

The A–Z of Visual Ideas  
*How to Solve Any Creative Brief*

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Published in 2011 by Laurence King Publishing Ltd  
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A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-85669-714-9

Design: Studio Ten and a Half  
Cover design: Jon Allan  
Senior editor: Peter Jones  
Printed in China



## *Introduction*

### **What's the big idea?**

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*The A–Z of Visual Ideas aims to open doors that lead to adventures in the land of imagination and inspiration. It links and interconnects ideas from all creative disciplines and different periods of history, to explain how and why they work and help readers connect to numerous sources that will inspire them.*

*The book is structured in an easy-to-use A–Z format. Each entry is a potential starting point for creating an idea or a possible source of inspiration to fire the imagination. It aims to help unlock creativity, ensuring that readers never again have to stare at a blank sheet of paper or a blank screen when striving for ideas. It aims to be an essential guide to creativity that will stimulate readers to create great work.*

*Ideas in the commercial arena need to provide answers to a client's problems, while ideas in art need to ask questions of the viewer. This book aims to provide stimulus, strategies and sparking points to create ideas that can both provide answers and ask provocative questions.*

*Entries in the A–Z section of the book have been chosen for their dominance in creativity and each one introduces a source of fertile inspiration or potential ideas. The ways in which an idea is able to seize the imagination and 'brainjack' a viewer is discussed and a 'how to' section that explains ways to explore it further is also included. Feed and develop your imagination with all the many different ideas discussed in the A–Z, be inspired by them – then transform this inspiration into ideas of your own.*

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## Free creativity and ideas

Creativity was once highly compartmentalized with creative individuals pigeonholed within narrow roles – as artists, graphic designers, illustrators, typographers, photographers, film-makers, writers, musicians, directors, magazine designers, exhibition designers, product designers, interior designers, costume designers, retail designers, set designers, etc.

This strict demarcation has now dissolved and creative people can work freely across all these exciting disciplines. To do this successfully they need to be multitalented, multiskilled and totally multidisciplinary in outlook.

Though the ways in which they are able to work have changed radically the universal factor in what they do has not: all creativity needs great ideas.

### What are ideas?

An idea is a sudden mental picturing of possibility – the realization that there is a possible way of doing something.

## Communication

It is said that the motivation of all human creativity is the desire to communicate. This means both ‘to have an interchange of thoughts or knowledge between people’ and ‘to have or to form a connection’. Communication is therefore exchanging information and forming connections with people – and is fundamental to creativity in both art and the commercial world.

Designer and writer Henry Wolf summed up this process as ‘the difficult business of getting messages out of one mind into another’.

It is difficult, but also thrilling and hugely rewarding to communicate successfully and this book aims to show you the many ways in which you can do this.

### Communication in art and commerce

A work of art aims to communicate the ideas of the person who created it whereas in commercial creativity the ideas

need to communicate successfully on behalf of someone else: a client.

### The challenge of communicating

You will seldom have a willing audience when you begin the task of communicating. You will have no volunteers queuing up expectantly to look at your work.

*‘Ideas are the content, execution is the style.’*

Alan Smithee, designer

*‘You simply can’t avoid a great idea.’*

Schway Whar, designer

*‘It’s thrilling that an idea you’ve created in your head can explode like fireworks in the heads of others.’*

Rose Tang, artist

*‘When a brilliant idea connects to a viewer it’s like a tenpin bowling “strike”. It would be great if it made that noise too.’*

Schway Whar, designer

### The joy of communication

Coming up with a great idea is hugely satisfying. Encountering a great idea is equally enjoyable.

*‘A great idea draws your mental picture in the minds of other people.’*

Rose Tang, artist

*‘Hang on a minute lads, I’ve got a great idea.’”*

Michael Caine in *The Italian Job*, screenplay by Troy Kennedy Martin

### Communication courses

People who worked creatively in design, advertising and illustration were once called commercial artists – encapsulating the fact that they were making creative work for commercial purposes.

When art colleges began to offer training for careers in commercial art the courses were in what was

known as 'graphic design'. They are now often called 'visual communication', 'communication design' or simply 'communication' courses. 'Communication' is the best title so far, as it reflects that the aim of the course is to train students to get messages successfully into the minds of other people.

## *How can you engage these passers-by?*

### **1. Switch the viewer's mindset**

Create ideas that switch the viewer's mindset from off to on, from passive to active – thereby making them receptive to the message you want them to receive.

### **2. Ambush**

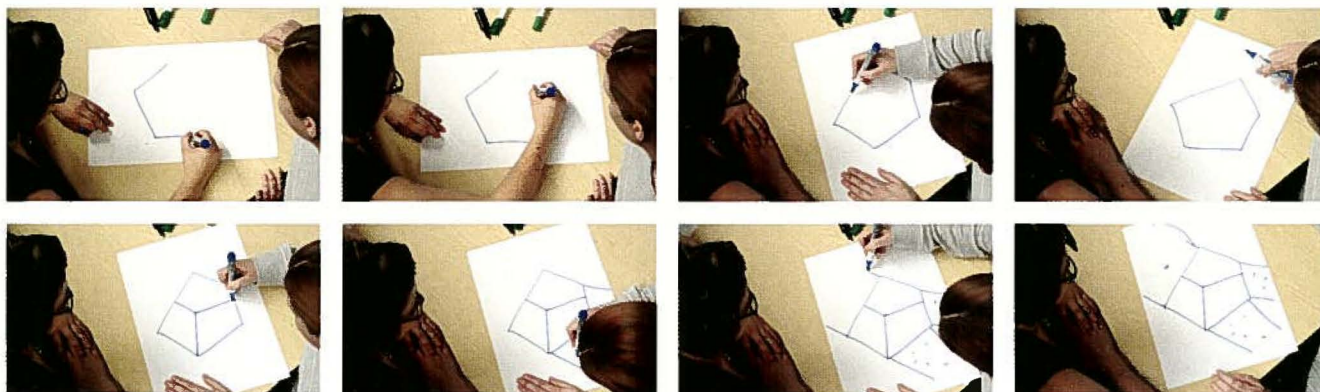
Clearly communicating a message is not simply a matter of creating visually striking images that capture the eye of the viewer; it's about capturing their brain. You must create ideas that ambush their mind and thoughts, and execute these ideas in fresh and exciting visual ways.

### **3. Brainjack**

You must strive to engage as powerfully as possible in order to communicate. The more potent the idea, the better the message will be remembered. The challenge is to create ideas that immediately grab the viewers' imaginations, light up their minds, create a joyful or jarring engagement, stimulate thoughts, emotions or action. You've got to brainjack the viewer. Doing this triggers a mental reaction such as an inner smile; additionally, it can provoke a physical reaction – such as a laugh or exhalation.

How different ideas brainjack successfully is discussed throughout this book.

**Brainjack v. 1.** to communicate by seizing someone's imagination. **2.** to transmit or reveal information, feelings, emotions or thoughts so that they are clearly understood.



## Ideas – a meeting of minds

In a meeting of minds between the creator of an idea and his or her audience there is a process of interaction and feeling of inclusion when the idea engages with the viewer's imagination. This bond occurs when the viewer recognizes, connects to and understands what the creator has set out to communicate because the connection in their mind is similar to the one that took place in the creator's imagination when he or she formed the idea.

Multidisciplinary designer Ross Cooper described what happens: 'When a viewer understands an idea they feel good about it. There's that moment when they "get it" in their mind, they feel they've done something clever; it brings out a smile. They feel good and feel a warmth at being included with the creator.'

### Creativity is child's play

Children all over the world play a version of the transformation drawing game (*see above*). Working in pairs, one child draws a shape without really thinking about it, then the other transforms this abstract form into something recognizable. A triangle becomes a boat, a circle a face, a rectangle a house, etc. Writer and children's laureate Anthony Browne concluded that, 'Although on one level it's just a game, I believe it encapsulates the act of creation'. An inspiration is transformed by an idea into something new; creativity is as simple as this. This book examines the many ways in which ideas can transform inspiration.

*'It is the most brilliant thing we do to have ideas. Anyone can have ideas, you don't need any equipment and your idea can change the world.'*

John Hegarty, adman

### Playful ideas

As children we create hugely inventive worlds during play. The scale and form of objects are happily ignored and overturned. A stick is a knight's sword or a Jedi's glowing

light sabre, a dressing-up box full of old clothes is the source of costumes from all nations and eras. At the seaside, while adults pursue a suntan, children build magnificent castles with towering turrets, drawbridges and moats fed by intricate waterways. They write imaginatively and draw wonderfully as is seen on refrigerators in every family home. As children, our imaginations are so powerful that we can even invent companions: imaginary friends.

The creative individuals whose work is showcased in this book are united by the fact that they have retained a spirit of childlike purpose and playfulness with objects, images, scale and words. Bring a child-like enthusiasm to what you do, sprinkle delight on it and be hugely playful with the ideas in this book.

*'The photographer must look with the eyes of a child who sees the world for the first time.'*

Bill Brandt, photographer

*'What kinds of people know how to communicate? ... I think they are people who have managed to retain their infantile directness, who have resisted the crippling effects of education.'*

Leo Rosten, writer

*'Hopefully I have a very child-like view of the world.'*

Paul Smith, designer

### The brain: the storehouse of inspiration

Our brains are the storehouses of our lives. Recent experiences and discoveries are freshly stored while others are tucked away in dark recesses. Everything is a possible source of inspiration.

### Inspiration: stimulus for the imagination

The word inspiration derives from the Latin *inspirare* (to breathe life into). Inspiration is the force that stimulates our imaginations to think creatively and have ideas, and breathes life into these ideas. This book offers many different ways in which to be inspired.

**Transformation game (opposite)**

The transformation drawing game played by art students.

**Symbolical head (below)**

An 1883 illustration of the world inside our heads.

*'You should as a creative person constantly experience as much as you can so that when a brief comes you've got some inspiration already. The whole world gives you stuff to call on. Immerse yourself in the world of culture – both high and low.'*

Liam Gibson, art director

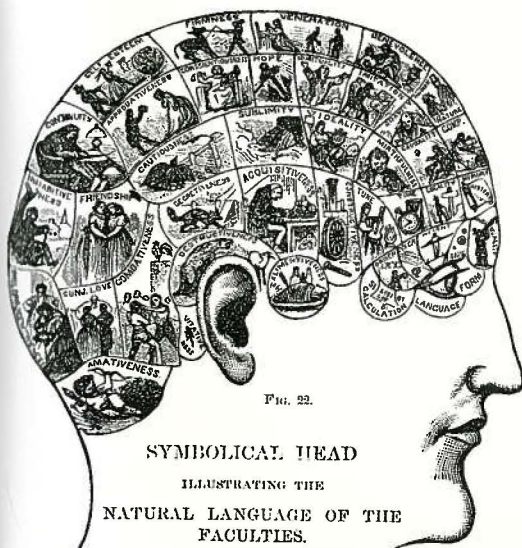
**The imagination: the brain's creative studio**

The imagination is the part of the mind where ideas are sparked and received, to transform inspiration into something new. It is where creative ideas are conjured up, and should be the place that all creative messages are aimed. Targeting the viewer's imagination is the secret of brainjacking. Our imaginations need to be constantly fed with inspiration to help create fresh ideas. This book aims to greatly nourish your imagination.

*'If you could look inside my imagination when I'm coming up with ideas I think it would look like lots of popcorn popping.'*

Liam Gibson, art director

How does your creative imagination work?

**The world inside our heads**

The world inside our heads was perfectly visualized in a recent exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery for which a group of artists was challenged to produce installations that show how the mind works.

Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn created a labyrinthine series of caves with interlinking tunnels. Visitors walked through winding passageways and caverns, the walls and roofs of which were plastered with magazine articles, random news pictures, film and pop music posters, pin-ups and photocopied scraps; television screens sunk into the walls flickered with long-forgotten programmes. Books, some massively enlarged in scale, were piled high on shelves. Some corners were dark and inaccessible. Hirschhorn wrote: 'We think there's no light on them, we think they're forgotten but they are not.' Everything was interconnected; in every corner chaotic wiring was linked with small explosive charges, all set to be detonated and remix and reconnect the stored material in new ways. It was a messy collage of memories, knowledge and desires, ready to be triggered.

American artist Jason Rhoades exhibited piles of logs stacked as if ready for the sawmill and covered with random collections of images and information. Some logs were already sawn, chopped in strange ways that created new juxtapositions and chunks. Creative fuel ready to fire the imagination. Neuroscience professor Sophie Scott commented that Rhoades' work neatly expressed the 'current thinking in neuroscience about the way the frontal lobes are involved in creative thought'.

Chiharu Shiota from Japan created an installation that featured miles of wool strung together to create complex, interrelating patterns and connections. Professor Scott wrote that, 'It was as if she'd stripped away all the gunk and blood and tissue – and you were actually standing in her brain.'

## Ideas people

*'In the colour spectrum of human endeavour, there are those at the indigo end who wish that everything would last forever. And then there are those opposite at the bright red end who believe that a day without 97 fresh ideas is a day without sunshine.'*

Eve Babitz, writer

**Great ideas people are polymaths, hugely interested in a massive range of subjects.** They are Renaissance men and women, constantly open to inspiration with a huge desire to know about everything and anything. Ideas people are possessed by passion for people, knowledge and the world around us, and have great enthusiasm – the word itself derives from the Greek *entheos* (full of god, or possessed).

### Ideas people flow round problems

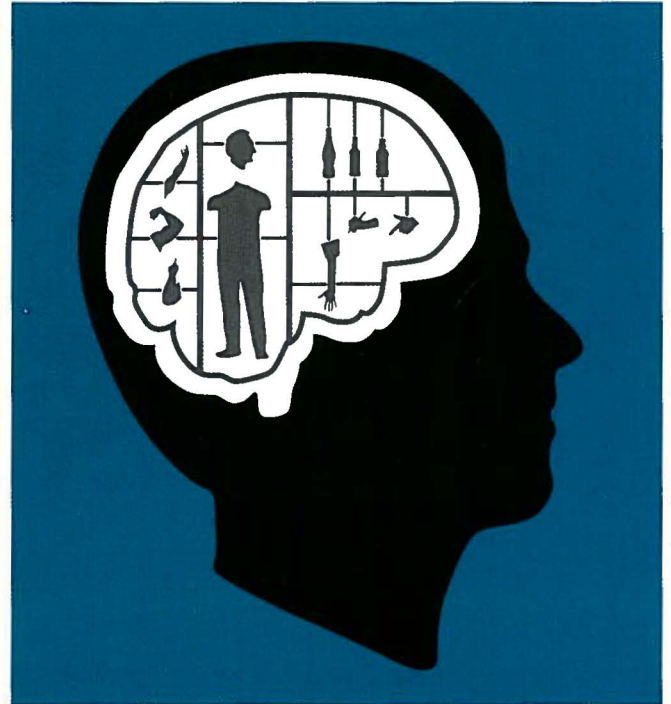
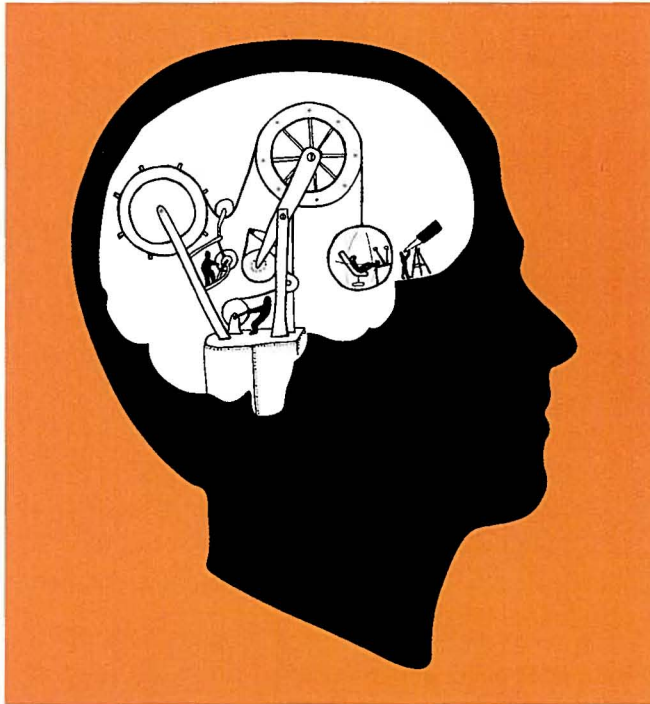
Creative people are said to have the Protean gene – a reference to Proteus, a Greek god whose ability to become liquid enabled him to flow round any obstacle.

### 'Surprise me! Astonish me!'

Ideas people are rarely isolationists and most of them share their creative problems with collaborators who act as sounding boards and filters for their ideas. The Russian ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev asked his colleagues to 'Surprise me!' while art director Alexey Brodovitch told the people he worked with to 'Astonish me!' The joy of all creative collaborations is finding creative playmates.

### Creative double acts

Advertising agencies believe in pairs of collaborators, when an art director and a copywriter are coupled to bounce





### The world inside (below)

Asked to design posters for a series of talks by Idearists, Kirsty Pook imagined the world inside each speaker's head.

ideas off each other. Initial ideas can be fragile and having a partner whom you trust totally means your wildest thoughts can be voiced without fear of ridicule or knock-back. An exciting creative telepathy can be engendered in a partnership.

Creative double acts are seen in many mediums. Examples are photographers Pierre et Gilles (*see* Places of worship) artists Gilbert and George, and comedians Laurel and Hardy, Morecambe and Wise, and the Two Ronnies (*see* Wordplay). Other partnerships include Rogers and Hammerstein, and Lennon and McCartney in the music business, and, in the movies, Powell and Pressburger,

*'In a partnership you have to convince the other person that what you are doing is good.'*

Rebecca Brown and Mike Heath, multidisciplinary designers



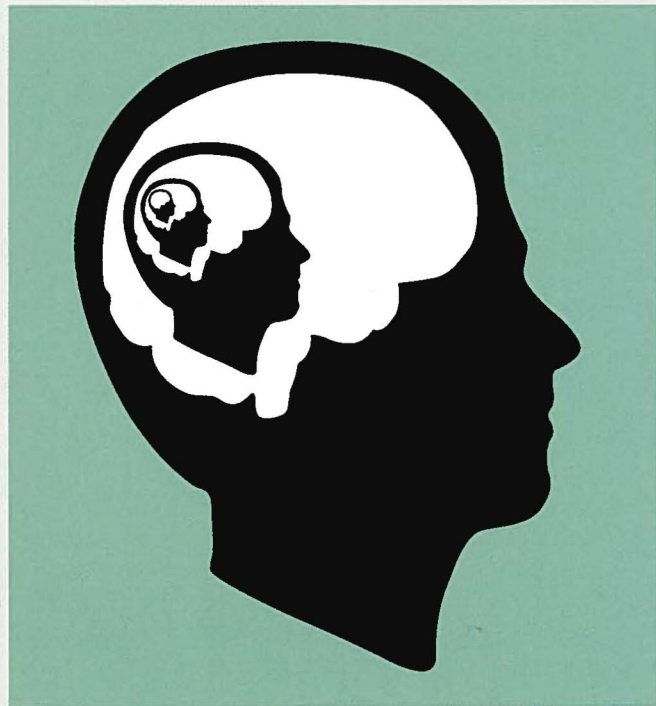
Try working with both like-minded and unlike-minded people. They will challenge you in different ways.

Enthusiasm is contagious, so find enthusiastic collaborators. Work with people who are possessed by passion, who stimulate you, make you laugh, challenge you, who you trust and with whom you spark.

Undertake collaborations with people from many creative disciplines, and learn from the cross-fertilization of ideas and working methods.

## Idearists

Idearists have a hunger for information and a thirst for knowledge. Idearists are rule-breakers, rewriters of rules, rule-haters, risk-takers, tide-turners, table-turners, game-changers, goal-post movers and match-winners. They are questioning, provocative and versatile. Idearists are



ingenious improvisers who do the unexpected, turn things around and are spontaneous, dogged, obsessive and obsessional. They have a great sense of humour and sense of the absurd. Idearists are curious; they are observers, fascinated by people and things. Idearists possess open minds, they think big, are freethinkers, forward thinkers. They think without a safety net, they make others think, they turn you on, they don't switch off, they don't watch the clock; they're always switched on, they live for their work. Idearists are visionary.

*'There's no off position on the genius switch.'*

Danny Baker, broadcaster

## The language of creativity and ideas

A rich and revealing language is used to describe creativity and ideas. An idea is a 'conception', a word also used for the beginning of life. We 'give birth' to ideas indicating that creativity is a natural but sometimes painful process. An idea is the 'brainchild' of its creator, indicating that it needs careful nurturing. Ideas are also said to 'come to fruition' and 'bear fruit' – both natural processes.

Creative people are said to be able to 'think laterally' – 'look sideways' or 'at a tangent' – and have the ability to 'turn problems on their heads', all of which communicates their capacity to see the world from different perspectives and highly unusual angles. Ideas come from the brain and link to the intelligence of the viewer. A poor idea is described as being 'half brained', indicating it has not been wholly formed in the mind of its creator. In France a poor idea is described as a 'wet fire cracker'.

In the joyous world of the children's comics of the 1950s and 1960s, when a character had a great idea it was often described as a 'wizard wheeze'. This perhaps derives from the exhalation of breath that can occur when someone understands an idea – the expression comically suggests that this causes a cheery, whistling sound. Equally quaint is the concept of someone 'putting their thinking cap on' to generate ideas.

Like Proteus, creativity is sometimes seen as a liquid – for example, in the concept of 'getting creative juices flowing' in order to solve a problem, and in the way ideas are said to 'brew' or 'percolate' in the mind. They are also described as 'brainwaves' and the brain as a 'think tank'. A highly creative person offers a 'torrent' of great ideas.

Being 'struck by an idea' equates having ideas with conflict while a 'lightning flash of inspiration' and 'brainstorming' liken creativity to a tempest. 'A creative leap forward', 'a leap of the imagination', 'pushing the boundaries' and 'a ground-breaking idea' convey creativity as an energetic, physically demanding and challenging activity.

Ideas and their pursuit are often described as 'exploring' – or 'pushing' – 'the creative envelope'. These expressions became popular in the 1990s, and were most often used by non-creative people. Perhaps they are the



result of eureka-moment ideas being hastily scribbled on the backs of envelopes, in the absence of other pieces of blank paper. Sir Alec Issigonis is said to have designed the revolutionary Mini in this way. It has also been suggested that the expression comes from aviation – that the envelope is the structure that contained the gas for an airship – and refers to test pilots pushing aircraft to their furthest limit. Other up-in-the-air terms include ‘blue sky’ and ‘clear sky’ thinking.

Other languages and cultures also have terms for fresh and exciting ideas. In Italy they are referred to as ‘third horizon thinking’ and in France they have ‘jumped from one river bank to another’ while in China they are described as ‘ideas that jump out of the frame’; in Brazil a fantastic idea is ‘from the magician’s top hat’.

## Ideas about ideas

In his thought-provoking *The Act of Creation* Arthur Koestler puts forward the theory that the creative process ‘consists in the discovery of hidden similarities’. He argues that this is the key to all the new ideas in visual creativity, science and humour.

### Make linking jumps

Koestler concludes that innovative creative ideas result from the ability to make a linking jump from one frame of reference to another. This is achieved through understanding established patterns, codes of behaviour and types of logic, then breaking free from them to discover and reveal new connections or interrelationships.

This idea is reflected in the phrases ‘jumped from one river bank to another’, ‘a leap of the imagination’ and ‘jump out of the frame’.

### Derail the usual trains of thought

Koestler relates that breaking and undoing regular habits of thought is a key to ideas: ‘The prerequisite of originality is the art of forgetting, at the proper moment, what we know... Without the art of forgetting, the mind clutters

with ready-made answers, and never finds occasion to ask the proper questions.’

Trying to forget or avoid normal patterns and habits of thought can be challenging. For example: Which of the following letters is the odd one out: A F H K M N Y Z? Normal habits and patterns of thought lead us to try to find a relationship between the letters. However, the odd one out is M. It is made from four straight lines, the others feature three. To solve the problem we have to forget we are looking at letters and see them as lines.

### Creativity as a paradox

Paradoxically, creative brains have to be simultaneously open to new ideas and focused on solving the problem at hand. It is necessary to hold two seemingly opposing requirements in the mind at precisely the same time.

### The collective telepathic intelligence

There has been speculation that human beings possess a telepathic collective intelligence that allows them to enhance each other’s wisdom without formal communication or interaction. Researchers have attempted to verify this phenomenon: they asked groups of individuals to complete a series of mental tasks then later asked new groups, totally unconnected to the first, to do the same. Results indicate that the latter groups had less difficulty performing the tasks, suggesting that collectively, as time passes, we could find problem solving increasingly easy.

### Horizontal thoughts

It has been suggested that ideas solidify more readily when we are horizontal as more blood flows from the upper body to the brain. It is thought that when we are vertical the brain becomes less efficient at certain types of thinking.

### Seeding ideas

Is it possible to seed the brain in the way that clouds can be seeded to produce rain, to make it more open to producing ideas? This book aims to seed the brains of its readers.

# Strategies for solving a creative brief

*In commercial creative work you are paid to find ways to communicate successfully with people. Your job is to ensure that your client's target audience 'gets the message' you've been employed to send.*

*Adman Raymond Chin said: 'The hardest thing is coming up with ideas in a pressure situation.' This book aims to help you do just this by discussing numerous sources of ideas and inspiration and, in this section, outlining actions to take at every stage of commercial creativity.*

*The process of communicating on behalf of a client and strategies for solving a brief can be broken down into 16 stages.*

Writer and professor of philosophy A.C. Grayling encapsulated the skills needed to communicate when he wrote: 'The intellectual gifts are a capacity to see things from highly unusual angles, to overlook what is not essential, and to understand the true significance of the obvious. The character traits are persistence, obduracy, a capacity for taking great pains, and indifference to ridicule.'

## **Simplify at every stage**

Simplify, don't complicate. **You need to edit, pare down and chop away at every stage of solving a brief, from analyzing it to the final images you create.** Reduce, cut the clutter, **get to the essence, crop** and cut out any irrelevance. Create simple ideas that expand in the viewer's imagination.

As adman John Hegarty pointed out: 'The French Revolution got its message down to only three words – *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*.' Likewise, the Chinese president Deng Xiaoping defined his ambitions for China in the words 'Reform and open'.

*'You have to crop everything down to concentrate the viewer's mind. The more extraneous stuff there is, the more you lose sight of the idea.'*

Clive Challis, art director and teacher

# 1

## *The briefing*

The first stage is when you are given the brief – the assignment from a client that outlines the problem you are commissioned to solve creatively.

Clearly identify in discussions with the client what you are being asked to do. Simplify. **What are you trying to achieve?** What are the ‘deliverables’ – what have you been asked to deliver?

Be courageous. Ask the client all the questions that immediately come to mind, however stupid or innocent they may seem. The answers could totally turn the brief on its head. The barrier created by thinking ‘I may make a fool of myself if I say this’ could lead to great ideas remaining undiscovered.

*They all laughed at Christopher Columbus  
When he said the world was round  
They all laughed when Edison recorded sound  
They all laughed at Wilbur and his brother  
When they said that man could fly  
They told Marconi  
Wireless was a phony  
It's the same old cry...  
... Who's got the last laugh now?*

George Gershwin, composer

### **Don't be afraid to ask**

When Kenneth Grange was asked to design British Rail's new intercity train a naive question came into his mind: ‘What exactly are the buffers on a locomotive for?’ He expected to be told, ‘They're to stop trains crashing on to

Paddington station, stupid!’ and was overjoyed to learn instead that their purpose was to shunt carriages – an unnecessary hangover from a bygone age. Freed of the need to include buffers, he could design a streamlined train that attained previously unheard-of speeds and thereby revolutionized rail travel in Britain.

### **Ask childlike questions**

Edwin Land was inspired to design the revolutionary, instant-photograph Polaroid camera in the 1940s when his three-year-old daughter asked, ‘Why can't I see the pictures now?’. Similarly writer Roger Hargreaves began writing his million-selling *Mr Men* books after his young son asked, ‘What does a tickle look like?’

# 2

## *Analyze the challenge*

Fiercely unpick the brief. Read, read and then reread it. Clearly identify in your own mind what the client needs. What is the goal you are asked to achieve?

Question and requestion the brief. **Get to the essence of the problem you have to solve.** Philosopher John Dewey said ‘A problem well stated is half-solved’. Simplify the problem so that it is clearly stated. Ask yourself: What is the purpose of the brief? **What is the message I have been asked to send and who are the people I am asked to send it to? What is the standpoint?** What is my client's need?

The result of this stage should be that you are clear about the challenge the brief poses.

And, of course, consider the deadline.

*‘The anchor to a great solution is totally understanding a brief.’*

Nick Hastings, creative director

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*'Find what is at the heart of a brief, find truths and fundamentals, things that are unique and undeniable about it.'*

Schway Whar, designer

*'The first thing I do is try to really understand what the brief is. We try to simplify and hone it down to its essential words. This really helps you to focus. We're currently working on a ten-page brief which we've been able to get down to 15 words.'*

Jon Mitchell, art director

*'When we get a brief we really try to distil it to the one thing we need to do. Briefs are often overwritten. We try to get really clear. As a team we try to get to a "truth" about the brief that we find irrefutable, that we can't really argue with.'*

Georg Thesmann, art director

*'I break a brief down into simple bullet points. We then pull together moodboards for the project, the look, the feel and the palette of the project. We surround ourselves with the world of the client, from books and from the internet. We educate ourselves about the client. When we have got that together we use these images as our sparks for ideas.'*

Alan Aboud, art director

# 3

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## *First ideas*

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Collate all the first thoughts about the brief that come into your head.

What do your instincts tell you to do? What are your 'reflex' ideas?

Develop your intuitive response to the brief.

Use this book to help you to inspire your first ideas.

*'One in a hundred times your first idea will be utterly brilliant – the other 99 times ideas will come from really getting under the skin of the brief and the audience.'*

Nick Hastings, creative director

# 4

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## *Visualization*

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Visualization is the process of putting your ideas down on paper.

**Make your first thoughts visual. Always visualize your ideas immediately – doodle, draw and sketch.** Use this book to inspire your visualization. By making things visual you can 'push' initial ideas by sparking new thoughts and finding new connections.

**'Pour all your thoughts and ideas on to a page no matter how half-formed they are. You can then look at them as a whole. Visualization allows you to begin to make new connections between things.'**

Ross Cooper, multidisciplinary designer

### **Learn different ways to visualize ideas**

Picture in your imagination the drawings and illustrations from the books of your childhood that you have stored in your mind. Assess and evaluate why these particular visualizations of ideas have been stored so successfully. Be inspired by doing this. *See You!* (put yourself in it).

Learn from great visualizers of ideas: James Gillray and George Cruikshank (*see Caricature*), Aubrey

Beardsley, Saul Steinberg, George Grosz, Gerard Hofnung, William Heath-Robinson and Shigeo Fukada (see Illusion, Shadows). These creative people have no boundaries when they visualize ideas and are hugely playful with scale, words, visual metaphors and visual coincidences.

See the storyboards that creators of television advertisements and movie-makers such as Terry Gilliam and Tim Burton draw to visualize their ideas. These are created in order to fine-tune concepts and maximize the impact of what will be filmed.

# 5

## *Know the subject / know the product*

Now do your homework. **Get to know the subject of the brief. Go on investigative fact-finding missions. Gather all the facts. Experience the product if you can. Interview. Be sociable; talk to people about the problem you have been asked to solve. Listen. Really get to the essence of the brief and become an authority on what it is all about.**

*'At this stage try going off at a tangent. If your brief is about a skin cream go talk to the guy that looks after the skin of an aircraft or a skyscraper, go talk to the guy at the zoo who looks after the skin of the elephants – these can lead to great insights.'*

Phil Dorman, creative director

*'When designing the cup and saucers for illy [see Mirror, Mirror] we did all our research into their previous designs, then we went for coffee in one of their cafés. Suddenly, rather than seeing the brief as designing two pieces of porcelain, we understood that we were creating something that was to do with an experience rather than objects: that coffee is served to you and you interact with the cup and saucers while you drink –*

*for example, you reveal the hidden circle on the saucer when lifting the cup and the coffee can be accidentally spilt. Getting to know our subject in this way led to our designs.'*

Ross Cooper, multidisciplinary designer

At the end of this stage you should have a thorough knowledge of your subject.

# 6

## *Know your audience*

When a stand-up comedian performs he or she must tailor their material to the audience. Nurses laugh at very different things to merchant bankers. You will nearly always be targeting a tough crowd, so always prepare. You need to create rapport and chemistry with every audience.

Graphic designer Derek Birdsall wrote that the key to great book design was 'simply putting oneself in the position of the reader,' commenting that 'it may seem common sense but it is surprisingly uncommon'.

Everyone has an appetite for ideas. The challenge for creative people is to create ideas that their viewers will want to consume.

*'The only way of establishing a first entry is to understand what your audience knows.'*

Milton Glaser, graphic designer

**Put yourself in your viewers' shoes and try to inhabit their minds.** Understand their hopes, their dreams and aspirations. Interview your audience – get insider knowledge. Find what will put them at their ease, what makes them laugh or what will shock them. Find out about their pageants, rites of passage, rituals, use of

technology, secret pleasures and anxieties, their vocabulary, their music, television habits and the movies they love and hate. Evelyn Waugh wrote, 'The accumulation of common experience, private jokes and private language... lies at the foundation of English friendship.' Become friends with your audience by studying these things.

At the end of this stage you should have a thorough knowledge of your viewers.

# 7

## Assimilate

Bring all your homework together.

You should now know about your subject and how to engage your audience. Mentally digest this information and break it down into its clearest and simplest elements.

# 8

## Play with all you have learnt

This is the creative and fun part when you let the things that inspire you act as a catalyst to produce ideas. Creativity should be like child's play – truly pleasurable. This stage is when you put on your thinking cap, place your imagination in the front of your mind, put your brain in gear and let the creative juices flow!

In the previous stages you assembled your creative material. Now make links between what you know and what

you have learnt. Seek previously undiscovered connections.

*'Combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought.'*

Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist

*'The work you have done in the earlier stages has built a solid creative trampoline on which you can now bounce.'*

Nick Hastings, creative director

*'Without play there would be no Picasso. Without play there is no experimentation. Experimentation is the quest for answers.'*

Paul Rand, designer

Review your knowledge and the discoveries you made in stages 6 and 7. Lay out all the information you have gathered about the creative problem and the audience. Now enjoy yourself with this information. Be imaginative – let your creative mind go to work – and go out to play.

This is the time to think laterally, sideways and tangentially, when you try to turn the problem on its head. Play and have fun with all the facts you have gathered. Put the pieces together in different ways.

Collage and make connections. Make free associations by recording your stream of consciousness – the random flow of thoughts that is triggered by a new situation.

Treat this stage like a game and fit unexpected pieces together. Try to discover coincidences both visual and verbal, seek previously unseen connections, relationships and associations between disconnected elements. Add to this mix the things that inspire you and use them to breathe life into your thoughts, to create ideas.

Additionally, now that you have the facts explore your intuitive and instinctive feelings once again. Adman Leo Burnett recommended: 'Steep yourself in your subject, work like hell, and love, honour and obey your hunches.'

### Use the A-Z to be playful

Take inspiration from the A-Z section, and the strategies for playfulness given in the 'how to' information in every



entry – and transform what you have discovered about your brief and audience into visual and verbal ideas.

By the end of this stage you should have a pile of different concepts.

Keep playing, don't stop playing – and don't get rusty at the ideas game.

### Stuck? Try these strategies

There are various tools to help the creative juices to flow again when thinking becomes tired, mired or at a dead end. Most of them will reconnect you to being playful.

#### 1. Take a card, any card

In his teaching of lateral thinking Edward de Bono recommends picking a word at random from the dictionary as a catalyst to finding new connections.

Playing cards have also been used to stimulate thinking: each card features a cryptic remark or phrase, such as 'What would your best friend do?' – 'Now do the opposite!' or 'Amplify the most embarrassing details'. The cards are shuffled and drawn at random when someone is stuck or deadlocked. Sets have been evolved in advertising and design agencies, and some have been published commercially including a deck co-created by the musician Brian Eno.

#### 2. Chance creation

Other ideas include cutting up and assembling snippets of unrelated text until they crystallize into understandable phrases that provide a fresh approach to a problem because they have been created by chance.

The author's strategy when he is stuck is 'fifth book along'. Go to a library to find a book related to your brief or project; then, as well as borrowing this book, take out the fifth one along from it on the shelf, in both directions – and also go five shelves up and down if possible. You will always find something inspiring in the additional books.

#### 3. Sketchbooks

Refer to the store of ideas you already have in your

sketchbooks and notebooks – rethink, adapt and evolve them. See Sketchbooks and scrapbooks.

#### 4. Wait until the last minute!

A 'just in time' policy can create a pressured intensity of creativity that produces fresh thinking. However, this is not recommended as a first-choice strategy for solving every brief.

#### 5. Use this book

Try randomly picking an entry from the A–Z section. Use it to help you generate ideas.

Still stuck? Try another entry.

# 9

## Visualize further

Visualize the ideas you created in stage 7.

Review your first ideas in the light of the facts you found in stages 5 and 6.

Visually refine and simplify a range of developed ideas.

# 10

## Incubation / reflection

Reflect on the ideas you have created. Judge them.

Are you communicating in a language your audience will understand? Examine each developed idea in the light of what you know about them. Will they really get it? Will it really connect with them?

Pick the best ideas. Eliminate any that on reflection don't work.

*'Now get rid of the obvious stuff – reject the stuff that you think is not creative enough.'*

Nick Hastings, creative director

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# 11

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## *Final visuals*

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Simplify further. The final execution of your ideas should put them in their most potent form. Be clear in your message – images should talk from 100 metres away.

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# 12

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## *Presentation / the pitch*

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Your final ideas will be presented, or pitched, to the client.

Prepare your presentation carefully. A pitch should be presented with clarity, confidence and pizzazz. Tell the story of how your design evolved clearly and simply, and refer to all the creative investigation you have done. Aim to be highly articulate. Express yourself, and deliver your

pitch, with passion and conviction. Many great ideas fall flat in front of clients because of poor presentation. Rehearse first and bring energy and enthusiasm to your pitch.

You must be persuasive. Hold out for your best ideas, and aim to convince the client that they will work. Make an impression – impress your ideas into the client's imagination.

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# 13

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## *Consensus*

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Come to an agreement with the client on which idea or ideas have cracked the brief.

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# 14

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## *Implementing the idea*

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This is the execution stage. Now bring your own signature to the idea. Follow writer George Eliot's advice: 'Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.' *See You!* (put yourself in it).

The final execution is all about choosing the visual tone to express the idea. Find your look and make it yours. Make it individual. Make it your visual voice. Do you want to be exuberant, stylish, cool or complex? How the implementation of an idea is detailed is critical. Adman

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John Hegarty describes this stage as 'like telling a joke: many different people can attempt to tell the same story but only one of them makes you really laugh – the delivery is key.'

Use this book to inspire how you deliver your ideas.

# 15

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## *Deadline*

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The deadline, the time agreed for the delivery of your finished creative work, is usually fixed at the initial briefing. The word deadline comes from lines drawn on the ground over which captives were forbidden to pass on pain of death.

Hand over your final creative work to the client.

# 16

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## *Publication and dissemination*

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Launch and distribute your ideas in the wider world in print, on the internet, on billboards, in magazines or by other means.

Use this book for inspiration about different ways of disseminating your work.

# Working on ideas

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*A creative job is not one in which you clock in and off. Whereas most people have a clear delineation between work and non-work time this does not apply to ideas people. They are constantly absorbing inspiration and thinking about their projects or the briefs they are working on.*

## Twenty-four hour creativity

Creativity is a 24-hour-a-day process that involves periods of active pursuit and also 'unconscious' work, which takes place during times of relaxation; sleep seems to be as important as consciously striving for ideas.

## Creative distraction

Ideas often solidify when we are not actively thinking. During a long soak in his bath Archimedes, the ancient Greek mathematician and inventor, suddenly leapt from the suds shouting 'Eureka!' (I've found it). He'd been struck by the perfect answer to a problem he'd been trying to solve.

The playful aspect of the creative process can be aided by engaging in a pleasurable and stimulating distraction. For Archimedes it was a bath, for Sherlock Holmes it was music. Advertising agencies often kit out their studios with pool tables and table football machines to provide an area in which to take breaks from active thinking and striving for answers. Creative distraction gives the brain free time to chew over partially formed ideas and allows the subconscious to work towards a synthesis – at a certain point something gels and solidifies as a firm idea.

Find the creative distractions that work for you. Listening to music or the radio, running, popping out for cigarettes, taking the dog for a walk, cycling, making tea and going to the movies (*see Movies*) are some of the distractions embraced by people who were interviewed for this book.

*'You remember how Sherlock Holmes used to stop right in the middle of a case and drag Watson off to a concert? That was a very irritating procedure to the literal-minded Watson.'*

James Webb Young, *adman*

*'I get my best ideas in my car. In a car you can't do anything practical, so your thoughts start wandering off into a different*

## Brainwave (below)

Designer Kirsty Pook imagines the world inside the author's head.

*mode. It's as if I'm working on two levels; I'm driving and at the same time I am somewhere else. Working out how to solve a problem always happens in my car.'*

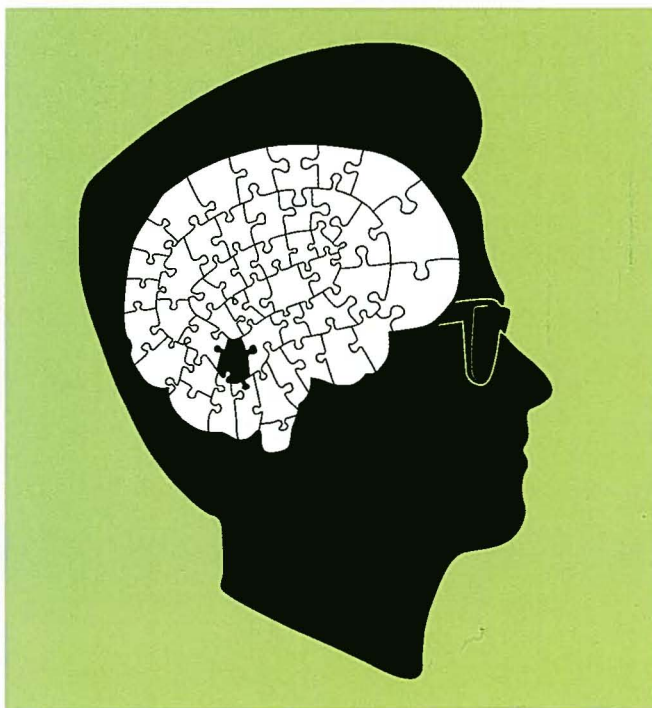
**Lotte Romer, musician and author, interviewed in *Inspired: How Creative People Think, Work and Find Inspiration***

*'Stuff your conscious mind with information, then unhook your rational thought process. You can help this process by going for a long walk, or taking a hot bath, or drinking half a pint of claret. Suddenly, if the telephone line from your unconscious is open, a big idea wells up within you.'*

**David Ogilvy, adman**

*'Men of lofty genius when they are doing the least work are most active.'*

**Leonardo da Vinci, painter, scientist and engineer**



## Sleep on it

You can't solve a creative problem? Then sleep on it. Creativity is the only job you can do well while you are sleeping – but don't try billing your clients for the time. There is as much brain activity during sleep as while we are awake, and the sleeping brain can creatively rearrange our thoughts in perfect order and help us to find answers. As writer John Steinbeck put it: 'It is a common experience that a difficult problem at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it.'

Sherlock Holmes: 'Now I recommend the universal solution to all problems.'

Dr Watson: 'What's that, Holmes?'

Sherlock Holmes: 'Sleep!'

*'You never have to change anything that you've got up in the middle of the night to write.'*

**Saul Bellow, writer**

*'We think that what's happening in sleep is that you open the aperture of memory and are able to see the bigger picture.'*

**Neuroscientist Matthew Walker, University of California, Berkeley**

*'At night while we are asleep our brains are secretly moonlighting for us.'*

**Rose Tang, artist**