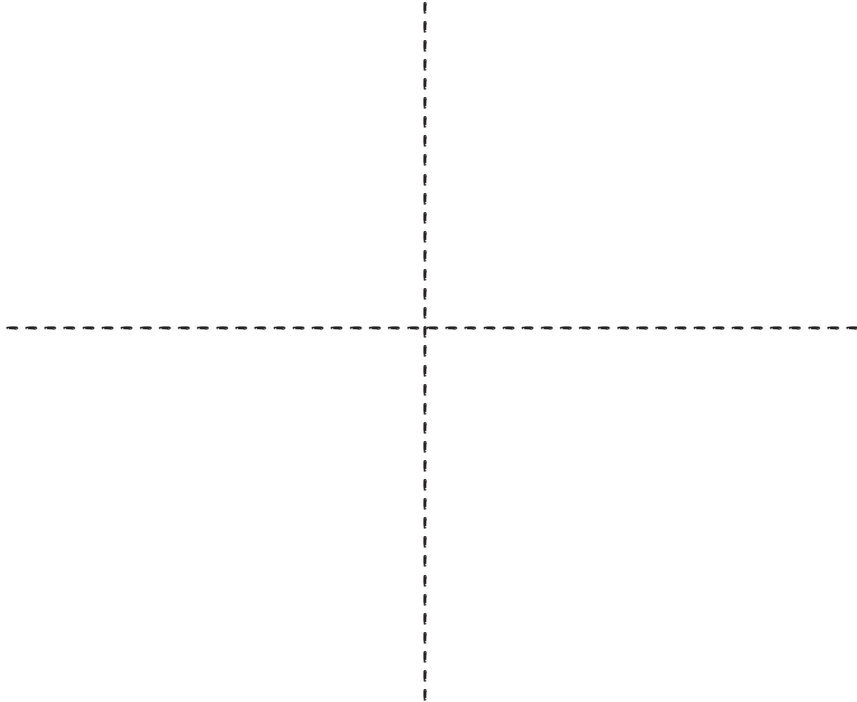
A high school pottery teacher told half of her class they had the entire semester to create a "perfect* pot", which would be submitted and graded. To the other half, she said they had to make 50 pots and they would be graded on their best pot.

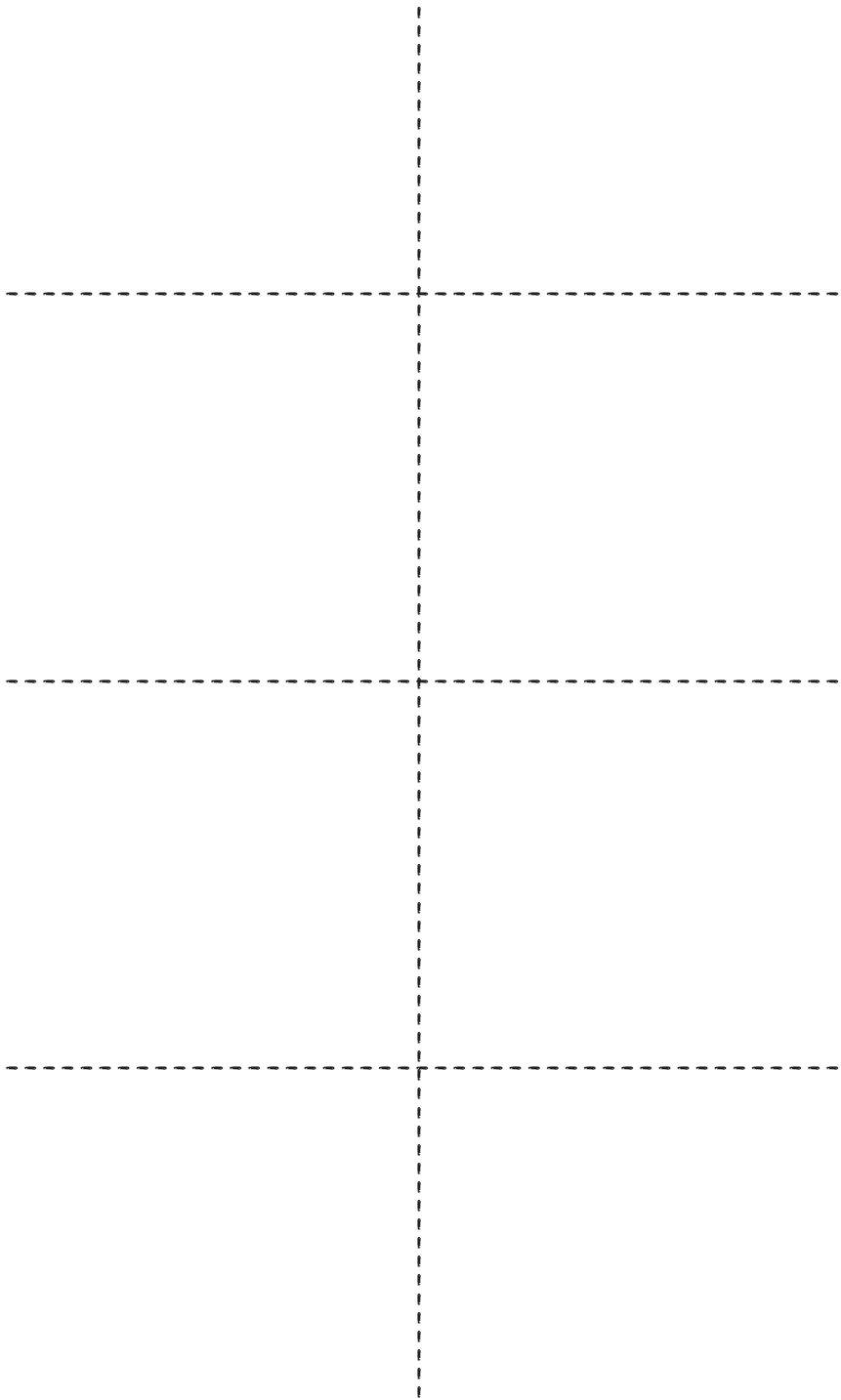
The first group ultimately never made the perfect* pot. The second group kept going making small improvements on each iteration and eventually made the perfect* pot.

Lesson: don't be blinded by perfection. Through iteration and an eye for improvements, the perfect* can be achieved.

Use the following 28 boxes to iterate over a doodle of your choosing. Continue on a another sheet if you're inspired to keep going. Choose your favourite.

*ok, ok, there is no "perfect" but darn close -- see page 7 on perfection





New Word Order

Urban Dictionary, the online resource for slang words and phrases, has recently hired a head writer for their R&D (Research and Development) department. This new hire is YOU. Your job is to create a number of new "products" for the 3rd quarter rollout. Start by reviewing some popular inventory from the past decades:

Crunk = a very fun or enjoyable time; also used to describe something cool, hip, or fashionable (c. 1995)

Gnarly = something extreme. Used in bad and good cases (c. 1982)

Phat = excellent (c. 1985)

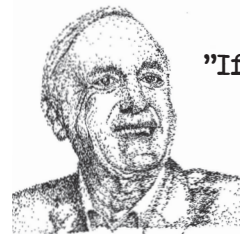
Turnt = excited, having a good time (c. 2012)

Lit = mildly intoxicated (c. 2004)

Off the Chain = Out of control, wild fun (c. 2005)

On Fleek = a state of flawlessness or being completely perfect (c. 2015)

Now, get to work on creating a new terms/phrases and their definitions.



"If you want creative workers, give them
enough time to play."

— John Cleese

Happy Spill Day

Spill some coffee, ink, or any other dark liquid on a sheet of paper. Blow some air on it, if you're inclined. Once it dries, study the spill; turn it around and around. Now turn each splotch into a creature, monster, or alien life form. Get started with these:



He Scores, He Shoots

Filmscoring is the art of composing music to edited scenes in a movie or other media. Traditionally speaking, the music is written at the end of a long process: a screenplay is written, the movie is filmed, the scenes are edited together, and finally the music is composed in post-production.

In this exercise, the music comes first! Put on a piece of music; preferably something instrumental so the words don't impose. Now, write the screenplay to the music. Is there dialogue? Is it a series of cuts? Is the mood active, melancholy?

SCENE I

FADE IN

LOCATION:

ACTION:

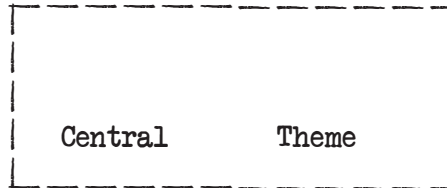
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are...YOU!

Renowned playwright Tom Stoppard penned an imaginative retelling of Shakespeare's Hamlet entitled Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. The play is told from the perspective of these two minor characters as they watch Hamlet slowly descend into madness.

Using Stoppard's method, make a diary/journal entry about being a classmate of The Bard himself. Observe Shakespeare in different school-day situations, his interactions, his behaviours, and what happens to him in the school.

Mindmap

Pick a topic. Any topic. Write it in the central theme box below. Then, branch off the theme with related words, phrases and/or doodles. Keep branching off until your page is full or your brain is empty.



Rand-i-pedia

Point your browser to wikipedia.org (choose English, if not already there, to take you to the main page). In the upper left corner click "Random Article". Start reading the article til you get the gist, then hit "Random Article" again. Describe in one or two sentences how the first article relates to the second. Hit "Random Article" again. Now see how this article relates to the previous one. Keep going.

Simplify

Prefer something more simple? Head to randomwordgenerator.com and do a similar exercise.

The ReWrite (Part 1)

Day 1 -- On this page and the adjacent, write about the following prompt:

Explain "dreams" to an alien life form who does not sleep and is completely unfamiliar with the concept.

The ReWrite (Part 2)

Day 2 -- Without looking back, take the same prompt and write on these pages:

Explain "dreams" to an alien life form who does not sleep and is completely unfamiliar with the concept.

[the act of resting and recreating can have profound
impacts on quality]

Unleash Your Inner Kendrick

In a Nature Magazine article from 2012, neurologists conducted fMRI scans of hip-hop artists while they "freestyled" (improvised lyrics with no set subject or structure). The rappers' brains were watched closely for activity. What they showed was off-the-chart levels of hemispheric connectivity. The freestylers' abilities to randomly take words and connect them to one another was unlike any other.

While you might not be up for a Pulitzer Prize anytime soon (see Kendrick Lamar 2018), start your own "spit"! You can set up a beat on your smart phone: GarageBand is free for iOS devices; Android has Magix Music Maker Jam, Walk Band, Easy Band Lite, PocketBand. Or choose to go beat free.

Start with the first thing you think of and go from there.

Extra credit: record yourself! You just might be the next Pitbull. (ok maybe aim higher).

Olympics 2264

Imagine the Olympics in 2264. What are the new sports? What sports remain? How have they evolved? Where does it take place? Draw or write about it below.

Sketchnote

The act of purposeful doodling while taking notes is commonly known as "sketchnoting." Studies have shown that drawing and writing, as opposed to writing alone, makes for better retention and greater engagement.

Put on a podcast, Ted Talk, or any other spoken audio and start taking visual notes.

The Morning (Brain) Dump

Journalist, author, and creator of The Artist's Way, Julia Cameron, uses a ritual she calls "The Morning Pages" to clear her head.

In this exercise, you just write. No thinking, just writing. It's not about writing well, or even making sense. It's just continuous stream from brain to pen (or keyboard, if that's your preference). Oh, and don't worry, you never have to show it to anyone.

Start here and continue on another page if/when necessary.

Empathetical Anthropologist

One of the most important factors in innovation, if not THE most important, is empathy. Understanding the perspectives of others is paramount to creating things of value.

Set yourself up in a public place; a coffee shop, a restaurant, anywhere where people are interacting. Now complete the grid below in each of the topics by writing what you observe people thinking, feeling, saying, and doing.

Think

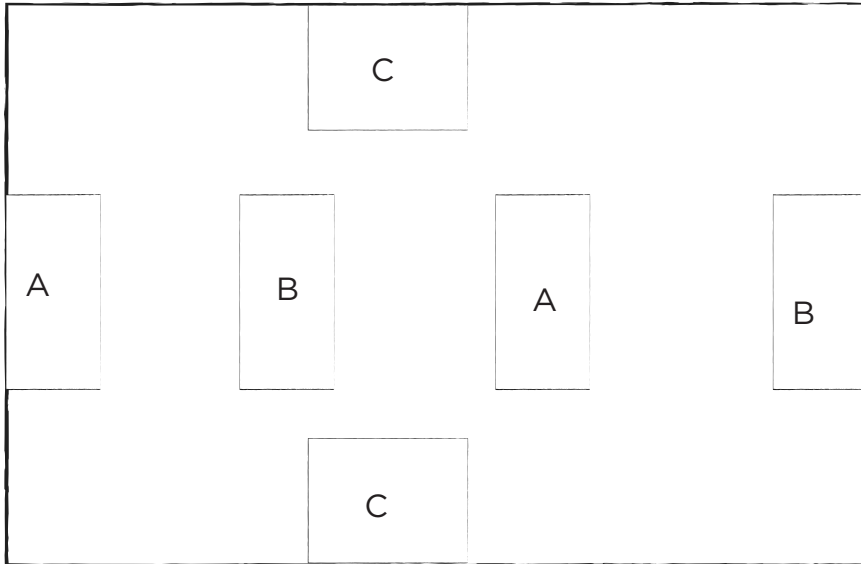
Feel

Say

Do

Don't Cross the Lines

Without crossing lines, or going outside the box, connect A to A, B to B, and C to C.



Sir Mix-a-Lot

First, choose one setting from the list below:

Ancient Egypt

American Wild West

Mars in 2472

Barbie World

(/w manbun Ken doll)

Jurassic World Theme Park

The Death Star

Tolkein's Middle Earth

The "Upside Down"

Goldilocks Planet
(Kepler 452b)

(Stranger Things)

Next . . . your assignment: you've been hired as a mixologist at the swankiest nightclub in your chosen setting. Your job is to come up with 3 unique cocktails to surprise and impress your discerning clientele. Draw and/or describe your drinks:

Jurassic Pork

Think of a movie you know really well. One in which you can see the next scene coming before it starts, and you can recite lots of the dialogue.

Now imagine a deleted scene gets recut into the movie and completely alters the outcome.

What if Indiana Jones never reached for his hat at the last second? What if Ron Weasley found a different seat on the Hogwarts Express? What if Pi Patel tipped the tiger out of the boat and into the ocean?

Describe the new scene, how it affects the movie, and, if necessary, give the movie a new title.



"It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see."

-- Henry David Thoreau

First Line, Last Line

Take the first line from a favourite book or article. Then, take the last line from another favourite. Weave these incongruous parts into a story, journal entry, instruction manual, or chapter in a self-help book.

Here are two to get started:

For thirty-five years now I've been in wastepaper, and it's my love story.

You can't keep counting forever.

"You can't use up creativity. The more you make, the more you have."

-- Maya Angelou



"You are not a drop in the ocean,
you are the ocean in a drop."

-- Rumi



"It's through mistakes that you actually grow. You have to get bad in order to get good."

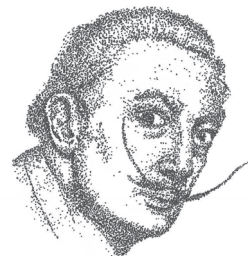
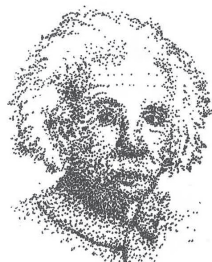
-- Paula Scher

"Great things are done by a series of small things brought together."

-- Vincent van Gogh



"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution." --Albert Einstein



"Have no fear of perfection,
you'll never reach it."

-- Salvador Dali



"Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people." --Leo Burnett

"When inspiration does not come to me, I go halfway to meet it."

-- Sigmund Freud



