

50 WAYS TO INSPIRE CREATIVITY

by derik nelson

- 1. Listen to the greats.** The best way to get inspired is to listen back to the people who made you want to get into music in the first place.
- 2. Try a new instrument.** It's easy to get stuck in familiar routines. Shake up your comfort zone and try a completely new instrument. Hit up your local music store and pick up a banjo, mandolin, accordion, trombone, etc.
- 3. Go outside.** One of my favorite quotes: "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." -Lao Tzu
- 4. Play one of your favorite songs.** Cleanse the palette with a little "Fire and Rain," and you might find that some new ideas begin to flow freely again.
- 5. Google Earth.** Traveling the world is one of the best ways to spark inspiration, but we don't all have the luxury of being able to get away to the coast of Tuscany at a moment's notice. Enter some random coordinates into Google Earth and look around on street view for the next best thing—all without leaving your desk.
- 6. Imaginary hero.** Your favorite writer, artist, or musician, living or dead, has just walked into the room to collaborate. What do they have to say? What input do they give you?
- 7. Listen to something different.** Listen to some music that's completely outside the style of what you usually listen to, and try to learn from it.
- 8. Put it away for a while.** Rome wasn't built in a day! Time can be your best co-writer sometimes.

- 9. Become somebody else.** Imagine yourself in someone else's shoes. Maybe it's somebody you know, maybe it's somebody from history, or maybe it's a completely fictional character. Change of perspective is a catalyst for great content.
- 10. Think about your problems.** The entire genre of blues music was built on lyrical themes of heartbreak, loss, and struggle. Dwell in your deepest life problems for a few minutes, and use it as a point of departure in your writing to tap into some heavier topics or darker content.
- 11. Pick a letter of the alphabet.** Now think of a place that starts with this letter. What's something that you find interesting about this place? Pick a new letter. Repeat.
- 12. Open a book to a random page.** Select a sentence or phrase that stands out to you. Think of some ways to rephrase this sentence in your own words.
- 13. Get sweaty.** Moving the body and moving the blood does wonders for the brain. Exercise is an awesome way to allow your subconscious to problem solve and work through things.
- 14. Photo inspiration.** Keep a glossy coffee table book of beautiful photos nearby. Thumbing through something tangible is always a more constructive experience than surfing the web, but Pinterest and Instagram will do in a pinch.
- 15. Time travel.** Travel through time to elicit the opinion of someone from the past and someone from the future. Who are they, and what do they have to say about your ideas?
- 16. Make some tea.** The simple act of getting up and walking to the kitchen to put a kettle on the stove can often be enough of a break to get the creative juices heated up, too.
- 17. Go for a drive.** Drive somewhere outside of your usual routine to force your brain to actively absorb new sights.

- 18. Start at the end.** Working backwards can present you with creative options and ideas that you might not consider when you start at the beginning.
- 19. Live performance simulation.** Imagine you're on the biggest stage of your life in front of thousands of people, and you're about to play the very song you've been struggling to write—except in this simulation, you've already played it hundreds of times and it's a hit song around the world. You step up to the mic, the lights come up, the crowd cheers... now play the song.
- 20. Write the opposite of what you're writing.** This technique can trick your brain into getting your ideas onto paper quickly in a way that becomes easy to edit and manipulate.
- 21. Eavesdrop on strangers.** Not in a creepy or intrusive way, but in a people-watching sort of way. Find a cafe, park, mall, coffee shop, or other public place, and start listening to snippets of conversations people have while passing by. Things overheard in public can quickly lead to lyrical gold nuggets.
- 22. Watch a movie.** The more stories, characters, and situations you can give your brain, the more content you'll have to draw from.
- 23. Become an animal.** Pick any animal and think about life through their eyes (or paws).
- 24. Become a plant.** Pick any plant and do the same exercise. Once again, shifting your perspective is the most powerful way to generate new ideas.
- 25. Do a puzzle.** Creativity goes hand-in-hand with problem solving. Warm up this part of the brain by solving a puzzle.
- 26. Clean something.** Cleaning is a mindless task with instant visual gratification. It also improves your mood. Being at a freshly cleaned desk is comfortable, and will subliminally prepare your brain for creative activity.
- 27. Space travel.** Pretend you're in outer space. You land on a brand new planet. What do you experience?

28. **Take a shower.** My best ideas happen in the shower, true story.
29. **Get big.** Imagine you're 5x your size. What would your life be like? What would be different?
30. **Get small.** Same exercise, but now you're microscopic.
31. **Desert Island.** Pick three items to take with you to a desert island. What is special and significant about each one of these items, and how can you emulate that magic and put that feeling into your writing?
32. **Become hyper-observant.** Let your eyes drift to the first object they come upon. Focus on it. What is it? What is it made of? Where did it come from? What stories could it tell if it could talk?
33. **Shipwreck.** You're a scuba diver and you've just stumbled upon a giant shipwreck. What treasures do you bring to the surface?
34. **House fire.** Without actually burning your house down, imagine you have 60 seconds to grab whatever you can. What do you rescue from the house and why? How can you use this in your writing?
35. **Use the seasons.** Go outside and really study what's happening around you. On the ground, in the sky, in the air... What subtle changes do you notice?
36. **Window replacement.** If you could instantly change the view from your window, what would you see?
37. **Weather.** Stand outside until you have one word for each of the five senses to describe the weather.
38. **Shopping trip.** Go inside a random shop, store, or business that you've never been in before. (You don't actually have to buy anything.)
39. **New art project.** Do something artistic that's completely outside your medium. Paint, sculpt, draw, etc.

- 40. Virtual trip.** Go online and act as if you're booking a trip anywhere in the world. Where do you go? What time of year? Why?
- 41. Meditate.**
- 42. Non-traditional instrument.** Pick up any object in the room. Now imagine you have to record a song using this object as the featured instrument. What would it sound like?
- 43. Watch a documentary.** Documentaries feature some of the most fascinating stories that make for highly emotional content.
- 44. Contact List Roulette.** Open your contacts or address book on your phone, close your eyes, and scroll. Stop. Open your eyes and look at the first name you see. Who are they? How are you connected? What would happen if you called them right now?
- 45. Inner child.** You meet a version of yourself from childhood. What kinds of things are they excited about? How do they feel about you now?
- 46. The best day of the rest of your life hasn't even happened yet.** Make a list of 5 things that would happen on the best day of your life.
- 47. Wikipedia Rabbit Hole.** Type the first word that comes to your mind into Wikipedia. Scroll halfway down the page and click a random link. Do it again. Do it again. Now read the article.
- 48. Imaginary Career Fair.** Sting wrote an entire musical about shipyard workers. Walk around an imaginary career fair in your mind and stop at a booth that interests you. What kinds of jobs does this career have? What stories, characters, and themes would be in your musical?
- 49. Doodle.** Sometimes the best way to refresh your brain is to get out a scratch piece of paper and your favorite pen and just go to town.
- 50. Read Shakespeare.** Wherefore art thou, O Creativity?