

10 Tips to Jumpstart Your Creativity

by Beth Barany, Creative Consultant for Writers

Writing is much like exercise: the more we write the stronger, the better writer, we become. And like exercise we need cross-train – strengthen different muscle groups – to have overall fitness.

This article is about training your creativity muscle.

These tips can get your juices flowing, pique your interest, help you come up with new ideas, or get unstuck, and can be used at every stage of the writing process from story idea generation, the actual writing and revising, and even story submission.

1 -Take a trip, anywhere out of the ordinary. Nothing opens the eye and the heart to the wonders of this world and all the stories laying in wait than stepping out of the ordinary path of your life. (This article was written in the tiny Urbana/Champaign, Illinois airport on the way back to the West Coast.) The trip doesn't have to be far or costly. Julia Cameron, author of The Artist's Way, describes this as the “weekly date with yourself”. Simply go to a grocery store you never go to, to a new part of town, or to a place within 30 miles you've never visited that always seemed boring and/or mysterious. Visit a local museum or art gallery (free art viewing!) Of course, an expensive overseas or cross-country trip does wonders to the soul, too.

Travel to a new place weekly, or whenever you need a boost for your senses.

2 - Open a random book and use the first line you see to start a free write.

3 - Have a conversation with someone you see occasionally but have never spoken to.

4 - Go to a new restaurant. Eat a food that you've never tried.

5 - Read a book outside your genre.

6 - Write a 20-30 min piece in a different genre, or different voice, or from a different POV.

7 - Write 20-30 minutes about your ideal writing environment. Choose one thing from this free write and incorporate that into your actual writing space.

8 - Use the Brainstorm cards that accompany the book, The Writer's Brainstorming Kit: Thinking in New Directions by Pam McCutcheon and Michael Waite, for help with ideas of plot and characterization. Use the deck in your writing group, or with friends who aren't writers. With only a little guidance anybody can use these cues to create story or sketch out character.

9 - Free write regularly/daily for 20-30 minutes (don't stop there if you don't want to. I generally free write for an hour). This exercise allows a bond to develop between your unconscious and your conscious mind and the act of the flow. Let yourself write whatever comes to mind – i.e., your daily life, musings, ramblings, dream fragments. Here you are giving yourself permission to write poorly without thought to word choice, spelling or grammar. You do have a goal however, and that is to get to your work-in-progress (WIP). Let your mind wander gently to the current niggling problem you're facing with your WIP. Free writing provides a good place and time to mull over possibilities.

10. Do an activity that you've always wanted to do that you may have been putting off for a more opportune time. Now's the time! Go take a class in racing, proper firearm use, archery, pottery, painting, weaving, etc. The key here is to engage all your senses and for the activity you choose to be very different from sitting, writing and reading.

Mix and match these tips in any order. Observe what works for you and incorporate that into your Regular Writing Workout. Most importantly, have fun. The Fun Factor is an all-important element to Jumpstarting Your Creativity.