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GUIDE

# Creative Confidence

Unlock Your Creativity in Work and Life

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# Creative Confidence

Unlock Your Creativity in Work and Life


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# How to Use This Guide

Somewhere along the way, many adults decide they are “not creative.” Often it happened early: a drawing someone laughed at, a teacher who preferred neat answers, a sibling who was “the artistic one.” Since then, creativity has felt like a talent other people have.

This guide starts from a different premise, one that research supports: creativity is a set of skills and habits that almost everyone can build. You will learn how creative thinking works, use proven techniques to generate ideas when you need them, quiet the inner critic, build a regular creative practice and, most importantly, finish and share your work. The methods apply equally to painting, writing, music, cooking, a side business, a lesson plan or a problem at work.

## What you will learn

- Which creativity myths hold people back, and what the evidence actually says.
- The two modes of creative thinking (generating and judging) and why mixing them kills ideas.
- Eight practical techniques for producing ideas on demand.
- How constraints, breaks and sleep help ideas arrive.
- How to build a creative practice that survives a busy life.
- How to handle the inner critic, perfectionism and feedback.
- How to finish projects, share them and bring more creativity into your job.

## How to get the most from it

1. **Choose a creative project to carry through the guide.** Anything counts: a short story, a garden design, a song, a new recipe, a redesign of a process at work. It should matter to you and be small enough to finish in about a month.
2. **Do the exercises with a timer.** Many exercises are short, timed bursts. The time limit is part of the method.
3. **Keep an idea notebook.** Paper or phone, but always within reach. You will use it in almost every chapter.
4. **Follow the 30-day plan** in the last chapter once you have read Chapters 1 to 9. You can start the practice habit from Chapter 6 earlier if you like.

TIP

### About the examples

The people in the example boxes (Maya, a product manager; Jonah, an accountant who used to draw; Leila, a nurse who writes stories; and Sam, a teacher) are fictional composites, created to show the techniques in action. Their stories are illustrations, not case studies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Creativity is a set of learnable skills and habits, not a fixed gift.
- ✓ Carry one small, real project through the guide and do the exercises with a timer.
- ✓ Keep an idea notebook within reach from today.

CHAPTER 1

# Creativity Myths That Hold You Back

01

Before you can build creative confidence, it helps to clear away a few beliefs that make creativity seem out of reach. Each one sounds plausible, and each one quietly tells you not to try.

## What creativity actually is

Researchers usually define creativity with two parts: an idea or product is creative when it is both **original** (new, at least in its context) and **effective** (it works, fits or is valuable in some way). Psychologists Mark Runco and Garrett Jaeger called this "the standard definition" in a 2012 paper tracing it back decades. A random string of words is original but not effective. A copy of an existing solution is effective but not original. Creativity lives where the two meet.

Notice what the definition does not require: genius, fame or art. Psychologists James Kaufman and Ronald Beghetto describe a "Four C" model: **mini-c** (new insights that are meaningful to you, such as understanding a concept in your own way), **little-c** (everyday creativity: a clever fix, a new recipe, a funny card), **Pro-c** (professional-level creative work) and **Big-C** (work that changes a field). Most of life's creativity, and most of this guide, is mini-c and little-c, with Pro-c within reach for those who practice.

## Myth 1: "I'm a left-brain person"

The idea that creative people are "right-brained" and logical people "left-brained" is one of the most popular myths in psychology. It grew out of real research on patients whose brain hemispheres had been surgically separated, but it was stretched far beyond what that research showed.

THE SCIENCE

### What brain research shows

In 2013, researchers at the University of Utah led by Jared Nielsen analyzed brain scans from more than 1,000 people and found no evidence that individuals are generally “left-brained” or “right-brained.” Creative thinking involves networks spread across both hemispheres. In a 2018 study, a team led by Roger Beaty found that people’s creative ability could be predicted from how strongly three large-scale brain networks worked together: the default network (linked to spontaneous thought and imagination), the executive control network (linked to focused attention and evaluation) and the salience network (linked to switching between them). Creativity, in other words, looks like cooperation between imagining and evaluating, not a property of one side of the brain.

## Myth 2: “You’re either born creative or you’re not”

People do differ. The personality trait most consistently linked to creativity is openness to experience: curiosity, enjoyment of new ideas, sensitivity to beauty. But traits are only part of the story. In 2004, Ginamarie Scott, Lyle Leritz and Michael Mumford published a review of dozens of creativity training programs and concluded that well-designed training generally improved creative performance, with programs that taught specific thinking skills among the most effective. Creativity responds to practice like most skills do.

## Myth 3: “Ideas strike like lightning”

Stories of sudden inspiration are memorable, but they skip the boring part: the person had usually been working on the problem for a long time. Insight tends to come to a prepared mind, often during a break (Chapter 5). If you wait for lightning without doing the preparation, you mostly wait.

## Myth 4: “It has to be completely original”

Almost every creative work combines existing elements in a new way. Songwriters borrow chord progressions; inventors combine existing parts; chefs riff on classic dishes. Originality comes from the combination and from you. Expecting total originality is a reliable way to never start.

## Myth 5: “Creativity is for artists”

A nurse who invents a better way to track medications is being creative. So is a parent who turns a dull chore into a game, or an analyst who finds a clearer way to show a trend. The skills in this guide work wherever there is a problem without one right answer.

EXAMPLE

### Maya’s belief

Maya, 34, a product manager, described herself as “the least creative person on my team.” When asked to list things she had made or improved in the past year, she wrote: a new onboarding checklist that halved support tickets, a birthday scavenger hunt for her niece, a spreadsheet that the whole team now copies and a vegetable curry she invented when the fridge was nearly empty. Every item was original in its context and effective. She did not lack creativity. She had been measuring herself only against painters and novelists.

EXERCISE

### Your creative record

1. Which of the five myths have you believed? Where did the belief come from?

2. List at least eight things you have made, improved, solved or invented in the past few years, at work or at home. Include small ones.