



## Narrative thinking approaches to creative idea creation

### What's a narrative?

An action causally sequenced to another action or actions create a narrative. For example, (1) you collect fire wood, (2) you arrange it into a suitable pile, (3) you light the firewood, (4) you put a marshmallow onto a suitable stick and (5) you heat it over the fire, to get a lovely toasty marshmallow. This is a narrative, a number of actions, sequentially arranged ultimately resulting with a toasty treat.

Now we've established with a narrative is, how can narrative thinking help with coming up with creative ideas? Fletcher and Benveniste (2022) suggest three techniques; world-building, perspective-shifting and action-generating.

### World-building

World-building in stories is often achieved by focussing in on the unexpected to prompt the audience to start hypothesising new possibilities. For example, if a story begins with a character flying into the room on a broomstick the audience will start to speculate that in this world magic exists and people are able to fly. You can frame your creative problems in a similar way. Start by identifying the unique events and characters in your situation and then conjecture what new risks or opportunities these events and characters may lead to. An example of this world-building technique could be that 'new virtual reality training devices have been found to deliver enhanced knowledge transfer benefits to learners over physical world pedagogy. What does this reveal about the rules of how pedagogy works in the physical world? How could these rules be used to improve pedagogy in the future?'

### Perspective-shifting

Perspective-shifting is often achieved in stories by the author revealing the characters motive, so the audience can then hypothesise how the character might act in a new situation. You can use this approach in a few ways to help your creative idea generation. You and a peer can each come up with a solution to a problem. You can then explain your motive to solving the problem (your causal thinking). You can then swap motives and using each other's motives solve a new problem. Alternatively, you can select three people and create possible solutions to a problem as if you were them, viewing the problem from their perspective.





You can even approach problems from the view of your former self, casting your mind back to a time when you were a child, selecting a time when you had the courage to forge your own path and go your own way, and approaching a current creative problem you're having from this mindset.

## Action-generating techniques

In narrative literature action is often generated by bringing characters with different motives together or in a different or strange environment to build a plot. To generate new creative ideas you could imagine what a character would do dropped into an unfamiliar or unexpected environment. For example, 'what would David Attenborough do if he woke up tomorrow and carbon capture had reversed global warming and species extinction?'

## But what's the difference between perspective-shifting and action-generating?

With the perspective-shifting technique, you are imaging getting inside someone else's head to think as they would, to see the challenge from their perspective, to create a solution (or possible solutions) as them and how they would come up with a solution. With the action-generating approach, it's more like being an external observer of what this character would do in this situation. You can also have multiple characters interacting simultaneously with each other in the action-generating technique which you don't in the perspective-shifting technique. In the action-generation approach you are watching a character from the outside and what they'd do next, not imaging you are them— it's subtle but it's a different approach.

For example, if we create an imaginary scenario 'All plastic is banned globally, single-use and otherwise – what would Annette Curtain the global head of Acme Plastic Manufacturing Corp. do in a meeting with Bob Sleigh head of governmental policy?' You can begin to imagine the potential conflict between these characters unfolding in the action generating approach.

If we tweak the imaginary scenario slightly we can approach it from the perspective-shifting technique 'All plastic is banned globally, single-use and otherwise – you are advisor to Annette Curtain the global head of Acme Plastic Manufacturing Corp. You know several other global heads of different manufacturing concerns very well, imagine they were facing this policy change, what would their solution be? What would they say in a meeting with Bob Sleigh head of governmental policy? Use this to create some possible solutions to present to Annette.'





## References

Fletcher, A. and Benveniste, M. 2022. A new method for training creativity: narrative as an alternative to divergent thinking. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

Fletcher, A. 2021. *Creative thinking: A Field Guide to Building Your Strategic Core*. Fort Leavenworth, KA: Command and General Staff College.

