
20 Tiny Techniques for Jumpstarting Creativity

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This is a go-to guide for the artist who sometimes needs a quick jumpstart (*or a completely new technique*) for a keeping their creative spirit alive and healthy.

#1. Imagine You're Someone Else

If you ever find yourself wondering where to go next with something, there is a great freedom from following how another artist would do it. If you're writing a song, hear that artist performing the song and where they would add inflections, where they would add pauses, what the instrumentation would be like. As an actor, play a video in your head of another actor doing this scene on TV. This is not stealing, because no matter how you imagine it, you will always perform it differently than what the original artist would. Mimicry is the best form of flattery and, in this case, it's also an excellent tool for growth and self-realization. Look at all of the visual artists over the centuries. We can visually see these artists copying and learning from their predecessors in an effort to grow and to find their own style. so I say go out there and try to mimic someone, try to copy them. It's going to give you a structure in which you can play that will free up your choices and impulses because most of the rules will be laid out by the artist that you are emulating.

#2 Put Music On In The Background

I am hearing this more and more from experts who are talking about "productivity." These are bloggers mostly or writers who will always listen to the same song or playlist when they sit down to work. Music does three things: 1) it blocks out the outside world so that all of your senses can focus on the task, 2) it simultaneously relaxes and stimulates the brain to increase productivity and creativity, and 3) once you have listened to the same song enough times, it creates a Pavlovian response so that next time all you have to do is turn on the song and your brain and body automatically know that it's time to work. Here's a great tip to use this to its fullest effect: make sure that the music is instrumental so that you're not distracted by lyrics. Everyone seems to have a different mood that they like, so that will be up to you as to which music you choose, but my favorite is the soundtrack for *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty*. I created a playlist and pulled out three or four of the songs that were a little bit heavier, a little more intense, and stuck out of the rest of the album. And I was left with a beautiful playlist of natural instruments, with a playful and inquisitive nature to it, and just enough of a pulse that I can lock into the rhythm and feel like I'm moving forward. also, I have to say, I'm a big fan of turning on a Latino pop radio

station. Most of the time the music is extremely upbeat, and I don't speak a word of Spanish so I'm never distracted by the lyrics. Works for me so hey, give it a whirl. I'm also curious to hear what songs or albums work for you, as I'm sure I'll want to change it up every once in a while. [Send me an email](#) and let me know!

#3 Ask A Friend

Maybe you have a couple ideas bouncing around in your head or you're just the kind of person who likes to work out ideas out loud. You need a sounding board. You need someone who will hear what you have to say, provide you with their own opinion, or at least offer you a new perspective. It's a great tool to bounce ideas off of others around you. Whenever possible, try to keep this between you and someone you respect. That way, you'll be much more likely to be open to their feedback, no matter how hard it may be to swallow. And these conversations don't need to only happen with the bigger picture stuff. Sometimes I will have two lyric lines that I like equally, so I ask someone else and they will usually have an immediate reaction. That's a little perk that If you continue to ask people around you, you're actually getting a little glimpse into your audience and what they prefer each time.

#4 & #5 Read A Book Or Listen To A Podcast

Both are equal parts intended to a) turn your brain off and b) learn from experts. I'm not saying that every author or podcast host is an expert, in fact I'm sure we are few and far between, but each of these is a great way to release your mind from the pressure of having to create something while introducing it to new ideas that could potentially move you forward in your process. This is not just about reading filler material in order to give your brain a rest. For example, there's a big difference between opening up your favorite teen vampire novel and opening up a book by the CEO of Pixar. But the best authors and podcast hosts will find ways of entertaining you, even when they are explaining the drabest of topics. Find a book or podcast that resonates with you and set a goal for reading one chapter or listening to one episode during your commute.

#6 Do A Mindless Task

This is my absolute favorite on the list because it is absolutely full proof. It worked every single time. Do a mindless task. And I don't mean turn on the TV. I mean mow the lawn or vacuum or iron or water your garden. It needs to be goal oriented so you

know what you have to do to start and what you have to do to stop but it should be something that you do often enough that you can just go into autopilot. And here's my story with this, the majority of my strategies that I have for my business, and many of the lyrics for my songs or ideas for blog posts have all been sparked while I was mowing my lawn. And I live in Florida so I mow my lawn a *lot*. Don't give me wrong, I hate mowing my lawn. This is not something where I say, "Oh, I need to think of a new blog post so I'm gonna go outside and mow the lawn and get all excited about it." No, the reason why this works is because I don't expect it to happen. I don't invite it in. I just put my body in to motion doing a task that I don't have to think about and then my brain takes over and does all of the work for me. So I urge you to know what those mindless tasks are in your life that you can do that allow you to daydream and then to eavesdrop on your own thoughts so that you're not actively trying to come up with something creative but that you are still aware of it when it does.

#7 Research And Find Another Version... Then Make It Better

Chances are, if you're creating something that somebody else has already created it

with their own vision. There is no song that you can write today that doesn't remotely sound like another artist's song; there's no painting that has new subject matter that someone else has thought of; there is no short story that won't be echoed in other short stories before it. So if you have an idea for something but you don't know where to begin, find some other artists to find that idea before you. And then make it better. With search engine today, it is incredibly easy to find anything you want within a matter of minutes. Look and see what other people have done. Be inspired by it, analyze it, break it down, and determine what you like about it and then how you can make it better. What are its strengths and what are its weaknesses? And similarly what are your strengths and what are your weaknesses? Do you have the strengths to be able to fill in the gaps where this one didn't perform as well as you think it should?

#8 Have A Drink... or Relax

So I jokingly call this one have a drink but it's kind of true. There's something that happens to your body after having *just one* drink that is enough to let those superficial troubles melt away and that your impulses take the spotlight. If nothing else, it takes away that need for perfection. It takes

away that censoring yourself for judging yourself in the moment that way you can truly write what you want to write and then go back and take it up later. If you are also holding some fear or guilt or anything else that might keep you from starting a project, one drink will help reduce that so that you can go jump right in excited. If you don't drink, then I'm sure you have something that you do that helps you relax to the same level. Maybe it's a bath, maybe it's a jog, whatever it is allow yourself that time to let your expectations and inhibitions drop away so that you can start your project uncensored, unfiltered, and truly in the moment.

#9 Repeat Repeat Repeat

This can be both short-term and long-term. Here's a short term example: Say you're hung up on writing a chorus for a song. You've got the verse and you've got the melody for the chorus but you don't have the lyrics. So repeat the verse over and over and over and over again. Listen to what you already have. Imagine where it needs to go; be open to the sounds that naturally come out of your mouth as you are singing the melody. Repetition is your friend here and all of the pieces will fit together on the 5th, 10th, 20th, 100th time that you sing through it. And in the long

term, repetition will be your friend if you challenge yourself to write every day. Tell yourself you will spend 10 minutes writing lyrics every day or write a new song each week. This is similar to keeping a journal except it is more goal oriented. You still want to keep it mostly stream of thought, and definitely not judging anything as a writing it down, but it is more creatively focused rather than giving a recap of your thoughts.

#10 Sleep

Sometimes you just have to sleep. Your brain can do magical, incredible, scientifically crazy things when you sleep. If you're feeling broken about something, I guarantee you that sleep will fix it 99% of the time. Give yourself permission to put the project on the back burner, read a book or do something relaxing before you fall asleep so that it's not the last thing you think about, and then enjoy your slumber. While you are sleeping, your brain is going to create new neural pathways that are going to make it easier to write that song or brainstorm that project, or memorize those lines or whatever it is that you're hung up on. Sleep is a necessary operation for the brain to be able to catalog everything that it is learned and to be able to create new pathways for you to be able to

recall it more easily the next time around. And as for the number of hours you sleep, everyone's a little bit different. Many people swear by 8 hours. I sometimes feel more relaxed if I only get 7. But your body can and will function on 4 to 5 hours of sleep as well. The trick is to go to sleep knowing that *you will feel fully rested when you wake up and ready to start your day*. If you fall asleep excited for the new day, then you will wake up the same way.

#11 Wake Up Earlier

This may seem counterintuitive, especially for all of we artist types who don't consider ourselves to be morning people, but I did this for a solid four months earlier this year. My family wakes up at 7 AM so I set an alarm for 5 AM every morning, including weekends, and I would get up and have two hours of alone time to work on anything that I wanted to do. And I have never felt better. Sure, I would get a little tired later in the day but it was never an angry tired. I was always a restful, smile on my face tired. Those 2 hours were my time. I could write, record, strategize, read, anything that I wanted to do to move forward in my goals. The hardest part about this, and the reason why I eventually ended up falling off of my pattern, was because I lost track of my goals. When I knew what I

was waking up for, and what I was going to accomplish, it was like Christmas morning. I would get up out of bed, I would brush my teeth, I splashed water on my face, and I got to work. It was exhilarating, it was freeing, and I got tons of stuff done before my family had even woken up, which kept up my excitement level throughout the day. So try it sometime. *Resolve yourself to waking up an hour early for four weeks.* Whenever you would set your alarm to wake up and get out the door, roll back one more hour. For bed, think about how you're going to use that extra hour in your day, and then get as much sleep as you can. When you wake up, start tackling your goals for the day. I guarantee you you'll wake up more excited for each day and things will fly off your to do list.

#12 Set A Deadline

If you don't have a To Do list, start one! I am not a list maker. I am not I am morning person. Or so I thought. My wife, on the other hand, is the number one list maker I know and is always super motivated to get out of bed in the morning. When I started waking up early and focusing on my goals is when I realized that she naturally does this all the time. It's because she said the deadline for herself. They're flexible, and she allows for life to happen

and she can move things around as they need to. But she sets up deadlines; she sets up expectations and goals of when she is going to start, work on, and finish specific projects and tasks in her life. That way she doesn't have to dedicate any more brain-power to it when she's not working on it because she already has it written down. And then when she is working on it, she is very clear picture in mind of how much time she has to work on it before she has to "turn it in."

#13 Find A New Space

Think back to college when you had a big paper due and you would go cloister yourself in the library in order to get it done. This wasn't just about being near resource material, this is about putting yourself into a new space, a space dedicated for getting work done; Space that you knew you wouldn't leave until you had achieved certain goals. Now think about meeting a friend or a coworker at a coffee shop in order to have a specific conversation. The space in which you find yourself directly impacts your work. It impacts how much work you can do, the quality of your work, and how focused you can stay in the amount of time you have allotted of yourself. So, if you're having a hard time getting something started for the ideas to

start flowing, maybe it's not you. Maybe it's the space. Get out of there for a while. Treat yourself to lunch and then stay for another hour with your paper notebook or laptop. Go for a walk and find a bench in the park. Go to the mall and do some people watching. There are very few things that will kickstart your creativity faster than watching the unique way each person walks by you and imagining what their life must be like for a split second.

#14 Journal

OK OK OK, I know you either journal or you don't. Some people will journal and will have done it since they were small. Some people have *never* done it and don't consider themselves to be journalers. I get it. It's kind of like you're a runner or you're not. The thing is, just like being a non-runner, you can always learn to run and eventually learn to enjoy it and see benefits from it. Same goes for journaling. This is nothing more than a free-flowing way to get those thoughts out of your head so that you can stop mulling over them and have them locked away securely in a place where you can go back and read over them later if you want to. Myself, my hand cramps up after a few minutes of writing in a journal and that's always a challenge for me that eventually makes me stop jour-

nalizing. However, with new technology, there are some amazing apps out there that are directly geared toward journalers that allow you to do all of this on your computer or your phone. I recently started using Day One, which features all of your journal entries, including pictures and videos and anything else you want to document, on a calendar of you in your app, and it only takes one button push to begin journaling for the day. I do this all through voice dictation with my headphones so that I never have to stare at my phone or even write anything down. I start talking and it's like a little mini therapy session right get all of my thoughts out. I talked about 1) What was great for the day, 2) What sucked that day, and 3) My goals for tomorrow. And that's it. Sometimes it's about family, sometimes about work, sometimes it's about other things. This is your journal and you can treat it anyway you want. But do believe me when I say the journaling is an exercise that can *and will* help anyone, if you dedicate time to it enough that it becomes a part of your daily routine. 5 minutes before bed or on the way home from work is all you need to create a thriving journal.

#15 Go For A Drive

This is similar to a mindless task except it's even more removed. It doesn't have a necessary goal in sight, you can drive around in circles or aimlessly explore new neighborhoods. I don't recommend trying to get anything done while you're driving because you do need to focus on the road and keeping others around you safe, but the road noise and breeze from your open windows and new scenery will do wonders for waking up your body and giving you new stimuli. This can also be a relaxing time for you if maybe you're starting to feel frustrated or that you need some alone time.

#16 Get Some Exercise

I mentioned jogging, but exercising whether at the gym or around your neighborhood or in your house is the perfect way to blow off some steam, have some alone time, focus on yourself, get your blood flowing, and improve your outlook. I don't think I know a single person who walks away from exercise that says, "Oh, I wish I hadn't exercised." Your brain will wake up, your body will thank you, and the time focusing on yourself will do you some good.

#17 Pay Yourself Or Reward Yourself

Whether you like it or not, we are creatures of ego and reward. So set yourself up for success! Give yourself a little cash incentive or a trip to that new store or a special lunch out once you've completed a goal. As artists, our work usually does not generate income immediately. Most of the time we are not pre-commissioned for something and get paid as soon as it's finished. Usually, we are writing a song, or painting a picture, or writing a story, or developing a character, in hopes that someone will want to pay us for our time afterward. But, if we just sit by the phone every time we finish something waiting for someone to call us and offer us money, that's a slippery slope. So reward yourself. You have put the work in, you have done your time and you have created what you wanted to create. Now do a little something special for yourself to show your appreciation. Then, if the phone rings and someone wants to pay you for your time, and that's icing on the cake.

#18 Block Out Time

Remember how we talked about setting up a deadline? Well just take it one step further and block out your time on your calendar. This is not taking away freedom, it's

actually opening you up for more freedom. Here's an example: Imagine you live on a street that has many houses side-by-side. You spend two hours in one house filled with musical instruments. You play, you write, you experiment, you record. Then when your time is up, you go next-door to another house that is filled entirely with books and you read and read and read for two hours. Then the next house has a kitchen with all of your favorite foods and you enjoy a nice lunch for an hour. This is what scheduling can do for you. You are setting up a structure for yourself that actually allows for more creativity. Within each timeslot, you only focus on one specific goal. In order to achieve that goal, you can do absolutely anything you want, as long as it is moving you toward that goal. Then, when your time is up, you move over to a different house, so to speak, which allows you to focus exclusively on another goal without any other distractions. I've spoken with so many people who use the calendar on their computer or phone and structure every moment of the day. For some, including myself, this can seem a little overbearing but think about it again with the houses. With these timeslots, you're not taking away freedom, you're taking away distractions. And if you need to build in free time, then build it in but it is it's on timeslot on your calendar. From 12 to 2,

you work on music. From 2 to 4, you work on building your website. From 4 to 5, you have dinner. From 5 to 6, you read. And from 6 to 8 you have 'free time' which can include a movie or a game or something else that you started earlier in the day but wanted to try to finish. It takes a lot of organizational skills to get started on this, but just like most of the other things on this list, once you dedicate some time to it and introduce it to your routine, it will eventually become a strength in your process.

#19 Put It Away

Sometimes a very short answer is put it away. If you can't do anything with it right now, put it away. Don't throw it away, but put it somewhere you can find it so that when inspiration strikes in the shower, you can pick up working on it right where you left off. There's nothing wrong about putting it away, you are not betraying yourself for giving up. In fact, you are improving yourself by being true to your instincts. Don't force it if it's not coming naturally and don't be afraid to stop everything in its tracks and start working on something else if that is what needs to happen right then.

#20 Let Someone Else Do It For You

It seems like a bit of a cop-out so let me share with you what I mean. I originally started Songs On Sunday which turned into SOSstudio because I was a songwriter who had all of the songs that eventually started to sound the same. Because all of the ideas were coming from *my head*. No matter how much I tried to change it up or think like someone else or adjust my process or anything like that, all of the ideas were coming from one brain. And it was a large leap of faith but I started sending my songs to friends so that they could add their input, whether the feedback or new tracks to add onto the songs. And a huge weight was taken off of my shoulders. I have more free time, because now I'm not trying to manufacture something, I simply hand off the song to an expert and they lay down an idea that is worlds beyond anything I could come up with on my own. On top of that, it gives me a higher quality finished product. I can get a real drum kit from a professional studio drummer rather than spending hours trying to figure out how to program the best sounding drum kit on my computer. And this is what I mean when I say let someone else do it for you. You know what you're really good at. There are a few things in your life that you can do with your eyes closed and that you can have total confidence in when

someone asks you to do it on the spot. For everything else, there is great merit to learning new skills, but you must recognize the collaboration factor as a valid option. Collaborating with others who are as good as they are one thing as you are at your one thing, will create something that is greater than the sum of its parts; something that will take on a life beyond where you could've imagined and it will happen in a fraction of the time because your collaborators, much like yourself, don't have to think about it. They show up, they follow their instincts, and they give you the best possible product that they can.

-J