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Creative journey for everyone:

How to foster creativity beyond
childhood

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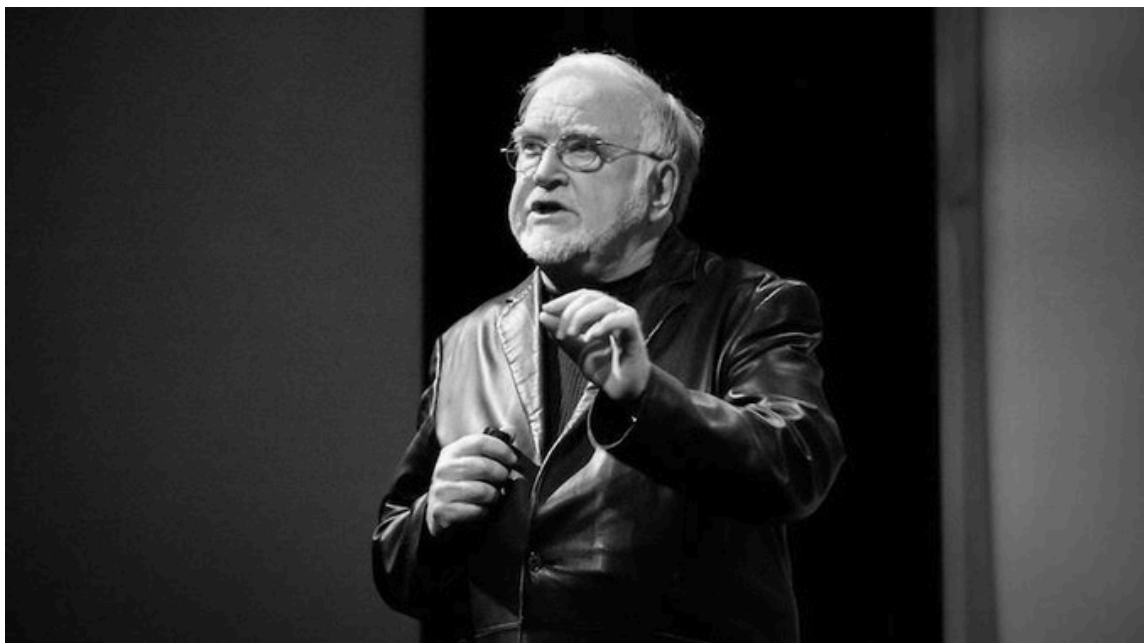
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What I Learned About Creativity from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

by Milisa Lekbir

After reading *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, I realized that creativity is much more than just talent or being artistic. It's a way of thinking, living, and working that can lead to new ideas, solutions, and even changes in the world.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934–2021) was a Hungarian-American psychologist best known for his work on creativity, happiness, and the concept of "flow." He was one of the founding figures of positive psychology and spent much of his career studying what makes life meaningful. Csikszentmihalyi served as a professor of psychology and management at Claremont Graduate University and published numerous works exploring human potential, creativity, and optimal experience. His research focused on how people find meaning in life and how creativity emerges not just from individual talent, but through the interaction between a person, their domain of work, and the society that surrounds them. He interviewed artists, scientists, and other highly creative individuals to understand how they work, think, and live. His goal was not only to define creativity but also to show how it can be nurtured and applied in all areas of life.

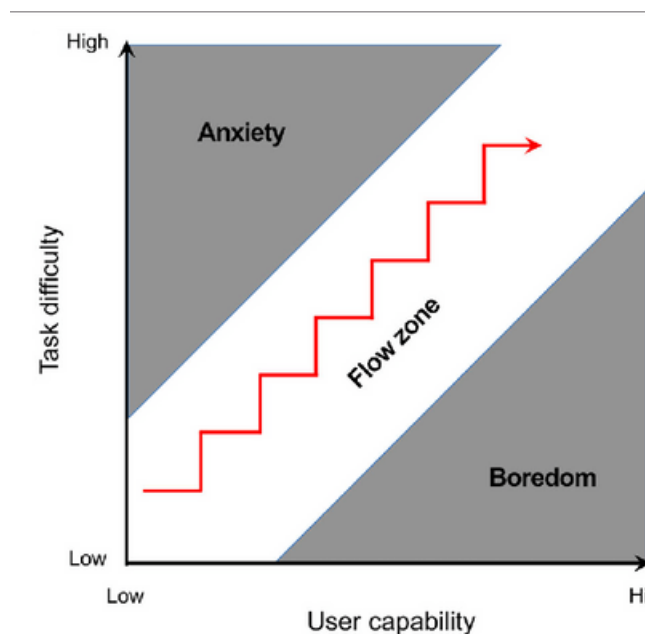


Understanding the “Flow” State

One big idea in the book is the concept of “flow.” This is a state when you are fully focused on what you are doing, so much so that you lose track of time because you are completely absorbed in the activity. When people experience flow, they tend to be more productive and happier, as creativity happens naturally in this state. I’ve noticed that I sometimes enter flow when I’m drawing, writing, or engaged in something I truly enjoy. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow happens when a person’s skills perfectly match the level of challenge in the task—neither too easy to cause boredom nor too hard to cause anxiety. Achieving flow requires discipline, focus, and passion.

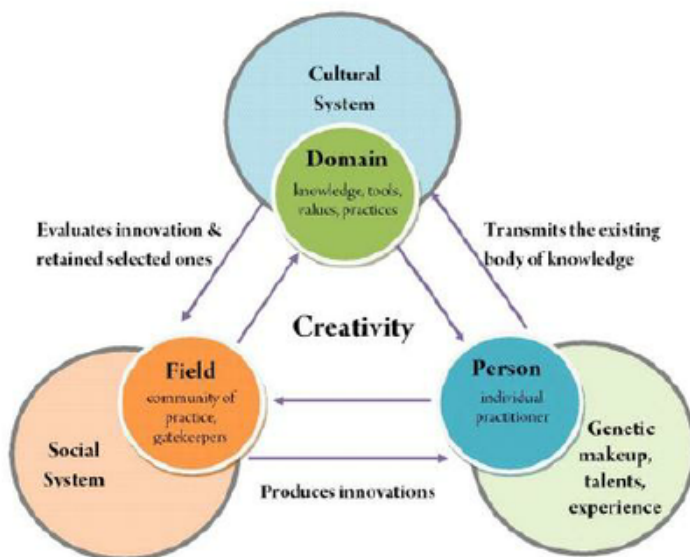
Finding the Sweet Spot Between Anxiety and Boredom

The diagram below illustrates this balance, showing how boredom arises when the challenge is too low compared to skills, and anxiety appears when the challenge is too high relative to skills. Flow occurs in the “sweet spot” where challenge and skill are balanced. Achieving flow requires discipline, focus, and passion. Csikszentmihalyi found that highly creative people often design their daily routines to experience flow regularly. Whether they are writing, painting, solving complex problems, or performing music, they feel most alive and creative when deeply immersed in their work. In today’s fast-paced world full of distractions, understanding and intentionally seeking flow can help us unlock our creativity and improve both our productivity and wellbeing.



Creativity Is a System, Not Just a Talent

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains that creativity is much more than just having a good or original idea. It happens within what he calls the “creative system,” made up of three important parts: the domain, the field, and the person. The domain is like a huge library of knowledge, skills, and rules in a particular area, such as music, science, or art. It contains everything that is already known and accepted in that field—the building blocks people use to create new ideas. The field is made up of experts and gatekeepers—like teachers, editors, or curators—who decide whether a new idea is truly original and valuable enough to be accepted. They act as the judges who keep the domain meaningful by accepting only the best or most useful ideas. The person is the individual creator—the one who comes up with new ideas, inventions, or works. But having a great idea alone is not enough. For creativity to happen, the field must recognize and accept the person’s idea, which then becomes part of the domain and can influence others.



To help visualize this process, the diagram below shows how the domain, field, and person interact in Csikszentmihalyi's creative system. This interaction highlights that creativity is not just about individual talent but depends on learning, feedback, and being part of a larger community.

For example, imagine a scientist (the person) working in biology (the domain). She discovers a new way to treat a disease. But for her discovery to be creative, other experts (the field) must review, test, and accept her idea before it becomes part of accepted scientific knowledge. Only then does her work truly add to the field and the domain.

Curiosity in Childhood: The First Step to Creative Genius

What I found fascinating is how creativity often has its roots deep in childhood. Many highly creative people share stories of their early years filled with curiosity and a strong sense of independence. As children, they were not afraid to ask questions about the world around them—sometimes questions that surprised or even challenged adults. They loved to explore freely, whether it was building things, drawing, playing imaginary games, or experimenting with ideas in their own unique ways. This natural curiosity pushed them to learn more, try new things, and not be afraid of making mistakes.

What makes this even more important is the role that encouragement plays during these early years. When children are supported to express themselves—whether through art, music, storytelling, or science—they develop confidence in their own ideas and creativity. Parents, teachers, and mentors who listen, show interest, and provide space for exploration help shape a child's creative spirit. This kind of nurturing environment acts like fertile soil, allowing the seeds of creativity to grow strong roots.

In fact, many creative adults say that their love for their work today started because they had freedom as kids to follow their interests without strict rules or fear of failure. They learned to trust their own imagination and felt excited to solve problems or come up with something new. This early habit of curiosity and independence becomes a foundation for creative thinking throughout life.



So, creativity isn't just something people are born with—it's also something that grows when we're allowed to explore, ask questions, and feel supported from a young age. This idea reminds us that fostering curiosity and giving children room to be imaginative can make a huge difference. It's like planting a garden: the more care and encouragement you give, the more vibrant and flourishing your creative future can be.

Creativity Needs a Home: The Power of Environment

Another powerful idea I discovered in the book is how creative people intentionally shape their environments to support their creativity. It's not just about having talent or original ideas—it's also about building a space, routine, and lifestyle that allows those ideas to grow. Csikszentmihalyi explains that many highly creative individuals don't just wait for inspiration to strike; they actively create the right conditions for it. They often design their daily routines to include moments of quiet, focus, or reflection. Some have specific times of day when they feel most creative and protect that time. Others arrange their workspaces in a way that helps them think more clearly—surrounded by objects that inspire them, or in a setting free from distractions.

What really spoke to me was how these people also seek out relationships that feed their minds. They connect with others who challenge them, support their work, or simply understand their creative process. I find this idea very relatable. I've noticed that when I'm in a space that feels calm and organized—or when I talk with someone who believes in me—I feel more energized and ready to create. On the other hand, when my environment is chaotic or filled with negativity, it becomes harder to focus or stay motivated.

This idea reminds me that creativity is not something that just happens on its own. We have to take care of it like a plant—we give it space, light, the right people, and the time it needs to grow. In my opinion, this is something we can all do, even in small ways. Whether it's lighting a candle before writing, listening to music that helps us focus, or simply talking to someone who inspires us, these little choices shape the way we think and create. Creativity doesn't live in a vacuum—it lives in the everyday world we build around ourselves.



How Society Can Support Creativity

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi believes that creativity doesn't happen in a vacuum—it grows best when society actively supports it. From the way we educate children to the way we manage teams at work, the systems around us play a big role in helping or blocking creative growth. If schools, families, and communities give people the freedom to explore, ask questions, and make mistakes, creativity can truly flourish.

Let's take schools as an example. Many traditional classrooms focus only on right answers, tests, and grades. But Csikszentmihalyi suggests that real learning—and creativity—happens when students are encouraged to think differently, to be curious, and to experiment without fear of failure. Imagine a classroom where students are allowed to explore their own interests, try new projects, and learn through hands-on experiences. That kind of environment builds confidence and original thinking.

The same goes for the workplace. In many jobs, people are expected to follow rules and focus on efficiency. But if leaders create a culture where new ideas are welcome, where teamwork and innovation are encouraged, and where mistakes are seen as part of the process, employees feel more inspired to think outside the box. Even something as simple as listening to ideas from every team member can make a big difference.



Communities also matter. When people feel supported by those around them—whether it's mentors, friends, or local organizations—they are more likely to take creative risks and share their ideas. Open-minded communities that celebrate diversity, offer resources for learning, and connect people with similar passions make it easier for creativity to thrive.

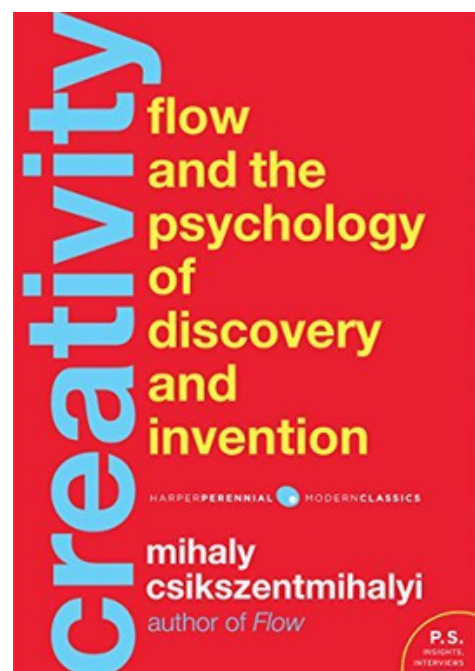
Creativity Is for Everyone

The book ends with a powerful message: creativity is not just for a small group of “geniuses” or naturally gifted people—it’s something that every one of us can grow through curiosity, passion, effort, and persistence. You don’t have to be an artist or a scientist to be creative. Creativity is also found in everyday life—in how we solve problems, how we communicate, how we make decisions, or how we bring new ideas to the people around us.

Csikszentmihalyi shows that creativity is not only about making something new; it’s also about finding meaning, making connections, and shaping a life that feels full and authentic. It’s about improving not just ourselves, but also the world. A creative person often seeks to leave something better behind—whether it’s a poem, a project, a solution to a challenge, or simply a new way of thinking that helps others.

What’s inspiring about the book is that it’s not just theoretical. It offers real tools and reflections that make creativity feel accessible. It reminds us that the creative journey requires both the mind (to think, imagine, and focus), the heart (to care deeply and stay motivated), and the world around us (to give us feedback, challenges, and support). Creativity grows stronger when we practice it every day, when we’re open to learning, and when we surround ourselves with people who believe in growth and innovation.

In the end, creativity is not just a talent—it’s a mindset, a way of seeing the world with fresh eyes and daring to imagine something better. When supported by schools, families, and communities, it becomes a tool for growth, empathy, and innovation. Creativity helps us make sense of challenges, express who we are, and connect more deeply with others. It lives in our everyday choices, in how we solve problems, tell stories, build relationships, and dream of the future. And when we nurture it—both in ourselves and in the people around us—we help shape a world that is more open, more alive, and full of possibility.



Creative exercises for everyday

by Pavla Faltová

Hey, it's time to flex that creative muscle! Whether you're an artist, a writer, or just someone looking to add a spark of imagination to your everyday life, creativity is a skill you can strengthen with practice. Just like going to the gym builds physical strength, regular creative exercises can boost your mental flexibility, problem-solving, and self-expression. In this article, we'll explore simple yet powerful exercises to help you break out of routine thinking and reconnect with your creative spark. Ready to get started? Let's dive in.

01: 30 Circles

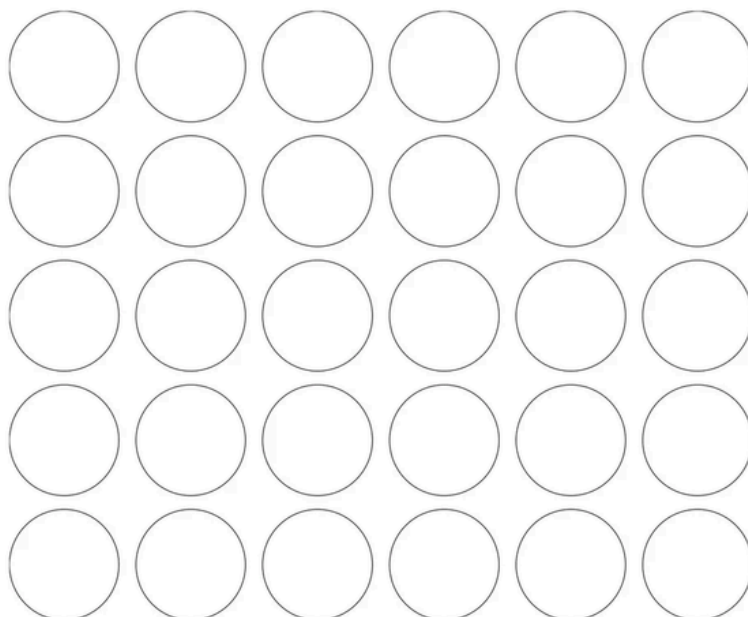
Time: 3 minutes, plus debrief

Supplies: Pen and a piece of paper (per person) with 30 blank circles on it of approximately the same size. You can either draw them, or find a printable template.

Set a timer for 3 minutes and turn as many of the blank shapes into recognizable objects (for example, clock, smiley face, etc.)

How many did you fill? Five, ten, fifteen, twenty or more circles? (Typically most people don't finish.) Were your ideas derivative (a basketball, a baseball, a volleyball) or distinct (a planet, a cookie, a happy face)?

This exercise takes just few minutes, but is sure to make your creativity going and get you ready for any tasks at hand.



02: Mindful walking

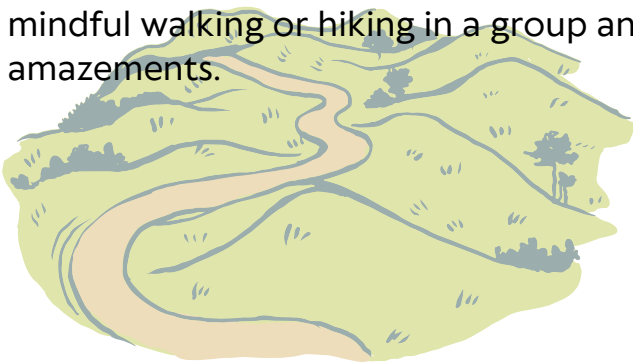
Time: 20 - 30 minutes

Supplies: Outdoor space, ideally in nature but cities can be just as interesting.

This one is a combination of simple walking and mindfulness.

Dedicate at least 20 minutes to go out and pay attention to the details while walking. Give yourself the gift of time to pay attention to a fascinating stone on the ground, the light playing with the leaves on the tree, the shape of a puddle. Go back to when you were 5 years old and had time for all these wonders!

And yes, you can touch, smell and play with the items you find. Feel free to try mindful walking or hiking in a group and then exchanging your discoveries and amazements.



03: Three different things

Time: 10 minutes

Supplies: Pen and a piece of paper.

It is possible to express the same idea in many different ways. For example, when I say flower, I may have a specific image of a flower in my mind (it might be a small red flower with six petals), but you could have a different picture of a flower in your mind (it might be a giant yellow sunflower, for example).

The task is to draw 3 different versions of the same thing. What versions come to your mind?

Draw 3 different:

Flowers

Ice creams

Cars

Dogs

Trees

Houses

Water transport

vessels

Facial expressions



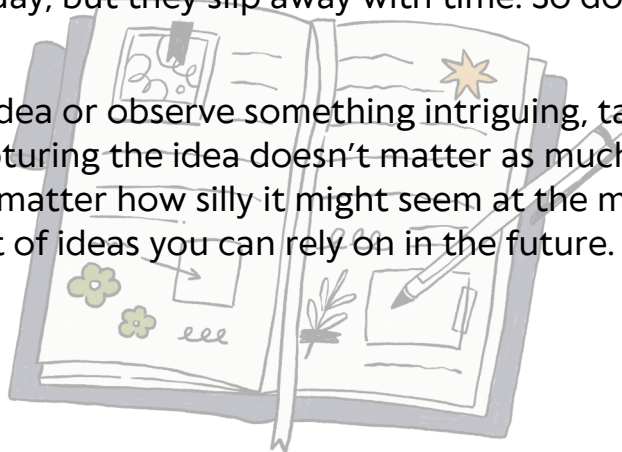
04: 15 Seconds of Brilliance

Time: 10 minutes per day

Supplies: Paper and pen, or a digital means of keeping notes

Our dreams fade away right after we wake up. If you want to remember them you need to capture them right after waking up. The same goes for creative ideas—capture them right away before they fade. Relying on memory alone means losing valuable sparks of inspiration. You probably have quite a few brilliant ideas everyday, but they slip away with time. So don't let them.

When you have an idea or observe something intriguing, take note of it. The actual means of capturing the idea doesn't matter as much as having it with you at all times. No matter how silly it might seem at the moment, soon you'll have a whole basket of ideas you can rely on in the future.



05: Dictionary story

Time: 15 - 30 minutes

Supplies: Paper and pen, physical or digital dictionary (you can also use a random book and search for words there)

Select a word at random from the dictionary. Use the word you chose, the word above it and the word below it to create a short story. Finding a way to create an interesting, cohesive story from seemingly random elements can improve your ability to make connections and combine ideas that don't necessarily relate.



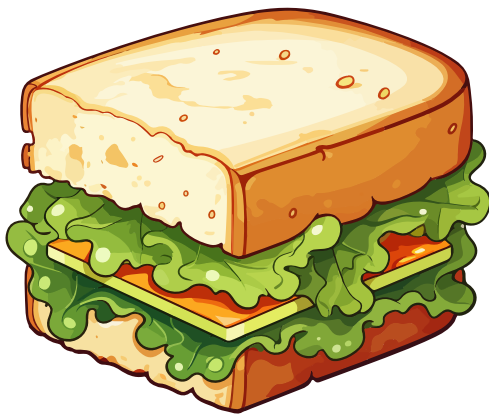
06: HOW?

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: Paper and pen

Think “how”. How would you do something in a different way than you usually do, or when deprived of skills, tools, or qualities people typically have to perform one of the given actions?

Here you’ll find a few suggestions but try to think of any unusual scenarion. Limit yourself with the time, a maximum of 5 minutes for each brainstorming session.



- How to make a sandwich without using your hands?**
- How to write an email without using any electronic device?**
- How to make tea without a tea bag?**
- How to draw without a pencil?**
- How to write a book while being illiterate?**

07: Recipe of Myself

Time: 10 minutes

Supplies: Paper and pen

What makes you who you are? What is the most important part of your identity? Did it ever change and why? If you were a dish, what would be the ingredients that make you YOU?

Come up with a unique recipe of yourself with your unique experiences, perceptions, ideas, ideals, personality traits, habits and more.

Take 2 cups of...
Add a cup of...
Add 150g of...
Add 50g of...
Add a pinch of...
Mix it with...



The next adventure

by Pavla Faltová

This a was just a peak into the world of creativity. It's one of the most important skills one can have and yet so often it's neglected with time and the rush of life. Even just implementing some creative exercises, focusing on fostering an enviroment where creative thinking can thrive, and giving yourself the space for growth, will put you miles ahead. So here are some additional sources I highly recommend checking out.

Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013)

Book the first part of this issue is based on. Probably the one source I would say you need to check out.

Creative Playbook (Various authors, Fundacja Instytut Innowacji. 2023)

This freely available booklet is available at:
<http://toolbox.salto-youth.net/3809>
You will find additional excersises that will help you with that spark you need in your everyday.

10 Exercises to Build Your Creative Confidence (IDEO, 2019)

Blog of a design company IDEO. Outside of design they also share more about creativity, about its use in profesional life and it's future. After you read this one, check out more of what they offer.

Other books to check out:

**The Nature of Creativity
(Sternberg & Lubart, 1999)**

Classic in the field; theoretical and empirical work on what creativity is and how to foster it.

The 30-Day Creativity Challenge (Bell, 2019)

**Wired to Create
(Kaufman, Gregoire, 2015)**

Looks at the traits and habits of creative people and can inspire you.

**Out of Our Minds: The Power of Being Creative
(Robinson, 2001)**

Focuses on education systems and how they suppress or enable creativity.

If any of these sources piqued your interest don't hesitate to check them out. Your creativity deserves to have the time and space to grow. Be it in school, work, or your personal life, regularly training your creative muscles will benefit you greatly and also make your life just that much more interesting and fun. And we all need some of that.

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