

**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**

Make Possibilities Happen

How To Redirect Your Thoughts to Reveal New Possibilities

Possibility is about the ability to see something in your imagination or in your heart and materialize it in real life. Unbeknownst to us, our imagination is limited by what we already know. Your brain is a repository of all your prior experience—it's mapped with all your cumulative emotional, cognitive, and motor experience to at least age twenty-five. This means your memories define how you perceive, process, and act.. This is how we make sense of things, which is why we are typically uncomfortable in unfamiliar situations that don't make sense—they are disorienting and disturbing and disrupt the brain's sacred trinity of comfort, certainty, and safety. But being tied down to the familiar keeps you from seeing new possibilities.

Don't let your default (your unconscious biases) hold you back! Redirect your thoughts and emotions around uncertainty to reveal new possibilities. Intentionally act outside of the familiar by not always sticking to your usual (drink choice, route home, schedule, and so on). Use creativity exercises to alter your mind by training your brain to innovate and create. Because the brain responds to and evolves with creativity practice and conditioning over a relatively short period of training, we know that creativity is a state of mind that can be taught and conditioned.

This activity from *Making Possibilities Happen* by Grace Hawthorne will help increase the flow of your creative juices from a trickle to a gush. The aim is to help you practice letting go of what you know so that you can see new possibilities. It has been adapted for use in both K12 and higher education classrooms.

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Activity: Do a Duchamp

LEARNING GOAL

To help learners develop creative thinking skills. To help them develop divergent thinking, confidence in their creative abilities, a bias to action, and brainstorming skills.

WHERE TO USE THIS ACTIVITY

Classrooms | Virtual learning sessions (Zoom, etc.) | Workshops

MATERIALS

Paper | Writing instrument

FORMAT

Individual work, with opportunity for individual or paired reflection.

INSTRUCTIONS

One way to open your mind to new possibilities is to let go of what you already know, unleashing your ability to see and conceive of an explosion of new ideas. The work of Marcel Duchamp, one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, is a great example of this. He famously took a discarded ceramic urinal, turned it upside down, and called it art. It threw the art world into an uproar. How can you call that art?! Ariel, in the animated film *Little Mermaid*, picked up a fork from a sunken ship and used it as a hair comb. When we're able to bypass preconceived notions of an object's purpose. When a fork is no longer just an eating utensil but a hair comb, a garden sign holder, a marshmallow roaster, a mini loom, a cake decorator, a back scratcher, and so on—an entirely new set of possibilities opens up. This activity is inspired by the Alternative Uses Test, a popular psychology assessment tool designed by J.P. Guilford in 1967 that evaluates divergent thinking abilities—basically, how flexible and creative the person can be.

1. Reach for an everyday object on your desk. Set a timer for 60 seconds.
2. On a piece of paper, jot down other uses that object could have that aren't the known or intended purpose. Go as quickly as you can. Go for quantity.

For example, if you grabbed a stapler, you could jot down: garlic smasher, photo easel, shoe heel, and so on.

3. Repeat daily with two objects, two times per week, for a month and see how you progress. It may not take very long for this ability to become second nature.

After your first effort, count the number of other uses you wrote down. Make a note of your level of ease. Did you have a difficult time coming up with ideas, or did your pen have a hard time keeping up with your brain? How did it feel differently the fifth time you did this? If you save your iterations of your output over time, you can reflect on your progress. This is a great go-to activity when you are feeling stuck. We run this activity during class in teams as a competition with a box of limited objects, one-minute turns per team, and rapidly changing themes. You'd be amazed at what a simple spatula can become in different contexts such as a shopping mall, restaurant, circus, and more.

WE'D LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK!



This educators' guide is a prototype (hooray!). We're hoping to understand what types of materials are useful to educators and learners in K12 and higher education classrooms. If you used this, please share your feedback with us in this four-question survey.

WANT TO READ MORE?

Check out *Make Possibilities Happen!* The book offers even more ways to spark your creativity and find the motivation to develop and launch new projects.

Learn about all of our d.school books at dschool.stanford.edu/books.

To request a complimentary examination copy to review for use in your classroom, contact Penguin Random House Education at k12education@penguinrandomhouse.com for PreK–12 Education or highereducation@penguinrandomhouse.com for Higher Education.