

Centre for English Teaching Specialization

MOOC 2: Problem-Solving Skills for University Success

4.3c Creative Ideation Strategies

Do the Opposite

If you are walking around New York City and take the first right turn every time, you will end up walking in a circle. The only way to stop walking in circles is to turn left or keep walking straight (or fly, or tunnel underground, or perhaps even teleport?).

This analogy explains why doing the opposite when you are going in circles trying to think of a solution to a problem can be highly beneficial.

Negative Brainstorms or de Bono's Intermediate Impossible

Negative brainstorming means that instead of writing down everything you know about a problem, topic or issue, you write down everything you don't know, or all the things that a particular problem topic or issue *isn't*.

Considering options you previously categorized as impossible or just wrong helps us in a couple of different ways. Firstly, by writing them down, viewing the connections between them, and then questioning the ideas we can often come up with fresh ideas, see assumptions we've made that we didn't notice, or come up with more nuanced solutions. Secondly, even if a complete idea doesn't work or is actually impossible, parts of the idea might be workable: if we disregard it without giving it the proper consideration, we are doing ourselves and injustice.

Play 'Devil's Advocate'

Ever heard of "playing the devil's advocate"?

Playing the devil's advocate means looking for all the problems within your solution or idea, problems for your problem or major ideological issues: basically pointing out everything that could possibly be wrong with what you are saying, or the issue at hand. In defending the idea or possible solutions, you become more confident in them (or might discard them altogether, which is helpful!) and it helps to plug any holes or possible misinterpretations.

Random Juxtaposition

Open a dictionary. Choose the...say, 7th word down. It can be any word on the page, but try not to "pick" a particular word. This strategy works better if it is organic. Then apply that word to your problem. The more difficult you find this task, the more interesting your explanations might be.

What this strategy aims to do is reveal different perspectives, aspects or avenues that you might not have considered in your response.

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