PRINTABLE CREATIVE THINKING CARDS

52 BRAINSTORMING TOOLS

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US LETTER SIZE

8.5x11" or 215.9x279.4mm

Use quality laser printer on card stock for best results
Can be printed on A4 size paper at 100%

You can order a physical deck of cards printed on high quality 310gsm casino quality linen card stock with matte varnish at: **thethinkingshop.org**

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THE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT INTERNATIONAL

Use these cards by yourself or in a group setting to stimulate creative thinking.

Pick a random card; create your own tool kit by selecting relevant cards; or use a color-coded section:

GENERATION
PERSPECTIVE SHIFTS
LIMITATION
MENTAL MODELS
PROVOCATION
IN GROUPS

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OTHER PROJECTS:

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yourfallacy.is

yourbias.is

freelearninglist.org

timelineofideas.org

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10 IDEAS IN 10 MINUTES

Force your internal critic to shut up by generating as many ideas as possible. Quantity over quality will help your mind to expand rather than contract.

Set a stopwatch for 10 minutes to write down 10 ideas. Importantly, they don't have to be good ideas.

DRAW ON INSPIRATION

Instead of writing ideas, simply start sketching relevant concepts.

By activating your visual cortex you'll open up new ways to think about things.

Don't try to solve the problem right away, just start moving the pencil.

SHOWER THOUGHTS

The reason we have great ideas in the shower is that we're not doing anything else.

Use your time in the shower, on the train, during your run, or meditating in a sensory deprivation chamber to consider the brief.

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101 IDEAS

Give yourself or your team a deadline to compile 101 ideas in a list.

By having so many ideas you give yourself permission to have more bad ideas, which in turn opens you up to more good ideas.

GO SLOW

Immerse yourself in research and visual references, then let your subconscious go to work.

Sleep on it and give your mind time to synthesize.

Try this before you start and/or between sessions.

META SEQUENCE

Deep – Research & Define
Deep dive and define the objective

Wide – Creative & Divergent
Think openly, play, and minimize criticism

Narrow – Critical & Convergent
Use objective evaluation criteria and critique

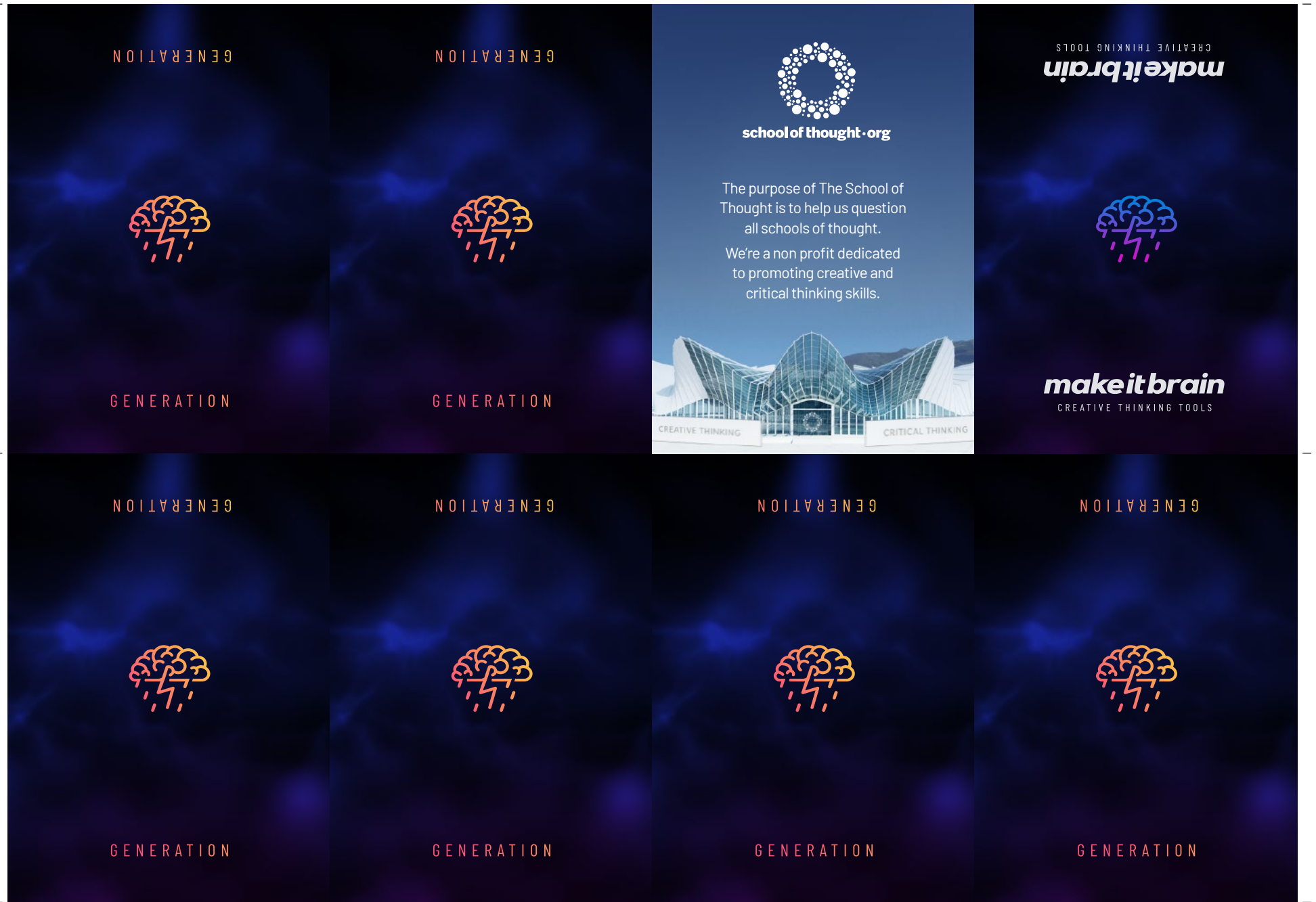**Up – Synthesise & Iterate**
Keep playing to find a deeper synthesis

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THE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT INTERNATIONAL

GENERATION

GENERATION

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The purpose of The School of Thought is to help us question all schools of thought.

We're a non profit dedicated to promoting creative and critical thinking skills.

CREATIVE THINKING   CRITICAL THINKING

make it brain
CREATIVE THINKING TOOLS

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TRICKTIONARY

Use random stimuli like reading out words from the dictionary to provoke a response, or try using the last letter of one word as the starting letter for another word.

Free-associate words and concepts to spark connections.

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MIND MAP

Write your objective in a bubble in the middle of the page and branch out nested and associated ideas to discover new perspectives as stimuli.

Try putting your mind map on the wall while brainstorming.

INVERSION

By flipping the perspective you can open up new insights.

What's the opposite of the problem or solution?

What would be the worst idea?

Who isn't the target audience?

RECONTEXT

How would you solve the problem in the future or past?

What about a different cultural context?

Try 5 ideas in 5 minutes to generate different perspectives then pick two or three to ideate from.

NO LIMITS

Removing limitations means removing assumptions, which can result in novel perspectives and solutions.

Imagine you have unlimited superpowers, budget, time, or technological capability to solve the problem. What would a god do?

EXTREMIFY

Looking at extremes can bring insights into sharp relief.

What would happen if you amplified the problem or solution?

What if it was minuscule or all-consuming; what would a global response look like?

CHALLENGE

Creative breakthroughs often arise from challenging conventions.

What assumptions have already been made? Could they be wrong, or shifted?

What if the brief is too narrow? Too wide?

Pretend to be your competitor.

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IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE DEVIL

What would someone ruthless do?

How could you use mischief to disrupt the situation?

What if we broke some stuff?

How might someone evil exploit *you*?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE CUSTOMER

What does a day in the life of your target audience look like?

What are their fears and aspirations?

What might they not understand?

What might we not understand about them?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE SAGE

Take on the persona of an oracle

Why are we really doing this?

What's the true insight and purpose of this project?

Is there a deeper truth?

What would someone truly wise do?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE EXPLORER

How can we break new ground?

Are we thinking too locally?

If we could rewrite the rules, what would we do differently?

How might someone from a different culture approach this?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE INNOCENT

What would you think if you knew nothing about this?

How might a child interpret the problem or solution?

What's the obvious solution and why is it good or bad?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE JOKER

Imagine you're a famous comedian who fits the tone of the brief. What would they joke about?

What's an irreverent insight?

Is there an elephant in the room that needs to be outed?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE RULER

What would you do if you were the boss, a wealthy investor, or someone with absolute power?

If you already had the support of everyone, how might you do things differently?

What might a judicious leader suggest?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
AN ALIEN

What would an alien make of this brief?

By writing from the perspective of an extraterrestrial we can discover insights and assumptions to help us think in a more 'first principles' way.

Check out the Strange Planet comics online for inspiration for alien perspectives.
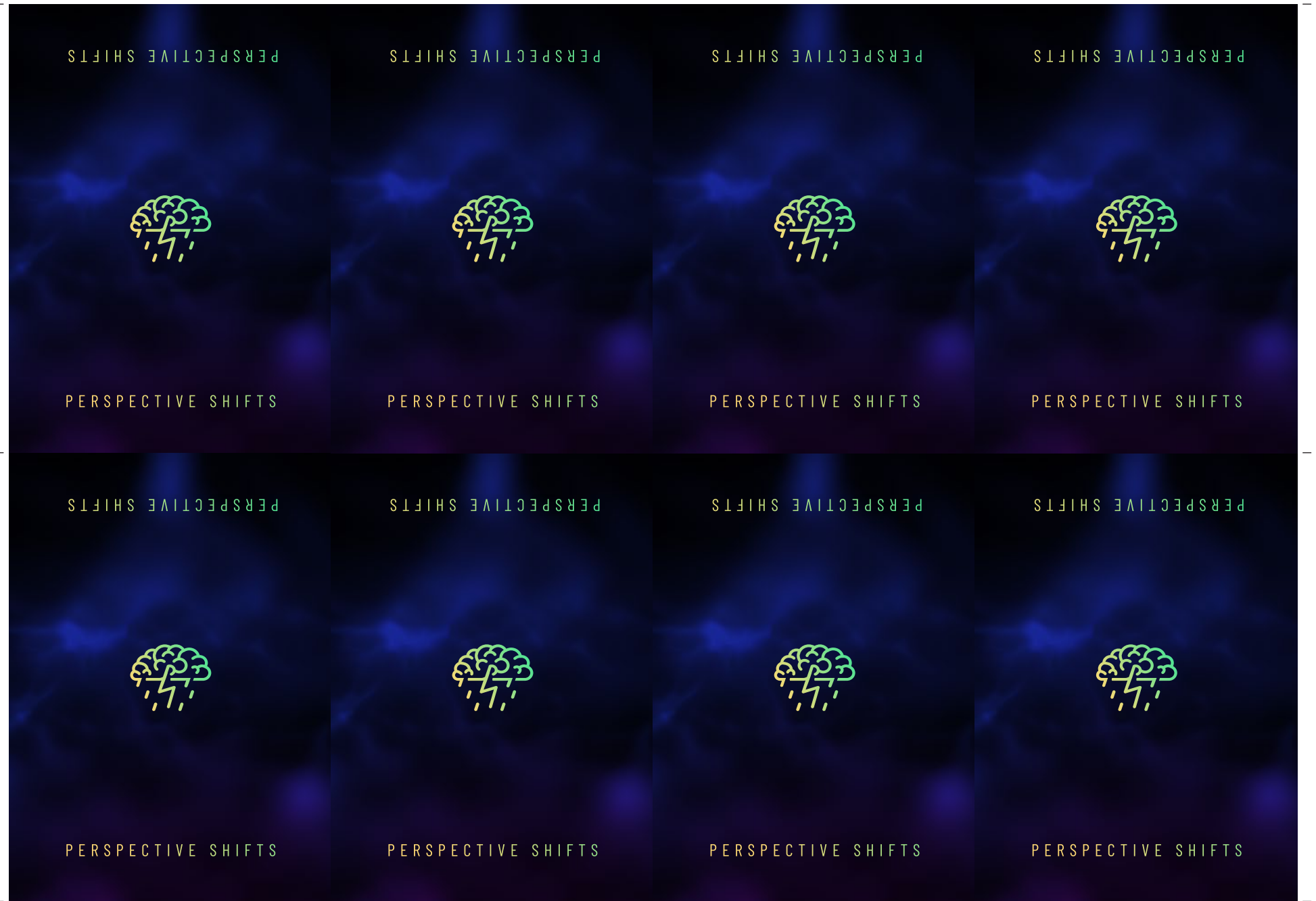
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IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE DISRUPTOR

Pretend you're an entrepreneur who is aiming to shake up the industry or status quo with a new vision for what might be.

What would a disruptor do to challenge the existing order with a new take on things?

How could you forge a new path?

IMAGINE YOU'RE
THE ARTIST

How might different kinds of artists interpret this problem?

Brainstorm from the perspective of a visual artist, thespian, fashion designer, advertising creative, product designer, UX designer, or poet.

ANOTHER'S SHOES

Meta-brainstorm different perspectives and archetypes that might be relevant for your particular situation.

For example, if you have a marketing problem you might suggest different kinds of customers and business stakeholders. Then generate ideas from their perspectives.

WRITE A
CLEAR BRIEF

Failing to provide a clear and compelling brief does not, contrary to popular opinion, 'open up' creativity.

Use the briefing template at *schoolofthought.org/brief* or at least provide a clear objective in the form of a single simple sentence.

THE PARETO PRINCIPLE

About 80% of the output tends to come from 20% of the input.

How might we optimise by focussing on the most relevant factors?

How can we design for the primary audience or most valuable outcome?

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Define the base principles to reason more clearly. Question what's actually fundamental to bring the problem (and solution) into sharper relief.

What unnecessary assumptions are being made? What if we had to make everything from scratch?

SOCIAL PROOF

As tribal creatures, we want validation before we act.

How can we create and communicate social buy-in? Could the crowd itself contribute in some way? Is there a way to provide a social feedback loop, testimonials, or other social validation?

CRITICAL MASS

A critical mass is a self-sustaining chain reaction.

What could we do to create a viral effect whereby the idea spreads itself?

How might we make it remarkable or useful enough to become its own amplifier?

LIMITATION

PERSPECTIVE SHIFTS

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MENTAL MODELS

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SCARCITY

We value things that are in short supply.

Is there a way to create demand or at least the perception of it? How might limitations be beneficial?

If there isn't a ready-made market or audience can we create one?

THE THIRD STORY

Consider the impartial perspective.

We're often blind to our own assumptions, and our perceptions are colored by our insider understanding.

What might someone with no knowledge or bias think?

SECOND ORDER THINKING

Consider the flow-on effects: what might the consequences of the problem or solution entail?

What are the variables at play? How might the family of your target audience react?

How could time, complications, or feedback loops have influence?

FUTURE NEWS

Pretend you've already achieved success. What would the newspaper headline or article say?

This will spur you to think of big, newsworthy ideas. Explaining how and why it worked so well forces you to consider the steps to success.

MINIMUM VIABLE IDEA

The creative process is iterative, and by getting to the minimum it can open us up to pivot in relevant and interesting ways.

What's the minimum needed to achieve the objective?

What's the most efficient, quickest, and cheapest option you can think of?

FIVE WHYS

This technique is often used to get to the root of a problem, but it can also discover insights that lead to innovative thinking.

Start with a problem or solution, then keep asking 'why?' to see where it leads you.

JOURNEY MAP

Write your problem or starting point at one end and the ideal outcome at the other.

Now fill in the gaps to map out what needs to happen to bring your objective into reality.

What steps will need to occur? How might they influence each other?

WHAT IF?

Simply starting the thinking process with 'What if?' can elicit a creative response.

Try saying it out loud or writing it down several times in a list to hack your brain to think differently.

Build upon other ideas by challenging them with 'what if' scenarios.

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SWOT NOW

Create four quadrants and list Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

S&W relate to internal factors while O&T tend to relate to external aspects.

SWOT analyses are usually used for strategic evaluation, but they can also be used to provoke new ideas.

CHANGE OF SCENE

Go outside, to a bar for a few drinks, or to the top of a mountain and see how the change of environment changes your perspective.

Many people find walking helpful for ideation and stimulus.

WILL IT BLEND

How could you combine two or more ideas, techniques, aspects, solutions, or problems?

Try writing relevant keywords or ideas down on bits of paper then mashing them up randomly.

SEE INSPIRATION

Use the room you're in as a visual inspiration canvas by finding references to print and put up on the walls, along with your rough concepts, sketches, headlines, and so on.

Try some image searches for related ideas and save the ones you like as stimuli.

REVERSE BRAINSTORMING

Instead of solutions, brainstorm to generate problems.

What other issues might need solving?

Will there be flow-on effects that require different solutions?

What's a different way of thinking about the problem space?

STARBURST QUESTIONS

Create a mind map star with six points for each of the classic analysis questions:

Who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Note that the 'why' is the most likely to provide relevant insight, and that the 'how' can sometimes be a distraction.

YOURBIAS.IS

Group brainstorming is often affected by social factors and confident voices thwarting more considered thinking.

Familiarize yourself with common cognitive biases that can affect decision making, evaluation, and group dynamics at yourbias.is

BRAIN WRITING

Everyone writes an idea on a piece of paper.

Pass your piece of paper clockwise, the next person builds on the idea.

Repeat until everyone has contributed to each other's ideas.

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VOTE NO TO BIAS

Our judgments are invariably shaped by our personal biases.

So, it's best to have discerning independent third parties evaluate anonymised ideas rather than a group vote.

DIVERSE INPUTS

Creative insights often arise from novel perspectives, so try to facilitate diverse group dynamics e.g. put engineers with designers, management with front-line staff, and so on.

STEP LADDER

Everyone brainstorms individually. The first two people present ideas to each other. A third person is invited into the room to present their ideas. Repeat until everyone has presented unaffected by others' ideas.

Finally, recap all ideas for the group.

HEADS IN THE CLOUD

Rather than verbal collaboration, use a cloud-based service like Google Docs with open sharing permissions so everyone can anonymously collaborate, comment, and build on each other's ideas. Create a copy of the doc at schoolofthought.org/cloud

ANONYPOST

Each person writes or draws a single idea per sticky note and puts it up on the wall in a separate room.

Take turns nominating your favorite idea that wasn't your own (and hasn't yet been nominated) and explain why.

ROLE UP

Give each person in the group a role to play such as the customer, the rebel, the narrator, the joker, the sage, the CEO, the shareholder, the lunatic, etc.

Then give a scenario involving the product, problem, or situation to role play.

CONCEPT WALL

To start your collaborative brainstorming session, everyone writes or draws a few key concepts relating to the subject matter on sticky notes. Then put them up on the wall as stimulus for further brainstorming.

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