

The Free Association Technique

To fully access your creative potential and generate more innovative ideas, you must tap into your intuition and engage in *free association*. This involves connecting seemingly unrelated objects or concepts, much like the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon game. Using the morphological matrix, you can randomly select three nouns and find a way to link them together using mental freewheeling.

This approach, similar to the improvisational style of jazz musicians and comedians, allows your mind to explore new possibilities and push the boundaries of logic. With an objective and starting point in mind, let your imagination run wild to discover exciting and unexpected connections.

What is Free Association and How Can You Use It?

Free association involves connecting unrelated words without a predetermined destination in mind. You can use one word to generate creative ideas related to a specific objective. This allows your mind to explore different directions, and you can always go back to the original word if you get stuck. For instance, if your friend runs a theater and needs help promoting it, you can use free association to generate fresh ideas. By randomly selecting a word from a play, such as "out," you can connect it to your objective in creative ways, such as hosting an open-air performance or performing in a hospital waiting room. By letting your creative juices flow and removing internal filters, you can generate truly innovative solutions beyond conventional ideas.

There are various stimuli besides words that can encourage free-association in your mind. As everyone's way of connecting with the world differs, some triggers may be more effective for you than others. To determine which ones work best for you, you must try them all. Here are several examples:

- **Sound:** Noises can be an excellent source of inspiration for generating new ideas. However, when selecting a sound to use, avoid music that you already have associations with. Instead, opt for sounds that are less recognizable. Listen intently to the sound and write down any ideas that come to mind. Then, consider how the sound relates to your objective. For instance, if you're brainstorming ideas for a birthday gift for your partner, and the sound of a train sparks an idea, let your thoughts wander. Try to explore connections beyond the obvious.

- **Sight:** Utilizing visual images can also help break down traditional patterns of thinking. The less specific and more abstract the image is, the more likely it is to encourage original and conceptual ideas. Study the image for a minute, then write down the thoughts that come to mind. After that, filter your ideas and select the most appropriate one. To boost your creativity further, try playing music in the background while looking at the image.
- **Scramble:** During this process, you use letters to jumpstart your ideas. Choose random Scrabble tiles or bits of paper with letters on them. Avoid forming complete words - instead, use the letters to generate sounds or parts of words. The idea is to build on them to create new ideas.
- **Touch:** Similar to sound and vision, objects can be used to break patterns. They also offer the added benefit of touch, which can contribute to creativity. Hold and feel different objects, such as rubber balls or paper clips, to stimulate new ideas.
- **Smell:** Your sense of smell can also be utilized to encourage free-association. Select a scent, and consider the ideas and memories it evokes for you. Try scents of varying complexity, from simple celery to more intricate whiskey. Closing your eyes and allowing your mind to be led by the aroma may stimulate fresh ideas.

If you encounter a block or reach a pause in your free association exercise, do not fret. Attempt the same challenge with alternative words or utilize sounds, images, or objects instead. It is recommended to use slightly abstract sounds since individuals react to them differently. Furthermore, be patient since creativity requires it. Do not expect to produce exceptional ideas every time you try to be creative. If you consistently create great ideas, it is possible that you are not applying creative thinking frequently enough.